



Indiana pitch competition showcases NSWC Crane's regional role as well as its intellectual property

Naval Surface Warfare Center, Crane Division

Inspired by an innovative pandemic recovery initiative at the Naval Surface Warfare Center (NSWC), Crane Division, a group of regional partners has created an annual pitch competition for entrepreneurs that showcases the federal laboratory's intellectual property (IP) and its pivotal role in the southern Indiana regional innovation ecosystem.

To spur economic recovery during the pandemic, the Technology Transfer (T2) Office at NSWC Crane implemented a program in the spring of 2020 offering short-term, royalty-free licenses for any technology in the lab's IP portfolio. The T2 Office utilized its network of partners to disseminate information about the program, which the FLC recognized with a 2021 National Award for Technology Transfer Innovation and a COVID-19 Response Distinction.

Radius Indiana, a regional business catalyst that has a Partnership Intermediary Agreement (PIA) with NSWC Crane, spread the word about the licensing program but wanted to do more to encourage local entrepreneurs to engage with the lab. Radius Indiana pulled together a group of partners in southern Indiana to help foster and sponsor a pitch competition focused solely on entrepreneurs and businesses interested in working with Crane IP.

That effort became what is now called the Crane IP Defense Innovation Pitch Competition. The inaugural event was held in July 2020, and a second event took place in June 2021. The goal of the pitch competition was that businesses and entrepreneurs would use NSWC Crane technologies to support new jobs and economic growth, especially during the COVID-19 crisis.

Individuals and teams were invited to develop an innovative 20-minute proposal for one of the many technologies in NSWC Crane's IP portfolio. In 2020, the offering was for 10 unique technologies, but in 2021 contestants could choose any technology from the entire list of 300+ patents. Participants included entrepreneurs and businesses in the local area, the state of Indiana, other states, and even Japan.

In addition to Radius Indiana and NSWC Crane, the



organizational partners for the inaugural event included the Indiana Small Business Development Center and Elevate Ventures, an entrepreneurial development nonprofit. For the 2021 event, they were joined by the Indiana Innovation Institute (IN3) and Dimension Mill, the largest coworking space in southern Indiana and a 501(c)(3) nonprofit center for entrepreneurship in Bloomington. Dimension Mill and NSWC Crane have now signed a PIA.

The top three finishers split \$5,000 in cash prizes in 2020 and \$6,000 in 2021. Teams are in ongoing communication with the T2 Office at NSWC Crane, with at least one team working with partnership intermediary TechLink currently to license two Crane patents in the artificial intelligence and machine learning areas.

For NSWC Crane, the impact of this pitch competition goes beyond monetary prizes or IP metrics. It has raised regional awareness of the resources NSWC Crane has to share with entrepreneurs and small businesses, and it has more firmly cemented the lab's strategic relationships within its region.✪