

Guest column: Tech Parks Arizona stays on track for growth despite pandemic

Tech Parks Arizona
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Leading a research park is far from mundane. Day-to-day activities are ever evolving. There are new collaborations to facilitate, new demands to meet and new companies to recruit and help launch.

With these new opportunities come new challenges. There is no degree or formal training that prepares you for the spontaneity that one faces while working at a research park, especially not during a pandemic. The Tech Parks Arizona team is very agile, which helped us pivot on a dime and adapt our strategy. As a team, we are writing the playbook for how to successfully overcome the challenges we face in this current business climate.

The UA Tech Park at Rita Road – a bustling employment hub, where technology giants and entrepreneurs rub shoulders – faced a unique challenge overnight. After processing the gravity of the situation, the shock wore off and we jumped into action.

The Tech Parks Arizona team moved early to quickly implement our **emergency response** [1] and business continuity of operations plans and developed pandemic protocols, communication and signage based upon up-to-date information from state and federal agencies. Pressure was placed on the more than 60 businesses that are tenants of the park to transition nearly 6,000 employees into working remotely while maintaining productivity. The transition went smoothly and all the businesses were able to continue to operate productively. The Tech Parks team has regular check-ins with executives of each company to find ways park management can help each business thrive.

Fortunately, the University of Arizona Tech Park stretches across 1,282 acres with ample indoor and outdoor spaces that are big enough for employees to gather while social distancing. Sanitation stations were positioned throughout campus and additional air filtration systems were installed.

Additional technology platforms and online support services ramped up to help our most critical companies – startups. The heart of the park is the incubator, the **University of Arizona Center for Innovation** [2], which supports early-stage startups by giving them the best chance at success. Some incubator colleagues from across North America are reporting 40% to 60% of their startup clients are closing. However, we have not lost one here. In fact, we have gained startups this season, bringing the total number of startups in residence to 33.

The pandemic hit while Tech Parks Arizona was in the midst of expansion. With only a momentary pause brought on by the pandemic, construction quickly resumed and is on track for the new biotech-focused incubator, the University of Arizona Center for Innovation at Oro Valley, opening later this fall.

Construction on our campus's extension site, the UA **Tech Park at The Bridges** [3], just 3 miles from the University's main campus, did not miss a beat either. The new park is being developed with 1.8 million square feet of office and laboratory space that could support up to 10,000 employees. Site preparation and infrastructure work was paused for a week, and then was quickly ramped up to keep the project on schedule.

Because of the endurance and resilience of our collaborators, the Boyer Co., the UA Tech Park at the Bridges' first building, The Refinery, is set to open on time during the fall of 2021. A four-story, 120,000-square-foot building, The Refinery will serve as a tech innovation hub for the University. It will provide the environment for innovators to collaborate, create and commercialize products through resources provided by the university, including Tech Launch Arizona and the University of Arizona Center for Innovation.

COVID-19 meant a new era of business development as well. We became more creative in our outreach tactics in order to maintain momentum in attracting businesses here to the parks to partner with the University of Arizona. In response to this challenge, Tech Parks Arizona created the program "Tamales and Tech Parks" knowing that sharing food creates business connections. The program provided a new way to engage site consultants, commercial brokers and other strategic partners to highlight Tech Parks Arizona as a strategic business location with the advantage of connecting to a tier one research university. As virtual lunch meetings were confirmed, the potential partners received a video providing a virtual walk through the park with opportunities to hear testimonials from executives located at the park as well as recent University of Arizona rankings. Participants selected their tamales and received a branded delivery, which included a map of where they were "going" for lunch. Quickly, our program gained traction and numerous prospects are considering Tucson for their new business location.

Our strategic advantage extends beyond location, amenities, ample space and precautionary measures, for it ventures into the endless potential for companies to plug into a talent pipeline of intelligence and research expertise found at the University of Arizona. Our region is gaining national attention and Tucson has been identified as a city that shows great capability toward post-pandemic recovery.

Forbes reported that Tucson has been ranked as one of the **10 cities best positioned to recover from the coronavirus** [4]. In addition, a survey released by the Site Selectors Guild, an association of the professional site selection consultants, **Tucson is identified as a strong market** [5] to recover from COVID-19.

With Tucson businesses thriving and an entrepreneurial ecosystem that is growing, Tech Parks Arizona is prepared to cater to businesses that find themselves captivated by the allure of our city's potential.

Leading a research park is unpredictable, which is why I'm so thankful for the team and every person who has contributed to the sustainability of Tech Parks Arizona. While we are far from this storm being over, Tech Parks Arizona has been able to thrive through the thunder.

Carol Stewart [6] began serving as associate vice president for Tech Parks Arizona in December 2018. This summer, AzBusiness Magazine included her on its "Most Influential Women in Arizona Business for 2020" list.

Source URL: <https://uaatwork.arizona.edu/lqp/guest-column-tech-parks-arizona-stays-track-growth-despite-pandemic>

Links

[1] <https://techparks.arizona.edu/covid-19-update> [2] <https://techparks.arizona.edu/UACenterForInnovation> [3] <https://techparks.arizona.edu/the-bridges> [4] <https://www-forbes-com.cdn.ampproject.org/c/s/www.forbes.com/sites/laurabegleybloom/2020/05/12/ranked-us-cities-coronavirus-recovery/amp/> [5] <https://siteselectorsguild.com/news/suburbs-are-in/> [6] <https://techparks.arizona.edu/about-us/management-staff/carol-stewart>