

Tri-Cities could be innovation hub

Change is inevitable. Many say it's the only constant. One can either wait for the waves to hit and avoid drowning or get ahead of them and maximize the ride. I believe being proactive is the harder but more powerful option.

During the past couple of years, many people have proactively worked to effect a particular change across Washington: to create a thriving ecosystem to accelerate technology-based economic development and achieve sustainable job growth. The result is an organization called Innovate Washington.

A true public-private hybrid, Innovate Washington empowers entrepreneurs, large companies, state government, investors and industry leaders to become highly collaborative. Under its umbrella, these parties share one simple goal: Make Washington the best place to launch innovations and grow companies.

Prior to Innovate Washington, a few technology-related organizations did their best to serve the state's

economy. But each had its own goals, sources of funding, resources to offer, limited reach into the business community, and so on. Now, they've been restructured into a cohesive organization focused on delivering services with direct input and involvement from industry partners.



Ali Madison

Economic
Diversity

"This was no small undertaking," said Mike Schwenk, director of Pacific Northwest National Laboratory's Technology Deployment & Outreach office and a Governor Gregoire-appointed member of Innovate Washington's board of directors. "Many parties from all over the state, including business leaders

from right here in the Tri-Cities, did a lot of heavy lifting to bring together the state's universities, high-tech and business associations, clean-energy businesses and environmental organizations to make this significant restructure happen."

And happen it did. Innovate Washington was codified by the Legislature in 2011 and signed into law by Gov. Chris Gregoire. It now operates as a nonprofit rather than a state program,

allowing for partnering with and receiving funding from a much wider range of sources including industry, other nongovernmental organizations and the federal government. As a result, Innovate Washington is able to directly engage with a range of stakeholders, including the state's resident national laboratory — PNNL — to foster more collaborative relationships for solving problems of regional and national significance.

The organization employs an outcome-focused, sector-based approach aligning research, industry, financial, regulatory and others involved in the technology transfer lifecycle in a new and exciting way. The first sector in its sights? Clean energy.

In concert with the Clean Energy Leadership Council, Innovate Washington's first organizational priority is to make the Northwest a world-class hub of clean-energy ideas, development and export; a leader in the creation of green jobs; and a home for high-growth clean technology and clean energy companies.

This is where I believe the Tri-Cities has an in. We are ideally situated to become the clean-energy technology hub in Washington. The

abundance of renewable and clean energy sources and the breadth of related expertise and innovation available via partnership with the state's only national laboratory are two major reasons.

But let's not stop there. We, too, are aligning ourselves to achieve tech-based economic growth with continuing development of the Tri-Cities Research District coupled with ongoing, proactive efforts to help new energy technology companies start, grow and relocate here in this community as manifested through the Mid-Columbia Energy Initiative.

With plans to open a new office established in the Research District and to hire a local consultant, Innovate Washington will soon directly, locally provide its plethora of no-cost consulting services to businesses or entrepreneurs who qualify.

Are you or do you know of a high tech rapid growth company that fits the bill? Go to innovatewashington.org to get ahead of the wave.

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