

Customer Discovery in the I/UCRC

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Why I'm Here

- Director in Vice President of Research Office
- Responsibilities
 - SW I-Corps Node
 - Managing Director of IUCRC
 - Center for Next Generation Photovoltaics
 - Other Stuff

Disclaimer



Couple of Questions...

- Who has run a start up?
- Who wants more members?
- Who has been a part of an I-Corps Team?



Setting the I/UCRC Stage

- Came on board 2 years ago
- Two Site IUCRC
- 7 Members when Joined



Initial Pitch



My Role (as told to me)

- Get New Members.....
- Get New Members.....
- Get New Members.....



What We Thought

- Industry Cared About Specific Materials Research
- Solar was Hopping
- NERF and IDC break was enough of a value proposition to get new members

Initial Observations

- Center Directors doing recruiting through “normal” means
 - Former Students
 - Email Blasts
- IAB not engaged
- Industry having massive issues
- Strict focus on Materials Research
- Lack of Awareness with University Administration

Overall Issue



So...



Recruiting Feedback Initially

- Initial Talks with Industry
 - “We don’t care about materials research”
 - “What you have isn’t what we need”
 - “Solar is Dead”
- Initial Talks with Administration and Faculty
 - “IUCRC are nice, but”
 - “What do you mean a NERF?”
 - “Why would I work with the IUCRC, I already have a project with industry?”

Feedback from Center Leadership

- You aren't telling people the right story
- It's only 50k, what's the problem
- You aren't explaining the science right



Typical in Start Ups

- Hire Staff
- Watch Them Fail
- Blame Them for it
- Rinse and Repeat



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What We Needed...

- The IUCRC needed to really understand what their customers wanted
- The IUCRC needed to refine the value proposition to something that resonated with prospective members
- We needed to offer something unique and avoid selling an unclear membership value

OK... so what now?

What We Did

- Formed I-Corps Team
 - Center Director Participated
 - IAB Approved
 - IUCRC Student was Entrepreneurial Lead
- And Then.....

WE GOT OUT OF THE BUILDING

What We Learned

- The Solar Industry was changing and had new problems from when the IUCRC was founded
- Industry wanted customized solutions to their problems
- We needed to collaborate to grow
- An IUCRC is a start up organization and should be managed as such

What We Thought Revisited



I-Corps Update

- 4 New Members
- Student Led Start Up Created (SBIR Awarded)
- Refinement of Value Proposition
- New Structure for “Pitching the Center”
- Center Director got valuable insight directly from industry

New Pitch



Center Today

- Entering Phase 2 application
- 12 Members as of now (3 more anticipated by March)
- Several Members funding amounts in excess of “standard fee”
- IAB actively engaged
- 2 New University Sites in the planning stages
- 5 New Faculty involved in IUCRC
- Administration Values IUCRC and is helping in promotion

Key Takeaways

- Your IUCRC is a business, you must manage it like one to be successful.
- Prospective members must understand your value proposition
- Center Directors must get out of the lab and get hands dirty in recruiting to understand the market.

Now...



BACK
TO
WORK

A blackboard with the words "BACK TO WORK" written in white chalk. The text is arranged in three lines: "BACK" on the top line, "TO" in the middle, and "WORK" on the bottom line. The chalk has a slightly grainy texture, and the background is a dark, mottled black.

The Charge

- 5 tables: Planning through year 3
- 2 tables: year 4- 6
- 1 table: year 7-15
- What new value propositions (across the 6 customer sub-segments) can I use to attract additional \$support to my center
- At the end of the session each table will report out their findings

Wait...Next Steps

- 15 Minute Break
- Everyone Pick Up Stuff and Leave
- Those With Numbers Return to Ballroom
- Those Without Go To Salon 1-3