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# INNOVATION NJ & NJPRO RELEASE 'BUILDING BRIDGES II'

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Report is a roadmap to enhance and develop state's "Innovation Ecosystem."

By Anthony Birritteri,  
Editor-in-Chief

Innovation NJ, a coalition of 90 businesses, institutions of higher education and state government, along with the New Jersey Policy Research Organization (NJPRO) Foundation (an independent affiliate of the New Jersey Business & Industry Association) released a report in March that is designed to serve as a catalyst to encourage academia, industry and the state to work together to meld their respective research and development assets. The mission is to enhance the state's "Innovation Ecosystem" and affirm New Jersey's historic role as a global leader in innovation.

Titled "Building Bridges II: Breaking Down the Barriers - Perspectives from Academia and Industry on Building a New Jersey Innovation Ecosystem," the 44-page report is the result of work conducted by eight industry-specific focus groups that discussed how to foster an environment for greater collaboration.

The call for greater collaboration has been at the heart of Innovation NJ (INJ), which was formed three years ago to expand and strengthen the culture of innovation in the state by sparking research and development, promote the commercialization of new medicines, technologies and products and stimulate economic growth.

In explaining an existing research chasm in the state, Melanie Willoughby, senior vice president, NJBIA, and co-chair of Innovation NJ, explains, "Over the decades, New Jersey's in-



novator companies had the capital to pursue their R&D agendas on their own, and the state had little competition from other venues that lacked the benefit of an embedded R&D infrastructure. Consequently, there was little need for R&D support from New Jersey's government or its academic community, and thus a void grew between industry and higher education in New Jersey."

According to Haskell Berman, senior vice president - state affairs, HealthCare Institute of New Jersey (HINJ) and co-chair of Innovation NJ, "Our state now faces mounting competition from other states for private sector R&D investment. Realizing the myriad and vast economic benefits generated by R&D, other states — as well as other nations — have aggressively been developing innovation ecosystems that marry the R&D efforts and resources of government, academia and industry around a specific industrial cluster.

"Having a built-in industrial R&D infrastructure and top-flight academic institutions, New Jersey has the components of a world-class innovation ecosystem," Berman continues. "What the Building Bridges II report is saying is that we need to put the pieces of the puzzle together in a cohesive fashion so that when people think of New Jersey, they once again think of a leader in R&D and innovation."

The eight focus groups identified five overarching challenges that are inhibiting greater industry collaboration

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with New Jersey academic institutions. It then developed 15 recommendations that would address the challenges.

The challenges are:

- The need to alleviate administrative burdens associated with partnering with an academic institution.
- The need to improve the coordination of state, industry and academic R&D efforts and resources.
- The need to bridge the clashing cultural differences between industry and academia.
- The need to raise awareness throughout the business community of the state's available higher education R&D assets.
- The need to have the state, industry and higher education work together to secure increased R&D funding, especially from federal government sources.

Some of the 15 recommendations include:

- The state, industry and academia should collectively work to reform their IP protocols and investigate the feasibility of a uniform IP agreement for state colleges and universities.
- Academic institutions should employ Master Agreements to avoid repetitive negotiations and to increase the efficiency of the execution of collaboration agreements.
- The state needs to identify within its institutions of higher education the expertise and resources that could form the basis for Centers of Excellence. Designation of a single center of excellence for a specific research topic would target resources and provide guidance to interested parties searching for a research partner.
- Academia, industry and the state should form consortiums dedicated to producing innovative ideas, products and services and to attract increased federal funding.
- In an era of reduced and increasingly competitive government funding, academia, industry and the state must combine their resources and ef-

forts to attract increased federal dollars.

- The state should establish a Council on Innovation to advise the governor, Legislature and other officials on ways to promote innovation and manage the innovation ecosystem.

- Academia should emphasize the teaching of interpersonal skills and provide basic business training for STEM majors to facilitate the translation of research from the lab into commercialized applications.

- Academia should design user-friendly websites, to make it easier for business to find the resources they are seeking and to facilitate potential collaborations.

- Academia, industry and the state should establish a comprehensive resource directory that includes existing research areas, capabilities and talent, and publicly available assets and facilities at New Jersey colleges and universities.

- Each college and university should publicly promote its own chief administrator to serve as a one-stop-shop for business to access university information and resources.

Willoughby says an eye opener in putting the Building Bridges II report together was the fact that universities in the state do not work closely together to try to create centers of excellence. "These would be places where businesses could go to and be able to get the information and research they need to order to create their products. Other states have

been very adept at creating these centers," she explains.

Phil Kirschner, NJBIA president, commended NJPRO and its executive director, Sara Bluhm (who is also vice president - environment, energy & federal affairs at NJBIA) for their work on Building Bridges II and its predecessor Building Bridges, which was published in 2010 and proposed that the state's universities and colleges serve as a cornerstone for the state's innovation economy to attract increased industry investment and be a catalyst for economic growth. According to Kirschner, "NJBIA and its 21,000 members have been long-time advocates in bringing together the resources and capabilities of higher education, business and government in order to create jobs and improve New Jersey's competitiveness. Where we go in the future depends on developing our knowledge economy. That is where the good jobs will be. The state has a good foundation on which to start, but this [report] can take it to the next level."

Willoughby adds, "We find ourselves at an opportune time. The Christie Administration and Legislature have reorganized higher education in the state, and the public has approved the higher education bond act to construct the facilities needed to attract research talent and investment. We see assembling our innovation ecosystem as a next logical step." **NJB**

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