Cathy Fore

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Announcer

You're listening to Further Together: The ORAU Podcast. Join Michael Holtz and his guests for conversations about all things ORAU. They'll talk about ORAU's storied history, our impact on an ever-changing world, our innovative, scientific and technical solutions for our customers, and our commitment to the communities where we do business. Welcome to Further Together: The ORAU Podcast.

Michael Holtz

- Welcome to Further Together: The ORAU Podcast. And as ever, it is me, your host, Michael Holtz from the Communications and Marketing Department at ORAU. And I am delighted to bring aboard a new guest co-host, a new member of the communications and marketing team, Miss Abbey Becker. Abbey, welcome to the podcast.

Abbey Becker

- Hello Michael. Excited to be here with you today.

Michael Holtz

- I'm excited to have you. You're spanking new to the team, which is always exciting. And this is your first time working with me on the podcast, and I'm excited about all of that. How are you feeling?

Abbey Becker

- Oh, I'm feeling great.

Michael Holtz

- And of course, I know you worked for ORISE, you were on the ORISE side of the house. Now you're on the ORAU side of the house, but it's still like drinking from a fire hose, so you're still learning all the things.

- Yes, learning never stops.

Michael Holtz

- Never stops. So speaking of, that's a great segue. Learning never stops and research never stops here at ORAU. And I am so excited to be talking about the research enterprise at ORAU. If you are a regular listener to our podcast, you know that I adore our research program, the Research and University Partnerships Office. Our Chief Research Officer, Ken Tobin, is here and our Senior Director of University Partnerships, Cathy fore is here. Ken and Cathy, welcome back.

Ken Tobin

- Oh, thank you very much. We're glad to be back. Always looking for an opportunity to talk about our research programs and investments and working with our staff and our university partners. So glad to be here. Thank you.

Michael Holtz

- Awesome, well, we have a lot to talk about because we talk regularly about specific grant programs of ORAU and the Research and University Partnerships Office. We don't often talk about putting all of that in context in terms of the total research investment across the entire enterprise. And so we're gonna do a little bit of that today. And again, regular listeners know, we've talked about ORAU directed research and development grants, and we've talked about our innovation partnership grants and Powe awards and all of those things. But today we're gonna kind of put all of research in context. Ken, talk about what it means to invest in research across our enterprise.

Ken Tobin

- Well, I know I sound like a broken record when I get on this topic, but I just, coming from a research background and just understanding what the benefits are of research to an organization, there's just so many good things that research can bring to ORAU and does bring to ORAU. And of course, I'd love to see it grow more and more. So we have more of a footprint in the research world. We're not a national laboratory. We don't want to be a national laboratory.

Michael Holtz

- Right.

Ken Tobin

- But having some aspect of our programmatic portfolios and investments and things like that, being in research helps us to position us to be more competitive, to hire great people, to keep really good people here that are already here, to build reputation, to, you know, make an impact for our customers and for the nation, you know, based on the outcomes of the things that we're doing that are unique to our kind of skill sets and history. So, I mean, research is just so important. And I'm not suggesting that, you know, like I say, that it be half of what we do.

Michael Holtz

- Right.

Ken Tobin

- But I think, I think if it's 10% of what we do, we can reap all of those benefits and rewards without a, you know, negatively impacting our programs or changing our culture in a significant way other than in a very positive way where we're providing opportunities for our staff to kind of do fun things, unique things, interesting things that kind of make the job here at ORAU fun.

Michael Holtz

- And you've talked about, kind of before we started, the total investment in research across the enterprise. Talk about that number, which is impressive, and then kind of how that breaks down.

Ken Tobin

- Yeah. Well, let me kind of break it up into two pieces. There's, there's-

Michael Holtz

- Okay.

Ken Tobin

- There's the research investments. You know, we take company profits or we take money from our foundation and we invest that in particular programs to support research activities, as you mentioned, like the ODRD program, the ORAU-Directed Research Development Program. Or we put money into our Powe grants and things like that to help support early career faculty and our university consortium, and those kinds of investments. And those are very important and we can talk more about those in a minute too. But one of the things that I've really pressed and pushed on over the last several years. I guess we've just completed our third year of tracking this, is our programmatic research. You know, really trying to encourage and promote the idea that our customers can benefit from us having some fraction of our portfolio, our programmatic portfolio be in research activity. And so for the last three years, we've been really working with the OGS side and the ORISE side and others to identify where research exists in our sponsored research, our sponsored programs. And so this year, at the end of FY24, lemme put it that way, we actually expended almost $19.6 million in research activity. So if you think of the $460 million company that we are, about 19.6 million of that was spent on research activities. Now that's about 4% of what we do as a company. I'd love it to grow. I'd love it to be 10%. And it's been 4% for the last three years. And it's only stayed at 4%, even though we've seen pretty significant growth because ORISE has been such a fantastic job of building portfolio around workforce development activity, which is fantastic for the company, but it squishes our research component down. But I say that kind of tongue in cheek, and in fact, if we look at just some of the growth that we've seen, at the end of fiscal year 23, we finished the year at about $17.3 million.

Michael Holtz

- Okay.

Ken Tobin

- So we finished this year at $19.6 million. So we saw a $2.3 million growth in research expenditures in FY 24 alone, which is great. We're heading in the right direction. And so hopefully our program folks, our subject matter experts, our staff who are interested in research kind of can hear this as we talk about this and think about, well, I wonder what my program director at federal agency XYZ could benefit from if we could look at something that was new and exciting that would help their programs be more effective or more efficient or more what have you, and try and use that to see how they could grow what they're doing on the program side as well. And I'm always happy to kind of reach out and talk about what research can look like for those folks and figure out how we can do that. So there's a lot to be said there. There's a lot I would love to be able to impress upon people to get them kind of more proactive about research. But these kinds of conversations, I think, really move us in that direction.

Michael Holtz

- Ken, are there examples of the kind of programmatic research that you're talking about that you can share?

Ken Tobin

- Yeah, yeah. In fact, we kind of, we have a list.

Michael Holtz

- Okay.

Ken Tobin

- Sort of the top five research areas that our programs cover. And they're, you know, they're big programs. Not the entire program is that activity, but there's a, you know, a portion of it that is. So our NIOSH work, National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, has obviously a strong research component in epidemiology and exposure science supporting the dose reconstruction work that we do. So that's kind of our top one. Our NOAA program, National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration Program, the Atmospheric Turbulence and Diffusion Division, ATDD. We've been working with those folks for 50 years, I think. And there is a fairly significant research component of that work as well that's related to data analysis for climate monitoring and things like this. So that's kind of number two.

Michael Holtz

- Okay.

Ken Tobin

- We have a Center for Medicaid and Medicare, or Medicare and Medicaid Services, CMS program, called INSPIRE, that has a research component that's related to sort of the expertise we provide to help transform healthcare delivery and promote innovation and reduce costs. So there's an element there of research, too. And then there's the DUE Renew Program, which is a program that relates to building foundations for students that are underrepresented in the Office of Science portfolio. And so there's research there related to really just kind of data analysis and evaluations, you know, very kind of rubber hits the road sort of studies and research, but research just the same. And then the last, you know, kind of the fifth one, the highest one here, it's our NIH, National Library of Medicine program called All of Us, which is around data training and engagement for academic libraries and such. But the research in that project, it relates to building capacity for libraries through campus wide data research engagement activities and such. So once again, you know, very kind of practical research, but research, nonetheless.

Michael Holtz

- Right, and we-

Ken Tobin

- So yeah.

Michael Holtz

- We don't always think about, you know, all of those, because they're program driven, we don't always think of that in the context of the whole picture of research that we do, but really they're important and key parts of that work.

Ken Tobin

- Oh, absolutely. And Tracey Cutright, who works in RUPO, she keeps up with this every month. And we look at the new projects that are going into place, and we look at the existing programs that are there, and she reaches out and she calls the project managers or the principal investigators and she says, hey, I see there's something new coming down the pipe, or there's something new that's being renewed or old that's being renewed. And she'll speak with folks and she'll find out, you know, well, what aspect of this has these sort of research components to it that, you know, we consider important and valuable to ORAU. And so, you know, we're keeping up with this on a monthly basis. And I'm really happy to be able to report to the board in November, we have our November board meeting, that we've just continued to grow, you know, this programmatic expenditure in research at the company over the last several years. So tracking's important. And hopefully, 'cause we're looking at it, it's gonna help us do more of it.

Michael Holtz

- Absolutely. Cathy, from the perspective of our university partners, I have to imagine that this aspect of our research is part of the value proposition for our consortium members.

Cathy Fore

- Oh, most definitely. We are having quarterly dialogue sessions that we started this year, getting in January.

Michael Holtz

- Okay.

Cathy Fore

- And each of those sessions has a topic or an example, or some new award announcement from an ORAU subject matter expert. So we are trying to use that venue as a way to share the research that we are doing with our member schools. And then also we have a member school talking about a related research topic. So we had like begin in July that session focused on emergency preparedness and response. It was nice to focus on that topic and everybody to share information and then they go away and contact each other. So it's part of building those relationships to grow the research portfolio at the institutions as well at ORAU.

Michael Holtz

- That's really exciting 'cause I know, you know, we love to, and Cathy, you love to play matchmaker, right, with research priorities and research opportunities across the board. So it's just sounds like a another fabulous tool in the tool belt for building those relationships.

Cathy Fore

- Yes, and I love playing matchmaker. I mean, you gotta love it. I've been doing it for so long, but it is just amazing the outcomes of just getting the right people together. And they love to talk about their research, not what they're just doing now, but where they could take their research and even taking it to the next step beyond the R&D stage, and taking it, as we used to say, and throw it over the fence to see how could that transition to an economic development opportunity, you know? And it's exciting to see that whole cycle of where you can take a research outcome or a product, and then that partnership with ORAU, with industry and with our member universities, that relationship, it stays throughout the entire process.

Michael Holtz

- Right.

Cathy Fore

- Which is really nice to see. So I think that ORAU is doing something very unique in pushing that envelope of building the right relationships, tracking the research and expanding it and bringing in partners as needed. And then just watch it, you know, being something that is on CNN or on the Wall Street Journal article, you know? Look at where we are now compared to where this started. So it's very exciting.

Michael Holtz

- Right. Cathy, are there examples of success stories, you know, recently that you can talk about with, you know, university partners, industry and our folks?

Cathy Fore

- Yes, I would like to talk about the recent award that we received from FEMA. We submitted a proposal to FEMA in response to a solicitation where they were looking at earthquake emergency preparedness and response.

Michael Holtz

- Okay.

Cathy Fore

- And they are seeing that we don't have enough seismic professionals in the workforce, so we need to expand that group of experts. And ORAU has, you know, tremendous expertise in just emergency preparedness and response, but we don't know too much about earthquakes except it's like happen in our backyard. Okay?

Michael Holtz

- Yeah.

Cathy Fore

- So we looked at our university consortium and we have 21 members who have expertise across the US in earthquake, all aspects of it. And so we matched up three universities: Portland State, and Columbia University, and the University of Memphis.

Michael Holtz

- Okay.

Cathy Fore

- And Memphis is right in that earthquake-

Michael Holtz

- Sure.

Cathy Fore

- zone. So they've got a lot of expertise. But we reached out to them. They expressed high interest in joining us, and we won the proposal, won the award. And now we are forming more of an advisory group and inviting other member schools to join us to be those seismic experts and like an advisory council to FEMA. And I will say that FEMA didn't have as much money as they thought they had when they issued the solicitation by the time the award is. And so they asked us to rescope. But they said, don't leave out the university group. They wanted that to stay because they saw that as a true discriminator. So I think that's a beautiful example of how we can engage all the parties together for success.

Michael Holtz

- That's a great example. I love that. And, you know, it's of course always exciting to get new work and to be innovating in a space like that, you know, when it comes to using our expertise and leveraging our university partners to help our government partners. So that's an awesome example. I love that. Ken, in terms of, you know, other like research priorities, again, I know we've talked about, you know, the ODRDs and, you know, IPG grants and innovation partnership grants and those sorts of things. Obviously still very valuable and important components of the research enterprise. Talk about what our research priorities look like with regard to both grant programs, but also just internally. I know you've talked a little bit about, you know, what's been funded programmatically. Are other priorities any different?

Ken Tobin

- Well, that's a good question. And you know, what we try to do at least through RUPO is work with business development, work with OGS, work with ORISE and kind of figure out where they are looking, you know. What are the sort of topics that are important to us in terms of developing our capability? Or if you look at our new Senior Vice President, Jim Sears, who's coming on board and he's helping us as we're trying to develop a strategy to grow OGS in very complimentary ways to other programs that we've already got in place and those kinds of things. You know, we have to look at where our strengths are and where we can leverage our historical experience and segue into new areas that can leverage what we know how to do to do something new. And so one of the things I believe we've talked about before is just this whole idea of developing concepts around a strategic investment area. So these are the topics that we create that help support our ODRD program, our innovation partnership grants, thought leadership research awards, and those kinds of things. And so we don't change those often. Right. Every two years, well, every year we get together with representatives from all those organizations and we kind of talk about where we are and we might tweak them a little bit. And then we try to do a little bit larger changeover of those things every two years. And so...

Michael Holtz

- Okay.

Ken Tobin

- Like I said, we might have talked about this in the last eight months or something, but for the sort of investment areas that we have for 25 and 26, right. So we've just awarded four ODRD projects for FY 25, which just started on October 1st. And our topical areas there, there's four kind of high level ones. There's one around our changing planet, which is really about sustainability and environmental justice and clean energy, renewable energy, things like this. There's one on improving our behavioral health, which is about health equity and social determinants of health, stress, loneliness, population health, like, you know, things that we do have a strong health sciences background in and we can plan to grow if we can. We had something which is kind of a carryover obviously from the COVID days, which is called the post pandemic world.

Michael Holtz

- Sure.

Ken Tobin

- And we're looking at, you know, the kind of the outcomes of those things. Remote working and learning, worker vulnerability, disease surveillance, health communications, things like that. And then the fourth kind of major topical area there was about innovative technologies, right? So data safety, cybersecurity, privacy, the digital economy, using things like AI, the digital divide, you know, just many areas there. It's not a catchall, but it's the whole idea that for us to be a progressive forward moving company, we have to think about innovative technologies and how to use 'em, how to adopt 'em, and that type of thing. So, you know, those are the sort of combined agreement on areas that we see important, you know, science and technical growth as a company. And hopefully, and I believe we have, we've got great buy-in as well as input on what those topics need to look like. And like I mentioned, we'll update them every year a little bit, and every other year a lot to capture where the markets are, who's in office, what the federal agencies think is important, you know, all those things play into what we try to identify and pursue there.

- Awesome.

- Yeah.

Michael Holtz

- Can can you talk about, since you just awarded them, the ODRD projects that were awarded this year?

Ken Tobin

- Yeah, I can say real quick. We have four of them that, like I mentioned, just started on October 1st. And they are with three of our member universities. And if you recall on ODRD, there's always a partnership with the university.

Michael Holtz

- Right.

Ken Tobin

- It just so happens that two of ours this year are with the University of Tennessee in two different areas. But Holly Holt is working with the University of Tennessee and with Texas A&M University. But it's primarily UTK that the project revolves around. And it's really interesting. It's around research related to black soldier fly larva, which is interesting, but it's a, it's, in fact the title is, it's researching black soldier fly larva husbandry to sustainably expand business models. And so, believe it or not, there is a whole industry out there, which is nascent to some extent, but growing where there's the possibility of using this product, if you would, these black soldier fly larva that come from, you know, decaying materials and that kind of thing. And they can tell you about toxins in the environment. There's products that you can create out of these larvae that are food products for livestock or dyes, colorants for food stuffs, or, you know, things like that. But it was a really kind of an interesting project that, while we don't do a significant amount of, I guess, entomological research in the company, we do a lot of work in how you communicate these things and how you can work in these partnerships. So it's sort of an interesting project.

Michael Holtz

- That is an interesting project.

Ken Tobin

- Yeah. The other University of Tennessee project we have is with Dre Gentry, and he's looking at, it's an AI project. He's looking at how to apply AI methods to the work that we do in the Cytogenetic Biodosimetry Laboratory. Right.

Michael Holtz

- Okay.

Ken Tobin

- There's a lot of very manual counting and things like that, and looking at the sort of genetic materials that you capture to make dose estimations and things like that from, through that process. And so they are working to try to see if there's a way to develop an AI methodology that could do that job more efficiently, faster, more reliably, and that type of thing. So very much in line, if you think about it. And then we also have Katherine Chyka, who's working with the University of Pittsburgh, and she's doing a study conducting a pilot study to support behavioral health needs of men with cancer. As you're familiar, I think you're familiar with this project.

Michael Holltz

- I'm very familiar with this project.

Ken Tobin

- Intimately.

Michael Holtz

- Very excited about this project.

Ken Tobin

- Absolutely. So, I mean, just think about that. That's so much in line with our health science research, health communications research and things like this. Our peer review, our, you know, you name it, the work that we do. So there's that one. And then the last one is actually kind of grew out of relationships that come through our NOAA program. And so this is Tim Wilson, who's working with the University of Colorado Boulder, and they're evaluating the use of small uncrewed aircraft systems to understand weather phenomena. And I thought this was great because I know I've talked to folks like Derek Hagemeyer on the IEAV program and things like this. It is just areas where we could learn about unmanned vehicles, UAVs, UASs, things like this, to better make measurements for these kinds of studies that we do, whether they're climatological or whether they're radiological. And it just seems like a great area that could give us a step up on technologies that could make us, you know, more competitive and more efficient in what we do and keep our sponsors, you know, better engaged because we're doing things more completely than we could in the past, right, 'cause we have new technologies, so.

Michael Holtz

- Right.

Ken Tobin

- Yeah. So that's a quick summary.

Michael Holtz

- That's exciting. It's always great. I love talking about, you know, the ODRD projects and as they come to fruition and completion you know, I'll circle back with our PIs and the folks at the university partnerships to talk about the impact of their research and just how they got the question, how they came together to be working on, what they're interested in, and then, you know, what the results are. And of course, then what happens next from a publication implementation, or if it's a pilot study, you know, hopefully getting more funding, right?

Ken Tobin

- Yep. Yeah. So in terms of that more funding and, you know, what happens next, one of the things that we actually, I guess we started it in 24, was, we now are bringing on a business development liaison person to work with each of the teams so they can kind of help them as they're thinking about, you know, future funding opportunities and how to go after them and things like that. And so I think that's a pretty key, you know, additional activity that we kind of brought to the whole ODRD program to make sure that BD's engaged and is able to work closely with the project teams for these different ODRD projects and to help them move forward. Because some of these folks know their, their technical areas very well, right? They do an excellent job, very compelling work. And then just not quite sure how do you go to the next step? Where's that next opportunity to go after? A research grant or go back to a sponsor that we might already have, and somehow poses in such a way that they see value in it. And there's just a lot that we all have to learn how to do and consistently do, you know, all the time to try to grow those new opportunities and expand our capabilities.

Michael Holtz

- Right. So it's a great way to operationalize.

Ken Tobin

- Yeah.

Michael Holtz

- Moving to the, moving, as you said, to the next step. For Cathy and Ken for both of you, I know, you know, it's end of October for all intents and purposes, but I know work has begun in earnest on our annual meeting, which will happen in March, which again, I love the annual meeting. I love going to the annual meeting. I love hearing all of the great speakers and then reporting out on, you know, to the extent we can, what happens at that meeting. Two questions. A, how did the 2024 meeting go? And then B, what can we look forward to for 2025?

Ken Tobin

- So I'm gonna ask Cathy to answer both of these questions more completely. All I wanna say is, just as you're listening to Cathy talk about these meetings and talk about what's coming up in 25, she just does this absolutely incredible job in terms of identifying topics, speakers from important, you know, federal agencies and programs and absolutely engages our universities in such a positive and incredible way. And so I'm just plugging plugging Cathy right now because she does this like nobody does this. And so Cathy, now you're gonna have to respond to that.

Cathy Fore

- Oh my goodness. Ken, thank you very much.

Ken Tobin

- Truly believe that.

Cathy Fore

- I think, you know, that I enjoy all the hard work and I've got such a great team to really manage, execute a fantastic annual meeting. The one coming up... Well, first you wanna know about 2024. We had a record crowd for 24. And-

Michael Holtz

- Awesome.

Cathy Fore

- It was about 250 people. And we saw probably more engagement, meaning asking questions, networking, side conversations among different institutions. You know, that's exactly what we wanna see is people taking whatever subject, you know, we are introducing and focusing on, but take that away so that they can start collaborating together.

Michael Holtz

- Right.

Cathy Fore

- But also the speakers gave us some very interesting insights that you won't see on a slide necessarily, you won't see on their website. And it's, as I asked the speakers to challenge the audience, you've got a very technical audience of leaders and research faculty, challenge them to address how they could become more competitive in winning proposals through partnerships. You know, what are your priorities? What are you not seeing in proposals that you'd like to see? And they like doing that. Now, for 2025, the theme is on advanced manufacturing industry 4.0. As you probably recognize, this is a topic of high interest across all federal agencies.

Michael Holtz

- Absolutely.

Cathy Fore

- We're talking about textile manufacturing, we're talking about biopharmaceuticals, we're talking about low orbit space manufacturing. So there's a role for all types of expertise to play into this exciting research area. And so we have 14 speakers, and I have about 12 already confirmed.

Michael Holtz

- Wow.

Cathy Fore

- And I'm very excited that one of our keynote speakers is Colonel Omar Perea, and he represents the new US Space Force.

Michael Holtz

- Okay.

Cathy Fore

- Okay. And he's actually in charge of innovation and prototyping. And he got very excited about talking to this group. Another keynote speaker is going to be Mr. Mike Molnar, who is the director of Advanced Manufacturing National Program Office with NIST.

Michael Holtz

- Okay.

Cathy Fore

- And so then we have other speakers on the panels. And our panels cover clean energy manufacturing, manufacturing supply chain challenges. One very important to all of us is how do we redefine the jobs for the future related to manufacturing? What does that look like now? Because you're using all these nice emerging technologies of AI and XR and, you know, AR. How does that play into the kind of job that I might wanna pursue? And then the fourth panel is sort of reflecting on what I said previously, you got all this great research, then what's next? So I added a panel that talks about transitioning the research to the marketplace. And I have speakers from the different federal agencies representing their SBIR, STTR offices. And so it's sort of like, wrap all this up together. You've got research, you've got education, and you've got tech transfer.

Michael Holtz

- It sounds like a great event on the horizon. And, you know, Cathy, as ever, you know, the whole idea of bringing federal partners and university partners together to find ways to collaborate and work together and advance both the research and the technology and the educate, you know, all the things is really a huge component of why we bring folks together.

Cathy Fore

- Yeah, the value proposition, I think is there for the speakers, the attendees and ORAU in general. And when I talk with the speakers and describe the kind of venue we have and who's in the audience, and this is not a death by PowerPoint kind of typical conference. So you don't have to prepare slides. Okay?

Michael Holtz

- Right.

Cathy Fore

- If you don't want to. There are couches and chairs on the stage, and we are going to have a serious conversation, okay?

Michael Holtz

- Which is having been at the last two, you know. Yeah, it's basically, you know, a day long ongoing conversation about different aspects of the topic at hand. It was, you know, STEM education, the STEM enterprise in 2024 and advanced manufacturing next year. And I look forward to being a fly on the wall, so to speak, for those conversations.

Ken Tobin

- Be careful, she'll put you on a panel, Michael.

Michael Holtz

- Well, if there's any expertise I can lend to any of that, I'm happy to do that.

Ken Tobin

- Absolutely.

Cathy

- We appreciate your support, Michael. And the after action report, you know, that you do, that summarizes what was discussed, that is extremely valuable as a good takeaway that we provide to all attendees.

Michael Holtz

- It's a fun report to do, partly because it means I have to listen really intently, right, to the speakers to come away with the key takeaways and the, you know, what happens next. But it's, you know, it's endemic I think to what you are already doing with this event to then, you know, put on paper, you know. Hopefully this is what you got out of, out of your two days invested at the annual meeting, so.

Cathy Fore

- That's right.

Michael Holtz

- It's a pleasure for me and Amber Davis who helped me with it this year for us to put that together. And I look forward to you doing that again this year, so.

Cathy Fore

- And Michael, I will add that we will announce, like we do every year, new members that been voted into the consortium. And it looks like at this point that we'll have six new members. And-

Michael Holtz

- Wow.

Cathy Fore

- You know, these are members that approach us. We do not recruit. We have 158 now, and that's a lot of members to take care of.

Michael Holtz

- Yeah, it is.

Cathy Fore

- You know, they see value in it and they will be announced at that time. So we're in the process of that.

Michael Holtz

- I was gonna say, they obviously see value in being part of the consortium if, I mean, last year it was at least that many new members and they, you know, they keep coming. Like, we're doing something right if the universities want to be part of the consortium and work with us and our subject matter experts, but you know, the other universities and our government partners as well. It just, it feels like the research enterprise, you know, is such an integral part of who we are and, you know, the consortium members that exist and that are coming are seeing that as well.

Cathy Fore

- Yes. It's exciting.

Ken Tobin

- Think about how unique a company that makes us. Just the university consortium, the activities that we run, the programs that we run with our federal sponsors. I mean, we're not just a government contractor, right? I mean, we have this history and this mission that's so apparent and we continue to attract new interests in what we do and how we do it. I mean, it's a great company.

Michael Holtz

- Absolutely.

Ken Tobin

- Because of our consortium and that history too, and everything else we do, of course.

Michael Holtz

- Of course.

Ken Tobin

- I see it through the eyes of the consortium and-

Michael Holtz

- Yeah. But it keeps, you know, it gives us so many great stories to tell.

Ken Tobin

- Yes.

Michael Holtz

- Which is why I love my job is because I get to be part of telling the stories of the Powe Award recipients and the ODRD grantees and the, you know, innovation partnership grantees and what comes out of the annual meeting because it's so important. And the more people hear those stories and the more we tell that story, the more interest we get, right? And people wanting, and obviously in the universities wanting to come and be part of what we're doing, and there's value obviously in what we're offering to the academic community as a whole, but certainly,

- Sure.

Michael Holtz

- across the country and around the world. Let's just put, let's just put all of that out there. Right? We're doing really great work and it's exciting to talk about.

Ken Tobin

- Absolutely.

Michael Holtz

- Cathy and Ken, is there anything that I haven't talked about that you wanna make sure we cover before we wrap things up? We've talked about a lot, I know. So.

Ken Tobin

- We really have. Yeah. I guess it's good, you know, a lot of times, especially we have new people come on board like Abbey, and they're trying to say, Hey, what is this consortium and why do we do this? And how does it benefit us? And so they're just, you know, everything that we do, whether it's ODRD or the summer internships or the innovation partnership grants or, you know, research partnerships that we're establishing or what have you, it's all meant to crash those two populations together. Our universities and our own staff, and our researchers, our subject matter experts in such a way that everybody benefits from that. And so, I hope when people listen to these and we talk about our research, we talk about our university programs, everybody understands that this is a win-win situation for everybody. That we're all benefiting from these activities, these programs, these interactions. And, and it's, like I said, it's just, we're just such a unique company in that way. So for everybody from ORAU that's gonna listen to this, just think about it from that perspective, right? It's just, it makes us really unique. It makes us really an interesting and fun place to be. And it gives us, you know, opportunities to grow in ways that we probably wouldn't have thought of in any other, any other setting or, or company, you know, setting. So, yeah.

Michael Holtz

- Absolutely.

Michael Holtz

- Abbey is someone who's been listening to this conversation. Are there thoughts or questions that are, I guess, sort of representing, quote unquote, "newer employees," even though you've been around the organization for a little while. You know, are there thoughts or questions that you have just listening to what you've heard in the last little bit?

Abbey Becker

- Well, Ken is absolutely right. I mean, that was one of the first questions when I started on the ORAU side, you know, what is the consortium? How does it work? You know, and asking those questions. And like we said in the beginning, learning never stops, research never stops. And Ken, again, is correct in saying that puts us in a unique position. And for me as a newer employee just listening to this, I've learned so much. And honestly, I'm very inspired about what I just heard to go forward and do my own research, you know, and see how that can work. So, absolutely no questions. Totally inspired.

Michael Holtz

- And I want to say, just to add to that, that what you just said about being inspired to do your own research is totally possible.

Ken Tobin

- Absolutely.

Michael Holtz

- Because I have been a Thought Leadership Award winner or recipient and did a white paper that actually led to the ODRD project that Katherine Chyka is leading. So, yeah. So to be sitting in the communications department as a non-researcher, but having, being able to do research and then have an impact on the enterprise is very exciting, it's also very humbling because, you know, I'm not the research expert, but someone, you know, saw an idea that I had and ran with it. And that's very exciting to see. So.

Ken Tobin

- Yeah, it's very cool.

Michael Holtz

- Cathy, anything from your perspective before we wrap things up?

Cathy Fore

- Well, let's just say that what we do is matchmaking on steroids, and lighting a spark. Maybe we just lit a spark with Abbey.

Abbey Becker

- Absolutely.

- Absolutely.

Cathy Fore

- There are a lot of Abbey's across ORAU that we want to light a spark and have seen that happen. And it's amazing to watch them think about outside their box and their daily job that I can do this. So for professional development, for just personal reasons, whatever it might be, we wanna light a lot of sparks.

Michael Holtz

- Absolutely. Absolutely. And anything is truly possible. Anything is truly possible.

Ken Tobin

- True.

Michael Holtz

- If I can do it, anybody can do it. And that's no joke. Cathy Fore and Ken Tobin, thank you so much for joining us for this incredible conversation about our research enterprise. It's always a pleasure. I know that you will be back soon to talk more as we get closer to the annual meeting and as activities go through fiscal year 2025. So thank you so much for your time today. I appreciate it.

Announcer

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