



Contributors

David Rowley: R.I. good for scientific collaboration

11:10 AM EDT on Thursday, June 28, 2007

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RHODE ISLAND is showing that it's ahead of the pack when it comes to supporting broad-based, cross-disciplinary scientific research. Collaborative research has been behind some of the most revolutionary and transformative technological breakthroughs in recent decades, and is a key factor to success in a challenging, globalized economy.

In early April, I attended a one-day forum in Providence on "Expanding Rhode Island's Research and Development Capacity Through Collaboration." The Rhode Island Science and Technology Advisory Council (STAC) and Rhode Island's Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (RI-EPSCoR) hosted the event. RI-EPSCoR, founded in 2004, is the state branch of a National Science Foundation program designed to spark competitive research in the life sciences, and to encourage partnerships between state government, universities and industry.

The event brought together about 100 members of Rhode Island's academic- and commercial-research community, as well as business and government leaders interested in supporting collaborative research in the state. Speakers discussed how collaboration promotes the likelihood for scientific breakthroughs and is increasingly important for attracting federal research dollars.

Rhode Island leaders clearly support such ideas. Earlier this year, STAC awarded \$1.5 million in grants to 32 scientists from 15 research organizations through its Research Alliance Collaborative Research Award program. Cross-disciplinary collaboration wasn't just an advantage in applying for these grants; it was a requirement. Grant winners included academic and industry scientists pursuing projects in medicine, engineering, chemistry, biology, oceanography and environmental science.

These efforts dovetail with other parts of Rhode Island's economic-development strategy, primarily efforts to enhance the state's tight-knit commercial, civic and academic networks — a byproduct of Rhode Island's small size — and to leverage these networks into an economic asset that promotes creative new businesses.

Collaboration across disciplines and institutions — between industry and colleges, between the public and private sectors, between scientists in diverse fields — will help create a solid foundation from which

to propel the state's economy in the 21st Century. The benefits will include better educational opportunities, competitiveness for federal research dollars, and the creation of new jobs and businesses.

The idea is that networking in the state's scientific community will foster an environment of innovation whose benefits will trickle down to all. And in our increasingly interconnected and challenging world, innovation and cooperation are what it's all about.

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