

Case Study 10.1. AIMday at Uppsala University

CRITICAL AREA OF FOCUS 1: “Scouting ideas/technologies from the PRO and incentivizing researchers to disclose IP”

BEST PRACTICE FOR: “Collaborative training programs” and “Collaboration among TTOs”

AIMED AT: TTO/Researcher/Industry

UNIVERSITY: Uppsala University (Sweden)

TTO: UU Innovation



The context:

Uppsala University is Sweden’s oldest university founded in 1477. It has an academic staff of 1,900 and 24,000 students in nine faculties.

UU Innovation (UUI) is Uppsala University’s technology transfer office with a staff of 27 and founded in 2008. The activities of UU Innovation are largely based on the work of the university’s holding company, UUAB Holding.

Ångström Materials Academy (ÅMA) is a strategic collaboration platform of the Uppsala University Innovation unit that acts as a link between companies and the researchers of the materials-related area at the Ångström Laboratory at Uppsala University.

The problem:

One of the main problems with Technology Transfer is the **gap between industry and academics**: industrial corporations might need feedback on advanced scientific and technological issues, academics may be unaware of the kind of issues that are important for industry. To make matters worse, there might be little to no natural networking between both sides. This makes communication and progress slow and unclear.

The solution:

In 2008, Ångström Materials Academy at Uppsala University organized its first Materials Day (AIMday) for ideas scouting. Success was immediate: ideas for further research were generated and various forms of collaborations started. Since then the use of the AIMday concept has been extended to other disciplinary areas, like life science and the humanities and social sciences.

Here the concept has proven itself effective just as well as in materials science. As a preparation work for AIMday industrial companies are invited to submit their issues formulated as one or more questions and to provide background information related to them. The questions from organizations are gathered and presented to researchers from different disciplines, who then announce which questions they have an interest in. During the meeting day, academic scientists and organizations are brought together in small groups (approximately 7-12 people) to match need for new knowledge with academic expertise. Questions raised by an organization are highlighted and discussed in one-hour meetings by scientists and experts from several different disciplines

The objective of the Materials Day is not to provide answers during the hour that a discussion group meeting lasts, however. As much as a solution or help to find a solution is a great outcome of the discussions, the new constellations of people and competences that are brought together help identify various ways to further elaborate on the issue, and open new possibilities for rewarding collaborations.

For organizations, this is a unique possibility to meet a national and international network of academic scientists and learn more about scientific methods and infrastructure at the university, getting insights and understanding of the world of academic research. Talking with experts and getting to know their research output improves the chance of emergence of new opportunities for both researchers and businesses. At the same time, it can create connections both for future collaborative research or future employment opportunities for young scientists.

The researchers will be able to get insights about business needs, how organizations outside academic research work and ways to apply their knowledge, even for future employments or projects. This can also stimulate the generation of new ideas and inventions, suggested by industry problems, thus representing an important opportunity for technology scouting. Also, AIMday gives researchers the opportunity to connect to other scientists and building a strong inter-national network.

In 2011 the use of funding of pre-studies as a way to facilitate the start of collaborative projects for new technologies was tested with great success.

Alignment to PROGRESS-TT:

This case is a good illustration of the "Collaborative training programs" and "Collaboration among TTOs", Best Practice in PROGRESS-TT Critical Area of Focus 1 "Scouting ideas/technologies from the PRO and incentivising researchers to disclose IP".

The unique AIMday where one question is taken on in one hour by a group of experts has proven successful in finding useful contacts, collaborations, and new paths to solutions to organizations' questions. The organizers point out that surveys undertaken indicated very favorable responses to the initiative leaving both representatives and scientists satisfied with their participation, but these were not made public.

In 2014, 8 **AIMday** events were organized, by the University of Edinburgh (2), Uppsala University (5) and KTH Royal Institute of Technology (1). This show cases of success in the event, as it is being taken over by other universities. Some were relatively small (4-5 companies, 8-12 researchers, 5-15 questions, 5-15 workshops) but they are also very specific like Bio-imaging, Advanced Manufacturing. Others were larger in scale: the Materials AIMday event was attended by 12 companies, with 27 representatives, and 58 academic researchers.

According to the organizers, **two main criteria need to be met for the event to be successful.**

Firstly it is critical being able to put together discussion groups with relevant and knowledgeable researchers, with preliminary work being the key to success, since this leads to a sharp timetable and discussion groups and questions handled well in advance.

Secondly, the focus should stay on the networking aspect, and less in finding solutions. While finding a solution is a great outcome, it is the new constellations of people and competences that are brought together that help identify various ways to further elaborate on the issue, or open new possibilities for rewarding collaborations.

This is further highlighted by the "**success stories**" (<http://aimday.se/success-stories/>) where the emphasis and praise is strongly directed towards the incredible networking opportunities in a crossfunctional forum like AIMday.

AIMday has been registered as a trademark by Uppsala University and AIMday Academy is used for diffusing and improving the concept behind this kind of meeting.

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