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Strategies and Tips for Recruiting and Keeping Industry Members

T. Avery Walton
GRAPES I/UCRC
University of Arkansas (L)
University of South Carolina



About Our Center

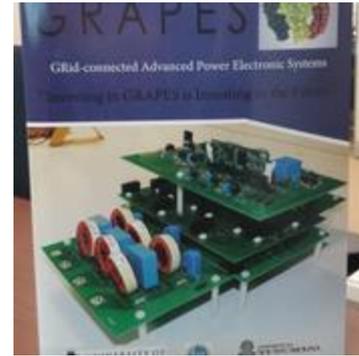
Our Center currently has two Sites (considering two others):

University of Arkansas – Lead Site

H. Alan Mantooth Executive Director

University of South Carolina

Roger Dougal, Co-Director and Site



Our Center's Mission:

- *“The mission of GRAPES is to accelerate the adoption and insertion of power electronics into the electric grid in order to improve system stability, flexibility, robustness, and economy.”*

How long has your Center been in existence?

- Five Years

Other pertinent Center information:

- Approved for Phase II Funding
- Approved for Innovative Managing Director Supplement for second year
- Completed two Strategic Planning Sessions in life of center



Sponsor/Industrial Background and Competitive Landscape

Tell us about the pool of potential sponsors:

- Utilities
- Power Equipment and Power Electronics Manufacturers
- Electronic Device Manufacturers
- Large end users of electricity



Provide some background on the industrial and research environment relevant to your Center.

Several technology gaps were identified that currently inhibit the widespread adoption and insertion of power electronics in the electric grid, which further hinders realization of a true “smart grid”. Several of these technology gaps were addressed by existing and planned GRAPES projects.

What are the characteristics of the industry that impact your recruitment/retention strategies? - SPECIFIC TO YOUR BUSINESS CATEGORY

- Inertia due to high capital investment that resists early trial of technology
- Highly regulated industry
- Highly commoditized product – making cost and reliability paramount
- Competitive and environments affecting some of our manufacturers



GRAPES CORE VALUES

- ***Spirit of Collaboration*** – leveraging the fact that faculty at USC and UA have worked together for over a decade in one capacity or another.
- ***Dedication to Excellence***—being good stewards of the resources entrusted to us, promoting the reputation of our respective universities, playing to our respective strengths while simultaneously respecting one another’s expertise in areas of overlap;
- ***Commitment to Learning and Growing***—continually improving our ability to identify opportunities, promoting learning and growth for our students and faculty, and sharing our best insights with one another;
- ***Visionary Thinking*** —imagining the future of power electronics, working at the frontier, realizing the full potential of the research and education at our schools, embracing risk, advancing promising ideas whenever possible, and encouraging creativity and initiative;
- ***Inclusive Behavior***—seeking and including contributions from all sources while reaching out, including groups that are underrepresented;
- ***Mutual Accountability***—collaborating with integrity and transparency, following through on commitments to one another, and maintaining high standards in administration, management, and oversight.



Center Value

How do you learn about and prioritize these values? Strategic Planning

The GRAPES strategic plan is a “living document” designed to be revisited periodically and revised as appropriate. Each year, we will measure our productivity against this plan to see how we are doing and to ensure that we provide maximum value to the “stakeholders” of this strategic plan - our member companies and our universities.

Do sponsor needs/values change over time? YES!

We have learned in Phase I that creating and sustaining value to our industrial stakeholders is a dynamic, ongoing component of our vision. Phase II refinements that were discussed include increasing the center’s focus, and thereby improving stakeholder value through:

- focusing in areas where we have technological leadership
- anticipating needs and providing technical resources
- being a “GO-TO” power electronics center consistently producing high-caliber students.



Recruitment Ideas

What is your recruitment strategy?

- Our strategy has become more “all hands on deck” as time has evolved
- Started with Directors’ existing research and industry relationships
- Later involved our faculty researchers and other industrial contacts
- Later evolved to members opening doors to new prospective members

Based on what you know about sponsors, how do you approach potential new sponsors?

- We involve our current sponsors to help seek out new ones. We talk to them about potential members before we approach many of them.
- We ask our members if any of them have relationships with the prospects. If so, they assist with the formal introduction or encourage them to join directly.

Is there a process you use to collect a list of all possible sponsors and/or a way to identify the best leads?

- We have “war room meetings” where all faculty come together to coordinate.

How do you find the right contact(s) within sponsoring organizations?

- We ask our industrial contacts to identify the gate keepers and decision makers at prospective organizations whenever possible.



Recruitment Ideas

Other recruitment ideas, stories, insights? What has worked well...or not so well?

Things that have worked well:

- Utilizing Member networks to identify and to contact prospective members.
- Allowing attendance at one semi-annual meeting as a guest (with a signed NDA)
- Encouraging members to bring one of their business associates to semi-annual meeting
- Leveraging project poster nights and resume' books as part of our semi-annual member experience
- Leveraging the access to Researchers and Interns

Not so much:

- Setting creative expectations during negotiations
- “Desperation negotiation” to gain a member (shows up in many ways)
- Seeking members that do not fit within the focus of the center
- Anything that puts recruiting ahead of core values (slow poison, in my point of view)

Other quick tips on how to recruit (or NOT recruit)

- Focus on Features and Benefits of membership
- Sometimes, it is right to say “No”.
- Keep a level playing field for all members – avoid “sweetheart deals” to get members



Keeping Sponsors

What is your retention strategy?

- Member visits to better learn what is important to them
- Exploration of options to help them with technical issues: GRAPES projects, internships, special projects, or independent research.
- Members engage and participate in the solutions by providing data and insights into technical needs.
- Seek opportunities to engage members in joint research efforts
- Survey the members as to what they are (or would be) looking for in a student, and match need
- Track the number of undergraduate and graduate students interning with members or having been hired full-time
- Have members actively share the benefits of our GRAPES interns and new hires

Do sponsor motives toward membership change over time? YES

Has your Center had to evolve over time to address changing environmental/sponsor demands? YES

Why do some sponsors leave quickly while others remain for years?

- Varying motivations for joining in the first place
- Loss of a champion within sponsor's organization
- Budget changes in business units/reorganization/company sold or temporal funding



Keeping Sponsors

Are there policies or structures within your Center that support long-term retention?

- Involvement of sponsors in our second Strategic Planning Session
- Involvement of sponsors in Bylaws revision and IP rights structure
- Strategic Plan review by full membership (attending and not attending)
- Member Survey on research priorities and strategic choices

Are there specific activities you employ to rescue a membership that might in in danger of lapsing?

- “War Room” meetings – designed to discuss at-risk memberships as well as recruiting
- Member site visits – to gain additional insights and perspective of an at-risk member

Are there characteristics you’ve developed within the IAB that help recruit/retain sponsors?

- IAB participation in recruiting (introductions, joint visits, joint conference calls)

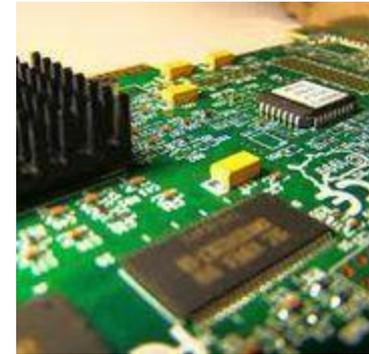
Other quick tips on keeping sponsors (or approaching sponsors who have left)?

- Exit interviews
- On-site visits



Closing Words of Wisdom

Other comments about your experiences? Any “words of wisdom” for us to take home?



Attrition happens!

Centers must adapt to the competitive environment

Do not grow faster than your capacity to do work

Be choiceful as you bring in members

The care taken in recruiting will reflect in attrits

Be watchful of changing dynamics

Open and transparent dealings seem to work best

