

Innovation Center Sets Sights on Biotechnology

Boulder nonprofit expands targets, partners with TTO

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BOULDER — Innovators in the biotech field may find they have friends in the business — potentially lots of friends.

Extended programming at the Boulder Innovation Center has targeted bioscience, and the heart of the program is matching new technologies with a list of hundreds of potential advisers who might help bring the product to market, according to the center's Executive Director Tim Bour.

At the same time, BIC appears to be getting closer with the University of Colorado Technology Transfer Office.

"We added bioscience as one of our target markets right after I came in September," Bour said. "We don't get 100 percent of our cases from CU, but certainly we've been focused on forging a strong relationship there."

Historically, the innovation center has focused on areas of natural and organic foods, and software and systems, but the recent expansion has added program areas in nanotechnology, optical, engineering, bioscience, energy and clean tech.

That's just fine with the CU Technology Transfer Office, said Kate Tallman, CU's assistant vice president for technology transfer.

"We've been involved with BIC since its inception (in 2005)," Tallman said. "(Bour) has really defined the process and expanded the range of technologies that we can bring in."

Tallman said the tech transfer office typically has seen about 10 potential startup companies work with BIC in a given year. This year that may increase to 20 or 30.

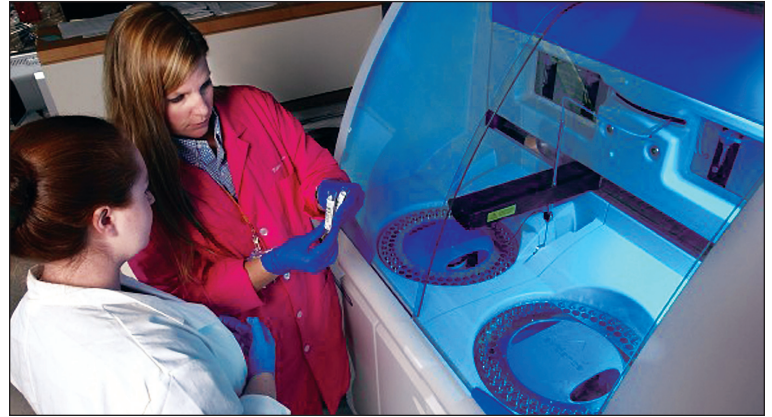
The expanded program list is one reason for that increase, and Bour has brought five part-time program managers on board to shoulder an increased workload. In just a few months the number of active clients who were headed for new business creation at BIC had more than doubled to about 20 potential businesses.

Bour noted that even when working with the transfer office, a number of scientific or technical ideas and patents are examined that are not ultimately selected for business creation.

"There's some triaging for best potential at TTO, but no one is exactly sure what the commercial potential is of any invention," Bour said. "Science at the university is funded with the aim of furthering scientific knowledge and not for business creation. There's quite a gap between there and actually creating a business."

That's where having hundreds of potential advisers can be useful.

Christopher Rehm is the new program manager for bioscience. He reviews available client information and sends out information to the



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The Boulder Innovation Center hopes to work closely with the University of Colorado Technology Transfer Office in the field of bioscience. The innovation center's Executive Director Tim Bour said, "We don't get 100 percent of our cases from CU, but certainly we've been focused on forging a strong relationship there." Here scientists work in a lab at CU's Denver Health Sciences Center's Anschutz Medical Campus Lab.

most qualified from a list of more than 650 volunteer advisers BIC keeps on hand. These advisers are contacts with scientific and technical expertise in the program areas. There are also serial entrepreneurs, business and financial experts and journalists interested in scientific or technical fields.

It is through this review process that the most likely candidates for business creation are gleaned. Eventually the most qualified and interested advisers will work closely with the principal investigators of the patent or business idea, and three or four volunteers ultimately may become a part of that business.

The process is much the same for business people who bring in novel concepts to the innovation center, which is loosely defined as a business incubation center. The innovation center is dramatically different from most incubation centers because the nonprofit does not seek equity in businesses and doesn't offer office space.

Initial funding came from the city of Boulder, the state of Colorado, the Boulder Chamber of Commerce and the Boulder Economic Council. A number of sponsors help keep the doors open, including Faegre & Benson, which supplies office space. A number of other sponsors provide financial and in-kind support, including financial and accounting assistance.

Potential businesses can come from a number of sources, including Web site applications and people walking through the front door, Bour said. His staff works closely with the Small Business Administration to sort through good fits for assistance to both organizations.

The heart and soul of the program, he said, is the many talented business and technical people who are willing to volunteer their time as advisers.

"I'm continually amazed by the quality of people who are willing to be our advisers," Bour said.



Bour