Vice President Hilary Ratner organized a task force to address issues related to improving technology commercialization and better integrating operations with the schools and colleges, TechTown, and industry. On March 5th, 2009, Phase 2 of the Commercialization Network Task Force was launched to continue the work that the Staff of the Technology Commercialization (TC) started in Phase 1 of the process. In addition to Phase 1 participants, Phase 2 included a number of faculty and school academic administrators, and was chaired by Associate Vice President Ahmad Ezzeddine (Complete roster of participants is attached—Appendix A).

Vice President Ratner charged the Phase 2 Task Force (TF) with increasing faculty engagement and industry utilization of TC and WSU expertise with the ultimate goal of increasing research funding (industry and state funding; federal STTR/SBIR awards), licensing and royalty revenue, startup companies, and contributions to state, national, and international economic development efforts. While Technology Commercialization has been successful in certain areas, there is an opportunity and need to more effectively leverage its resources, as well as resources available across and outside of the university. Areas of emphasis include initiatives which will increase the number of faculty members engaged in commercialization and entrepreneurial activities, and creation of stronger connections between Tech Commercialization, schools and colleges, Tech Town, and collaborators (industry, foundations, and government organizations). In furtherance of these initiatives, it was thought that a refocusing and restructuring of Technology Commercialization may be required. Long term success will be measured in increased SBIR, STTR and grant funding.

Phase 2 Process and Findings

During Phase 2, the following activities occurred:

- Three meetings with all the members of the Taskforce
- Three subgroup meetings with a select members of the Phase 2 TF
- Two focus group meetings with faculty involved in Technology commercialization

The process started with a review of Phase 1’s objectives, findings, and recommendations. Technology Commercialization staff presented a comprehensive overview of issues related to improving the services and impact of the operation that they explored during Phase 1 (a copy of this report can be
provided on request). The Phase 1 group developed a list of tactics and initiatives that could be implemented in order to meet the broad objectives outlined by VP Ratner. The initial (and somewhat truncated) discussion of the Phase 1 outputs identified areas where clarification, and suggestions for next steps to incorporate the perspective of faculty and schools and colleges. Among the most salient questions asked, there were these:

- What are the bottlenecks preventing the improvement of the process of tech commercialization at WSU?
- How to make the process more transparent?
- What is currently working well and what is isn’t?
- Have best practices at WSU been captured? Do we know what they are? And if yes, have they been shared/ communicated across campus?
- Have the best practices from other campuses been reviewed and adopted?
- How is Tech Commercialization leveraging the connections with TechTown?
- How does Tech Commercialization help reconcile the competing objectives of expecting faculty to pursue funded research and measuring them on their success in this area, while also encouraging them to be involved in Tech Commercialization activities?
- Is there a way to improve the current Technology Commercialization model which is a “push” model with the “pull” model favoring the needs of industry and others external to the university?

There were suggestions made, even at this early stage, and additional discussion ensued during a second meeting of the Phase 2 group, where several new members joined the discussion. During this second meeting, there was a return to the items covered in the Phase 1 presentation, and it was suggested that the efforts to increase faculty engagement in this arena required an effort to listen to the “voice of the customer” in a more focused setting. Accordingly, several facilitated group discussions were held.

**Faculty Focus Groups**

Additional insights as to the faculty perspective of the Technology Commercialization office, was obtained through two focus groups involving WSU Faculty who had previously worked with the Technology Transfer Office (detailed summary attached in Appendix B). The primary focus was to gather information regarding the participants’ experience with the process of Technology
Commercialization at WSU. Each of the session lasted 90 minutes. The first focus group was held on May 14, 2009 and attended by six participants, and the second was held on May 18, 2009 and attended by five participants.

The following questions were used as a discussion guide:

- What has been your interaction with technology commercialization at WSU?
- Describe the experience?
- What benefits did you derive?
- What expectations were not met?
- Additional comments on the process?
- How does WSU compare with your colleagues’ experiences at other institutions and/or your experiences at other institutions?
- What do you know about Tech Town and its activities?
- What roles can an incubator, like Tech Town, play in research, student training and commercialization?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of faculty collaboration with industry?
- What role do these collaborations play in a faculty member’s research career?
- What would it take to increase faculty involvement in commercialization?
- Are there incentives that could be put in place?
- What, if any, disincentives are there?
- Any other recommendations to improve WSU efforts in technology commercialization?

Several clear themes emerged, and these are presented here, along with specific dimensions of each. It should be noted that many of these same observations emerged in the first two meetings of the Phase 2 group.

- **Process Improvement**
  - There were positive interactions with Tech Commercialization staff, and at least part of the process is performing very well. Staff is seen as knowledgeable and supportive, even of “smaller” ideas.
  - The process remains difficult for many faculty members to maneuver. It was felt that TC needs to better focus their efforts on the needs of the faculty. A better focus on treating faculty as “customers” was part of this, but, there is also a desire to have assistance in the cultivation of ideas.
  - There is a need to have experts (scientist, engineers, etc) involved early on in the evaluation of product ideas.
  - There is a need to focus more on the full lifecycle of commercialization, not just paperwork or patent approval. There was an expressed need for greater assistance
after patent application, with particular emphasis on help selling the idea, advice in dealing with companies on licensing and negotiation, etc.

- The process should be made much more transparent. Tech Commercialization needs to proactively communicate with the client faculty.
- Legal counsel is needed and attorneys should provide more expert assistance on content (guide and advise the applicant) to maximize patent approval, not just put the supplied text into legal form.
- There is a need for advocacy on behalf of the university inventors/scientists.

- **Faculty Interaction/Outreach**
  - There is a clear need to provide faculty with an orientation to commercialization processes, outcomes, and benefits.
  - There is a need to create a network of faculty mentors and a culture to support faculty members working in this area.
  - There needs to be increased outreach to faculty not currently involved in commercialization efforts.
  - Scientists are primarily interested in research and science, so the process of commercialization should allow them to spin off ideas/companies and then return to their research as quickly as possible.

- **TechTown**
  - The resources available through TechTown need to be made more accessible to WSU Researchers, and there should be a seamless transition when working with this resource.
  - There is a need to greatly improved communication about the opportunities that are/could be made available, and process of getting involved with TechTown.
  - From a faculty perspective, there is a clear need for additional physical assets and infrastructure to support the TC processes, and TechTown is seen as serving this role.

- **Recognition and Promotion of Scientists and Commercialization Activities**
  - There is a need for a programmatic effort to recognize and reward faculty for their commercialization efforts. This effort needs to target the campus community and WSU’s other stakeholders.
  - WSU merit policies need to be modified to support commercialization efforts.
Phase 2 Recommendations

The Phase group met a final time on June 23, 2009, and reviewed the comments made in the facilitated group sessions, and provided additional comments of their own. Via email, members of the Phase 2 group also made additional recommendations.

While the strong foundation in Technology Commercialization is acknowledged, in order to achieve the goals set by the Vice President for Research, changes in the policies, practices, structure, and capabilities of the Office of Technology Commercialization should be considered. Additionally, it is clear that the university environment needs to reinforce and support this direction. The following constitute the recommendations of the Phase 2 group. (Note: These have not been formally presented to that group for their support or dissent)

- Conduct a “Process Mapping” of the current technology commercialization process. This effort will identify current bottlenecks, failure points, and ways to improve the process and ensure that value is being added through the commercialization process. For example, a patent filing should not be the end of the process. During the 12 months after a provisional application is filed there should be a concerted effort to demonstrate (commercial viability of the intellectual property. This validation should not be placed on the shoulders of the faculty. Such additional validation will be seen as a win-win for the office, faculty, industry partners and/or potential investors.
- Establish a new focus on commercialization through creation of start-up companies. This effort will need to identify and integrate venture capital and other funding sources in the process, and provide and support the technical expertise, along with the right business expertise. A teaming and less sequential approach is strongly encouraged in lieu of the current hierarchical and linear structure and process.
- Inventory the number of successful Technology Transfer/Technology Commercialization instances that have happened at Wayne State University and benchmark case studies from TC operations at other universities. The goal is to identify best practices that can be adopted at WSU and create a community of peer mentors (“mentor-innovator”), which pairs experienced faculty with faculty who are new to the commercialization process.
- Foster a campus climate which will nurture and expand the creative, innovative, and entrepreneurial culture. Partner with the Office of the Provost and the academic units to develop well defined core academic programs/experiences, hire faculty with a strong interest in and capacity for commercialization, and provide faculty incentives; Programatically work to establish and foster a sense of community and make it clear that commercialization success is a vital component of the university’s mission and commitment to economic development.
- Utilize TechTown to promote and facilitate Business-to-Campus and Campus-to-Business connections, and provide infrastructure required by faculty.
## Appendix A

### Phase 2 Commercialization Development Task Force Members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title and Department</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Ramharack, Randy</td>
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<td>Winter, Charles</td>
<td>Associate Department Chair, Chemistry</td>
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