

# Sittenfeld: What's your big idea for Cincinnati?

**P.G. Sittenfeld** 7:12 a.m. EDT July 29, 2014

(Photo: File photo )

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In the spring of 2008, I had four hourlong interviews in order to be part of a program at Google for students on the graduate school scholarship that I was on. The most striking question I remember Google employees asking was: "What's your billion-dollar idea going to be?"

Not a million-dollar idea.

They wanted *billion*-dollar ideas.

What a bold prompt. I appreciated then and appreciate now how that query focuses the brain to be ambitious, to be aspirational about what might be accomplished.

Recently, a 25 year-old Cincinnati asked to get together. When we met, he told me that he wants to make a positive impact on our city. The Google question came to mind.

I suggested that the equivalent question in his case might be: "What can you do before you turn 30 that would represent a meaningful improvement to some aspect of life in Cincinnati?"

I believe everyone who is ambitious for our city should ask him or herself some version of Google's question. What's your idea to propel Cincinnati forward as a truly great city?

Yes, we need to be realistic and pursue what's viable – but we also need to think big. The good news is, powerful examples of thinking big already abound:

- The startups at the Brandery are quite literally striving for billion-dollar ideas.

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- The folks championing Cincinnati's Preschool Promise are focused on educating *all* 3- and 4-year-olds, not just some.
- The University of Cincinnati, under Santa Ono's leadership, is building partnerships to increase dramatically the number of women and minorities in STEM disciplines.

Then there are examples where thinking big has already yielded major results:

- The Castellinis believed our Reds are worthy of hosting MLB's All-Star Game, and next year, we will do just that.
- The concept of turning Cincinnati's Public Schools into bustling, partnership-filled Community Learning Centers has become *the* national model for transforming schools into neighborhood hubs.
- The Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra sought to make a world-class artistic experience free to the public, and so it has with Lumenocity.

We salute all of the individuals and institutions already committed to thinking big. But we should also remind ourselves why thinking big is so essential. The answer is that we are in a serious competition.

And it's not some parochial, small-minded competition that pits our Downtown against Northern Kentucky, or the city of Cincinnati versus the great communities surrounding us. We're all in this together.

We're in a competition against marquee cities like Charlotte, Denver, Minneapolis and Austin, which are each striving for greatness.

There's an old saying in politics that there are only two ways to run for office: unopposed or scared. In the competition to attract and retain the best talent and the best businesses, Cincinnati is certainly not running unopposed. Therefore, we had better run scared – scared of complacency.

Shared civic ambition. Collaborative can-do thinking. Let's make these qualities a new, permanent part of our Cincinnati DNA.

So go ahead, ask yourself: What's your billion-dollar idea? What's your game-changer for our city?

Your answer might hold the key to an even greater Cincinnati. ■