

AUTM Women Inventors Toolkit

Creating a Program at Your University

There are several elements to consider when implementing a program to help women faculty members disclose, protect, and commercialize their research. Below are just some of the different options that can be used and is meant to provide a high-level overview, and should not be viewed as a complete list.

Know Your Target Audience

At the outset of the planning process, it is important to identify the goal(s) you want to accomplish for your institution. Meeting with key stakeholders/supporters (female faculty members, department chairs, Deans, etc.) to understand their perspectives and to identify metrics of success will help streamline event planning and make it more effective. Below are examples of how you can identify the topics most important to your target audience.

- **Roundtable discussions**—Hosting roundtable discussions with your key supporters and target audience members will help you identify what matters most to them. This can be helpful in identifying important topics and how to format your event.
- **Metrics**—Knowing what matters most to your university (disclosures, issued patents, licenses) will help you garner support from the administration, as well as identify those areas on which to focus. Furthermore, identifying important metrics beforehand will help you identify and show success after each event is over.
- **Feedback**—Once a program is in place, get feedback and modify based on the feedback. Repeat the process as many times as necessary. What's working and what isn't?

Funding Considerations

Early on in the planning process, it is important to establish a budget for program costs and funding. Below are suggestions. We found that many programs use multiple sources of funding in order to accomplish their goals and that it is possible to initiate a program with limited resources.

- **Internal funding from your university**
 - Technology Transfer Office
 - Deans from each college or department chairs

- **External grant funding**
 - [NSF Advance grant](#)
 - [NSF AWARE grant](#)
 - [NIH CTSA](#) (if your institution is a CTSA Program Hub)
- **Other**
 - Participants pay to attend (faculty buy-in)

Format

Deciding how you are going to reach your target audience is a challenging aspect of initiating a program. The options below are ones that have been tried and tested. Commentary provided in order to give a deeper insight into what has worked and what lessons were learned. Many of the suggestions below can be (and have been) combined.

- **Outreach to “affinity” groups (Society of Women Engineers, Women in Bio, etc. chapters on campus, or even a special session for a female PI’s lab) or participate in a regularly scheduled group meeting**—Ask if everyone even knows what the process is, how to disclose inventions, why they should, examples of “inventions” (i.e., doesn’t have to be perfect or polished to disclose!).
- **One-day conference**—This is a good choice if you have limited funds or are trying to initiate a larger program; however, many institutions that have tried the one-day conference found that it is difficult to maintain momentum. Goals may be difficult to achieve within this limited time frame. It is also challenging to cover a wide breadth of topics in a single day.
- **Workshop series that cover different topics in each session or ones building on a single topic**
 - Continuous weekly meetings spanning a month or two (e.g. boot camp style)
 - Monthly or quarterly (e.g. brown bag lunches, webinar series)
- **Networking events**—A common theme of the existing programs is the importance of networking for women interested in commercializing their research. Providing opportunities for women to network with each other, as well as with experts and thought-leaders from the community is often a highpoint of this type of program. It is very important to ensure that the event is not rushed allowing enough time for people to meet and talk at length.
 - Stand-alone sessions not associated with other programs (e.g. Friday afternoon happy-hour)
 - Scheduled time as part of a workshop series

Topics

When selecting topics to discuss with your female faculty members, it's important to know your overall goal and what your stakeholders expect to accomplish. If you receive funding from an NSF Advance grant, the main focus could be retention and recruitment of female faculty members in STEM; however, that shouldn't keep you from exploring topics related to IP and commercialization of their research. Below are some additional considerations when it comes to planning topics for your program.

- **Focused**—An event, program or presentation that covers a single topic is great when you have a complex topic or one that is incredibly important to your stakeholders. Focused presentations are also important when planning workshops that span multiple days. This will allow you to start with a broad goal, but then drill down into the individual components of that topic (e.g. a broad topic of commercialization with a focused discussion on licensing).
- **Broad**—Events or programs that cover multiple topics in a single session are a good way to discuss topics at a high level, without getting into too many details. This is beneficial if you have a full day event that requires covering multiple aspects of a single topic (e.g. a broad topic of commercialization where all aspects are discussed—from licensing to starting a company to SBIR/STTR funding, etc).

Additional Considerations

Below are some additional aspects of planning an event or program that are important to consider. The type of program or event you choose will determine what will work best for your purposes.

- **Should you cap the number of attendees?** The size of your facility and available resources will determine this. For more in depth boot camp style programs, it may be important to control the numbers of attendees in order to facilitate in-depth open discussions.
- **Should participants pay to attend?** There are myriad reasons for requiring participants to pay or not. One benefit to having participants pay is that it creates a sense of commitment among the participants. On the other hand, payment might exclude those who may not have the means to pay, such as graduate students. Note that payment requirements may limit your overall attendance levels.
- **Who's invited? Students, post-docs, non-tenured faculty, or just tenured faculty?** While there are benefits to being inclusive, as well as selective, it is important to consider if you are being too selective. Limiting your event to only tenured faculty will significantly reduce the number of participants. However, if you have the ability to hold a number of events, one could consider holding different levels of events for different invitees. For example, seminars/lectures for anyone, webinar series/brown bag lunches open to grad students on up, or special workshops for a more select group.

Examples of Existing Programs

NSF ADVANCE grant programs: These programs received funding through the NSF ADVANCE grant. This funding mechanism largely focuses on increasing participation and advancement of female faculty members in STEM. While most of these programs are not directly focused on innovation or commercialization, they offer a great starting point to building a community of women faculty members. As women become more confident and secure in their academic careers and research, the next step is helping them disclose their inventions and eventually working towards commercialization of their research.

- University of Cincinnati LEAF Program
- [University of Southern Mississippi Gulf Coast Advance Partnership](#)
- [University of Washington LEAD-It Yourself](#)
- [The Ohio State University Project REACH for Commercialization Program](#)

NSF AWARE grant programs: Initiated in 2015, and currently a pilot grant, the NSF AWARE (Advancing Women and Under Represented Entrepreneurs) grant is focused on helping women and minorities apply for and receive SBIR/STTR funding.

- University of Illinois-Champaign-Urbana
- University of Louisville, Indiana University, Missouri University of Science and Technology
- Children's Hospital of Philadelphia

Internally funded programs:

- [University of Florida Empowering Women in Technology Startups \(EWITS®\)](#)
- [Washington University of St Louis Women in Innovation & Technology \(WIT\)](#)
- [Northwestern University INVOReach](#)

Get in Touch

Interested in learning more about how to start a program or have questions? Please feel free to contact any of the members of the AUTM Women Inventors Committee—Barriers and Best Practices Subcommittee.

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