ADVANCING
the Gateway Cities Vision for
DYNAMIC
Community-Wide Learning

Working together over the past several years, Gateway City leaders have formed a common vision for innovation in education. Two core principles underpin their vision: First, Gateway Cities can develop learning systems that become a selling point for families seeking a community with exceptional educational offerings. Second, such robust learning systems will provide students with a full range of supports, giving them equal opportunity to develop the skills demanded by employers in today's knowledge economy. Achieving these dual goals will funnel investment into our urban centers and ensure that the Commonwealth benefits from the full potential of Gateway City youth, a critical block of the state's future workforce. Generating support for the policy change required to implement this vision begins with effectively communicating the opportunity at hand. To gain a better understanding of how the public views these issues, we surveyed Massachusetts voters and combed through the results looking for key takeaways.

NEW POLLING DATA

FRAMING THE ISSUE

Creating a sense of urgency for innovation in education can be a challenge, especially in a state that is already viewed as a national leader. But talking about education as a means for growth may be a way to break through.

FRAME 1: Innovation in education is critical to the state's economic competitiveness. Despite the Commonwealth's success, voters clearly see economic benefits from continuing to improve the state's public education system. More Massachusetts voters think improving public education will contribute "a great deal" to economic growth than any other approach tested in the poll. While this sentiment is particularly strong among Gateway City voters, improving education to grow the economy has universal appeal across age, race, ethnicity, income, region, and political affiliation.

FRAME 2: Innovation in education is a primary economic revitalization strategy. Families with children under 18 make up nearly one-third of all households in Massachusetts. In order to grow and maintain strong neighborhoods, Gateway Cities must compete for this large segment of the housing market. Massachusetts parents cite the quality of local schools as the top factor in deciding where they will live, and right now very few (11 percent) parents in neighboring communities say they would consider moving to the nearest Gateway City. Providing more information about the strength and potential of Gateway City schools could be helpful. Many parents in neighboring communities hold a negative opinion about Gate-

way City school quality (three-quarters with a mark grade the nearest district C or lower), but others (40 percent) have not formed an opinion and could be particularly receptive to marketing efforts.

Poor perceptions of the schools are only one factor keeping parents from considering moving to a Gateway City, but unlike some more permanent barriers (a dislike of city living, for instance), schools are an obstacle that Gateway Cities can address.

Improving education can also help strengthen neighborhoods by retaining current residents. Nearly half (47 percent) of Gateway City parents say they would like to move in the next few years—double the rate for parents statewide (23 percent). Concerns over schools are a

factor. Half (50 percent) of Gateway City parents rate their schools C or lower; only 28 percent of parents outside of Gateway Cities give their schools similarly disappointing marks.

Improving and marketing the success of Gateway City schools may have benefits beyond attracting and retaining families. Statewide, 70 percent of survey respondents who gave their local schools an A or B felt the quality of life in their community was excellent or very good, compared to only half as many (35 percent) among those giving the schools a lower grade. A number of factors could explain this correlation, but there is certainly reason to believe that strong public schools represent a significant point of pride that contributes broadly to community cohesion.
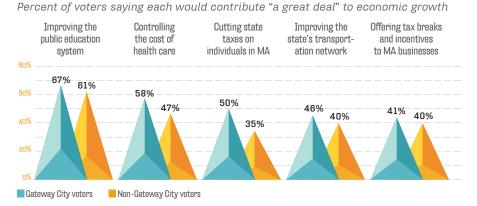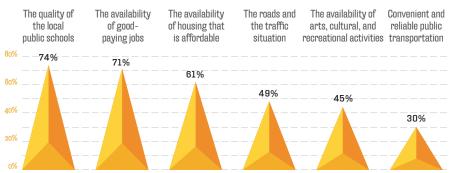
KEY TAKEAWAY: Linking education to growth is a strong way to frame the issue. Gateway City leaders can help elected officials and candidates for office understand how the Vision seeks to create more dynamic learning systems that will better prepare students for a changing economy.

Voters see improving education as a top way to improve the economy

Percent of voters saying each would contribute "a great deal" to economic growth

	Improving the public education system	Controlling the cost of health care	Cutting state taxes on individuals in MA	Improving the state's transportation network	Offering tax breaks and incentives to MA businesses
Gateway City voters	67%	58%	50%	46%	41%
Non-Gateway City voters	61%	47%	35%	40%	40%

Schools are top concern for parents when deciding where to move

The quality of the local public schools	The availability of good-paying jobs	The availability of housing that is affordable	The roads and the traffic situation	The availability of arts, cultural, and recreational activities	Convenient and reliable public transportation
74%	71%	61%	49%	45%	30%

TAPPING INTO A DESIRE FOR CHANGE

Education leaders are sensitive to the fatigue in the field after successive rounds of reform in recent years. But survey data suggest voters are ready for more dramatic change.
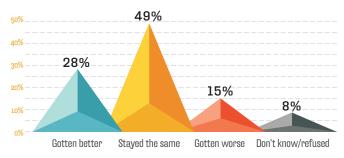
Voters don't perceive much recent progress. Nearly two-thirds of voters feel that schools in their communities have either "stayed the same" over the last five years (49 percent) or "gotten worse" (15 percent). But in Gateway Cities, which have seen a burst of activity from Race to the Top and the 2009 education reform law, voters sense more progress. More than a third (37 percent) of Gateway City parents think the schools in their communities have improved in the past five years—10 points higher than parents elsewhere.

Unfortunately, the majority of voters living in towns surrounding Gateway Cities don't perceive gains. Most either have no opinion about recent changes in Gateway City school districts (40 percent) or believe things have stayed the same (36 percent).

Voters say the state needs to "radically restructure" education for today's economy. Overall, 58 percent of voters believe we need radical change in education,
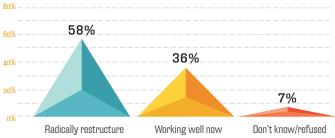
versus just 36 percent who feel the current system works well. While this sentiment for change is slightly stronger among younger and nonwhite voters, it receives majority support across all socioeconomic, geographic, and political lines.

If anything, the progress Gateway City parents sense may have fueled a desire to see additional innovation; two-thirds of Gateway parents responding to the survey voice support for radical change.

KEY TAKEAWAY: Despite years of reform and relatively strong grades for schools statewide, voters are not complacent. By getting the word out about the innovative learning models they are developing, Gateway City leaders can increase confidence in the public schools among prospective residents, but equally important, they can create greater buy-in among voters statewide for expanding new learning models that have been successful in Gateway Cities.
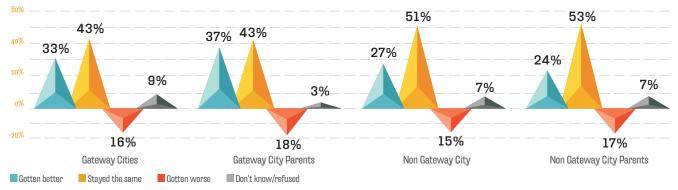
Most voters don't sense improvement in education
In the last five years, do you think the public schools in your [city/town] have gotten better overall, or stayed about the same?

28% Gotten better
49% Stayed the same
15% Gotten worse
8% Don't know/refused

Voters are open to radical change in education
Some people say we need to radically restructure education for today's economy. Others say schools are working pretty well right now and don't need major change. Which is closer to your own view?

58% Radically restructure
36% Working well now
7% Don't know/refused

Gateway City voters see more improvement in their schools
In the last five years, do you think the public schools in [your city or town] have gotten better overall, gotten worse overall, or stayed about the same?

Gateway Cities: 33%, 43%, 16%, 9%
Gateway City Parents: 37%, 43%, 18%, 3%
Non Gateway City: 27%, 51%, 15%, 7%
Non Gateway City Parents: 24%, 53%, 17%, 7%

■ Gotten better ■ Stayed the same ■ Gotten worse ■ Don't know/refused

MARKETING INNOVATIVE LEARNING MODELS

Change often sounds enticing in the abstract, but survey data confirm that there is actual support for innovative approaches to education.

A strong majority of parents desire the learning models outlined in the Vision; interest in these approaches is particularly high among Gateway City parents. Across the state, parents say they look for schools with qualities central to the Vision including advising programs, career development opportunities, vocational and technical education, college coursework, and social-emotional learning.

Gateway City parents voice significantly higher interest in these learning models. Their support for the innovations highlighted in the Vision stands out sharply when contrasted with more fundamental school attributes like teacher quality, technology, and extracurriculars. While demand is also very high for these more standard features, in these areas Gateway City parents look much more similar to non-Gateway City parents. It is also notable that all of these school qualities rank far higher than scores on standardized tests, especially for non-Gateway City parents.

By smaller margins, voters endorse extended learning time, a central pillar of the Vision. Statewide, 59 percent of voters support extending the school day and 54 percent support adding days to the school year. The policy receives majority backing across all demographic, geographic, and political subgroups, although the appeal is slightly lower for non-Gateway City parents.

KEY TAKEAWAY: The learning models represented in the Vision will have real appeal for both current and prospective parents. Voters also seem very open to extended learning time. Gateway Cities can help build support for the required investment by demonstrating the value of successful ELT schools.

Gateway City parents are especially interested in the Vision's learning models

Percent of parents saying each is a "very important" quality in school for their children

Gateway City Vision Learning Models		GATEWAY CITIES	ALL OTHERS
	Advising programs that help prepare students for college	81%	72%
	Career development programs like internships, job shadowing, and vocational technical classes	76%	57%
	Programs focused on developing self-esteem, teamwork, and character	72%	60%
	Courses that allow students to earn college credit	66%	56%
Other School Attributes	High-quality principals and teachers	94%	96%
	Modern equipment and technology in the classroom	76%	70%
	Sports, arts, music, and other extra-curricular activities	70%	74%
	Parents who are engaged with the school	65%	64%
	A diverse student body made of different racial, ethnic, and language groups	53%	35%
	High scores on state tests	47%	27%

Gateway City voters favor extended learning time

60% support / 38% oppose — Extending the school day in Massachusetts schools to include more learning time

56% support / 42% oppose — Extending the school year to include more days for class

SIZING UP THE CHALLENGE

Voters value education and endorse change, but support falls when there is a price tag attached to innovation, particularly among Gateway City voters.

Voters look for schools leaders to drive innovation

Who would you say is MOST responsible for improving overall quality of the education delivered in Massachusetts public schools?

Teachers	27%
Administrators at each school	23%
The local community	18%
Massachusetts state political leaders	16%
Local political leaders in your city or town	11%
Don't know/refused	6%

Very few voters think lack of funding is the main problem

Which of the following do you think is MOST responsible for the low achievement in the state's lowest performing schools?

Not enough funding for the schools	35%
The poverty and social problems the students face	33%
Bad management at the school level	11%
Poor teaching	10%
Lack of parental involvement	6%
Don't know/refused	5%

Voters see a need for more funding, but there isn't a strong appetite for raising additional revenue. Nearly half of voters (47 percent) think Massachusetts spends "too little" on education and just 9 percent say we spend "too much." Gateway City voters are more like likely than non-Gateway City voters to see current funding levels as sufficient (43 percent vs. 35 percent).

Forty-seven percent of voters would support raising the state income tax to increase education funding while just 36 percent would support higher property taxes. There is widespread support for an increase in corporate income taxes (78 percent), but less enthusiasm for redirecting funds from elsewhere in the state budget (55 percent). On each of these revenue questions, support for additional education funding was lower among Gateway City voters.

Support for targeting additional funding to low-performing schools is limited. Half of voters statewide would want to see additional education funding distributed evenly; only 40 percent support directing new resources to the lowest-performing districts. Voters clearly do not see funding as the defining problem facing struggling schools.

When asked about what is "most responsible" for low levels of achievement, only 10 percent of voters say not enough funding; the largest shares blame "lack of parental involvement" (35 percent) and the "poverty and social problems the students face" (33 percent).

Voters in neighboring communities do not have well-formed opinions about funding for Gateway City schools. While some (22 percent) feel Gateway Cities aren't getting their fair share, an equal number believe Gateway City districts receive too much; the largest group of voters in neighboring communities (47 percent) simply don't know whether Gateway Cities receive a fair share.

Voters see school leaders as the driving force behind educational progress. Half of voters think teachers (27 percent) or school administrators (23 percent) are most responsible for improving education. In contrast, only about one-quarter say state (16 percent) or local (11 percent) political leaders are responsible for driving innovation. Gateway City and non-Gateway City voters have similar views about accountability with one exception: Fewer Gateway City voters place the onus on themselves by saying "the community" is responsible (11 percent vs. 20 percent).

KEY TAKEAWAY: Voters value education and there is threshold willingness to consider additional funding, but asking voters to reach into their own wallets to pay for improvements will be challenging. Efforts to change funding formulas to favor low-performing districts will likely draw resistance from Massachusetts voters; even within Gateway Cities, a redistributive approach may have difficulty gaining traction. To build support for new investments in education, Gateway leaders can point to innovative models already succeeding in schools and explain how the Vision's policy agenda will support the expansion of these effective new approaches.

TOPLINE RESULTS

Overall, how would you rate the quality of life in [your city or town]? Would you say it is excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor?

Excellent	22%
Very good	34%
Good	29%
Fair	11%
Poor	4%
Don't Know / Refused	1%

How much do you think each of the following ideas would contribute to economic growth in Massachusetts in the long term—a great deal, a fair amount, not very much, or not at all?

Order rotated.	A great deal	A fair amount	Not very much	Nothing at all	Don'tKnow/ Refused
Controlling the cost of health care	50%	30%	10%	7%	3%
Improving the state's transportation network	41%	38%	11%	6%	3%
Cutting state taxes on individuals in Massachusetts	39%	28%	18%	10%	5%
Improving the public education system	62%	24%	7%	4%	3%
Offering tax breaks and incentives to Massachusetts businesses	40%	35%	13%	8%	3%

Thinking about your personal situation....If you had the opportunity within the next few years, would you like to move out of your community, or would you rather stay where you are?

Would like to move	27%
Would rather stay where you are	71%
Don't Know / Refused	3%

The following two questions were asked of those who said they would like to move.

Would you like to move somewhere else in Massachusetts, to another state in New England or out of New England altogether?

Somewhere else in Massachusetts	33%
To another state in New England	21%
Out of New England altogether	45%
Don't Know / Refused	1%

What is the MAIN reason you would like to move? Order randomized.

To go somewhere with lower cost of living	24%
To go somewhere with better weather	13%
To go somewhere less crowded and stressful	9%
To find better job opportunities	8%
To be closer to family or friends	5%
To try something new/change of scenery	15%
For a better school system	7%
Other (not read)	18%
Don't Know/Refused	1%

If you were to consider moving, how much of a factor would each of the following be in deciding where to move? Would READ FIRST ITEM be a major factor, a minor factor, or not a factor?

Order rotated.	Major factor	Minor factor	Not a factor	Don't Know /Refused
The roads and the traffic situation in each community	52%	33%	15%	1%
The availability of good-paying jobs in each community	62%	17%	19%	1%
The quality of the local public schools in each community	52%	16%	32%	1%
The availability of affordable housing in each community	62%	22%	14%	1%
The availability of arts, cultural, and recreational activities nearby in each community	46%	34%	19%	1%
Convenient and reliable public transportation in each community	39%	35%	25%	<1%

The following two questions were asked only of voters residing communities neighboring a Gateway City, about the Gateway City closest to them.

Now I would like to ask you a few questions about [the closest Gateway City]. How frequently do you go to [the closest Gateway City] for something specific, rather than just passing through temporarily?

Once a week or more	25%
A few times a month	13%
About once a month	10%
A few times a year	17%
Once a year or less	9%
Never	24%
Don't Know/Refused	1%

If you were to consider moving out of your city or town, how likely would you be to consider moving to [the closest Gateway City]?

Definitely would consider it	4%
Probably would consider it	12%
Probably would not consider it	21%
Definitely would not consider it	58%
Wouldn't consider moving (DO not read)	4%
Don't Know / Refused	2%

The following question was asked of those who responded "Probably would not consider it" or "Definitely would not consider it" to the previous question.

What are the main reasons you would not consider moving to [the closest Gateway City]? Open-ended.
All responses given were recorded and categorized.

Lack of shops, restaurants	4%
Too crowded / dense	24%
Poor schools	12%
Safety, crime concerns	29%
Dislike city living	21%
It is dirty and run down	17%
It is too expensive	4%
The commute would be inconvenient	12%
Other	31%
Don't know / refused	3%

Let's talk a bit more about education, specifically. If the state were to focus on improving the public education system over the next few years, which one should they focus on the most?

The preschool system	12%
The public K through 12 system	60%
The public higher education system	18%
All three / none of these / it depends (not read)	8%
Don't Know / Refused	3%

Do you think the state of Massachusetts spends too much on education, not enough, or about the right amount?

Too much	9%
Too little	47%
About the right amount	37%
Don't Know / Refused	7%

The following question was asked of those who responded "too little".

You said you think we spend too little on education. If we were to raise the level of funding for education in Massachusetts, would you support or oppose raising the new funds by READ FIRST ITEM? How about READ NEXT ITEM?

Order rotated.	Support	Oppose	Don't Know/Refused
Raising the Massachusetts state income tax	47%	50%	3%
Raising local property taxes	36%	62%	2%
Raising corporate taxes	78%	20%	2%
Shifting money from other state programs	55%	30%	15%

Students are often graded on the quality of their work using the letters A, B, C, D, and F. Suppose the public schools themselves were graded in the same way. What grade would you give the public schools in [your city or town]?

A	20%
B	41%
C	24%
D	7%
F	3%
Don't Know / Refused	5%

How would you grade the K-12 public education system in [your city or town] in terms of preparing students for their eventual entry into the job market?

A	14%
B	37%
C	26%
D	8%
F	4%
Don't Know / Refused	11%

How would you grade the K-12 public education system in [your city or town] in terms of preparing students for college?

A	23%
B	37%
C	21%
D	7%
F	3%
Don't Know / Refused	9%

In the last five years, do you think the public schools in [your city or town] have gotten better overall, gotten worse overall, or stayed about the same?

Gotten Better	28%
Stayed the Same	49%
Gotten Worse	15%
Don't Know / Refused	8%

The following two questions were asked only of voters residing communities neighboring a Gateway City, about the Gateway City closest to them.

And how about the public schools in [the closest Gateway City]? What grade would you give them? IF DON'T KNOW, PROBE, Just based on what you've heard, even if you have no direct experience, what grade do you think you'd give the schools there?

A	3%
B	14%
C	29%
D	12%
F	4%
Don't Know / Refused	39%

In the last five years, do you think the public schools in [the closest Gateway City] have gotten better overall, gotten worse overall, or stayed about the same?

Gotten Better	13%
Stayed the Same	36%
Gotten Worse	10%
Don't Know/Refused	40%

Let's go back to talking about Massachusetts public schools as a whole. Some people say READ FIRST ITEM. Others say READ OTHER ITEM. Which is closer to your own view? Order rotated.

We need to radically restructure education for today's economy	58%
Schools are working pretty well right now and don't need major change	36%
Don't Know / Refused	7%

The order of the following two questions was rotated.

Would you support or oppose extending the school day in Massachusetts schools to include more learning time?

Support	59%
Oppose	37%
Both / neither / depends (not read)	2%
Don't Know / Refused	2%

Would you support or oppose extending the school year to include more days for class?

Support	54%
Oppose	42%
Both / neither / depends (not read)	2%
Don't Know/Refused	2%

Regarding children, which of the following applies to you?

I have one or more children under age 18	30%
I have one or more adult children age 18 or older	41%
I have no children but plan to in the next three years	4%
I have no children and don't plan to have any in the next three years	25%
Don't Know / Refused	1%

The following question was asked of voters who responded "I have one or more children under the age of 18" to the previous question.

Which of the following best describes the school(s) the child(ren) living with you attend? READ LIST. PAUSE AND WAIT FOR RESPONSE. IF NECESSARY, READ: If your children are too young for school or if they do not attend school please just say so. Multiple responses allowed. Figures may total more than 100%.

A regular public school	75%
A public charter school	7%
A private school	16%
Other type of school (not read)	2%
Child(ren) are too young for school	5%
Do not attend school (not read)	%

The following two batteries of questions were asked of voters who responded "I have one or more children under the age of 18" or "I have no children but plan to in the next three years".

When thinking of the qualities of school you would send your kids to, how important is it to you that the school offers each of the following programs? Would READ FIRST ITEM be very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not at all important?

Order rotated.	Very important	Somewhat important	Not too important	Not at all important	Don't Know /Refused
Sports, arts, music, and other extracurricular activities	73%	22%	3%	1%	<1%
Courses that allow students to earn college credit	58%	30%	8%	4%	<1%
Advising programs that help prepare students for college	74%	21%	3%	2%	<1%
Programs focused on developing self-esteem, teamwork, and character	63%	28%	5%	3%	1%
Career development programs like internships, job shadowing, and vocational technical classes	62%	25%	10%	3%	1%

When thinking of a school you would send your kids to, how important is each of the following attributes? Would READ FIRST ITEM be very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not at all important?

Order rotated.	Very important	Somewhat important	Not too important	Not at all important	Don't Know/ Refused
High scores on state tests	32%	47%	13%	8%	1%
A diverse student body made up of different racial, ethnic, and language groups	39%	42%	12%	7%	<1%
Modern equipment and technology in the classroom	71%	23%	6%	<1%	<1%
Parents who are engaged with the school	64%	30%	4%	1%	1%
High-quality principals and teachers	95%	4%	1%	<1%	0%

Who would you say is most responsible for improving the overall quality of the education delivered in Massachusetts public schools? Order Rotated.

Massachusetts state political leaders	16%
Local political leaders in your city or town	11%
Administrators at each school	23%
Teachers	27%
The local community	18%
Don't Know / Refused	6%

Thinking about the money the state of Massachusetts gives to cities and towns for education, do the public schools in [your city or town] receive… ? Options rotated.

More than their fair share of state education funding	4%
About the right share of state education funding	47%
Less than their fair share of state education funding	31%
Don't Know / Refused	18%

The following two questions were asked only of voters residing in communities neighboring a Gateway City, about the Gateway City closest to them.

How about the schools in [the closest Gateway City]? Do the public schools in [the closest Gateway City] receive… ? Options rotated.

More than their fair share of the state's total education funding	9%
About the right share of the state's total education funding	22%
Less than their fair share of the state's total education funding	22%
Don't Know / Refused	47%

If the Massachusetts state government decided to increase education funding, which of the following do you think would do more to improve the education system?

A general increase in funding for the state's public schools	50%
Targeting the lowest performing districts for a larger increase in funding	40%
Both (not read)	2%
Neither (not read)	3%
Don't Know / Refused	4%

Let's talk about some of the lower performing school districts in Massachusetts. When it comes to the lowest performing schools, which of the following is closer to your own point of view? Order rotated.

Troubled schools face complex social problems that more money won't solve.	47%
An increase in funding for low performing schools would go a long way toward solving the problems they face	41%
Both / neither (not read)	6%
Don't Know / Refused	5%

Which of the following do you think is most responsible for the low achievement in the state's lowest performing schools? Order rotated.

Not enough funding for the schools	10%
The poverty and social problems the students face	33%
Bad management at the school level	11%
Poor teaching	6%
Lack of parental involvement	35%
Don't Know / Refused	5%

Demographics

Race / ethnic background

White, not Hispanic	81%
Black, not Hispanic	5%
Hispanic	8%
Other	4%
Don't Know / Refused	2%

Education

High school or less	33%
Some college, no degree	23%
College graduate (BA/BS)	26%
Advanced degree	17%
Don't Know / Refused	2%

Age

18 to 29	17%
30 to 44	26%
45 to 59	29%
60+	28%

Party Registration

Democrat	36%
Republican	11%
Independent / Unenrolled	53%

Gender

Male	48%
Female	52%

ABOUT THE GATEWAY CITIES VISION PROJECT

The Vision Project is a collaborative multi-year effort to advance a comprehensive education agenda that meets the opportunities and challenges in the Commonwealth's 21st-century economy. The project emerged from informal conversations among Gateway City mayors and superintendents. In 2013, MassINC facilitated a series of meetings with a wider cross-section of Gateway City leaders to carefully delineate a Vision for Dynamic Community-Wide Learning Systems. A document describing this vision in full can be found at gateway-cities.org.

ABOUT THE SURVEY

In April 2014, the MassINC Polling Group conducted a telephone survey with a random sample of 1,200 Massachusetts voters. The survey was administered in both English and Spanish with respondents using both landlines and mobile phones. This large number of participants, which includes an oversample of 400 Gateway City voters, allows us to segment opinion geographically and demographically. In describing the results, we draw attention to the views of Gateway City voters, voters in communities adjacent to Gateway Cities, and "parents" (defined as voters with children under age 18, or voters who report plans to have children in the next few years). The full survey methodology and topline are available at gateway-cities.org.

ABOUT THE GATEWAY CITIES INNOVATION INSTITUTE

The Gateway Cities Innovation Institute is a new platform at MassINC designed to build and sustain collaborative cross-city, cross-sector efforts to advance a common agenda for Gateway City growth and renewal. The Institute provides independent analysis and a neutral table to help communities coalesce around shared priorities and implement bold policy innovation.

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