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# An Academic Library-Biotech Industry Partnership: Defining a Collaboration

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**Background** New York Medical College opened BioInc@NYMC, a multimillion-dollar government-funded biotechnology incubator, in October 2014. To spur medical innovation and economic development, the public and private sectors collaborated to provide biotech start-ups with state-of-the-art facilities. By April 2015 four start-up companies had joined the incubator. The Health Sciences Library was given a unique opportunity to interface with the private biotechnology industry and define an academic library-biotechnology industry partnership.

**Methods** In the absence of a formal plan to accommodate the biotech companies' information needs, librarians had questions about members' access to library resources and of fees for library services. Initial discussions among librarians centered on creating a business model and outlining it in a brochure. Librarians decided that onsite access to the library would allow self-service for start-up members doing their own research and a business model was implemented for members seeking full service. We designed an information package with a brochure promoting library search and document delivery services for free and reduced fees. Other services, such as classes, were included at no charge. Meetings between members and librarians were set up to discuss members' needs and promote and explain library services.

**Objectives** The Hudson Valley has become a hub for the biotechnology industry, propelling the region's economy. As the only incubator in the region located on a health sciences university campus, members were promised the tools, resources and infrastructure an academic institution could provide, including library services. However, no formal plan was developed by college administration to accommodate the information needs of the members. The Health Sciences Library, sure of its role in the incubator's success, seized the opportunity to collaborate. With academic-industry partnerships becoming more common, defining an academic library-biotechnology industry collaboration would contribute to the success of an important endeavor. Our objectives were to:

- Welcome biotech start-up company members
- Offer an introductory package of library services, including reference and document delivery services
- Establish procedures and policies to facilitate access to library resources
- Employ a business model, while honoring the spirit of the membership agreement
- Develop and define a mutually beneficial collaboration
- Demonstrate the value of the library to college administration

**Barriers** Expected barriers to collaboration on the part of librarians included differences between academic and private pursuits, resource funding and the use of a business model. Familiar challenges like marketing library services and understanding and supporting user needs were also anticipated. Since college administration had not included the library in their plan when creating member agreements, library services were not defined. Librarians were not sure which services could be offered, whether fees could be charged or what a fair price would be. However, the greatest barrier proved to be unanticipated: direct access to the members by librarians, since all messages were conveyed through a college intermediary. Although a welcome package was designed, four months elapsed before we were given permission to contact start-up members directly.

**Conclusions** A librarian should be part of the college's planning initiatives when launching a biotechnology incubator. A formal plan outlining library services offered, fees for services, and methods of access should be discussed as part of the initial contract between each company and the college. An information package and in-person meetings between start-up members and librarians help promote library services and address member needs, ensuring a successful collaboration. Librarians should investigate members' companies and research interests before the initial meeting. Start-up members primarily need expert searching and document delivery. Partnering with an academic health sciences library can help biotechnology companies succeed and help the library enhance its value to the college.

## Future Plans

- Continue marketing library services
- Expand policies and procedures
- Develop outcome measures
- Define library services as a part of membership



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