

Technology Assistance Program

Leveraging research expertise to solve small businesses' technical challenges



Pacific Northwest
NATIONAL LABORATORY

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"A lot of a research takes a long time to realize benefits. In fact, sometimes so long that we have to pause and wonder, "where's this all leading?" Given that, it's very satisfying to get involved with something short-term and/or small scale (project) that has enormous impact, especially if it's helping someone. I think that's an important part of being a big national laboratory."

– **Mark Engelhard,**
Senior Research Scientist, EMSL

What it's all about

The U.S. Department of Energy sponsors the Technology Assistance Program (TAP) at Pacific Northwest National Laboratory (PNNL) to help grow and diversify the nation's economy. The TAP helps technology-based companies improve their competitiveness by providing free assistance or information to assist businesses with specific technology questions or needs.

TAP activities offer PNNL's research community access to the commercial marketplace to help solve real-world problems and needs. Additionally, the TAP provides a forum for researchers and commercial businesses to interact. It's an intersection for potential technological solutions to address commercial technical problems by leveraging government research funding.

Through the TAP, researchers at the Laboratory are funded to work with a small business for up to one staff-week per project. Companies can request one project each year, so some researchers work with the same company more than once. An individual



TAP helps local business win \$140K grant

Through a TAP project, XL Sci-Tech leveraged PNNL's business development guidance and technical expertise to confirm research findings for a proposal the company was submitting. The proposal won XL Sci-Tech a \$140K Small Business Innovation Research Phase I grant from the National Institutes of Health.

Pictured: back row, from left, Kim Piper, PNNL; Robin Conger, PNNL; in front, Ben Peng, XL-Sci-Tech.

XL Sci-Tech, a bio-tech research firm in Richland, WA, provides research, development, and testing of bioabsorbable materials for cancer treatment. The company was founded by XL Sci-Tech CEO, Ben Peng, a former staff member of PNNL.

researcher can work on a number of projects for different businesses within the same year.

A business may come to a researcher looking for help, especially if it has worked with you before. But usually, the requests come in to PNNL's Economic Development Office (EDO) and are matched with researchers who have the capabilities the business is seeking. Once the scope of work and the deliverable are agreed upon, EDO issues a work package number to the assigned researcher. From there, the work is completed in about one staff-week and concludes with a written summary of the results.

In addition to giving staff more opportunities to work with businesses and commercial products, technology assistance projects at PNNL have led to follow-on work, shared intellectual property, and new business partners, as well as contributing to R&D 100 and FLC awards.

Worthwhile program, superior results

Created in 1994, the program has helped 500-plus companies through more than 800 projects with a stellar satisfaction rating—many companies have even come back to the Laboratory for additional assistance. More than 94 percent of businesses in the program surveyed gave PNNL high ratings for usefulness and delivery of assistance.

Examples of the researchers' assistance for TAP projects include:

- advising on existing or emerging products
- providing advanced technology for hardware and software applications
- improving production and manufacturing processes
- resolving technical problems
- performing scientific peer reviews
- recommending energy conservation and environmental technologies.

TAP improves blood platelet assessment system

Blood Cell Storage, Inc. (BCSI), an international medical device company, developed a fluorescence sensor that measures the pH level of platelet concentrate. BCSI's reader device was suffering from an intermittent error that caused the reader display to freeze. Using the TAP, BCSI teamed with PNNL researchers to assess and remedy the sensor's error and to improve the design and manufacturing process for one of the system's polymer components.



TAP helps Oregon company improve building energy efficiency technology

NorthWrite Inc., a web-based software company, requested technology assistance from PNNL to add a new feature to Energy Expert, an energy efficiency web-tool for buildings. Under a TAP project, PNNL researchers provided three potential weather/energy prediction capabilities that could be integrated into the Energy Expert tool.

TAP into success

In addition to helping businesses with their challenges, an added benefit of the TAP program is that the projects can help us build capabilities and bring in new collaborations from the public and private sectors. If you know a business in need of this technology-based support or are interested in becoming part of the program:

- visit the TAP website: <http://www.pnl.gov/edo/assistance/techassist.stm>, or
- contact Gary Spanner, see information below.

For more information, contact:

Gary Spanner

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