

Collaboration Rules at STAC/EPSCoR Event

Collaboration was the buzzword of the day at "Expanding Rhode Island's Research and Development Capacity through Collaboration," a one-day forum, hosted on April 12 by the Rhode Island Science and Technology Advisory Council (STAC) and Rhode Island's Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR).

Nearly 100 participants attended the event including members of Rhode Island's academic and commercial research community, and business and community leaders interested in supporting collaborative research in Rhode Island.

"The partnerships in Rhode Island have evolved," said Dr. Jeff Seemann, Dean at the University of Rhode Island's College of the Environment and Life Sciences and a moderator for the event. "The collaboration that is present in Rhode Island's research community has surprised and motivated a lot of people."

The day was divided into three sessions, each with its own impressive line-up of nationally and locally-renowned scientists and researchers. "Why Collaboration Matters," the first session, featured the deputy director of the National Science Foundation Dr. Kathie Olsen, Broad Institute Assistant Professor of Medicine and Tucker Gosnell Investigator Dr. Sridhar Ramaswamy, and President of the State Science and Technology Institute Dan Berglund.

Olsen encouraged Rhode Island's government, businesses and colleges to work together to develop strategies for improving Rhode Island's science and technology education programs. "We have to excite our kids in terms of math, science and education," she said. "It's our future."

Ramaswamy discussed the importance of collaboration in his field, cancer research. "Although multi-million-dollar funding is important, the best model for collaboration is small, guerilla-like teams that can take advantage of each member's different experience," he said. "We need to collaborate because that is the only way we are going to solve problems we are faced with."

The nature of technology will inevitably force and encourage more collaboration, said Berglund. Technology is constantly progressing, and progress is being made in large part due to collaboration. In this environment, collaboration is a necessity, he said.

But collaboration can only get scientists and researchers so far. They need the tools necessary to move research forward from innovation to implementation. The day's second session, "Tools and Resources to Make Collaborative Research a Reality," focused on the different (and sometimes surprising) resources that are available to the competitive research sector in Rhode Island.

Dr. Rick Borchelt, Communications Director for the Genetics and Public Policy Center at John Hopkins University, discussed the difficult task of communicating science. Communicating poorly is worse than not communicating at all, he said. By knowing how key stakeholders find their information, communications professionals should be able to communicate directly and successfully with the targeted audience.

Communicating discoveries in scientific research to other researchers, institutions and the public is the best way to make "noise" in the marketplace and ultimately, receive funding for further research. According to George Lennon, Public Affairs Director for the National Science Foundation, the NSF offers scientists resources such as video news releases and three-dimensional graphic visualization and animation to help researchers share their findings with the general public.

Just last week, the University of Rhode Island was awarded with a contract to create Rhode Island's newest research resource - the first Center of Excellence in Undersea Technology in the United States that strongly reflects the mission of STAC and EPSCoR, said Dr. John Muench, Science and Technology Program Director for the Naval Undersea Warfare Center (NUWC).

The day's third and final session, "Best Practices in Collaborative Research," highlighted how scientists and researchers are using the state's resources and close-knit networks to produce successful collaborative research projects.

When Dr. David Rowley, Associate Professor of Biomedical Sciences at the University of Rhode Island, came to the state from San Diego, CA, he was pleasantly surprised how easy it was to become a part of the state's research community and collaborate with other scientists from URI as well as other institutions.

Collaboration was not only the key, but it was a requirement for STAC's Research Alliance Collaborative Research Award program, which awarded \$1.5 million to 32 scientists from 15 research organizations across the state. Dr. Joseph Crisco, Associate Professor of Orthopedics for the Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University, discussed his collaboration with four other researchers from institutions across the state on a project that will develop high-tech toys to assist in the rehabilitation of children with diseases such as cerebral palsy.

"This is a great signal of collaboration throughout the state," said Saul Kaplan, Executive Director of the Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation and a moderator for the event. "It is a sign of what's to come."

It was fitting that Dr. Bethany Jenkins and Dr. Robinson Fulweiler, both of the University of Rhode Island, had the last word on collaborative research for the day. The scientists, who have different scientific backgrounds, discussed how collaborators have to learn to work with the different ways scientists approach their work. For example, Jenkins and Fulweiler worked with a computer science group to store and graph their research data. While the two scientists were focused on the discovery part of the project, the computer scientists were dedicated to storing the data and making it user-friendly. The project couldn't have been done without the input from each of the groups - a perfect collaboration.