University of Cincinnati: Kroger: A Key Ingredient of the Cincinnati Innovation District
ABOUT THE KROGER, UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI PARTNERSHIP

Kroger was one of the first partners to move into the 1819 Innovation Hub, the nerve center of the Cincinnati Innovation District (CID), and there was purpose and intention behind it. For Kroger, it was their technology unit that took up residence in the Innovation Hub in close proximity to the University. Despite a reputation for being a grocery store chain, Kroger was looking for talent and innovation, which is why the partnership within the CID and with the University of Cincinnati (UC) has worked so well. For the last four years, the relationship that began with a location within the CID nerve center of the 1819 Innovation Hub, has grown and strengthened, providing a model for the corporate engagements that have followed.

Commenting on the relationship, UC President Neville Pinto said, "Working with a hometown company and one of the world’s largest retailers gives our university an opportunity to make an impact not only locally but also globally. This is the kind of partnership that allows our students and faculty to work on real-world challenges in a cross-disciplinary way while offering our corporate partners added value with access to talent, expertise, research, creativity, and specialized equipment and technology."

Because of the novel approach to connecting talent at the CID, Yael Cosset, Kroger’s Chief Information Officer states, “The Cincinnati Innovation District has really given us the access to talent we would not have been able to engage with in the past.”

Kroger Tech Connects

Beyond student sprints, co-ops, and internships, the Kroger Technology and Digital Team embarked on another innovative way to engage students: Kroger Tech Connects. This series of virtual, hybrid, and in-person meet-ups connects students and company executives to discuss digital and technology business topics and showcase to students how Kroger could be their next career stop.

“Through the Kroger Tech Connect I realized that Kroger is not just an ordinary grocery store, but an innovative company solving tech problems,” said Luke
Grothaus, a student in UC’s Carl H. Lindner College of Business.

While Kroger routinely engages the university talent, the relationship goes even deeper. When Kroger joined the CID, they committed to space within the Innovation Hub and along with that also committed the resources to develop a deeper relationship. Those resources included R&D engineers and software developers to work with the UC Partner Success team co-located within the Innovation Center to engage and work with UC faculty members and students. Working with the Success team staff custom programs were organized for them, they utilized internships, and they connected with dynamic student co-ops to continue to evolve the relationship. There are many more facets to the evolving and growing relationship.

*Kroger Health and SuperWIN*

In one example, Kroger Health, the healthcare division of Kroger, partnered with UC to execute a first-of-a-kind clinical research study to learn how retailers like themselves may improve health outcomes through retail food and nutrition education. The study, the Supermarket and Web-based Intervention Targeting Nutrition study, or SuperWIN, is a partnership to improve dietary intake (see articles link).

Dylan Steen, MD, UC Medical: “SuperWIN is probably the most scientifically rigorous study of comprehensive health care intervention ever conducted with the retail industry.” He adds that the study has laid the foundation for a new era of research between academic researchers and retailers. Results demonstrated that in-store and online service options, interventions, and education improve health outcomes and were reported at the American College of Cardiology’s Annual Scientific session and expo on April 3rd, 2022. As a result of the study, Kroger has moved to expand its programming in stores and online.

Bridget Wojciak, director of nutrition for Kroger Health had this to say, “We are striving every day to elevate the grocery store as a destination for preventative healthcare. Our food as medicine strategy is a dedicated, education and personalized approach to eating and enjoying food to prevent illness before it starts, and this study has shown that our strategy works.”

*Kroger bringing in 5/3rd Bank*

In another instance, Kroger was able to bring its efforts to connect to talent through CID connect events and virtual innovation sprints to another level via a collaboration
with another Innovation Hub partner company, fellow Cincinnati based and Fortune 500 member, 5/3rd Bank. Facilitated by the CID Partner. Success team during the pandemic and using the UC Office of Innovation virtual meeting platform, Kroger and the bank collaborated around an innovative talent recruitment/retention and customer experience solutions opportunity that engaged dozens of UC tech, design, and business students.

Leaving the event with plans to implement ideas from the event over the next several months Kroger and 5/3rd Bank expressed expectations to become strong partners in innovation going forward and expressed the hope to collaborate with other CID partner companies as well.

Doug Sackin, VP of Innovation Design for 5/3rd Bank expressed clear support. “This is exactly the kind of innovative partnership we hoped to create at the Innovation Hub. Without Kroger’s presence and ours there and UC’s assistance, this kind of collaboration and competitive advantage would not be possible.”

**Linking with UC Forward**

And the synergy made possible with Kroger through the CID, the Fortune 500 company partnered with UC Forward, a collaborative learning opportunity involving faculty and students, to bring the company’s Zero Hunger Zero Waste initiative to UC’s campus. Increasingly students report episodes of food insecurity. A study published in the American Association of Colleges and Universities newsletter, more than 60 percent of college students in the U.S. had experienced food insecurity over a 30-day period.

Students were divided into six interdisciplinary teams made up of a range of students and faculty from A&S, the Carl H. Lindner College of Business, the College of Medicine, and the College of Engineering and Applied Science. Each team developed a plan in which they could both educate and raise awareness about food waste to fellow students on campus and developed concepts for food rescue programs throughout UC to reduce waste and provide unused food to food-insecure students and others.
LINKS TO FURTHER INFORMATION

Articles:
- UC, Kroger form research collaboration to improve health outcomes

Videos:
- Kroger Interview
ABOUT APLU

The Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) is North America’s oldest higher education association. APLU is a research, policy, and advocacy organization dedicated to strengthening and advancing the work of public universities in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. The association's membership consists of public research universities, land-grant institutions, state university systems, and affiliated organizations.

APLU's mission is to: expand access and improve student success to deliver the innovative workforce of tomorrow; advance and promote research and discovery to improve society, foster economic growth, and address global challenges; and build healthy, prosperous, equitable, and vibrant communities locally and globally.

Based in Washington, DC, the association's work is furthered by an active and effective advocacy arm that works with Congress and the administration as well as the media to advance federal policies that strengthen public universities and benefit the students they serve.

ABOUT THE IEP UNIVERSITIES PROGRAM

APLU and its Commission on Economic and Community Engagement (CECE) established the Innovation and Economic Prosperity (IEP) Universities Program to help higher education institutions codify, elevate, and advance their campus enterprise supporting economic and community development.

The IEP designation program recognizes institutions that have demonstrated a meaningful, ongoing and substantial commitment to economic and community development, growth, and economic opportunity.

The IEP awards program recognize exemplary and innovative projects in university-based economic and community engagement:

- **Talent** and workforce development
- **Innovation**, entrepreneurship, and tech-based economic development
- **Place** development through public service, outreach, and community engagement

Learn more at: [www.APLU.org/IEP](http://www.APLU.org/IEP)