

Innovative Ideas – University of North Carolina Asheville

Category: Research

Project Name: HUB Project Technology Cluster

The Idea: UNC Asheville's National Environmental Modeling and Analysis Center (NEMAC) and Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College (A-B Tech) are engaged in the joint management of the HUB Technology Cluster, part of a new regional economic development effort. The HUB Project is an initiative undertaken by public, private and nonprofit organizations to create sustainable economic development for the City of Asheville and Buncombe County. The HUB's strategies are designed to enhance Asheville and Buncombe County's role as the regional economic engine, or "HUB," of Western North Carolina. The HUB Project involves seven clusters or areas of development activity: Technology, Rejuvenation and Health Care, Creativity and Craft, Manufacturing, Enterprise, Agriculture and Land Use, and Marketing.

Project Execution: Buncombe County has supplied \$200,000 for the first year of what is envisioned to be a three- to five-year timeframe needed to accomplish the Technology Cluster Goals, including:

- The completion of regional broadband and high-performance computing and storage infrastructure.
- Enhanced access to and multidimensional use of the world's largest environmental database at NOAA's National Climatic Data Center, located in Asheville, as a resource to attract federal government agencies and private meteorological companies to Western North Carolina.
- The creation of a Digital Media Center in Asheville as a public-private-nonprofit partnership to spur growth and development of the region's expanding multimedia industry.
- The growth of the Western North Carolina Center for Technology Commercialization at Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College (A-B Tech) into a technology incubator for research and development.

External Impact: The Technology Cluster creates and promotes an environment in which knowledge-based technology companies can emerge and flourish. The HUB Project has fostered collaborations between UNC Asheville, A-B Tech, and local, state, and federal government agencies. In addition, collaborations have developed among NEMAC, the Renaissance Computing Institute (RENCI), the Media Arts Project, AdvantageWest, the Education & Research Consortium of the Western Carolinas, Education Research Services, and Meet the Geeks. In the short time that the Technology Commercialization Center has been operational, it has already served over 40 companies in the region.

Internal Impact: Through NEMAC's leadership in The HUB Project, UNC Asheville, the state's public liberal arts university, actively participates in the region's economic development. UNC Asheville's role in this initiative provides rich opportunities for collaborative grant-funded projects; faculty scholarship in the fields of technology, climate, and the environment; and

undergraduate research that prepares students for future work in a knowledge-based global marketplace.

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