This research proposal seeks to understand how a high tech innovation corridor and eventual cluster may be emerging between the bi-national Vancouver, Canada and Seattle, Washington area, namely the Cascadia region, and what policy formations around professional foreign labor mobility and highly skilled immigration may facilitate its equitable development. The need for greater ease and mobility of professionals is especially true for the emerging high-tech corridor of Cascadia’s border region. For Vancouver, B.C. and Seattle, Washington, the two city-regions are separated by approximately 150 miles. In fact, both have developed successfully over the past 100 years into modern settlements, both lauded internationally for their quality of life and globally competitive high-tech industries (Richardson, 2006). Despite all of these similarities, both Vancouver’s and Seattle’s high-technology and biotechnology clusters have historically operated independently of one another (Richardson, 2017). Now, with both Seattle based Microsoft Corp. and Amazon.com’s new and significant R&D facilities being established in Vancouver, there is anticipation that a more robust high-technology cross-border cluster may emerge between Seattle and Vancouver over the next 10 years. In fact, Microsoft Corp., in 2016, launched a multimillion dollar Cascadia Innovation Corridor initiative in an effort to garner support with key regional business and federal and provincial/state governmental interests regarding the advancement of a cross border innovation economy (Capellano, Richardson, and Trautman, 2020). However, Microsoft’s new connections to Vancouver are nascent, and somewhat fragile at best.

With the above described growth and success of high tech in Seattle and Vancouver, and now these nascent high tech firm connections between the two cities, there is a growing need to determine the extent and robustness of ties, if not clustering effects, between the two cities when it comes to high-technology and related industries as is the case with Silicon Valley, and the possible impacts of the closing of the Canada-U.S. border for much of the spring and early summer of 2020 due to COVID-19. Thus, this research agenda has four main goals: The first goal seeks to better understand the role and efficacy of the private firm in the possible development of a regional cross border corridor and potential cluster formation. The second goal includes probing the strengths and weaknesses of current immigration and labor mobility policy regarding Canadian professional labor mobility, especially in relation to the US, and US professional labor mobility, especially in relation to Canada. The third goal aims to determine if and how the Canada-US border may be an impediment and/or a facilitator to the formation of a cross-border high tech cluster in the Salish Sea/Cascadia border region. The fourth goal includes gaining greater insights into how might the closing of the Canada-U.S. border due to COVID-19 and the subsequent economic fallout influenced the emergence of a cross border high tech innovation/corridor/cluster between Seattle and Vancouver B.C. and beyond.