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8 Garrison Ave, Durham, NH 03824

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Contact: [Sharon Keeler](#)

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DURHAM, N.H. -- The University of New Hampshire is poised to both lead and benefit from a new state initiative that makes New Hampshire a member in the National Science Foundation's Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR).

EPSCoR focuses on those states that have historically received lesser amounts of federal research and development funding, and are committed to developing their research bases and improving the quality of science and engineering research conducted at their universities and colleges. Including New Hampshire, the program operates in 24 states.

With an annual budget of more than \$100 million, EPSCoR's goal is to "maximize science and technology resources as a foundation for economic growth through partnerships among universities, industries, state government and the federal research and development enterprise."

EPSCoR aids researchers and institutions in securing federal R&D funding, and is managed at the state level by a planning group drawn from business, government and academia. In addition to NSF funding, EPSCoR opens the door to research dollars from the Department of Defense, DEA, and NASA, among others.

New Hampshire's EPSCoR program is led by UNH and will initially be directed by John Aber, vice president for research and public service. According to Aber, New Hampshire was awarded a \$200,000 planning grant in August to assess the state's strengths in science and technology, as well as those areas "ready to make a jump."

The planning group -- which includes Aber; John Crosier, president, NH Business and Industry Association; Dave Stewart, president Poly Roll, Inc.; Stephen Reno, chancellor, University System of New Hampshire; Roger Sloboda, assoc. provost for research, Dartmouth College; John Thomas, representative of the New Hampshire General Court (legislature); and Thomas Wisbey, president, N.H. Community Technical College, Manchester/Stratham -- is working with NorthStar Consulting in Madison, Wis., and Rainey & Associates of Burlington, Vt., on the science and technology report, which was partially completed before EPSCoR status was secured.

The report's findings, to be completed July 1, 2005, will guide the future program. It will also include a comprehensive statewide analysis of existing barriers and possible solutions to improve research competitiveness, as well as determine science and engineering focal areas that represent exceptional opportunities.

"New Hampshire is poised to make significant strides in public-private partnerships to support economic growth," says Aber. "The goal of the New Hampshire EPSCoR program is to then maximize the potential of science and technology resources and use those resources as a foundation for this growth." EPSCoR provides funding in three key areas: infrastructure improvement, research and educational grants and outreach initiatives. Potential resources are up to \$9 million over 36 to 48 months.

Many EPSCoR states have used their funding to advance or begin new initiatives that have benefited their economies. Louisiana, for example, expanded its research in micro- and nano-scale science and technology. Maine has used EPSCoR resources to support its Environmental Sensor Research Group - which spun off two startup companies -- and Rhode Island is enhancing its training and education for students in science and engineering to better connect the workforce to new jobs being created.

"EPSCoR will allow us to infuse money into research areas and new programs that best meet the need of New Hampshire companies and the state," Aber says. "It will also foster change in educational programs and practice, and redefine research opportunities for our graduate and undergraduate students. Public and private sectors will be sharing and supporting common goals."

For more information on EPSCoR and funding opportunities, visit the program homepage at <http://www.epscor.unh.edu>.