A new University of Minnesota program is helping ensure the most promising new medical technologies and pharmaceuticals are ready to be brought to market.
The U’s MN-REACH program provides university-wide commercial expertise and resources to help develop and commercialize diagnostics, therapeutics, preventive medicine and medical devices. The program, formed after the National Institutes of Health named the U one of three Research Evaluation and Commercialization Hub (http://discover.umn.edu/news/science-technology/university-minnesota-selected-hub.nih-program-accelerate-new-inventions) (REACH) sites in March, funds 10-20 research projects a year. It is supported by a $3 million NIH grant and $3 million in matching U of M funds.

MN-REACH establishes new industry partnerships, strengthens existing partnerships and provides entrepreneurial education to accelerate the pace at which innovations reach the market. Through workshops and industry mentors, the program aims to coach faculty in subjects like competition, venture capital and market assessment. The program also identifies and addresses barriers in the academic environment that may hinder commercialization.

“The MN-REACH program supports the entrepreneurial training and cultural change that will help U of M researchers better navigate the path to commercialization, whether in the form of a startup company or a licensing opportunity,” said Charles Muscoplat, Ph.D., principle investigator of the MN-REACH program, adjunct professor in the Medical School and professor of food science and nutrition in the U’s College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resources Science. “Through funding opportunities and education, this program will help cutting-edge medical technology and pharmaceuticals reach the market.”

The first cycle of MN-REACH projects will receive funding soon. Full proposals are now being considered for funding of up to $150,000 by an external board that includes local medical device and pharmaceutical companies. A review committee at NIH will then provide comments on the proposals with input from other industry experts. MN-REACH leaders expect to announce the awards on or around Oct. 1.

Skills development

MN-REACH builds upon Minnesota’s long history of success in medical innovation, as the state is home to the top 17 publicly traded medical device companies in the U.S. At the U of M, medical innovations are among the prominent inventions in the U’s commercialization portfolio.

To continue the U’s leadership in this field, MN-REACH will coach members of the university research community in the entrepreneurial skills they need to commercialize a discovery or invention. These learning opportunities will provide practical information to researchers on assessing market opportunities, understanding intellectual property and developing value propositions.

The next Medical Technology Commercialization Boot Camp will be held from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Aug. 26 in Keller Hall. This seminar is open to university faculty, staff and student health care researchers who want to learn more about the commercialization process, as well as the resources
available to support bringing an innovation to market. The information will be especially helpful to researchers planning to submit a Letter of Intent to apply for a MN-REACH grant. Register now (https://umn-med-tech-commercialization-bootcamp.eventbrite.com/) to attend.

Request for proposals

MN-REACH program leaders invite the university’s scientific community to submit proposals for the second funding cycle that describe a health care-related product or service within a few steps of a commercial transaction. Funding is available in the range of $10,000 to $150,000 per project, and certain restrictions apply.

Cycle 2 pre-proposals will be accepted and reviewed through 5 p.m. on Tuesday, Sept. 8. Visit the MN-REACH website (http://www.mn-reach.umn.edu/) to access the pre-proposal submission form, as well as information on funding eligibility, proposal evaluation criteria and future funding cycles. Successful applicants will be invited to submit full proposals at a later date. Contact mn-reach@umn.edu (mailto:mn-reach@umn.edu) with questions.