

Corning

Corning Incorporated is the world leader in specialty glass and ceramics. Drawing on more than 160 years of materials science and process engineering knowledge, Corning creates and makes keystone components that enable high-technology systems for consumer electronics, mobile emissions control, telecommunications and life sciences. Learn more about how Corning collaborates closely with customers across these industries to turn what were once only [possibilities](#) into breakthrough realities.

Corning invests heavily in internal R&D (approximately 9% of revenue goes to R&D), and this is the basis for innovation in new technologies and products. When they move into new areas, they reach out to universities. Corning strives to build relationships with a few universities covering broad areas of interest rather than pursuing individual projects in very specific areas. To do this, they support graduate students through grants to professors. On the East Coast, they support six PhD students at three different universities.

In the past year, teams from Corning visited Cornell and other universities to explore collaborative relationships. We interviewed the Director of their West Coast Research Center who had just set up meetings for a team of 12 from the Corning New York laboratories to discuss linking their work in materials and glasses to the Life Sciences.

They visited UC Santa Barbara and UC San Diego and spent a day at each place. (The original plan was to just visit UCSB, but while setting that meeting up, the UCSB business development manager suggested they also contact her counterpart at UCSD.) The goal of these meetings was to start to build relationships and to initiate support for research that looks promising for Corning. At UCSB, the Director of Corporate Business Development for the College of Engineering arranged the entire visit and spent the whole day with the Corning team as their host. In addition, three professors with research interests in the Life Sciences spent the entire day with the visitors. When potential areas for collaboration were identified, they were immediately able to schedule follow-up visits at Corning, New York. The team was impressed by the level of interest in collaborating expressed by the UCSB researchers. The team was similarly engaged at UCSD.

The lead from Corning New York had never visited these California schools before. After the visit, he compared these two days with similar visits to MIT and Cornell. His comment was that MIT was much harder to work with, and Cornell faculty seemed less

interested in working with industry. He described the Cornell faculty he had interacted with as arrogant.

Several points stood out from this interview as key factors in building industrial partnerships.

1. Focus on building relationships that are long-term, not project focused. Relationships and the building of trust and respect are the keys to productive industrial partnerships.
2. Someone needs to be responsible for the success of launching the partnership. It takes a lot of work to get relationships going. Once the personal relationships between industrial teams and a professor and his students are established, these relationships can go on for years with little administrative oversight, but initially it takes work. One success factor that was mentioned was bi-weekly conference calls to track the status of building the relationship. This continued interaction is important in both the early stages and after formal project or collaboration agreements are in place.
3. Visitors to campus need to feel they are valued. They are investing time and money just to come to campus. Engineering staff need to invest their time into understanding industrial needs and exploring the potential for mutually beneficial collaboration.
4. Be patient. The payoff in these relationships comes with time and it can take many forms. It may start with unrestricted grants funding a single graduate student. It can build from there.