

The Future of Our Communities Relies on Research

By Gary Whitney

Understanding where the future of research is heading will enable higher education institutions to plan for their next research discovery.

The business of research is changing rapidly and getting more complex.

Research's Impact on Our Community

Research discoveries made at universities enrich the lives of our local and global communities. Some of the most important innovations are a result of academic research. From [nuclear science](#) to [poverty solutions](#), higher education institutions lead the way in discovering innovative breakthroughs that address society's pressing issues. In fact, since the 1950s, university researchers were the main contributors to [40 percent of the top inventions](#).

As a result, our society looks to higher education to pave the way for these discoveries. A recent survey found that 71 percent of Americans view research

universities as the leading entity driving innovation in the United States—with large corporations, start-up businesses and government trailing. Given academic research's success in the field, it's no wonder confidence—and expectations—in delivering innovation is high.

External Pressures on Research

The expectation for research institutions to lead the way comes at a time when the industry is under increasing internal and external pressures—decreasing funding from the federal government, more top funded researchers nearing retirement and [changing policies and regulations](#) (to name a few) are some of the forces affecting research.

While removing these barriers would improve the industry outlook, the reality of doing so is slim. Many university research leaders are wondering what they can do to continue driving innovation. As the future of research unfolds, it's key to understand and plan for this changing landscape.

Top Trends Impacting the Future of Research

Understanding future trends provides higher education institutions the opportunity to continue driving research innovation in the United States—

and the world. In a recent poll conducted by Huron, representatives from 60 of the top North American research institutions shared their predictions for the future of research. Their top three predictions were:

1. Data security will be a top concern for university CIOs.
2. Over the next seven years, the biggest breakthroughs will come from cross-disciplinary research.
3. By 2025, less than half of research institutions will [manage their own data centers](#).

Additionally, respondents identified four overall themes they believe will influence the future of research: artificial intelligence (AI) to assist researchers, global research competition and collaboration, personalized medicine and an increased emphasis on reproducibility of results. Remaining proactive, not reactive, to future trends and challenges provides institutions the flexibility to guide research innovation.

The business of research is changing rapidly and getting more complex. Creating strategies to align and leverage major trends in research will be critical for organizations to adapt and own their futures. The next generation of scientific discoveries hinges on the ability of research leaders to embrace new business models and accelerate the future of research.

Key Takeaways

Preparing your institution for its next research discovery requires higher education leaders to:

Think differently.

Understand where the research industry is and where it is heading.

Plan differently.

Create strategies to align and leverage the major trends in research.

Act differently.

Embrace new business models to accelerate the pace of innovation.



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