



Research Triangle Firm Enters Agreement with Air Force Venture Unit

Over the past 50 years, RTI Innovation Advisors has helped expand the innovation perspectives of hundreds of corporations, foundations, and federal agencies. Through technical agility, innovation expertise, and a collaborative approach, RTI Innovation Advisors bring rigor and clarity to the innovation process.

“We focus on delivering insights, providing strategic consulting, and accelerating technology to market – no matter where organizations are in their innovation process,” says Adam Klich, an Innovation Advisor for RTI. “RTI Innovation Advisors amplifies clients’ innovation impact.”

As a business unit of RTI International – an independent global research institute with a staff of nearly 6,000 – Innovation Advisors has access to experts in a range of technologies and innovative leaders with extensive industry experience. “When clients work with us, they tap into the expertise of our multidisciplinary team and of RTI’s vast resources and network: 250 disciplines, hundreds of industry specialists, and decades of combined research,” outlines Klich. “Collaboratively, we all work alongside clients to define challenges and opportunities, explore possibilities, broaden their knowledge and enable innovation.”

RTI Innovation Advisors helps clients turn insights into new products, services and technologies that have meaningful business and human impacts. They arm clients with the knowledge and tools they need to make creative decisions that push their organization and humankind forward, so they can make a difference and align efforts to meaningful outcomes. “We are dedicated to solving mission problems for innovation-driven government agencies by designing innovation programs, creating technical solutions, and finding market partners” added Klich.

One of their newest clients is a venture unit of the United States Air Force called AF CyberWorx, based near Colorado Springs

at the United States Air Force Academy. RTI Innovation Advisors has been partnered with AF CyberWorx for more than a year, after signing a Partnership Intermediary Agreement, or PIA, in 2020.

Klich states his company’s role is to support AF CyberWorx collaborative events that bring together government and industry partners to solve wicked problems. RTI Innovation Advisors serves as the liaison to industry, and is responsible for identifying, recruiting and managing industry participation in specific cyber-related technology events.

“In 2020 we supported AF CyberWorx and other DoD stakeholders by bringing them innovative large and small companies that have capabilities to enable secure remote access to different levels of classified data,” Klich revealed. “Now, in 2021, we helped design an event that focused on electromagnetic spectrum capabilities, including 5G. Given the dynamic environment of innovation efforts, we had two weeks to recruit industry partners to participate in the event. Our proven scouting processes and agility allowed us to identify 150+ companies and have 28 of them support the event, most of which were small and nontraditionals.”

As with any business collaboration, the organizations have determined the desired outcomes and impacts of the agreement. As

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Klich details, there are several layers to this concept. “First, RTI Innovation Advisors’ mission is to help organizations develop new products, services, and technologies that have meaningful business and human impacts. Our group also is a big proponent of the use of human-centered design methodology for problem solving. AF CyberWorx aims to solve difficult problems by bringing together really smart people from government, academia, and industry together, leveraging human-centered design methodology.”

“So, there is strong alignment in our goals to solve problems and enable innovation through design thinking. We believe both organizations expect the same successful outcomes: creating stronger linkages in the ecosystem, bringing together great people to collaborate around wicked problems, providing more opportunities for nontraditional organizations to engage with DoD, and enable organizations to create solutions that can help enhance the capabilities of the Air Force.”

This is the first PIA entered into by RTI International, so they have learned a great deal on working within this agreement and understanding the needs and solutions in the DoD cyberspace. Klich sees this PIA as a great opportunity to expand RTI’s network, both within the DoD and with nontraditional technology and service developers. As he describes it, they now have a “more expansive rolodex” of nontraditional companies with capabilities in solving cyber challenges that their clients can access for future projects. “Our approach complements the Air Force’s efforts to invest in innovative organizations, collaborate with private sector partners, and accelerate results,” he adds. “Like the Air Force, our group embraces excellence and integrity – among other values – when solving our clients’ greatest innovation challenges.”

One unexpected challenge occurred less than two months after entering into the PIA: COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns. Events which were previously planned as “in-person” had to be redesigned as virtual experiences; however, since the company is accustomed to conducting the majority of their work for global organizations virtually, they were able to leverage their expertise to help AF CyberWorx pivot their workshops and events to the virtual environment. “While in-person events would have provided a richer collaboration experience and helped us to get to know the participants better, the virtual events accomplished

the goals of the project,” Klich reveals.

Although this PIA with AF CyberWorx is recent, RTI Innovation Advisors has been supporting government agencies with innovation since the mid-1960s, when they were awarded one of the first technology transfer contracts for NASA. While they still have a partnership with NASA, their work in the space now expands to multiple branches of the DoD, as well as other government agencies such as the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), the National Institute of Health (NIH), the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), and a host of others.

“Beyond the work with government, we also provide advisory services to corporate and university clients,” Klich says. “This understanding of the corporate, government, and academia worlds is really what helps us understand the perspectives of all stakeholders within innovation ecosystems, especially when conversations move toward dual use.”

For the past decade, RTI Innovation Advisors has also been providing diversification services (dual use) for US manufacturers funded by the Office of Local Defense Community Cooperation, formerly the Office of Economic Adjustment (OEA), to help ensure they maintain a strong defense industrial base at both war and peace times. Through that work the team has helped hundreds of small- and medium-sized companies diversify into new markets for existing products and capabilities.

To learn more about RTI Innovation Advisors, or to explore innovative solutions for your needs and goals, visit the company’s website at <https://rtiinnovationadvisors.org/> or contact them via email at pia@rti.org.

Partnership Intermediary Agreements are offered through the Air Force Research Laboratory’s Technology Transfer and Transition (T3) program office, enabling long-term partnerships between a federal government laboratory and a state government, local government, or affiliated non-profit entity to facilitate technology transfers and transitions between federal and non-federal entities. A comprehensive suite of T3 mechanisms for partnering with industry and academia are offered through the office. To find out how you can partner with the T3 Program, please visit <https://www.aft3.af.mil>.



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