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ACCELERATING LIFE SCIENCES COMMERCIALIZATION

By Mary Hecht-Kissell, North Carolina Biotechnology Center

Since 1984, the North Carolina Biotechnology Center has played a pivotal role in transforming North Carolina into a leading global life sciences hub. As a state-funded nonprofit, NCBiotech champions programs that help move ideas from research laboratories to the marketplace.

North Carolina is becoming well known for its research and development (R&D) prowess. The state has 490 R&D companies employing 13,300 workers statewide.

North Carolina universities serve as engines for innovation, developing new technologies, from cancer therapies to advanced drug delivery systems. NCBiotech provides grants to academic researchers to support translational research. These grants help researchers begin evaluating commercial applications for technologies, laying the foundation for new patents, licensing agreements, and spinout companies.

Early-stage life sciences companies often face difficulty securing initial funding. NCBiotech provides loans ranging from \$150,000 to \$650,000 to early-stage startups. These loans allow companies to advance product development and

hit critical technical and business milestones. In many cases, NCBiotech funding serves as a catalyst that unlocks additional financing from other sources. Portfolio companies have raised \$8B+ in follow-on capital. That's \$124 for every \$1 invested by NCBiotech.¹

COACHING AND MENTORING

Developing a commercially viable product is challenging and often necessitates guidance from trusted experts. NCBiotech's Emerging Company Development (ECD) team serves as a connector for its loan portfolio companies by facilitating meaningful engagement with industry experts.

Through its Entrepreneurs in Residence (EIR) Program, ECD connects startups with successful life sciences executives who can provide coaching, strategy support, and at times, access to helpful resources. EIRs help companies establish business models and operational plans, and provide fundraising guidance, including how to successfully engage and attract opportunities with investors and partners.

ECD also advises companies, delivering feedback on business plans, investor presentations, and supporting technical and scientific materials. The team maintains strong ties with university tech transfer offices and regional incubators and accelerators.

ECD also fosters deep relationships with venture capital investors and angel investor networks, as well as tech scouts from global pharmaceutical companies, enabling matchmaking between these groups and promising startups.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

NCBiotech's Life Sciences Intelligence (LSI) team provides services that help startups make informed commercialization decisions. This team delivers market data, industry analysis, and scientific insights. LSI also offers fee-based custom research services.

NCBiotech's LSI team maintains a state-wide Company Directory that includes 860 life sciences companies and additional support companies. Startups can use the directory to identify product- and service-providers in the state, such as contract research organizations, IP attorneys and legal counsel, regulatory affairs specialists, and manufacturing and design firms.

COLLABORATIVE ECOSYSTEM

Many startups leverage partnerships with research institutions, clinical research organizations, manufacturing partners, or large pharmaceutical companies to advance products successfully.

North Carolina has five R-1 research universities, offering abundant opportunities for co-development and access to specialized equipment and scientific advisors.

As the birthplace of clinical research, North Carolina has 170+ clinical service organizations providing a range of services, including assay development, preclinical and clinical research, and clinical trial management. North Carolina has three designated comprehensive cancer centers, ideal locations for conducting clinical trials.

North Carolina has a variety of well-equipped lab spaces statewide. From incubators to accelerators to research parks, startups have plenty of cost-effective options.

With a high quality of life, North Carolina continues to attract strong C-level talent, which is paramount to building resilient, high-performing startups. North Carolina's highly skilled life sciences workforce, which is 76,000 employees strong and growing, ensures startups can find the talent they need at all levels. NCBiotech champions several workforce development programs and job resources to keep the talent pipeline full.

The Conference Center at NCBiotech hosts 480 events annually, bringing together academia, government, entrepreneurs, investors and industry leaders for networking and educational programs.

PROOF OF A SUCCESSFUL INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM:

Here are recent examples of North Carolina's momentum in advancing innovations and attracting outside investment:

- In 2025, venture funding for North Carolina life sciences hit a record \$1.6 billion, beating the state's previous high of \$1 billion in 2021.
- In February 2026, Slate Medicines announced a \$130 million Series A financing led by RA Capital Management, Forbion, and Foresite Capital, to advance its novel therapy for migraine and headache disorders. The company intends to start Phase 1 clinical trials in mid-2026.
- In May 2026, Bayer AG announced plans to acquire Perfuse Therapeutics, whose R&D facility is based in Research Triangle Park, for its investigational treatments for ocular diseases. Bayer will pay \$300 million up front, with additional payments possible if the treatment meets certain development, regulatory and commercial goals, bringing the deal's potential value up to \$2.45 billion.

NCBiotech's long-standing commitment to accelerating commercialization has contributed significantly to North Carolina's reputation as a premier destination for life sciences innovation. Startups navigating the complex path from scientific breakthrough to commercial success will find all the resources they need to grow and scale in North Carolina.

¹ Source: NCBiotech Business Intelligence and Analytics (July 2025)

To learn more, visit ncbiotech.org

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