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**INNOVATION**

# Entrepreneurship center opens in city

## State partners with Brown to boost innovation in Rhode Island

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PROVIDENCE — The Rhode Island Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (RI-CIE), a 5,000-square-foot community space aimed at bolstering startup firms in the city, opened its doors today following a ceremony attended by political and business leaders.

The new center is a collaboration between Brown University, the R.I. Economic Development Corporation (EDC), the R.I. Science and Technology Advisory Council (STAC), and the quasi-public Slater Technology Fund. The three state government agencies have committed \$200,000 in funding for the center's first two years, while Brown is providing the space and paying employee salaries.

In addition, a month ago the Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce and the city of Providence awarded RI-CIE a [\\$15,500 grant](#).

The center is located at One Davol Square, in a building owned by Brown that has conference rooms, meeting spaces and room for expansion, according to the university. Its director is Brendan McNally, Brown's special assistant to the vice president for planning.

"Innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurship are critical to creating a strong economic foundation for Rhode Island," Gov. Donald L. Carcieri said in a statement. "I applaud Brown University and the leadership at the Economic Development Corporation for this joint venture to provide our future business leaders with the tools they need to grow their businesses, grow jobs and create new industries in Rhode Island."

Carcieri was joined at today's grand opening by Providence Mayor David N. Cicilline, and Brown University President Ruth J. Simmons, among others. The mayor said the center would speed the hoped-for transformation of Providence's Jewelry District into a hub for new companies.

The center's opening follows more than a year of planning by the sponsor organizations, as well as the city, the Greater Providence Chamber and other partners.

The various groups decided to work together after agreeing on the need for the city to have a designated place where entrepreneurs could network, collaborate and receive guidance and support. The specific impetus came from a report released last October by the Chamber that called for strengthening entrepreneurial activity in Rhode Island.

Local leaders have been saying for years that Rhode Island needs to prepare for the new



COURTESY JOHN ABROMOWSKI / BROWN UNIVERSITY

THE CENTER FOR INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP will be housed in a Brown-owned building at One Davol Square, above. It is the product of a public-private partnership.

"knowledge economy" if it is to get out of the economic doldrums that currently find the state with double-digit unemployment. RI-CIE is one of a number of initiatives the state has undertaken, including the new \$54 million life sciences center that opened at the University of Rhode Island in January. It was also one of the key priorities for 2009 outlined by both [EDC](#) and [STAC](#).

In an [interview with PBN about RI-CIE](#) earlier this year, EDC Director of Business Development Katharine Flynn, said it would fill a void because Rhode Island "didn't have ... a real effort in helping people start businesses."

Clyde Briant, vice president for research at Brown and co-chair of STAC, noted that the state's colleges, universities and hospitals are already doing hundreds of millions of dollars worth of cutting-edge research each year. "RI-CIE will help move useful ideas from the laboratory to the marketplace," he said.

J. Michael Saul, interim director of the EDC, called RI-CIE "an essential component in strengthening our economy" and said the center would be "a cornerstone of the state's efforts to identify and nurture our future entrepreneurs, to accelerate new business growth and to bring new, high-wage jobs to Rhode Island."

A stakeholder workshop to discuss the center's future activities and possible further partnerships will be held there on May 19. The center is seeking private sector financing and sponsorships as it develops its long-term strategy.

In a news release, Brown said the center would offer "expertise to the state's college and university faculties, as well as to researchers and entrepreneurs who want to launch new companies in Rhode Island, focused on high technology, life sciences, design or other knowledge economy businesses."

*The Rhode Island Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (RI-CIE) is a a 5,000-square-foot community center that provides collaborative space and guidance to startup firms in the city. It is a partnership between Brown University, the R.I. Economic Development Corporation, the R.I. Science and Technology Advisory Council, and the quasi-public Slater Technology Fund. For more information, visit [RI-CIE.org](#).*