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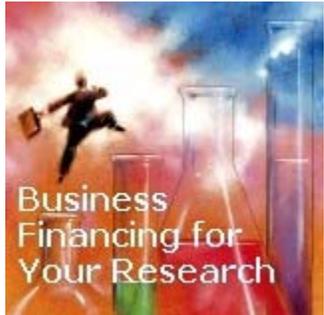
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#### Finding Industry Funding

Siri Carpenter  
United States  
14 March 2008

Most collaborations between companies and academic researchers are initiated by industry scientists looking for specific technologies or expertise, notes Anthony Boccanfuso, executive director of the Washington, D.C.-based [University-Industry Demonstration Partnership \(UIDP\)](#), a consortium aimed at improving collaboration between universities and industry. But that doesn't mean university researchers have to sit and wait for the phone to ring. If you are looking for industry funding, it helps to be proactive.

If somebody inside the company is pulling while you're pushing, stuff tends to get done a lot faster and a lot more effectively." - David Rosen, Pfizer

#### EXPLOIT READY-MADE OPPORTUNITIES

In many cases, researchers interested in private-sector funding need look no further than their own campuses. Many research institutions already host industry-funded programs. At their most ambitious, these programs are massive, multicenter research consortia that recruit dozens or even hundreds of industry partners. Albany NanoTech, a

multibillion-dollar research complex affiliated with the [College of Nanoscale Science and Engineering](#) at the University at Albany in New York state, involves more than 250 corporations, many of which provide major funding for university faculty members.

Many universities also administer industry-funded grant programs on a smaller scale. ConocoPhillips, for example, recently announced that it will give \$22.5 million over 8 years to the multidisciplinary biorenewable fuels research program at Iowa State University in Ames. The grant will fund about 10 faculty members in its first year.

#### TUNE IN TO INDUSTRY NEEDS

Establishing new university-industry alliances requires some legwork. If you have a good sense of which companies might profit from your work, search those companies' Web sites for faculty fellowships. Also look for competitive requests for proposals (RFPs), a mechanism a small but growing number of companies use to provide grants to academic researchers.

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For the past 2 years, a response to an RFP has netted two unrestricted grants of about \$40,000 for computer scientist [Frank Dellaert](#), who studies robotics and computer vision at the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta, to develop new online three-dimensional mapping technologies for Microsoft's [Virtual Earth](#). Dellaert says the RFP application process is far less cumbersome than some federal grant applications, which require technical proposals 15 to 60 pages long. "With Microsoft, you write one page of text; there is no budget, just a back-of-the-envelope calculation. It's extremely painless."

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**Take the lead.** Anthony Boccanfuso (*left*) urges academic scientists to make their case to industry, as Karen Wooley of Washington University in St. Louis has done.

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In addition to developing formal RFP procedures, many large corporations--[DuPont](#) and [Pfizer](#), for example--have adopted an R&D model known as open innovation, forming corporate "technology connectors" to fund external scientists and entrepreneurs to work on tightly defined problems. A consumer-products company, for example, might use this mechanism to request proposals for a polymer that adheres to polyester surfaces. Open innovation is largely focused on technology transfer or intellectual-property licensing, but opportunities for funding academic research also exist.

Some companies also work through intermediaries, such as the companies [NineSigma](#) and [InnoCentive](#), which broadcast their clients' R&D requests to scientists, engineers, and entrepreneurs around the world who have opted into the companies' proprietary "solution provider" networks.

## BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

Too often, academic researchers seeking corporate support for their work try to convince industry scientists that what they do is great science, notes [Michael Amiridis](#), a chemical engineer and dean of the college of engineering and computing at the University of South Carolina, Columbia. Instead, he says, "try to understand what the problem is that industry is trying to solve and show what you can bring to the table. It takes cultivation, and it takes time."

"A lot of people think, 'Oh, companies have lots of money; let's get some of that money,' " says chemist [Karen Wooley](#) of Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, who studies nanometer-scale polymer particles and has received funding from a number of industry sources. "That's a naive point of view. We can't expect handouts or open-ended gifts. It has to be a friendship based on mutual respect, and there has to be an indication that the company is going to get something out of it."

Making personal connections is "far and away the best way to get a deal done," says David Rosen, executive director in [worldwide business development](#) at Pfizer. "Getting a champion inside the company to want your technology breaks through a lot of barriers. If somebody inside the company is pulling while you're pushing, stuff tends to get done a lot faster and a lot more effectively."

The trick is knowing where to start. Many academic researchers feel disconnected from the private sector, and targeting companies "cold" is "a tortured path because companies' internal

structures aren't usually transparent to the public," notes Boccanfuso.

But finding industry scientists with compatible interests isn't as hard or as mysterious as it might seem. Industry researchers graduate from the same doctoral programs that generate academic researchers, belong to the same scientific societies, attend the same conferences, publish in the same journals, and register with the same patent office. That means that with some detective work, you can figure out who they are.

At professional conferences, take advantage of opportunities to meet industry scientists. "I see the tendency of academics to cluster among themselves at these meetings," says Amiridis. "I don't do this. I go out and look at the nametags. Talk to people. You need to sell yourself." While you're chatting, nurture these fledgling relationships by inviting your new industry friend to give a seminar in your department. Return the honor by offering to give a seminar to the company's scientists.

Make yourself as visible as possible. Set up a profile on the professional networking site [LinkedIn](#) and indicate in your contact settings that you're interested in consulting offers, job inquiries, and expertise requests. Make full use of university databases that detail researchers' interests, suggests cognitive psychologist [Dennis Proffitt](#) of the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, who has received funding from several industry sources.

University research administrators can also be rainmakers, says [Don Gerhart](#), associate vice president for research and innovation at the University of Oregon, Eugene. Many research administrators, he notes, monitor opportunities for research partnerships with the private sector and are happy to help guide faculty members toward industry collaborations.

When all else fails, pick up the phone and make cold calls. "Be bold and invite yourself in, even if it's going to cost you some money," says Amiridis. "Maybe three out of four times it won't lead to anything, but the one time that it does, it can easily pay for the other times."

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