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City to City



Michael Lake will lead City to City, an organization that seeks best practices in cities globally and brings them to Boston. Photo by Mary Knox Merrill

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For the first time in history, more of the world's population lives in cities than in rural areas. Moreover, nearly all the population growth over the next 30 years is expected to happen in urban areas, according to the World Health Organization.

As a result, the needs of cities are about to become more pressing than ever. Fortunately, an organization currently relocating from the Boston Foundation to Northeastern University is already tackling these challenges.

City to City, which began in 1997, works to create a strong network of community and business leaders, identify best practices that achieve social and economic change in urban areas across the globe, and bring those ideas back to Boston to share them with the world.

At Northeastern, City to City's work will be supplemented by the research being done by the university's World-Class Cities Partnership, says Michael Lake, the partnership's executive director, and the future executive director at City to City. The World-Class Cities Partnership develops long-term relationships with business, civic and academic leaders in cities worldwide to explore solutions for complex social issues, such as job creation and economic development.

Officials hope the synergy created by City to City and the World-Class Cities Partnership will lead to the creation of "innovation districts" in Boston neighborhoods, which attract new businesses, grow jobs and serve as anchors in the community. Getting the business community engaged in this endeavor will be a critical component, Lake says.

"Northeastern seeks to expand the meaning and the impact of its engagement in the world," he says. "Both the World-Class Cities Partnership and City to City do that. It's urban engagement, it's research and it's global."

City to City, which is co-chaired by Northeastern president Joseph Aoun, Boston mayor Thomas Menino, and State Street president and CEO Ron Logue, is "an exciting opportunity," says Lake. "It certainly builds on the longstanding relationship between Northeastern University and the city."

One major City to City success story came in 2003, when the Boston Children's Chorus was formed, bringing children together to unite Boston communities and inspire social change through music. A 2001 visit to the Chicago Children's Choir provided the inspiration for the Boston chorus.

A City to City trip to Haifa, Israel, is currently being planned for the fall. Israel, Lake explains, has more patents per capita than any other country in the world, and is second only to the United States in the number of companies listed on the NASDAQ.

"Israel has certainly harnessed the power of innovation," Lake says. "This is a great opportunity for us to support Mayor Menino's leadership and vision with global research."

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