

Nov 2021

Dear 2021 NSW Council Election Candidate,

I am writing to you on behalf of the [North Sydney Innovation Network](#) (NSIN), a not for profit incorporated association that was set up to support, promote and advocate for technology, innovation, entrepreneurs and startups on Sydney's north shore.

Now and beyond the Covid pandemic, a crisis that has shifted so many features of our everyday lives, local communities expect to be able to engage with their service providers 24 hours a day across a variety of digital channels. Councils are therefore under increasing pressure to meet these expectations, and must consider how to evolve into [Smart Cities](#).

We urge you to consider the North Sydney Innovation Network's **7 Policy Priorities** and work with us to realise these objectives and create Smart Cities across the North Shore.

## Creating a Smart City LGA

The Australian Government's [Smart Cities Plan](#), a key aspect of which was the Federal Government's commitment to *"drive the take up of smart technology, to improve the sustainability of our cities and drive innovation"*. To that end the Government has advocated for a *"Technology first approach"* which recognises that *"whether it's the private sector or states and territories, technology can provide a unique and creative solution to the challenges we face"*. We have considered both the Australian Government's Smart Cities policy and international best practice to identify the key innovation and technology priorities that we believe will drive the economic prosperity, livability and sustainability of our LGAs going forward.

## The 7 Key North Sydney Innovation Network Policy Priorities

### 1. Promoting Entrepreneurship

The Chief Scientist of Australia highlighted [entrepreneurship](#) as the key to a high-growth, innovation-led economy, but unfortunately Australia has been slow to embrace this as a driver of economic growth. In 2012, there were an estimated 1,500 Australian tech startups, with 64% of startups located in Sydney<sup>1</sup>. It is estimated that by 2025, the annual impact on the Australian economy of seven technologies - mobile internet, automated knowledge work, the internet of things, cloud technology, advanced robotics, autonomous vehicles and 3D printing- will be \$479 billion<sup>2</sup>. Councils can support entrepreneurship by providing entrepreneurs and tech startup companies with a local environment that offers support networks, business and entrepreneurship education, infrastructure such as local coworking spaces and financing, such as grants for local innovators.

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<sup>1</sup> PwC, 2013, *The startup economy: How to support tech startups and accelerate Australian innovation*: [www.digitalpulse.pwc.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/PwC-Google-The-startup-economy-2013.pdf](http://www.digitalpulse.pwc.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/PwC-Google-The-startup-economy-2013.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> McKinsey Global Institute 2013 report *Disruptive technologies: Advances that will transform life, business, and the global economy*

## 2. Free Public WiFi

Internet and wireless communication is a fundamental feature of the social, economic and cultural life of modern cities and should be pivotal in all urban infrastructure planning. Both the IoT and open data require public WiFi with broad LGA coverage. Free WiFi is also a matter of equity, being of central importance to financially-disadvantaged segments of our population facilitating inclusivity and access across communities. All councils should seek to establish stable, free public WiFi in all community spaces.

## 3. Open Data

The NSIN advocates for a policy of open data in all aspects of community operations including information about transportation, roadworks, waste collection, development applications, support services and facilities. Open Data can contribute to improving the financial efficiency of public services via cross-sector sharing of data, which can assist in identifying unnecessary spending. Open Data also enhances collaboration, participation and social innovation because communities benefit when information is more transparent and accessible. Open data should be at the heart of council operations and communications.

## 4. The Internet of Things (IoT)

IoT devices effectively embed digital intelligence into basic objects, making the world around us smarter and more responsive. Local governments can leverage the IoT through everything from smart, energy efficient lighting systems to smart elevators that reduce wait times, to smart bins that notify local governments when they are full and community safety innovations. Financial efficiencies are also possible in IoT implementation if local, state and federal governments work together.

## 5. Flexible Work & Collaboration Spaces

The COVID crisis demonstrates why agile and responsive working arrangements are the future. Flexible practices include allowing employees to work remotely from home or from local co-working spaces. This has substantial individual and environmental benefits such as facilitating caring responsibilities and taking pressure off our roads and transport system<sup>3</sup>. Many councils have committed to renew or refresh ageing infrastructure and community spaces, and convert these spaces into usable, Internet-connected shared workspaces. Ideas that can be deployed quickly and economically include providing undercover seating with outdoor powerpoints and WiFi hotspots in green spaces and setting up [hot desks](#) in underutilised community buildings.

## 6. Autonomous Vehicles, Drones & Robotics

**Autonomous/driverless vehicles** offer the opportunity to radically change transport and society by improving road safety, mobility, freight productivity and the environment through reduced road congestion. [Trials](#) of automated vehicles are already underway across Australia. The NSIN encourages north shore elected officials to contact their local federal members to promote their respective LGA's as testing sites for autonomous vehicles and make the north shore a first adopter of driverless public transport.

**Drones** will also impact the way both commercial enterprises and government departments carry out their functions. The pandemic has illustrated how valuable drones can be in tracking human movement, delivering food and [medicine](#) in a safe, contactless manner and [encouraging physical distancing](#). Effective utilisation of drones requires strategic planning and infrastructure decisions, such as allowing for landing pads and hubs in densely populated urban areas. Privacy and regulation

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<sup>3</sup> C Harris, 2017, Bright future for coworking, North Sydney Innovation Network, <http://www.northsydneyinnovation.org/bright-future-coworking-reflections-gcucau/>.

issues are also essential to consider for effective societal integration of drones.

In a context in which Councils are under significant pressure to cut costs, **Robots and Artificial Intelligence** can be utilised to cut costs and complete a range of repetitive administrative tasks within council operations. This technology offers 24 hour operation, speed, and an absence of human resourcing issues and ongoing costs. Change of address and name processes, database deduplication and other basic administrative functions could be performed with the use of robotics and AI, freeing up council staff for more complex work requiring human interaction.

## 7. Boosting 'Advanced' STEM

High-quality science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education is critically important for our current and future productivity and international competitiveness. Research indicates 75% of the fastest growing occupations require STEM skills and knowledge, with employment in STEM occupations to grow at almost twice the pace of other occupations. Unfortunately a quarter of Australian employers cite a lack of applicants with STEM skills<sup>4</sup>. Research indicates that fostering engagement in STEM education in primary school positively influences later participation in STEM disciplines, particularly in the senior secondary years<sup>5</sup>. Local councils can help to immerse students in STEM education by ensuring library collections include up to date STEM literature and technology such as 3D printers for community use. Councils can also assist by offering subsidised weekly coding classes at local libraries, or STEM based school holiday programs.

We hope that you will consider these **7 Policy Priorities** priorities, both when articulating your running platform and in the policy priorities you pursue should your candidacy be successful.

## About Us

The NSIN upholds three primary goals within all of our activities: **Network, Educate** and **Advocate**.

**Network:** We hold regular in-person or virtual events, including pitch nights, that connect our members with each other and with the larger innovation ecosystem. We use our social media presence<sup>6</sup> to promote innovation, technology, startups and an overarching entrepreneurial mindset.

**Educate:** Our [public Dropbox](#) is a freely accessible repository for innovation, technology, entrepreneurial and startup-related reports and information. We also produce our own thought-leadership papers in our key policy priorities areas, such as [The Drone Report](#).

**Advocate:** We regularly provide feedback and [submissions](#) to key North Shore Council development proposals and Community Strategic Plans, with the objective of encouraging local councils to consider how technology, startups and, more broadly, a paradigm of innovation can be integrated into Council infrastructure and planning.

**For more information please contact:**  
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<sup>4</sup> Lifting our Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) skills, Australian Industry Group

<sup>5</sup> Rosicka, C 2016, From concept to Classroom: Translating STEM Education research into practice, ACER Victoria p.224

<sup>6</sup> JOIN our FB group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/NorthSydInnovationNetwork/>  
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