

National labs, communities should communicate

The word "partnering" is teetering on the edge of becoming a buzzword. But I need to use it to describe how national laboratories and their communities should work together to move innovations to the marketplace.

Innovations can be basic science or technology. And moving either of them from a government-owned facility can often take a completely different kind of innovation. Representatives from Los Alamos National Laboratory and Pacific Northwest National Laboratory recently spoke on the topic at an Energy Communities Alliance meeting in Richland.

"Communities need to plug into what national labs are doing — and vice versa," said Steve Stringer, Tech-



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As an industrial fellow, Stringer can better connect industry needs with the laboratory's basic science.

"If I know that P&G has a challenge in a particular area, I can take that

nology Transfer Division at Los Alamos National Laboratory. He suggested that "fellow agreements," similar to how his job is structured at LANL as an industrial fellow with Procter and Gamble, should be considered between labs and their communities.

need back to LANL and see if we can work up a research agreement. In some cases this type of information sharing may already be happening with national labs' communities, but maybe it would be worthwhile to have a more formal structure that creates competitive advantages for local businesses," he said.

We don't have formal agreements between the Tri-Cities and PNNL, but we do have examples of how informal partnering is moving innovation into the public sector.

Richland-based InEnTec is a PNNL spinoff that has grown exponentially in the past couple of years. The foundation of the company, its Plasma Enhanced Melter process, was born at

PNNL and Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The developers left the lab through the entrepreneurial leave-of-absence program. The program allowed researchers to try their start-up, but return to the laboratory within a certain time frame if their business didn't take off.

The city of Richland and the Port of Benton also have seen value in working with InEnTec to keep its operations in this area. For example, the port leased space to InEnTec when it was just starting out. And the city has an agreement with InEnTec that allows testing of its evolving technology on a portion of the city's waste.

The partnerships are benefiting everyone and little of it would have

been possible without all of the players working together to identify each other's needs and solutions.

Stringer's observation about "fellow agreements" may be worth considering. But maybe more important is the simple reminder that communities and their national laboratories need two-way communication to keep the economy growing.

To learn more about PNNL's technology commercialization and economic development offices, go to <http://availabletechnologies.pnl.gov> or www.pnl.gov/edo.

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