

Responding to the Coronavirus: A Highlight of Six Innovation-Focused North Carolina Companies Combating COVID-19

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In my lifetime, never has there been more of an imperative to create an innovative solution than the current challenge of combating the COVID-19 health and economic crisis.

Over the last 18 months, I have served on the North Carolina Board of Science, Technology & Innovation (BSTI) and seen first-hand the work the Board and staff do to improve the economic well-being and quality of life for North Carolinians through science and technology. For example, its [One North Carolina Small Business Program](#) works directly with entrepreneurial companies to advance its mission to create jobs through innovation.



one north carolina
Small Business Program

I am proud that six of the companies receiving grants through this program are leading state, national, and international effort in the development of testing and diagnostic technologies, treatments, or other products for addressing COVID-19. Altogether, the BSTI *has invested just over half a million state dollars* in these companies, which currently employ nearly 120 people. We would like to highlight them and the critical work they're doing:



AskBio

Asklepios BioPharmaceutical, Inc. (AskBio): is a clinical-stage adeno-associated virus (AAV) gene therapy company dedicated to improving the lives of patients with rare diseases and other genetic disorders. AskBio is working on a vectorized antibody approach to address COVID-19 using its AAV platform.



BioMedomics, Inc.: is a point-of-care diagnostics company that aims to provide novel, rapid point-of-care tests to aid in the diagnosis of critical diseases. BioMedomics has developed and launched one of the world's first rapid point-of-care lateral flow immunoassays for the diagnosis of coronavirus infection.



Collaborations Pharmaceuticals, Inc.: works on drug discovery for rare and neglected diseases. Collaborations Pharmaceuticals has its Assay Central machine-learning software for building models to predict compounds with likely activity against the Coronavirus.

Mucommune, LLC: researches improved protection against infectious diseases transmitted at mucosal surfaces. Inhalon Biopharma, a spin-off from Mucommune, is advancing inhaled, muco-trapping therapeutics for treatment of COVID-19.



Novan, Inc.: uses a proprietary nitric oxide-based science and technology platform to develop innovative, first-in-class therapies for unmet medical needs. Novan's nitric-oxide platform may have potential as a treatment for COVID-19, as it has the ability to inhibit viral replication.



Plasma Games, Inc.: develops entertainment-quality video games for STEM classes. Plasma Game donated its National Science Foundation award-winning resource, *Sci-Ops: Global Defense*, to teachers across the US to help during this COVID-19 crisis.

In addition to the One NC Small Business Program grants funded by the State, all six of these companies have received competitive federal Phase I Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) or Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) grants. These grants, which are initial financial injections, provide critical funding for the development of new, prototype technologies, which are often expensive to develop and have not yet been vetted for commercialization.

Innovation is necessary for overcoming new challenges, and often requires some form of personal, financial, and technical contribution to be successful. These six companies, like all the nearly 300 other [One NC Small Business Program grantees](#) supported with nearly \$26 million in state funds, continue to advance innovation for the well-being of all of us, as well as demonstrate that innovation can happen at critical times, as long as they have the early capital to do it.

About the Author & More Information:

Rick Webb is an appointed member of the North Carolina Board of Science, Technology & Innovation and serves as Senior Advisor to Accenture.

More Information on the One North Carolina Small Business Program is found at <https://www.nccommerce.com/grants-incentives/technology-funds/one-north-carolina-small-business-program>.

More information on the NC Board of Science, Technology & Innovation can be found at <https://www.nccommerce.com/about-us/boards-commissions/board-science-technology-innovation>.



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