

BUILDING A ROBUST WORKFORCE IN THE U.S.

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From the beginning of Joseph Francisco's presidential succession, he has focused on one overarching theme—ensuring that aspiring chemists and seasoned professionals in the U.S. have the skill sets, resources, and external environment to build and sustain a robust workforce in the U.S. Given the historic job losses in our enterprise in the past few years, he felt that this was by far his most important priority.

Last year at the ACS spring meeting, a Presidential symposium explored the skills needed by industry in a global environment and what universities could do to provide those skills. Also last year, President Francisco appointed two presidential task forces, both of which have now come to fruition. One task force completed its work late last year and developed the concept of an ACS international center, which would be the first place a U.S. chemist would come to learn about international education, research, and employment opportunities abroad and a non U.S. chemist would come to learn about those same opportunities in the U.S.

The second task force was charged with ensuring that the U.S. remains the most innovative and entrepreneurial country in the world. This task force was headed by Harvard University professor and entrepreneur George Whitesides and comprised eminent members of the chemical enterprise from industry, academia, and government, all with experience in entrepreneurship. They outlined the current landscape of innovation in chemistry, broadly defined; defined barriers and opportunities for stimulating innovation; and recommended specific programs that ACS could implement to help chemists become innovators and entrepreneurs and thus create new, high-paying sustainable jobs in the U.S. and stem further job losses

The Task Force had many recommendations, which fall into four major categories.

First, the task force recommended that ACS should **develop a single organizational unit—a kind of “technological farmers’ market”—offering affordable (or free) help to entrepreneurs.** This unit is envisioned as supporting entrepreneurs by facilitating more affordable access to resources that should foster the creation of small companies from startups. Relevant resources might include information, management expertise, key services, and mentors. The unit could also support entrepreneurs in making introductions to much-needed capital and fostering partnerships with large companies. ACS staff and several ACS governance units are already exploring how this one-stop portal can be implemented.

Second, the task force recommended that ACS should **increase its advocacy of policies at the federal and state level to improve the business environment** for entrepreneurs

and startup companies. The task force suggested that ACS should urge reforms within the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office to assure more accurate patents and faster issuance. The USPTO has a backlog of 700,000 patents, and the slow pace of issuance is a deterrent to keeping the U.S. competitive. ACS needs to lobby for legislative reforms, but in addition, ACS has talented unemployed members who could be of assistance to patent examiners. ACS has written to the head of the USPTO and have already heard back that they are interested in exploring a number of ideas. The task force also outlined a number of financial policies that if enacted could encourage large companies to partner with small ones to promote entrepreneurship. These include preferential tax treatment for repatriated income invested in U.S.-based developers of technology and making the R&D tax credit more simplified, permanent, and transferable. And there was a host of other ideas.

The third recommendation urged ACS to **partner more vigorously with academic institutions and other relevant organizations to promote awareness of career pathways and educational opportunities** that involve or include entrepreneurship. The task force had several interesting suggestions that will be pursued by various staff and governance units.

And finally, the task force felt that ACS should **increase public awareness of the value of early-stage entrepreneurship** in the chemical enterprise with focused media coverage and information targeted to federal agencies that support chemistry. In addition, ACS should provide ways to recognize entrepreneurs publicly, to increase their visibility and enhance their opportunities for success.

In the near future, President Francisco plans to release the entire report to members, the public, and policymakers. If you have ideas, please send them to Madeleine Jacobs, m_jacobs@acs.org.

As this Task Force was concluding its work, President Barack Obama delivered his January 2011 State of the Union Address. In that address, President Obama stated: “The first step in winning the future is encouraging American innovation. None of us can predict with certainty what the next big industry will be, or where the new jobs will come from. ...What we can do—what America does better than anyone—is spark the creativity and imagination of our people.”

To that end, the American Chemical Society is positioned to help stimulate entrepreneurial activities across the chemical enterprise to help spark the creativity and imagination of our country’s chemists and thereby create quality jobs in the U.S.