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Models for Successfully Applying Space Technology Beyond Its Original Intent (2)

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LESSONS FROM PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS: DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO A COMMON PROBLEM

Abstract

Government agencies that develop technologies as part of their mission, such as space agencies, often have commercial partnership offices or divisions. These offices have a common goal, disseminate technology information in hopes of accelerating technology development. Information flow is often bidirectional and these offices frequently oversee partnership activities for joint technology development. It is widely recognized; commercial partnerships are attractive mechanisms for technology development in hopes of reducing risk, promoting technology transfer, and encouraging economic growth while developing technologies to meet national needs. However, despite the common goal and technology-focused missions, technology transfer offices within U.S. government agencies have implemented a wide range of structures with divergent activities.

Recently, NASA's Langley Research Center requested the Tauri Group review government agencies engaged in commercial partnerships to understand different approaches used within the U.S. and explore the merits of each approach. We surveyed senior managers within the National Institutes of Health, National Institute for Standards and Technology, National Renewable Energy Laboratory, Food and Drug Administration, Sandia National Laboratory, and others to gain insight into office structure and partnership activities. Surveys revealed that partnership offices range from very centralized to loosely coordinated personal. Some offices actively manage partnerships while others are designed as a resource to facilitate technology transfer if required. Interviewed personnel were asked to identify both the advantages and challenges to their agency's approach. Lessons drawn from interviews may assist other technology development agencies, such as NASA or other national space agencies, craft or adjust technology partnership activities for increased impact.

This paper presents findings from The Tauri Group's survey and highlights lessons that may benefit public-private partnerships within the space community. It describes the organizational approaches of interviewed agencies and discusses pros and cons. We provide examples of partnership activities and discuss how those examples can be applied to the space community. We also identify common challenges and potential pitfalls.