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## Greater Local Engagement Would Advance National Labs' Technology and Economic Missions

### *Brookings and CCEI Release Recommendations to Make the Energy Department's 17 National Labs Stronger Regional Economic Assets*

(Washington, D.C.) – The Department of Energy's 17 national laboratories are critical hubs of technology innovation in the United States, but they could do more to engage with their adjacent economic regions, concludes a new report from the Brookings Institution's Metropolitan Policy Program and the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation's Center for Clean Energy Innovation (CCEI).

In "Going Local: Connecting the National Labs to their Regions for Innovation and Growth," Senior Policy Analyst Scott Andes and Senior Fellow and Policy Director Mark Muro of the Brookings Institution and Matthew Stepp, executive director of the Center for Clean Energy Innovation, explain the importance of local technology exchanges and advance a series of recommendations to improve the labs' connections to their surrounding economies.

Among the recommendations are administrative and legislative steps that would improve the labs as economic assets, open the labs to small- and medium-sized businesses, increase the labs' relevance to regional and metropolitan industry clusters, and provide greater flexibility in oversight and funding.

The national lab system was originally created in the 1940s to manage atomic weapons research and development. Yet over the past 70 years, both U.S. priorities and technology dynamics have changed. Today, the labs are key sites for innovation-driven economic growth. However, to fully advance their economic mission, the labs must make technology commercialization and regional engagement more of a priority.

"There is no contradiction: By engaging more with local communities as key platforms for applied research and tech transfer, the national labs can actually deliver even more on their mission of national problem-solving," said Andes. "By supporting regional innovation the labs are in fact better able to support national economic growth."

DOE labs can serve as anchor institutions for regional clusters—networks of firms, trade associations, educational institutions, private labs and regional economic development organizations—that advance technology development and commercialization. The 21<sup>st</sup> century innovation economy, made up of vibrant metropolitan economies, is reliant on these regional clusters and the exchanges of ideas and expertise that takes place within them.

In order to better align the lab system to its economic development mission, the authors make a number of policy recommendations, most of which could be implemented administratively and with little to no additional funding by DOE and the lab managers. The recommendations come as a congressionally mandated commission prepares to meet next week to continue assessing policy reforms aimed at increasing the effectiveness and economic relevance of the lab system.

“The National Labs are the envy of the world and a key element of the U.S. innovation economy,” said Stepp. “But we’re missing a critical opportunity to connect the labs’ science and engineering capabilities with the market pull prowess of metros, states and regions. The Department of Energy and the national labs should add ‘going local’ to their mission to turn today’s cutting-edge science into tomorrow’s breakthrough innovation.”

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**The Metropolitan Policy Program** at Brookings provides decision-makers with cutting-edge research and policy ideas for improving the health and prosperity of metropolitan areas, including their component cities, suburbs, and rural areas. To learn more, please visit: [www.brookings.edu/metro](http://www.brookings.edu/metro). Follow us on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/brookingsmetro](https://www.twitter.com/brookingsmetro).

**The Center for Clean Energy Innovation** is a Washington, D.C.-based think tank dedicated to designing, advocating, and advancing cutting edge energy innovation policies to address global climate change, increase economic growth, and provide universal energy access. Founded in 2014, CCEI is a non-partisan organization that accepts climate change as an innovation challenge at heart, focusing on energy RD&D policy, smart deployment, clean technology trade policy, STEM education and training, and advanced manufacturing at the state, national, and international levels. To learn more, please visit: [www.energyinnovation.us](http://www.energyinnovation.us). Follow on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/ccenergyinnov](https://www.twitter.com/ccenergyinnov).