

Incubator aid: Grant will focus on clean energy

by Vic Kolenc \ El Paso Times

The University of Texas at El Paso has received a \$200,000 state grant to start a clean energy incubator to help develop clean energy technologies and form and expand clean energy companies.

That grant is aimed at replicating the success of the Austin Technology Incubator, or ATI, and its Clean Energy Incubator at the University of Texas at Austin.

It also boosts formation of a broader El Paso technology incubator being established by UTEP and six other organizations.

The plan is to have the clean energy incubator become part of the broader Paso del Norte Regional Technology Incubator, which is in the process of changing its name to The Hub of Human Innovation, said Mike Acosta, interim executive director of the still-forming Hub incubator.

Besides clean energy, The Hub also will focus on biomedical, border security, defense, aerospace and advanced manufacturing.

The incubators, which are expected to open in the next two months, will be housed in a building at 500 W. Overland, in the Union Plaza District Downtown. That building is becoming a center for high-tech companies and organizations.

"We're looking to setting up similar to the Austin Technology Incubator since it has had successes with all kinds of technologies over the years," Acosta said.

The ATI will provide training and other expertise to the El Paso clean energy incubator as part of the grant from the Texas State Energy Conservation Office, said Gary Williams, who helped get the grant and will oversee formation of the incubator.

"ATI will mentor us so we can speed up the learning curve as much as possible," said Williams, director of UTEP's Center for Research Entrepreneurship and Innovative Enterprises.

The clean energy incubator and The Hub technology incubator are aimed at stimulating and accelerating new job creation and economic development, Williams said.



Gary E. Williams is director for the Center for Research Entrepreneurship and Innovative Enterprises at the University of Texas at El Paso. He stands inside the future home of the Clean Energy Technology Incubator in the Sotoa Gallery building at 500 W. Overland.

Acosta said, "We want to start transforming the culture here to one of innovation and entrepreneurship. We want to bring high-paying, high-tech jobs here."

The ATI Clean Energy Incubator in Austin in the past two years, has incubated 15 companies, and helped those companies attract nearly \$20 million in capital investment, according to Mitch Jacobson, director of the incubator.

More than 30 companies have used the incubator since it started in 2001, he said. It currently is working with nine companies.

"Companies are in our incubator about 18 months. We help them raise money and get the business together, and eventually commercialize its product," Jacobson said.

Williams said the El Paso clean energy incubator will work with area companies and several organizations, including the Sandia and Los Alamos national laboratories and White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico, Fort Bliss, New Mexico State University and UTEP to get clean energy technologies that can be commercialized. It also will test products at those institutions as well as at manufacturing plants in Juárez through an agreement with the Association of Maquiladoras in Juárez, he said.

"A lot is going on in this region, and we want to make sure we collect all possible technologies and do business assessments to see how big the market (for the technologies) may be," Williams said.

The clean energy umbrella is wide, Williams said. It includes wind, solar, biofuels, bioenergy, geothermal, efficient lighting, electric vehicles, water purification, sewage recycling and others, he said.

The clean energy incubator and The Hub incubator will try to bring in grants and private funds to operate, Williams and Acosta said.

Vic Kolenc may be reached at vkolenc@elpasotimes.com; 546-6421.

More information: ati.utexas.edu, innovateelpaso.org