



Finding Industry Collaborators . . .

Finding an industry collaborator is a lot like dating. It can take time and a lot of contacts before you find a company that shares your research interests, understands the commercial potential, and wants to provide research funding for your lab.

Once you have made a connection, don't assume research funding will come quickly. The process of the company getting to know you and Iowa State takes time. Companies consider the cost-benefit ratio to funding the research, the ability to meet and recruit future employees, and the long-term potential of the relationship. Similarly, you should consider the value to your research program and Iowa State, will this collaboration lead to publications, intellectual property, commercialization, graduate student assistantships, student job opportunities, etc. Not every collaboration makes sense. Time spent up-front developing the opportunity will lead to better results for your research program, industry partners, and Iowa State.

Always remember to carry business cards, hand them out, and follow-up with company personnel who share their business card with you. A bonus, but not required, is a one-page description of your area(s) of research expertise and contact information that you can hand out when making connections with industry.



Professional Network

Utilize your colleagues, former classmates and former students who work in industry. This is the easiest way to make connections, as you already have a personal relationship. If your contact is not the right person in the company to make funding decisions, ask them to facilitate an introduction to the right person.


Conference Presentations


When presenting, remember to include practical applications of your technology. If an industry researcher comes to speak with you after the presentation – this is a great sign – get a business card and follow-up promptly with non-confidential information, including potential applications.


When industry presents at a conference, there may not be a lot of technical depth, because industry keeps information more proprietary than universities. It is important to approach the speaker after the talk to exchange ideas and contact information.


Conference Networking Events


Conference networking and evening social events are another great place to connect with industry partners. Wear a shirt with an Iowa State logo and alumni *will* come find you. They love to talk about Iowa State; be prepared to discuss sports, what has changed about campus, how many students there are, and favorite social places. Be prepared with a 30-second “elevator” speech about your research to transition from shared experiences to current business.


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Request for Proposals (RFP) from Industry
Occasionally, a company will issue an RFP. Because your response is not confidential, it can be difficult to determine how much information to include. It is possible to write a proposal to state what you are going to do, including specific milestones, while not sharing the key points on “how” you are going to accomplish this – enough to convince the company it is feasible, but not give away the “secret sauce.”
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Economic Development and Industry Relations Office (EDIR)
All of the units in EDIR are located at the Economic Development Core Facility in the ISU Research Park. The people working in these units collaborate with industry on a regular basis and would be happy to help make connections – contact them!
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Newspaper/Popular Press Articles
Information about companies often appears in the news. These articles will not be detailed, but they will provide clues on the priorities of the companies. If your research fits a company’s priorities, use other sources like your professional network or social media to obtain contact information.
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Social Media
LinkedIn is another great resource for finding individuals in companies that share your research interests. Keep your profile up-to-date, and don’t be shy about connecting with others! Twitter, Facebook, and other social media sites can also provide leads on companies, ISU Alumni, or individuals you can connect with.
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Iowa State Alumni
As mentioned above under conference networking, wearing an Iowa State logo when you travel will be an instant conversation starter and a great way to meet new people and potential industry partners. Make sure you always have business cards in your pocket if you’re wearing an Iowa State shirt or lapel pin.
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Personal Networks
Never underestimate the power of a friend. Leverage your personal networks to learn about the companies they work for – you might be surprised how many connections that can bring.

Contact Information

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