

Statewide initiative to speed transfer of ASU lab research to marketplace

Board of Regents grant to fund technology-transfer project for 3 state universities

By Mary Beth Faller, ASU News

March 4, 2025

A new initiative will help speed the time it takes for groundbreaking biomedical research at Arizona's three public universities to be transformed into devices, drugs and therapies that help people.

The [project](#), fueled by a \$1.5 million grant from the Arizona Board of Regents, will focus on helping Arizona State University, the University of Arizona and Northern Arizona University move their research from the laboratory to the marketplace, a process called "technology transfer." The grant will focus on data collection and metrics.

The initiative will not only help the taxpayers of Arizona access better health care, it will also create jobs and grow the biomedical industry in the state.

The challenges and potential benefits of this effort were outlined at a kickoff event on Feb. 28, sponsored by the [ASU Global Center for Technology Transfer](#) and held at the Downtown Phoenix campus. The center focuses on best practices for technology transfer.

Fred DuVal, a member of the Board of Regents, told the crowd that there is much debate nationwide now about the value of university research.

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“We’re in a moment in our national history where we need to forcibly make the case for research in public universities,” he said, adding that academic research led to the cure for childhood polio as well as the technology revolution in Silicon Valley.

“In the past decades, we’ve filed thousands of patents, launched hundreds of startups and brought transformative technology to market,” he said.

Duval said the new focus on technology transfer at Arizona’s public universities should be able to double venture capital investment, double the number of university startup companies and create 10,000 jobs.

“We have all the ingredients to lead in this space. We have world-class public research institutions. We have a growing talent pool. We have a business-friendly climate and we have the Phoenix Bioscience Core,” he said.

“We have everything we need except a unified statewide strategy that can fully leverage these assets into our full potential. And that is what today is all about.”

Incentives are important for successful technology transfer at universities, according to [Don Siegel](#), co-director of the Global Center for Technology Transfer and Foundation Professor of public policy and management. Research has found that faculty need motivation to pursue entrepreneurship — not just financial but also promotion and tenure.

“(Faculty) have very strong pro-social motivations. They want to help people. They want to see people use their technology to cure diseases and to enhance their lives,” Siegel told the crowd.

Universities must work closely with industry partners to keep technology transfer in the state, said Joan Koerber-Walker, CEO and president of the Arizona Bioindustry Association.

She said that Arizona ranks ninth in the nation for clinical trials.

“But the majority of the clinical trials that are happening in Arizona are not Arizona technologies. They’re technologies that came from somewhere else,” she said.

“What I would like to see the most is how we do tech transfer and keep that activity in Arizona, because that is the business case that we have to make to the legislature so they help us fund it.”

Several speakers discussed the challenge of getting capital investment in early-stage ventures and how important it is to lessen the risk for potential investors. For example, an investor might hold off until the results of first-round clinical trials show promise.

Kyle Siegal, executive director and chief patent counsel for [Skysong Innovations at ASU](#), said that investors' aversion to risk is pressuring universities to find the resources to "de-risk" ventures.

"It's things like, how do they get access to wet lab space? How do they find the funding to run all the studies that ideally would be performed at the university level, but just simply aren't in most cases?" he said.

Koerber-Walker said she has been working to get \$200 million put into the Arizona Health Innovation Trust Fund.

"And then let it grow, and it will fund the highest risk early-stage innovation coming out of our companies in our universities so that they start to reach the milestones that are necessary for them to be investible by angels and venture capitalists. Because today they are not," she said.

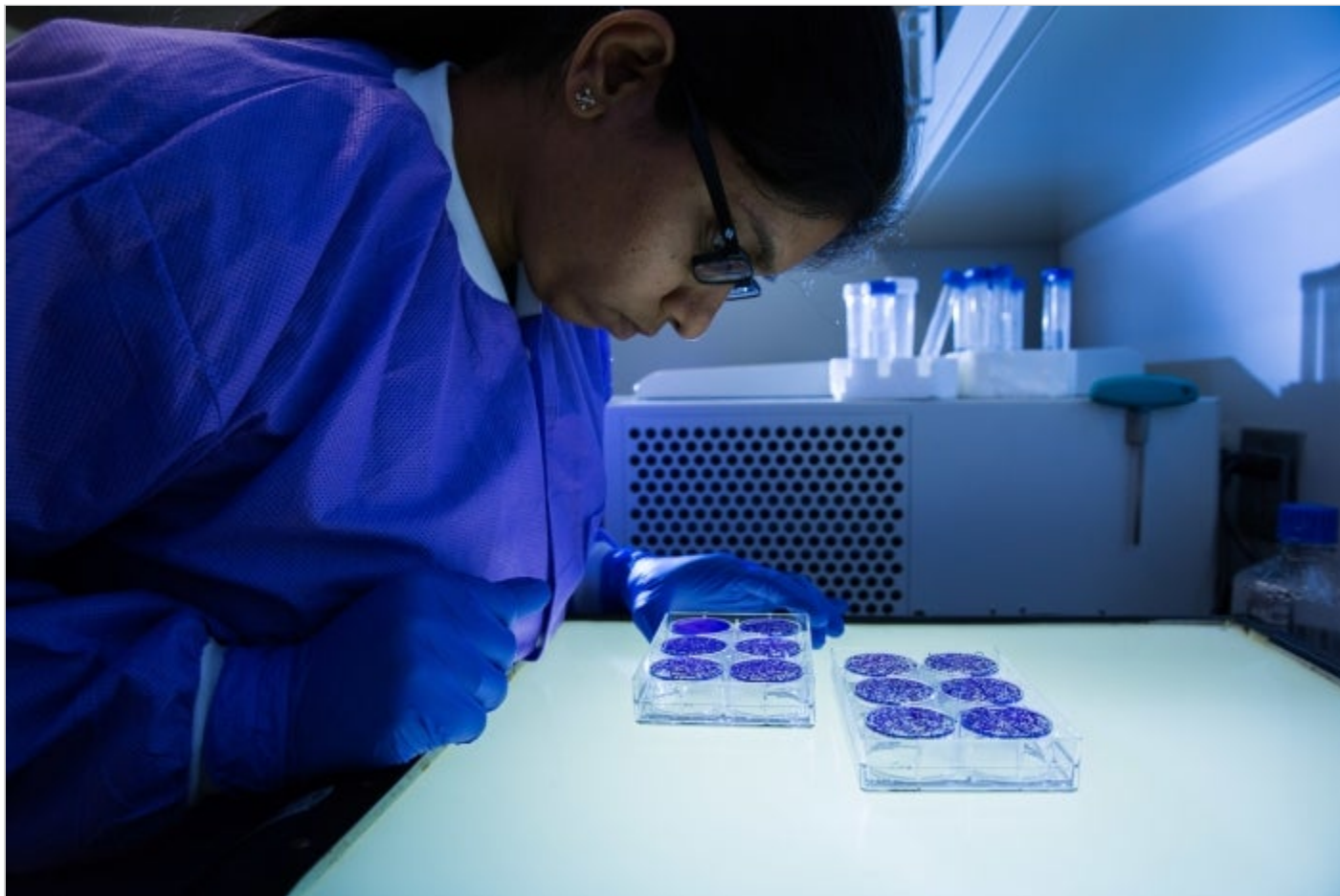
Tracy Lea, director of venture development in the [J. Orin Edson Entrepreneurship + Innovation Institute](#), said that her team has been focusing on faculty ventures.

"We have over a hundred faculty in our pipeline right now," she said.

"We're unearthing some of those that haven't done venture disclosures or aren't really versed on the process, but we're very intentional on how we can build statewide leverage."

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



A new statewide initiative will help Arizona State University, the University of Arizona and Northern Arizona University move their research from the laboratory to the marketplace faster, a process called “technology transfer.” A \$1.5 million grant from the Arizona Board of Regents will fund the project, called "A Roadmap to Fulfilling the Economic Potential of Technology Transfer in the Life Sciences and Biomedicine in Arizona." Photo by Deanna Dent/ASU News

Gallery



The kickoff event for the statewide initiative featured several panel discussions, including one that highlighted experts on economic development in biomedicine. From left: Joan Koerber-Walker, CEO and president of the Arizona Bioindustry Association; Sandra Watson, CEO and president of the Arizona Commerce Authority; Christine Mackay, community and economic development director for the city of Phoenix; Mary O'Reilly, vice president for bioscience research programs at the Flinn Foundation; and Scarlett Spring, executive director of Phoenix Bioscience Core.



Fred DuVal, treasurer for the Arizona Board of Regents, said that university research is critical to the nation's health and the new initiative is a unified strategy that can leverage the work of the state's three public institutions.



Kyle Siegal, executive director and chief patent counsel for Skysong Innovations at ASU, participated in a panel discussion and said that universities are under pressure to find the resources to “de-risk” ventures.