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## **Spokane Intercollegiate Research & Technology Institute helps eastern Washington entrepreneurs**

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Technology entrepreneurs in the Tri-Cities can choose from a mix of more than 40 organizations in eastern Washington to help them get up and running. One of these is the Spokane Intercollegiate Research & Technology Institute, or SIRTI.

SIRTI helps private companies and innovative entrepreneurs in eastern Washington transform new technologies into commercial products. SIRTI's current programs were launched through a federal start-up grant in 1995. In June 1998, the Washington legislature chartered SIRTI as an independent state agency to commercialize technology.

SIRTI's Innovation Grants provide funding and business services to help entrepreneurs move prototype products or technologies into the marketplace. "Sixty-one companies have received \$6.2 million in grants and other assistance from SIRTI since 1996," said SIRTI communication specialist Jennifer Bader. "In addition, company revenue and private investment into these entrepreneurial ventures totals more than \$14.5 million."

SIRTI's primary clients are small, tech-based start-up companies in eastern Washington. To help these companies, SIRTI provides customized business and marketing development, technology and intellectual property assessment, access to financial resources and incubator services. Services are tailored to individual company needs, but might include assistance in market research, development of marketing materials, business plan creation, financial data analysis and recruitment of qualified customers. SIRTI also offers specialized incubator space in its building on Washington State University's Riverpoint campus in Spokane.

Whether they receive grant funding or contract directly for specific services, companies give a nominal portion of their future revenues as payback to SIRTI. Agreements are negotiated based on each company's stage of development and projected income. SIRTI reinvests these revenues in its programs, helping ensure a sustainable source of assistance.

In the past five years, SIRTI has helped five Tri-Cities companies, with two more coming on line. One of these was Berkeley Instruments, a Richland company founded by Rich Ozanich. Ozanich received \$50,000 in funding plus expertise in marketing and commercialization from SIRTI. The Richland company develops analytical equipment that uses light waves to measure internal fruit quality on food processing lines.

"SIRTI conducted market research on equipment manufacturers, developed our web site, created trade show materials and set up meetings with industry leaders," Ozanich said. This deluge of focused expertise helped Ozanich attract an important strategic partner and investor, one of the world's top manufacturers of fruit sorting equipment.

InnovaTek is another SIRTI beneficiary. Patricia Irving started the Richland venture four years ago to create advanced technologies for health, safety and energy. "Over the past few years, we've received \$400,000 in funding from SIRTI, which we used to develop two of our primary technologies," Irving said.

Initial work in one of these technology areas, hydrogen-based fuel cells, got the U.S. military's attention. "SIRTI worked with Washington state's Congressional delegation to get \$5 million in Army funding for further fuel cell development," Irving said. InnovaTek and Pacific Northwest National Laboratory are co-funded to carry out the work. Irving and her staff also have used SIRTI interns from Gonzaga University for marketing tasks.

Jerry Straalsund took the helm as SIRTI's Executive Director last fall. A program manager at Pacific Northwest National Laboratory for more than 20 years, Straalsund understands the challenges entrepreneurs face in trying to get a new product to market. "A good technology does not guarantee a good product, nor does it guarantee the financing companies need to move forward," he explained. "SIRTI's added value is to work with clients and bring the required expertise needed to prepare businesses for growth and also for obtaining investment capital."

Straalsund said that investors want to see protected intellectual property, a viable business model, a defined market and a seasoned management team. "SIRTI is working with regional business leaders to identify people who could become available as chief executive officers, or else mentor the firm's own leaders," he said. SIRTI is accepting written proposals for its 2001 innovation grants through April 16. Selected entrepreneurs will receive services and/or funding of up to \$100,000.

Candidates must be developing an innovative technology with a prototype under way for the environmental, digital or biomedical technology markets. They must have invested a considerable amount of money and time in the project already and be a legal business entity or a faculty member partnering with a business. They must demonstrate the ability to create jobs and revenue.

Go to the SIRTI web site at [www.sirti.org](http://www.sirti.org) to see the request for proposal for a 2001 Innovation Grant. For more information, or to request an RFP, contact Jean Montano at [rfp2001@sirti.org](mailto:rfp2001@sirti.org) or 509.358.2055. For information about SIRTI, contact Jennifer Bader at 509.358.2062 or [jennib@sirti.org](mailto:jennib@sirti.org).