

MICHIGAN INITIATIVE  
FOR INNOVATION & ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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*Foundation for a New Economy*

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## New Grants to State Universities Aimed at Entrepreneurs, Commercializing Research

**Lansing, Mich.** — The Michigan Initiative for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (MIIE) has awarded nine more grants to public university researchers totaling \$600,000 aimed at helping move innovative products toward commercial development.

These grants target a host of exciting potential new products and processes that could lead to more jobs in Michigan, including a new treatment for blindness caused by certain retinal degenerative disorders, simplified biodiesel production, a Wireless Smart Sensor that could assist disabled workers and development of new classes on silicone-based materials.

The grants will be used to speed the commercialization of university research while promoting a culture of entrepreneurial risk-taking. In 2008, MIIE awarded nearly \$2 million to 30 grantees at universities as part of the multi-year, multi-million dollar coordinated campaign by Michigan's public universities to help rebuild the state's economy on a foundation of diversified, knowledge-based industries. MIIE has set as its goal raising \$75 million from foundations to bridge the gap between university research and commercial development.

"These are exciting ideas, well into development, that with a little help in testing, final investigation or marketing strategies can be turned into businesses. It's our goal to provide that last little lift these professors and researchers need to turn their ideas into jobs," said Marvin Parnes, associate vice president for research and executive director of research administration at the University of Michigan.

Parnes and Jim Baker, director of technology and economic development at Michigan Technological University, have been working with research, technology transfer, and entrepreneurship offices at all 15 public universities to make MIIE a success.

"It's early, but the first round of grants are making important progress," said Baker. "These early investments are critical to bringing research discoveries to a stage where they can attract private funding from venture capitalists. In addition, our grants to entrepreneurship programs at universities are vital to encourage and enable innovators in our state to take that next step to forming businesses."

MIIE hopes to foster as many as 200 new Michigan start-ups over the next decade by partnering Michigan's philanthropic resources with university and private business resources to help commercialize university research, and strengthen ties between small business, industry and academia.

Since 2008, MIIE has awarded nearly \$2 million through nearly 30 grants to commercialize research and encourage public and private collaboration in Michigan.

Included in this round of awards:

- \$115,000 to a project at Michigan State University that would build on research showing a black pepper compound may help reduce grain contamination by fungi. The grant will help the researchers develop a bulk purification of the product, test the processes and products, and then develop a strategy to initiative commercialization.

- \$75,264 to a University of Michigan project that seeks to bring to business ultra-low power microcontrollers for wireless sensing. The researchers have developed a prototype that operates at low power, reducing energy use. The grant will fund additional prototypes for delivery to key customers for real-world testing.
- \$129,960 to Wayne State University researchers working to make it easier and cheaper to create biodiesel out of multiple, low-cost feed stock such as waste cooking oil, crude oils and rendered animal fat that can be directly converted to biodiesel without costly and time-consuming pretreatment. This proposal requests funds to validate the production capability of the research.

The MIIE consortium seeks to leverage public university expertise through donations from some of the more than 2,200 philanthropic foundations across the state, matching those funds with resources and funding from universities and private businesses. Initial funding for the MIIE was provided by the C.S. Mott Foundation, which awarded a \$2 million planning grant last fall.

Two-thirds of the money will go to the Technology Commercialization Fund, which provides “gap funding” to guide university-born ideas along the path toward venture-capitalist investment. The other third will be used to build a culture of entrepreneurialism among students, faculty and industry in Michigan.

The MIIE draws on the creative output of Michigan's 15 public universities, which together bring more than \$1.5 billion in R&D funds into the state each year.

MIIE is currently accepting proposals from university researchers to be considered for its next round of grants, which will be awarded later this year. The deadline for applications is 5 p.m., Friday, March 27. Application forms for the various grants, more information about MIIE and details on the grants awarded are available at [www.pcsun.org/miie.html](http://www.pcsun.org/miie.html).

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