

BACK TO BUSINESS IOWA PODCAST

A partnership of Iowa State University Extension and Outreach and America's SBDC Iowa

SEASON 1 | EPISODE 27: Encountering Innovation Conference

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Description: *Host Steve Adams speaks to Laurie Pieper, tech consultant for Iowa's Small Business Development Centers, and Alan Badgley, tech director for the Kansas Small Business Development Centers, about the upcoming Encountering Innovation Conference. This episode is particularly interesting to Iowa's various tech companies seeking funding and assistance commercializing their tech products and services.*

[music]

Steve Adams, host 00:10

Hello, and welcome to the Back to Business Iowa podcast from Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. This podcast is a collaboration between Iowa State University Extension and Outreach and the programs including Community and Economic Development, Farm, Food and Enterprise Development, and the Iowa Small Business Development Centers. These podcasts cover relevant topics for businesses and individuals related to education, research and technical assistance during and post COVID-19.

Steve Adams, host 00:54

I'm Steve Adams, field specialist at Iowa State University Extension and Outreach in the Community and Economic Development unit, and also your host for these podcasts. Today our guests are Laurie Pieper, tech consultant for Iowa's Small Business Development Centers, and Alan Badgley, director for the Kansas Small Business Development Center. Thanks both of you for being here today.

Alan Badgley 01:19

Thank you, Steve.

Laurie Pieper 01:20

Yes, thank you, Steve.

Steve Adams, host 01:22

Hey, Laurie, let's start with you. We've had several guests on this podcast from the SBDC. But how does your role as tech consultant differ from other small business development counselors?

Laurie Pieper 01:36

Thank you for the question, Steve. My role in working with the SBDC in Iowa is to assist small businesses that are considered tech clients. And so those are businesses that are doing something that is science-based, technology-based, something that has high growth potential. And what I do is I help them understand different pathways to commercialization, help them understand which ones might work best for their business, what things they need to put in place in order to pursue those. And also connect them with resources, help them develop funding. So my role is different in that I specialize in working with a particular type of client.

Steve Adams, host 02:31



So that technology-based client then, so is that all I really need for qualifications, just as long as it's technology based, right?

Laurie Pieper 02:42

Yes.

Steve Adams, host 02:42

Okay. Could you give us just a real quick example of a typical client perhaps?

Laurie Pieper 02:49

Um, might be somebody who's doing something in ag technology, biotechnology, medical technology. Might be a client that's in the startup phase, working toward being able to launch a business. Might be a business that is developing a new technology, a new product or service and wants to grow through that.

Steve Adams, host 03:16

So Alan, this is for you. You're a tech director, obviously with the Kansas SBDC. Are there any different responsibilities that you have over Laurie's?

Alan Badgley 03:28

Our program, it has two components to it, basically. So yeah, there's, and it's more of the outreach. We have a conference called Encountering Innovation, where we reach out to multiple states to bring in the innovators to work with the Department of Defense tech scouts. So with that being our primary focus, it creates a little bit different overview, if you will, beyond that. It's basically utilizing the various business advisors across the state of Kansas, to be able to work with our tech commercialization clients.

Steve Adams, host 04:12

Well, you touched a little bit on the Encountering Innovation Conference. Can you tell us a little bit more about it as to when, where?

Alan Badgley 04:20

Sure. The last three years have been a physical or conference in person. Because of COVID-19, we are going to have a virtual conference this year, and it is September 14 through the 18th. And I've been challenging everyone that's involved to go about this as if we chose to go virtual instead of that we had to go virtual. And we're very excited. We think there's some additional benefits to going virtual this year. So we're looking forward to the alternative.

Steve Adams, host 04:54

Not it's my understanding you need to apply so you can attend this conference. Can you tell us a little bit about the application process itself, Alan?

Alan Badgley 05:03

Sure. So this is what I call, I try to help everyone by helping them understand, this is what I call an extremely collaborative process. There is some judgment involved, but it's only to match their technology with the needs of the DoD. Beyond that, really, it's a collaborative process. So what we have is a website and link to going into becoming a client, so they sign up as a client, which protects them. That way, first of all, then we can't, we're held confidential with their information.

Alan Badgley 05:39

And then second of all, there's a question and answer survey. And all we ask our innovators to do is just answer the questions as best they can. Then we will supply them two documents, the two main

documents that the Department of Defense tech scouts want: that's a quad chart and information paper. So we give them, the client, back their two documents, as they've answered them, which then begins the editing process for the client and the assistance from our business advisor slash tech coach and our science advisor, who is the director over the matching of the innovation technology to the DoD needs and then the judgment or understanding of their, their development stage.

Alan Badgley 06:31

We call that a technology readiness level, TRL, and can be from a one, which is the idea, to a nine, which is a completed product ready to sell commercially. We are focused on a six or above, a prototype, field-tested, as the presentation level that we want. The tech scouts actually want technology that they could get to the war fighter within 12 months That seems to be the best target.

Steve Adams, host 07:01

And for all of those that may not know, DoD is obviously the Department of Defense. Now, I'm kind of curious. I'm aware of government programs out there, like the SBIR, which is the Small Business Innovation Research Program. And then the Small Business Technology Transfer or STTR program. Are a lot of the clients here involved with those two government programs, to your knowledge?

Alan Badgley 07:27

Yes, in fact, we have a the beginning of an eight-week series of lunch and learns where we're talking about SBIR and Encountering Innovation together, how they link together. The Encountering Innovation Conference attracts innovators that hopefully can have an opportunity to sell to the Department of Defense because of their wide variety of needs. But there are more that will fit the needs or match of the SBIR program than they will DoD. That seems to be our experience. So, we definitely try to help them understand the opportunities in SBIR and the various programs that are happening with the with the change of SBIR, and also the DoD.

Steve Adams, host 08:22

Well you've mentioned the Encountering Innovation Conference going all virtual this year. How many conferences have been held overall?

Alan Badgley 08:31

This will be our fourth year. First year was in Wichita, the last two years have been in the Kansas City metro area at our Johnson County Community College regional office.

Steve Adams, host 08:45

Well, could you share a story or two perhaps about businesses that have participated in the past and what kind of experiences have they had?

Alan Badgley 08:54

So we've got a variety of innovators that have participated and the success is varied. I think the one that your clients or your listeners probably can relate to or would like to relate to is the one that our premier tech scout in the country, Brett Sharinghouse, had shared with me when I first met him. And that was, he had gone to, before they were doing conferences, they would go out— how they do this was amazing—but they would go out and actually meet with individual innovators.

Alan Badgley 09:31

He was at a residence, and it was an 11-year-old girl and her grandfather. And the 11-year-old girl proceeds to tell Brett, the tech scout, that she had learned that the human blood coagulates faster with copper. And she said now, Papa is going to demonstrate. Papa proceeds to cut himself twice, once on

each arm, and puts a regular Band Aid or bandage on one arm, and then a copper-threaded Band Aid on the other arm.

Alan Badgley 10:08

And the copper-threaded Band Aid coagulated the blood and stopped the bleeding faster than the regular bandage. And then, as Brett put it, he said, long story short, that 11-year-old is now a millionaire. The program demonstrates with what he just said that we have innovators that aren't quite ready to really do business with DoD. They don't have the legal structure in some cases or the business wherewithal to be ready. I daresay an 11-year-old girl was not probably ready for that. But her innovation was such that the DoD was extremely interested.

Alan Badgley 10:51

The DoD is part of the federal government and they're not here to try to steal your innovation. They're here to try to find solutions to their needs. So they'll do everything they can to work with our innovators. On top of that, then you've got the Small Business Development Centers, and our program, which is even moreso—as soon as someone succeeds, we count that success through the economic impact. So the two together makes it really easy for someone to understand that they're going to have to do their work. That's not our job to do their work for them. But it's our job to try to assist them as they go.

Steve Adams, host 11:29

My producer and I were having that very same conversation this morning and there was questions back and forth. So if you had come up with this innovation, you're not giving up any intellectual property rights or anything like that, you get a keep your IP, is that correct?

Alan Badgley 11:45

That is correct. Which is really the same thing with the SBIR and STTR. So one of the things, another reason why—we're trying to encourage people to understand that Encountering Innovation is a conference that happens once a year, but the program of Encountering Innovation blended with the SBDCs across the entire region is an ongoing support program that we want to utilize as that foundation for opportunities such as the multiple agencies within the SBIR.

Steve Adams, host 12:21

Well and you talked about, you know, having to make adjustments, our favorite word in these podcasts has been pivot. So, you know, you're going virtual. Have you made any other accommodations because of the pandemic?

Alan Badgley 12:34

Yes, we're actually working on bringing in a consultant who has had nationwide experience as a director of a program within the DoD program. That person left back in March. So we are working hard to get them to come on and give us several months of specific assistance with our existing businesses that are looking to commercialize, that have been impacted negatively by COVID.

Alan Badgley 13:05

Just the process of trying to get them on board has got us to, we've got an entire strategic plan of action with our existing businesses that we've been working with over the last three years. So yes, COVID has given us some stresses. But in a lot of ways, it's been a great opportunity, if we look at it that way, to be able to double down if you will, and try to help our existing businesses.

Steve Adams, host 13:33

Well, as I like to say, with every challenge comes an opportunity; sounds like you're taking advantage of this. Now I'm pretty sure you may have touched on this, but just so all our listeners are clear: this is not just limited because it's in Kansas, not just limited to Kansas residents?

Alan Badgley 13:50

That is correct. If we did just Kansas, then our primary focus would not have survived. Our primary focus is to serve the DoD tech scouts. DoD, Department of Defense, has combatant commands. Each combatant command has a tech scout. So we try to bring all the tech scouts, one from each of the combatant commands, which at this time are 11—six regions and five services. So we try to attract the DoD tech scouts, along with Department of Homeland Security, FBI, NASA and several others.

Alan Badgley 14:27

And by bringing them in, if all we had was Kansas, we would use up our usable technology innovation very quickly. Instead, we've reached out across the country, but our focus is in the states that are closest to Kansas. In the past that's been because of the geography and geographical area and the travel, whether that's by vehicle or by plane. This year, they could come, you know, from Maine, and it wouldn't make any difference. It's about matching that need with a solution. So there is no concern as to where they're at. In our case, if someone's listening and they're outside of Iowa, and they say that they would like to, what we'll do is, as soon as we bring them in, we will turn around and try to bring on the SBDC from that state to get them involved. So they have a local presence or someone to help them.

Steve Adams, host 15:29

So, Laurie, back to you. How are you planning on getting Iowa businesses involved with the Encountering Innovation Conference?

Laurie Pieper 15:39

We are spreading the word throughout the SBDC throughout our regional centers to try to look for businesses that would be a good fit for the conference. We're also reaching out to our university partners and other partners around the state. We're definitely hoping to get some great businesses from Iowa to participate in the conference. I believe that there were four businesses from Iowa that attended last year. We would love to see even more this year, because the conference really presents people a very unique opportunity to get in front of those tech scouts to inform them about their technology.

Steve Adams, host 16:26

Well, I don't think you're going to be able to top Alan's bloodletting story here with with the Band Aids, but are there any success stories coming out of Iowa that you could share with our listeners?

Laurie Pieper 16:38

I believe that we had four businesses from Iowa that participated last year, and I don't want to tell their stories without their permission. But as far as I know, they're all moving forward and I've continued to work with one of them on a regular basis. We have businesses in Iowa that I'm working with right now that have potential to do well at the conference.

Laurie Pieper 17:09

One of the things that Alan mentioned is that they're looking for businesses that have the capability to scale up and get their product or services in the hands of the war fighter within a year. But it's not just defense-related products that we're looking for. Department of Defense has interest in a lot of different things—medical technology, energy, materials, and even some interest in ag technology, anything that

can really support the people, the processes, the objectives of those various Department of Defense agencies.

Steve Adams, host 17:54

Laurie, what would you say is the primary benefit to attending even if the business doesn't walk away with a new funding source?

Laurie Pieper 18:02

The businesses I think really get a lot out of the experience of being in front of the technology scouts, because they get to learn more about how to interact with them and the interest of the various DoD agencies. The tech scouts not only try to pass along their information to help the businesses get contracts or get funding, but they also advise the businesses. Like, have you tried calling this person, have you tried doing that, you need to get this kind of letter, you need to get this kind of testing. So they also provide advising in addition to trying to help the businesses move forward through the socialization process. So those are definitely advantages, and then it's a really great opportunity to network with other high-potential high-growth businesses that are doing well, doing interesting, exciting, innovative things.

Steve Adams, host 19:10

Well, that kind of makes me wonder out loud then, are most of the clients, Laurie and Alan, that you work with, are they startups? Are they mid-sized companies looking to expand? Are they R&D companies to begin with?

Alan Badgley 19:26

So Steve, I would say over the past three years, we have a wide variety of everyone that you've described. There is probably 15%, maybe 20% that are individuals or extremely small teams. The majority are probably five to seven employees in their business. And then there are a few that are surprisingly well-established at 20 to 25-plus employees.

Steve Adams, host 20:02

So not just a start-up, it's a variety, I appreciate that too. So Alan, I assume there's a website for the conference, and some ways of looking for more information. Where would they find that application?

Alan Badgley 20:16

The most readily available and current information is always at encounteringinnovation.com. www.encounteringinnovation.com.

Steve Adams, host 20:29

That's so easy even I might be able to remember that. So encounteringinnovation.com.

Alan Badgley 20:35

Right, yes. Singular. Some people try to put an S on there. But yes, just [encounteringinnovation](http://encounteringinnovation.com).

Steve Adams, host 20:41

[Encounteringinnovation.com](http://encounteringinnovation.com). Okay, Alan, thank you so much. Hey, that length of time to fill out that application, Alan, about how long would a client have to devote to that app?

Alan Badgley 20:52

It's generally about 10 to 15 minutes if they have all their answers. It is a very simple question and answer as we've talked about. If they don't know something or they need to think about it, they literally can write down "I don't know, I'll think about it," because we're going to give them back their answers

and the quad chart and information paper ready to be edited. So whatever they write in there, they'll get back. Some people will actually want to complete it the first time and take their time. If they even time out, all they have to do is reach out to us and we can go back and reactivate the application. So some will take their time, five to 10 out of 100, and they'll have to reach out to us, but the majority can get them done in just about 10 to 15 minutes.

Steve Adams, host 21:41

Terrific. I don't think that's going to be overwhelming for anybody there. So, well, I want to thank you both for your time today. And, Alan, if our listeners have any further questions about the conference, or how to contact you, what's the best way to do that?

Alan Badgley 21:58

They can go back to, once again, they can go to encounteringinnovation, my contact information and the way to get hold of us is in there. They can also email me if they would like to. It's my last name at KSBDC.net. So that's Badgley, b a d, g l e y, at K as in Kansas, KSBDC.net. [badgley@ksbdc.net]

Steve Adams, host 22:25

Outstanding. Laurie, same question back to you. If somebody wanted to reach out or needed some guidance or assistance, how would they contact you?

Laurie Pieper 22:34

The best way to contact me is through email, lpieper@iastate.edu. Or they can just reach out to America's SBDC Iowa for my contact information.

Steve Adams, host 22:51

Outstanding. Hey, you know this sounds really exciting. And I know that we've got some of those tech entrepreneurs out there and some these other R&D companies that ought to participate in this conference and we'll do our best on our end to try to promote that for you. Again, thanks Lori and Alan for taking time to visit with us, and really the best of luck on the, sounds like an exciting Encountering Innovation Conference.

Steve Adams, host 23:19

Well, if you have any questions about this Back to Business Iowa podcast, please feel free to contact me, Steve Adams, at stadams@iastate.edu. This podcast again is a collaboration between Iowa State Extension and Outreach and the Small Business Development Centers of Iowa. We're always serving Iowans, hashtag strong Iowa. Let's get back to business, Iowa. Our justice statement is as follows: This institution is an equal opportunity provider. For the full non-discrimination statement or accommodation inquiries, please go to please go to www.extension.iastate.edu/diversity/ext. Hey, thanks again for listening and we'll see you next time.

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