



The i6 Challenge: Creating Regional Innovation Ecosystems

Q&A Session Responses

Nish Acharya, U.S. Department of Commerce:

Question	Answer
What does "i6" stand for?	"i" = innovation; "6" = the six EDA regions
Can you steer me to some location on the Department of Commerce website which describes the i6 program at the 50,000 ft level?	Please see the Economic Development Administration website and look at the i6 Challenge page, http://www.eda.gov/challenges/i6/ .
Is \$1 million the total federal share offered for this year's program?	The Economic Development Administration (EDA) will provide a total of \$6 million, with \$1 million each to be distributed by each EDA regional office.
Of the \$3 million in project funding (\$1 million Department of Commerce, \$1 million private, \$1 million NSF-SBIR), how does the \$1 million from NSF-SBIR come in? Automatic matching to the winning project, or a separate competition?	In previous years, the National Science Foundation committed \$3 million in total to support SBIR applicants from i6 centers. We hope that a similar arrangement will occur this year.
How can the i6 funds (\$1 million) be used? For instance, can proof of concept projects and/or collaborations with commercial partners be funded directly?	No. The Economic Development Administration has guidelines on how i6 Challenge funds can be used. Details will be provided in the 2013 i6 Challenge Federal Funding Opportunity (FFO) announcement.
Will SBIR/STTR funding (the additional \$1M mentioned) be set aside for partnerships with i6 Challenge institutions?	We do not know for sure, but will announce as part of the i6 announcement.
Where can I find more winner project information such as the key contacts for discussion and information?	The list of winners can be found on the Economic Development Administration website (www.eda.gov) under the i6 Challenge link . Unfortunately, the site does not have a list of each winner's point of contact.



GOVERNMENT-UNIVERSITY-INDUSTRY RESEARCH ROUNDTABLE

The National Academies

Question	Answer
<p>I have an idea that I'd like to test for commercial viability. How can I find a group has related research interests and has the appropriate facilities to conduct scientific research? Is this type of collaboration possible?</p>	<p>Although we are working on using technology to help connect you with the right i6 center, at this point the best way to do that is to research the work of each of the nineteen i6 winners. This can be found on the EDA website.</p>
<p>Can you talk to the FY13 National Defense Authorization Act language that supports regional advanced technology clusters and requires DOD to report its interactions with regional clusters?</p>	<p>Unable to comment.</p>
<p>Is there a way to track which federally funded basic research actually moves into a regional innovation cluster?</p>	<p>EDA is currently working on this topic, but there is no easy database to search for this.</p>
<p>What do you expect to see as USDA involvement in this program? Which federal agencies that you have contacted? Committed?</p>	<p>We are in the process of contacting many agencies to determine their levels of interest. We won't know which agencies commit until closer to the release of the 2013 i6 Challenge Federal Funding Opportunity (FFO) announcement, scheduled for later this year.</p>
<p>If a region was a past winner and has an idea for a complimentary, but different, project for this year, what would be the key aspects of the proposal that you would like to see to grant another "WIN" to the region?</p>	<p>Past winners of the i6 are welcome to apply, and we certainly hope their application reflects the growth and success of their i6 Center and the opportunity to expand its scope or size through the new application.</p>
<p>Since i6 is a regional network, what roles do the State Department of Economic Development offices play in promoting the i6 challenge in their jurisdictions?</p>	<p>Applicants should consider state and municipal agencies as potential funding and implementation partners, since many of them are interested in innovation-driven economic development.</p>
<p>You mentioned NSF I-Corps - an education program; and the SBIR/STTR program; but have you looked into the NSF Accelerating Innovation Research (AIR) programs that have 2 choices towards applied research: Tech Transfer (\$150K) and Research Alliance (\$800K)?</p>	<p>Yes, thank you. We are also speaking with representatives from this program.</p>



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Question	Answer
Is it still a "win" if a company is spun out, attracts private funding, becomes successful, but has moved away from the "region of origin?"	EDA does not have a position on this. We are seeking to promote economic development in regions, but also across the United States.
Entrepreneurship can take place anywhere; innovation is more difficult. How many places have all the ingredients necessary for innovation, and a million dollars is not that much? Why not invest more money in fewer places?	We believe that there are many places across the United States that have the capacity to innovate and support entrepreneurs. But this capacity also varies based on history, research capacity and business networks. And the investment we are making of \$1 million is to help seed or grow that capacity.
In rural areas, like northwest Oklahoma, how can we get involved? Our closest research centers are an hour or more away, but we have huge job growth and are working on our entrepreneurial ecosystem and diversifying beyond the ag and energy sectors.	We suggest you develop a strategy for your i6 application that leverages the strengths of your region as a complement to your research colleagues.
Can you tell us or give us examples of people thinking about this from a new perspective - who and where these who already participate are - and what has been successful - is there a web link to look at this?	We believe all nineteen of our i6 centers are taking innovative and encouraging approaches to developing innovation in their region. The nineteen winners are listed on the EDA website , and have very distinct approaches to innovation commercialization, reflecting their regional economies.
When is the next round of funding?	The 2013 i6 Challenge Federal Funding Opportunity (FFO) announcement is planned for Spring 2013. Please check the Economic Development Administration website at www.eda.gov for updates



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Barry Rosenbaum, University of Akron Research Foundation:

Question	Answer
Are Akron results typical?	We expect that over time, most i6 winners will achieve similar results. Strong management teams with commitment to deliverables. 3 Akron research hospitals had no process for encouraging tech commercialization. I6 filled a huge gap in innovation process.
How much of the organization had been structured before submission of your first successful i6 proposal?	The organization was in place but not the disciplined innovation processes nor the strong collaboration commitment.
How do you do your IP and Market Assessments?	We form business assessment teams with volunteer mentors, students, and paid content experts. Strong positive assessments are needed before proof of concept grants are awarded.
I have an idea that I'd like to test for commercial viability. How can I find a group that has related research interests and has the appropriate facilities to conduct scientific research? Is this type of collaboration possible?	You need to develop a business model and value proposition. I suggest you then discuss with your alma mater's Tech Transfer Office.
What is the total fund that you have raised to support the 24 projects?	Beyond proof of concept grants, we support entrepreneurs in raising pre-seed and angel funding....roughly 10x leverage on the i6 funding.
Could you elaborate a bit about the role of IP inventor in this process?	The IP inventor typically becomes CTO in the startup company, a key role but not CEO.
You are a Fellow with the UARF who brings a wealth of industrial and entrepreneurial expertise. How can other regions encourage people with your background to become active in their region's university research foundations & entrepreneurial programs?	I would suggest starting with your Alumni Office. Many alums are eager to engage, but not encouraged by universities.



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Is it still a "win" if a company is spun out, attracts private funding, becomes successful, but has moved away from the "region of origin?"	Yes—it is always a win when the market embraces new technology.
Entrepreneurship can take place anywhere; innovation is more difficult. How many places have all the ingredients necessary for innovation, and a million dollars is not that much? Why not invest more money in fewer places?	i6 is seeding the innovation process only. There is a need to look towards private investors and industry to provide larger sums.
Innovation, entrepreneurship and value creation has not always been valued in academic institutions. Our own experience indicates that generation of IP recognized/ rewarded within the existing faculty P/T framework is a powerful tool for culture change.	Absolutely. When faculty recognize that innovation / entrepreneurship help their students to have more successful careers, everyone wins.
Can you tell us or give us examples of people thinking about this from a new perspective - who and where these who already participate are - and what has been successful - is there a web link to look at this?	I suggest you subscribe to Innovation DAILY , a free service.

Contact Information

<p><i>U.S. Economic Development Administration</i></p> <p>Nish Acharya, Director of the U.S. Department of Commerce's Office of Innovation and Entrepreneurship (OIE) - nacharya@doc.gov</p> <p><i>For more information:</i> http://www.eda.gov/challenges/i6/</p>	<p><i>University of Akron Research Foundation</i></p> <p>Barry Rosenbaum, Senior Fellow – barry@uakron.edu</p> <p><i>For more information:</i> http://www.uakron.edu/research/uarf.dot</p>
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