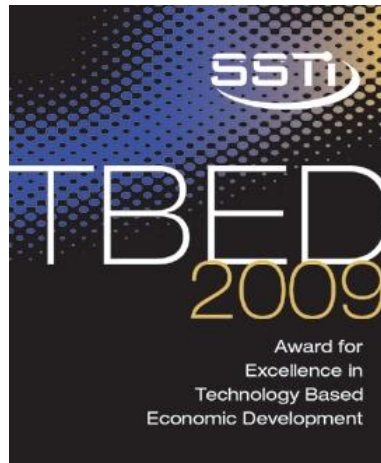


Podcast Interview



Chris Coleman, Interim Executive
Director, The Washington
Technology Center
(Now Innovate Washington)
Interviewed by: Phillip Battle, SSSI

*2009 Excellence in TBED Award Winner:
Commercializing Research*

Mr. Battle: Hello, this is Phillip Battle with SSTI and this is the SSTI Podcast. Today I'm speaking with Chris Coleman, Interim Executive Director of The Washington Technology Center. The center's Research and Technology Development Program was the 2009 winner of SSTI's Excellence in TBED Award in the category Commercializing Research.

Hi Chris, thanks for being here.

Mr. Coleman: Thank you.

Mr. Battle: So the Research Technology Development Program – it seems to have had a long history of success. Could you just give us a little bit of background about the program?

Mr. Coleman: Well the program was originally designed to be kind of both a push and a pull when it comes to intellectual property in moving research out of research institutions. So it's based on partnering a company with a specific technology related need with one of the research institutions here in the state of Washington that has the expertise to solve that company's problem. Company problems get solved and then the research institution has a pretty direct line for licensing that intellectual property.

Mr. Battle: So when looking for a potential project to work with, what do you look for?

Mr. Coleman: Well a number of things, first of all economic impact, since we are an economic development organization. Is this a need where if this technology problem is solved that this company is going to in the short term, and sometimes looking at the long term, distinctly increase their competitiveness. Through that of course, economic growth, company growth and therefore job growth. Another thing is it the type of scenario where there is a distinct benefit on the IP for research institution too because this is often one of the situations where we can fill the partnership mandates here in the state in getting – especially the universities – engaged within the stream of companies more.

Mr. Battle: And you offer financial support, correct?

Mr. Coleman: Correct. It's actually built around a three stage process. In each stage there is up to \$100,000 available. So we put in \$100,000, there is a

company match required as well at a minimum of 20%. Therefore, there is stage one and if that is successful the company can apply for a stage two and a stage three. So it's an evolution in solving that problem often as well.

Mr. Battle: So beyond matching companies with researchers and offering the financial support, you offer additional support for these projects, right?

Mr. Coleman: Correct. One thing is just matching that company need with a researcher, one of the research institutions is in and of itself often a huge support to the company. Especially with the small growing companies, they don't have the biochemist on staff that a lot of the research institutions do. So there is a resource there in just that partnering aspect is a huge value to the company. In addition, we have the program set up where the companies can utilize their match for perhaps other needs that we believe, and that the company might believe would make the overall economic impact more successful. As an example, business planning support or market planning support. In addition, the proposal process itself ensures that companies get a lot of feedback on those pieces that can often be overlooked if we're just focusing on the pure research to ensure that the company has the best chance to succeed as possible.

Mr. Battle: So how do you make sure that stakeholders and state leaders know about the success you're having?

Mr. Coleman: A few ways. One we do an annual report every year, which goes to the state legislature, the governor's office and in that we highlight the companies that we've worked with in that particular fiscal period. Also how are the companies doing that we worked with over the preceding, at this point 25 years in WTC's history and 15 plus years for their RTD program. Press releases go out with every award. We make sure that each legislator has an example, knows about companies that are receiving awards in their districts, and we have a pretty extensive online news forum as well that's picked up by a number of online and print publications here in the state.

Mr. Battle: So what lessons have you learned along the way that might be useful for another organization trying to have success with a similar program?

Mr. Coleman: Well again, I think there would be a few points. One is that the proposal review process that we have in place has a series of committees focused

on a technological aspect that the proposal would fall under. These review committees are non-WTC staff. They are volunteers and it really ensures there is no appearance of bias. So WTC staff is not in the end making the final recommendations if you will. Though the Executive Director does actually make the final recommendation to the Board for approval or not. The review is really completely unbiased.

The second big piece I think is ensuring that there is a clear economic development benefit as part of the criteria for awarding a proposal. We'll often get a proposal that has a clear problem, looks like it could have a lot of benefit to solve this problem, clear research need, but the thought hasn't actually gone beyond: will this actually have economic benefit or not? Is this something that actually could be marketed? Is there a marketing plan? Is there a business plan in place to ensure the success of the company?

Another thing I think along with that is the proposal feedback, which is something we really focus on so that company through the process itself is almost getting a consulting service in giving that feedback about the overall business plan, research plan, marketing plan, etc.

I think the last thing is that it being split into three stages so that there is that evolution and you are not just setting it up so you have one shot at success or failure. You can bring the project along; you can bring the company along to ensure that the funds are used most effectively as well.

- Mr. Battle: Do you find the companies you work with who apply that might not participate in this program come back to use WTC's other programs or reapply for this one in the future?
- Mr. Coleman: Often yes, we do which is I think very beneficial for us and the company and shows the value of some of these programs.
- Mr. Battle: Well thank you Chris for speaking with us today. If our listeners would like to find out more about WTC's Research and Technology Development Program they can visit the website at www.watechcenter.org. For more information about the SSTI Awards Program, please visit our website at <http://www.sstiawards.org>.