Meeting Minutes

First Meeting – October 20, 2005

PRESENT:	Jeffrey Seemann, PhD (co-chair) Andries van Dam, PhD (co-chair) David Bengston Paul Choquette Jr. David Hibbitt, PhD Saul Kaplan Margaret Leinen, PhD (via teleconference) Richard Nadolink, PhD Thomas Rockett, PhD Donald Stanford
ABSENT:	Joseph Amaral, MD Thomas Ryan Cheryl Snead
OTHER PARTICIPANTS:	Governor Donald L. Carcieri Senator William Walaska Randall Kempner, Council on Competitiveness

The Rhode Island Science and Technology Advisory Council (STAC) held its first meeting on October 20 at the Rhode Island Foundation in Providence. The meeting began with a welcome and introduction by Andries van Dam and Jeffrey Seemann.

Dr. van Dam presented the challenge that the United States faces in maintaining its lead in science and technology in the face of decreasing funding for basic science, 9/11's chilling effects on the recruitment of foreign talent, rapid ramping up of Asian high-tech universities and research centers, and off-shoring of creative jobs in high-tech industries. Dr. van Dam stated the importance of aggressively investing in education, research, and up-skilling of the U.S. workforce, as a means to making innovation central to local and national economic development strategy and securing Rhode Island's economic future.

Dr. Seemann noted that in response to the challenges our state and country face, STAC will examine what Rhode Island can do to take advantage of its strengths and position itself to better compete nationally and internationally. Dr. Seemann reiterated the Council's mandate to advise the Governor and General Assembly on actions that the state can take to improve Rhode Island's capacity for innovation, noting that current activities include implementing the **innovate RI** initiative and supporting Rhode Island's continued pursuit of basic research funding through federal-state partnerships such as EPSCoR.

Governor Donald Carcieri discussed the importance of innovation for Rhode Island and the role of STAC. Governor Carcieri recalled how decades ago, in the midst of the Cold War, the U.S. recognized the strategic value of science and technology and dramatically increased its training of scientists and engineers, noting that our success again depends on elevating science, technology and innovation. Governor Carcieri remarked that members of STAC represent Rhode Island's unique strengths and assets in higher education, science, technology, and business. He reiterated that Rhode Island needs a strategy to build on these strengths, growing and utilizing the resources we already have to make strategic investments.

Governor Carcieri concluded his remarks by noting that Rhode Island's economic future hinges on our ability to compete in the global science, technology and innovation economy.

Saul Kaplan introduced the **innovate RI** project as STAC's first effort to meet the Governor's mandate to develop a science, technology and innovation strategy. Mr. Kaplan explained that **innovate RI** includes an assessment of Rhode Island's innovation capacity, the development of targeted recommendations for increasing our capacity, and the creation of an implementation roadmap for actualizing these recommendations. Mr. Kaplan informed the group that STAC has completed the first phase of **innovate RI** by teaming with the Council on Competitiveness to conduct an assessment of the state's innovation capacity. He informed the Council that the second and third phases of the initiative will occur in the months leading up to STAC's next meeting in late January / early February.

Randall Kempner, Vice President for Regional Innovation at the Council on Competitiveness, presented a preliminary assessment of Rhode Island's innovation capacity. The state was benchmarked against the nation and the region in over 50 innovation metrics. In addition, 26 executives, university administrators, entrepreneurs, technology transfer officers, financiers, and policymakers from organizations inside and outside of the state took part in detailed interviews. Mr. Kempner noted that ~100 business and community leaders completed a 64-question survey covering Rhode Island's business environment, innovation networks, norms and attitudes, and activities of individual organizations.

Mr. Kempner reported that Rhode Island's innovation performance is average or slightly below average. He reported that while the state is slightly above the US average in wealth generation and income, and poverty rates are slightly better than the nation's, Rhode Island's performance on these measures still trails other New England states. State innovation metrics show mixed results. Patenting is increasing, but at a slower rate than the national average. SBIR funding is also increasing, slightly above national average. University innovation outputs show room for improvement.

Mr. Kempner reported that one key challenge for Rhode Island is building and retaining talent, and the state is lagging in the development and retention of skilled people. An additional concern is the state's difficulty in leveraging knowledge assets through business-university collaboration.

Thomas Rockett noted that university and business collaborations are difficult because the needs of business and academic institutions often differ significantly.

Mr. Kempner stressed that Rhode Island has a unique opportunity to utilize the state's small size and linkages to Greater Boston region to develop a unique and valued innovation environment. Kempner noted that to develop a strategy for future success, STAC must ask: How can Rhode Island sustain a differentiated innovation environment while leveraging its regional links to Boston and New England? How can the state take advantage of its size to accelerate strengthening of innovation capacity? What, specifically, should Rhode Island's leadership do to improve the state innovation capacity?

David Hibbitt urged Council members to recognize that efforts to improve the state's science and technology platform will be long-term and that the results of current efforts may not be felt for decades.

Dr. Seemann closed the meeting by outlining steps that STAC will take to complete the **innovate RI** project and formulate recommendations and implementation plan. Principally, the council will draft the **innovate RI** report, gathering additional feedback on the innovation capacity assessment and engaging STAC members and the academic, business, and government community to develop strategies for increasing innovation capacity. He noted that STAC will create a roadmap for enacting recommended strategies and develop a detailed budget request. Concurrently, STAC will engage government leaders to build awareness and support for **innovate RI** and STAC activities. The full report will be presented at the next council meeting in January.

In response to Dr. Seemann's comments, Senator Walaska stressed that collaboration with both the executive and the legislative branches will be essential for success of the Council and its initiatives.

STAC members agreed that garnering the support of both the Governor and General Assembly is critically important for achieving the Council's goals, and that engaging both branches of government will be a top priority of STAC's leadership, members and staff.

Meeting was adjourned.