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

Your Mileage May Vary
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
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

YOU'RE DOING IT ALL WRONG
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
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