From Microsoft to Starbucks, and from Boeing to Amazon, world-famous names and industry-shifting innovations rank among some of the most defining features of the Washington economy. Across its 70,000 or so square miles, the Evergreen State has become established as a hub for cloud computing, a center for the global health industry and a hotbed for renewable energy and smart technologies—and a lot more else besides.

“Innovation is not just confined to one of our key sectors, like aerospace or tech, but it actually spans across the economy,” says Lisa Brown, director of the Washington State Department of Commerce. “And then you start to get the interplay between tech and energy, or between agriculture and energy, so the intersections are also really interesting places for this innovation to take place.”

That interplay is something that can be clearly seen at places such as the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, which is dedicated to the elimination of cancer and related diseases. Located in Seattle, Fred Hutch receives more NIH funding than any other independent research institute in the U.S.—over $305 million in FY 2018—which has helped it become a leader in such areas as immunotherapy and precision medicine. Plus, now it’s taking full advantage of its location by collaborating with local tech leaders to explore how the convergence of bioscience and data science can help better prevent, treat and diagnose cancer.

“To manage the size of datasets, the terabytes of data from patients, we really need to have help from the Amazons and Microsofts of the world,” says president and director Gary Gilliland. “What I’m most excited about is where we differentiate based on our ability to apply large data sets to understand how patients respond and why they don’t respond, and then modulating our therapies and our approaches to manipulating the immune system to enable that.”

This innovation environment owes plenty to Washington’s robust higher education ecosystem, which runs the gamut from large public research universities to small liberal arts schools and community colleges aligned with the needs of local companies. More than 34 percent of state residents have a Bachelor’s degree or higher, while the state’s businesses are poised to build upon technologies...