Building a career through networking

Carol Curtis, PhD
Venture Advisor
Director of Academic Research Assessment

ccurtis@i2E.org
• Participated in career development workshops; met one-on-one with external speakers as much as possible

• Performed informational interviews – FDA, CROs, big pharma clinical trial coordinators and MSLs, patent attorneys, etc.

• Read articles and books on biotech and pharma industry job requirements and outlook

• Networking in anticipation of moving to South Florida – leveraged scientific connections and heavily used LinkedIn to connect with biotech industry reps – led to several interviews and 2 job offers

• When the plan shifted and I was propelled into Oklahoma, the ability to reach out to cold call researchers became critical
• Took opportunities to network with scientific colleagues on OMRF/OUHSC campus and at conferences
• Performed informational interviews – tech transfer, local biotech startups, project management groups
• Subscribed to IP Watchdog to learn about patents and the patent prosecution path, and FierceBiotech/FiercePharma to learn about the biotech/pharma industry
• OMRF Postdoc Association planning committee member, then Co-Chair and Chair
• Volunteered to plan an Oklahoma-wide Postdoc conference with OKBio (introduced to Noble, OCAST, i2E etc)
• Led to relationships at OKBio and i2E
• Participated in Bioscience Roundtable by OKBio

Networking
OMRF Tech Transfer Intern & i2E Venture Fellow  
2012, Part-time

• Learned how to interpret and write legal documents including license agreements, sponsored research agreements, and general contracts

• Immersed in the “business of biotech” – learned how to evaluate a product, plan a development path, and chart the costs associated with critical activities

• Read books and articles on clinical trial management, preclinical models of disease, statistics, and venture deals

• Took the PMI project management course at OCU to enhance knowledge and understanding of project management

• Participated in several networking events throughout OKC – both scientific and business related – to continue building network

• Wrote an SBIR Phase I grant proposal for emerging biotech company, and i2E client, EpimedX
• High risk, low cash, start-up biotech company; limited funds to support operations; critical milestones must be met on time

• Company consisted of 2 part-time scientific founders and 1 full-time technician; had to have a “can do/will do anything” attitude

• Learned about non-dilutive and dilutive funding models and when/why certain investment tools are used

• Built and led relationships with investors and stakeholders

• Managed state and federal grant funds (OARS/SBIR); learned how to manage accounting and accurately model financial projections

• Continued to network within the OK bioscience community and at national conferences such as BIO
Through networking efforts, I met representatives of TreMonti and had a good group of bioscience contacts in OKC.

Lack of efficacy and funding concerns at EpimedX led me to start consulting with TreMonti on a part-time basis in 2013 and move to launch my own consulting practice in 2014.

To build my consulting practice, I had to leverage connections that had been made over years of networking in OKC (researchers, OMRF/OU tech transfer, i2E clients, etc).

I had to be confident in my skill set to offer my services for a fee.

Continued to read extensively, follow industry newsletters, watch webinars, participate in networking events locally and at conferences such as the BIO Convention.
Venture Advisor  
Director of Academic Research Assessment  
2015 - Present

- Review and evaluate innovative technologies
- Facilitate assessment of commercialization potential
- Provide guidance and resources to researchers to prepare for transition from bench to bedside
- Increase access to grant funding – OCAST, SBIR
- Review and provide input on the preclinical/clinical development plan and model the costs associated
- Make investments to help start new companies and grow existing companies
- Continue to network, make connections, seek opportunities to learn new things that might apply to positions in the future
How to network at an event...

• Before the event, educate yourself on the typical attendees

• If you find a name, Google it or look on LinkedIn to find an image so you know how to find him/her at the event

• Introduce yourself, shake hands and provide a sentence or two on why you’re there and/or what you’re looking to achieve

• Ask questions but allow conversation to happen organically

• Pay attention to body language

• Keep your interaction brief and end by providing your card and asking for one in exchange; ask if you can connect again
Local networking opportunities

On campus:
- Department seminars
- Invited speaker series

Follow on social media and/or sign up for event alerts:
- Bioscience Roundtable
- Oklahoma Bioscience Association
- Innovation District
- i2E
- OCAST
- OK Catalyst

For the local tech (includes biotech) scene:
- 1 Million Cups
- Startup Grind
- OK-WIT
- OK-WISE
- Greater OKC Chamber
How to connect 1-on-1...

Follow up with people you’ve met at networking events
Use your personal connections
Use LinkedIn and Google
Do not be afraid to connect with someone you admire
Perform Informational Interviews – early and often

Informational Interview - Suggested questions

• What does a typical day look like? What are your key responsibilities?
• What do you like best about your career? What is the worst/most tedious part of your job?
• What types of personality traits are essential for this career?
• Do you have suggestions on how to get experience or make myself more desirable for a position like this in the future?
• Can you suggest reading material and/or industry newsletters to learn more?

Start local and in person, gain confidence, and then branch out: connect with people at conferences or ask for a 30 minute phone call
Oklahoma Bioscience At A Glance