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Posted June 29, 2009

TECHNOLOGY

IBM seeks partners for research center

By **Kevin Shalvey**
PBN Staff Writer

In the flow chart that Nicholas Bowen, vice president of technology at IBM, pitched last week as a possible structure of a public-private research and computing consortium in Rhode Island, there seemed to be a glaring omission: the end result was hazy, listed only as solutions to "grand challenges."

"To me that means we'll need to focus and say: 'What are the real problems that you're going to take the resources in Rhode Island ... and really declare publicly that you're going to solve something that couldn't otherwise be solved,'" Bowen told the crowd at the June 22 R.I. Science & Technology Advisory Council meeting. STAC is leading the push to bring universities and businesses on board with the program. Bowen added that the best collaborations start with "big ideas."

"You have people in industry, you have universities, you have governments," Bowen said. "And they [all] have a set of strengths and a set of needs. For us, we want to really accelerate our knowledge, our ability to do research."

One of the state's research institutions has already signed on as an IBM partner. In May, Brown University signed a memorandum of understanding with IBM to go ahead with a two-year pilot program that would create a central research and computing hub run by IBM. The price of that program and who would pay for it are still undetermined, as are the research issues Brown would like to focus on. A similar program in Albany, N.Y., called for about \$600 million in investment and has since created 6,200 jobs and drawn another \$10 billion in private investment.

Brown University Vice President for Research Clyde Briant, who is co-chair of STAC, said last week that the MOU came out of discussions between he, Bowen and others at STAC. He added that Brown's plan to work with IBM was not intended to be an exclusive deal.

"One of the things that Nick [Bowen] made very clear is that one of the goals that IBM had was to work with geographical entities, like the state of Rhode Island," Briant said, "where they could work with a number of groups and not just one single group."

Briant thought Rhode Island – "a small state where we really collaborate" – would be perfect for that type of joint research. Bringing Bowen in to talk with STAC, which has representatives from research institutions, government and business, was a way to pitch the center.



PHOTO COURTESY EDC

PARTNERING UP: Nicholas Bowen, an IBM vice president, left, said the company has increased its research partnerships in the past 10 years. At right is Gov. Donald L. Carcieri.

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