

The Benefits of Building University Corporate Partnerships

Academic Futures White Paper
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As Academic Futures explores the future of learning and discovery, we recommend a more **expansive** and **coordinated** effort towards building campus-wide university corporate partnerships. Universities and corporations have a long history of entering into mutually beneficial partnerships. Some ways that universities benefit from partnering with corporations include providing students access to mentorship, experiential learning, and job opportunities; increasing revenue through corporate philanthropy and sponsored research; and catalyzing economic development. Corporations also benefit from partnering with universities in a number of ways, including accessing and influencing the workforce pipeline, investing in corporate citizenship goals, and helping solve problems that impact their bottom line.

The benefits of university corporate partnerships in the philanthropic and sponsored research arenas, specifically, are well-documented. They provide long-term, secure funding and help modernize teaching and learning through an open exchange of ideas.¹ Furthermore, states with high percentages of industry-sponsored research tend to have higher-ranked, well-funded universities and more technology-based firms.² Corporate partnerships not only increase employment opportunities, but they also offer pathways to inform academic programs to best set our students up for success.

The potential of corporate partnerships at CU Boulder has received increased attention, as both state funding of the University of Colorado System³ and federal funding of university research across the nation have steadily declined.⁴ Several units at CU Boulder focus on corporate partnerships, including Advancement, the Research & Innovation Office (RIO), Career Services, Athletics, Procurement, and unit-specific external relations teams. Advancement and RIO are two of the largest groups, and they focus their efforts on philanthropic and sponsored research corporate partnerships, respectively. In 2013, the Office of Industry Collaboration (OIC) was established as a sub-unit of RIO to address the gap in corporate relations efforts within the sponsored research space. While both Advancement and RIO help craft corporate university research partnerships, a differentiating factor in their efforts is the goal of the research partnerships. Generally, research funding without an expected return will come to the university as a gift, while research funding with an expected return (e.g., intellectual property) will come through the university as a contract.

There is much potential in this arena, as industry has the highest R&D budget (\$317B in 2012) of all funding sources (e.g. federal, nonprofit, higher education)⁵. While Colorado as a state pulls in 5.5% of its

¹ Edmondson, Gail, et al. "Making Industry-University Partnership Work: Lessons from Successful Collaborations." *Science Business Innovation Board*, 2012, www.sciencebusiness.net/sites/default/files/archive/Assets/94fe6d15-5432-4cf9-a656-633248e63541.pdf.

² Atkinson, Robert D. *Industry Funding of University Research: Which States Lead?*, Information Technology & Innovation Foundation, 8 Jan. 2018, itif.org/publications/2018/01/08/industry-funding-university-research-which-states-lead?mc_cid=2c29cb6a43&mc_eid=cd4d37571e.

³ Office of the Vice President for Budget & Finance. "Funding Higher Education in Colorado." *University of Colorado*, 10 Nov. 2015, www.cu.edu/funding-higher-education-colorado.

⁴ "National Science Foundation - Where Discoveries Begin." *Nsf.gov - NCSES Higher Education Research and Development: Fiscal Year 2014 - US National Science Foundation (NSF)*, ncesdata.nsf.gov/herd/2014/index.html.

⁵ "University Research Forum." EAB, *For the Greater Good: Boosting the Value of Corporate Partnerships*, 2017.

research funding from industry, states like North Carolina and Georgia pull in between 10-12%, demonstrating great potential for growth as a funding mechanism.⁶ Similar to the state average, CU Boulder receives 5% of its sponsored research funding from industry, which also indicates that there is room for improvement.

A bulk of current corporate relations efforts currently support the College of Engineering & Applied Science (CEAS) and the Leeds School of Business, which historically have had the strongest corporate relationships and have dedicated corporate relations and career services personnel. OIC, with its small staff, spends the majority of its efforts also supporting the College of Engineering & Applied Science, with the remainder generally focused on research institutes and natural sciences departments. While strengthening these CEAS and Business partnerships should continue to be a priority, **it will be vitally important for the campus to expand resourcing and coordination of advancement, research, and career services corporate relations efforts to benefit other units on campus**, such as the College of Arts & Sciences; the College of Media, Communications, and Information (CMCI); the School of Education; and research institutes.

Research also shows that corporations are increasingly limiting the number of university partners they work with, **which will require a more coordinated effort on CU's part to build these strategic partnerships**⁷. A chief complaint of corporate partners is that universities are difficult to navigate and uncoordinated in their approach (Education Advisory Board, 2017).⁸ Anecdotally speaking, it is not uncommon for a CU corporate relations officer to approach a company only to find out that they have been pitched by several other CU entities in the recent past. This approach to corporate partnership runs in direct conflict with established best practices, which note that “one-stop shopping,” or the ability for companies to have a single entry-point into the university landscape, as well as “campus coordination” are two of five key elements of a successful corporate relations strategy.⁹

As government funding streams continue to dry-up and skepticism about the value of higher education continues to grow,¹⁰ it is critically important for CU Boulder to focus its efforts on building valuable external partnerships, including with corporations. Failure to emphasize this now will result in CU Boulder lagging behind its peer and aspirational institutions in the near-future, while giving our regional competitor institutions in-roads with corporate partners that we may be unable to recover.

⁶ Atkinson, Robert D. *Industry Funding of University Research: Which States Lead?*, Information Technology & Innovation Foundation, 8 Jan. 2018, itif.org/publications/2018/01/08/industry-funding-university-research-which-states-lead?mc_cid=2c29cb6a43&mc_eid=cd4d37571e.

⁷ EAB, 2017

⁸ “University Research Forum.” EAB, *For the Greater Good: Boosting the Value of Corporate Partnerships*, 2017.

⁹ Network of Academic Corporate Relations Officers. 2011. “Five Essential Elements of a Successful Twenty-First Century University Corporate Relations Program.”

¹⁰ Jaschik, Scott. “Losing the White Working Class, Too.” *New Data Point to White Working Class Skepticism of the Value of College*, Inside Higher Ed, 31 July 2017, www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/07/31/new-data-point-white-working-class-skepticism-value-college.