Biotech progress report

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According to the Arizona's Bioscience Roadmap, commissioned and coordinated by the Flinn Foundation, there are four main strategies the state needs to focus on to develop a strong bioscience hub. Here are those strategies and how Arizona fared in the fourth quarter of 2006.

Strategy 1: Build Research Infrastructure

- The International Genomics Consortium, in partnership with the Translational Genomics Research Institute, is chosen from 370 applicants to manage tissue samples for the Cancer Genome Atlas project, the next phase of the Human Genome Project. A $6.6-million grant from the National Institutes of Health will support IGC's efforts in this international undertaking to map the genomes of most forms of cancer.
- A network of 20 Arizona organizations involved in biomedical research receives an important Clinical Translational and Science Award planning grant from the National Institutes of Health. While small in terms of dollars ($150,000), the award positions the state favorably to receive a multimillion-dollar CTSA grant down the road. In a separate application, Mayo Clinic's local operations share in a $72 million CTSA award with Mayo campuses in Minnesota and Florida.
- Science Foundation Arizona releases its investment strategy, announcing funding programs for research in strategic areas, development of new small businesses based on this research, and improvement in K-12 science and math performance. The new nonprofit gets authorization from a state legislative budget committee to receive $35 million previously approved.
- More than 800 people celebrate the opening of the University of Arizona College of Medicine-Phoenix in collaboration with Arizona State University. The unique collaborative medical school will help to address Arizona's physician shortage and provide an essential asset in the state's biomedical research infrastructure.
- A crowd nearly as large attends the opening of two major research buildings at UA's Tucson campus. The Thomas W. Keating BioResearch Building, home of the BIO5 institute, opens as well as the Medical Research Building of the UA College of Medicine.
- Business and science leaders in Tucson announce the findings and recommendations of the Southern Arizona Bioscience Roadmap.

This regional version of Arizona's Bioscience Roadmap, keying on the Tucson area's specific strengths and needs, is the first of three regional roadmaps that will be compiled by Battelle. Northern and Central Arizona will follow.

- TGen announces three discoveries that capture attention in the scientific community. Its researchers have isolated genes that play an influential role in human memory performance, Lou Gehrig's disease, and prostate cancer in black males.
- The Arizona Alzheimer's Disease Core Center, a national model of eight collaborating research institutions, lands a $7.5 million grant from the National Institute on Aging.

In addition, a key member, Banner Health, celebrates the opening of a major research and treatment facility, the Banner Alzheimer's Institute.

- A $5 million donation from the Evelyn F. McKnight Brain Research Foundation enables the UA to launch a new brain institute that will focus on memory loss, the fourth of its kind in the nation.

Strategy 2: Build Critical Mass of Firms

- Global drug development services firm Covance purchases 50 acres of industrially zoned land in Chandler for a 600,000-square-foot research facility designed to eventually support up to 2,000 high-wage jobs.
- The Critical Path Institute in Tucson reaches an agreement with 15 major pharmaceutical firms to share internal protocols for measuring drug safety, an unprecedented move in the industry.
- Singapore-based Aurigin becomes the first foreign company to commit to space at SkySong, the Arizona State University Scottsdale Innovation Center. The company builds equipment for computer-chip manufacturers and hopes to expand into the biomedical equipment industry.
- Genomics USA moves its research and development headquarters from Chicago to Tucson and also may follow with its information technology group. California dietary powder-maker NutraCea announces it will move its corporate headquarters to Scottsdale.
- Tempe-based GenoSensor signs a distribution deal with a German life sciences company. The move is expected to enable the biochip-maker to penetrate the large life sciences and pharmaceutical research markets of the European Union.

Strategy 3: Enhance Business Environment

- Amplimed, a Tucson cancer drug developer, announces $8.5 million in private financing that will enable completion of clinical trials for its primary drug, Amplimexon. The investment raises the total for its Series B preferred round to $14.6 million. It has raised more than $24 million.
- ASU announces that it will host a major conference in nanotechnology in March 2007. The Nano and Giga Challenges Conference will involve about 500 experts from 50 countries over five days.

Strategy 4: Prepare Work Force, Educate Citizens

- The Arizona Board of Regents approves a budget request to enable UA to accelerate the expansion of its colleges of medicine and pharmacy into Phoenix.

- Voters in all 11 school districts of Pima County approve Proposition 400 to create a Joint Technological Education District. This allows districts to pool resources enabling students to take career-focused technical and vocational courses.
- Gateway Community College, one of the state's top trainers of health care professionals and nurses, announces an $80 million expansion plan which includes health care and bioscience training centers.
- A first-ever statewide survey of high school bioscience training programs is launched to gain insights into existing resources and unmet needs. A report will be issued in early 2007.

-- Compiled by the Flinn Foundation.