

Northeast Ohio Public Universities Collaborate on Research and Innovation

Frank discussions about how to equip students for the jobs of today and tomorrow, technology commercialization efforts and some of the “big questions” that face the region’s innovation outlook were the hot topics as Kent State hosted Innovation Day 2023 on Friday, March 24.

The inaugural Innovation Day was a collaborative effort of the Northeast Ohio Public University Research Alliance, comprised of Kent State University, Cleveland State University, Northeast Ohio Medical University, The University of Akron and Youngstown State University.

A key goal of the alliance is to grow research in the region, bringing faculty from different disciplines and institutions together, says Doug Delahanty, vice president for Research and Sponsored Programs at Kent State.

The event served as a venue for innovators, faculty members and students to discuss and showcase the region’s key innovations, technology transfer strategies and thought leadership.

In a welcome video that kicked off the day, Lydia Mihalik, director of the Ohio Department of Development, notes that “Investments in new and emerging technologies are positioning Ohio at the forefront of innovation, and that is driving real change all over the world.”

Under Mihalik’s leadership, the state agency is forging partnerships between public and private sectors to help build a thriving economy, invest in small businesses, prepare communities for the future, construct robust broadband infrastructure and expand workforce skills.

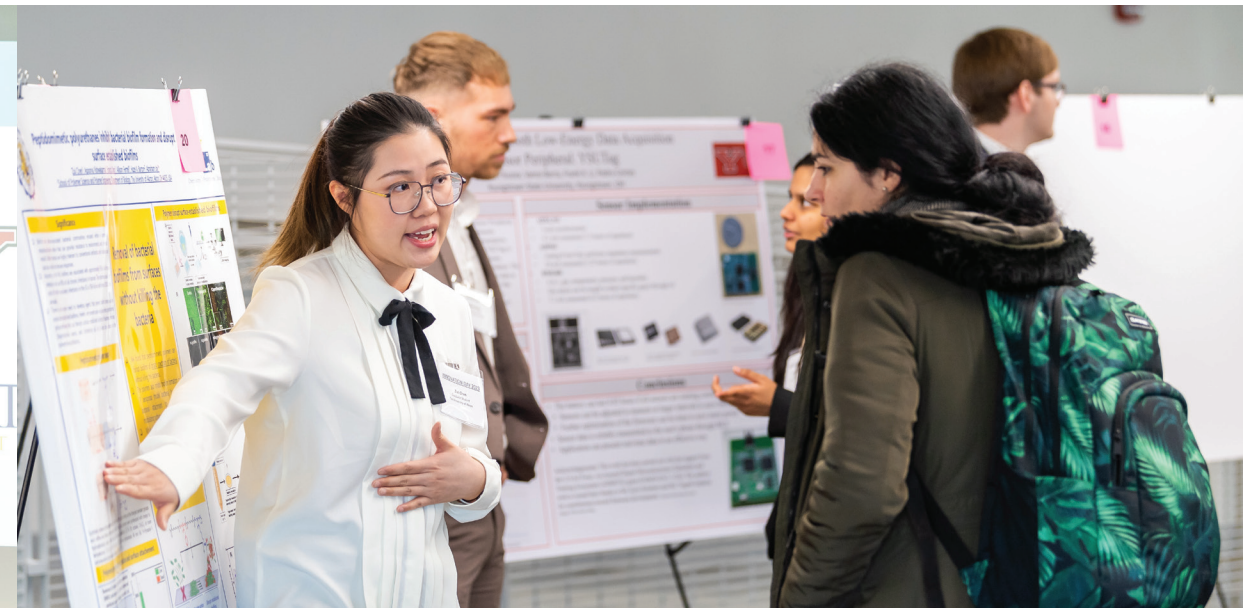
A workforce development panel was moderated by William (Bill) Koehler, chief executive officer of Team NEO, an organization that promotes job creation and business growth and development in 18 counties throughout Northeast Ohio.



Workforce development panelists were (left to right): Maria Spangler, director of community engagement at Sherwin-Williams Co.; Nikki Russell, director of talent acquisition at The Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co.; and Debbie Connelly, senior vice president and chief people officer of Hyland Software

The panel discussed the importance of students taking advantage of internships, engaging in conversations with employees while on those internships and learning proper business etiquette in the workplace. Panelists noted that it is important for companies to offer entry-level positions for students.

Debbie Connelly, senior vice president and chief people officer of Hyland Software, urged universities to help students hone their problem-solving skills. She says students need to learn to be flexible and consider a variety of solutions for problems, not just one.



At the event, several students from the universities present their research during a poster session.



A Kent State student tries virtual reality glasses at Innovation Day 2023.

“Investments in new and emerging technologies are positioning Ohio at the forefront of innovation.” — Lydia Mihalik, director of the Ohio Department of Development

Maria Spangler, director of community engagement at Sherwin-Williams, says some universities only ask for money to fund labs or buildings when spending time with students has a better return on investment. “I would rather send over a team of master chemists or robotics engineers,” she says. “We are a talent consumer. A million dollars for a building doesn’t get us students.”

J.R. Campbell, executive director of Kent State’s Design Innovation Initiative, moderated a panel discussion on global technology trends and the big questions around Northeast Ohio’s innovation outlook.

Panel members represented key strengths of the region and the universities, including healthcare, engineering innovation, advanced materials, and immersive reality tools and technologies.

Michal Soclof, principal and director of tech ventures for Matrix Equities, LLC, which invests in startup ventures, says angel investor groups all over Ohio are looking for innovators and great ideas to develop. The problem is connecting innovators at universities with funding. “Please come find us,” he says. “We are searching for projects to invest in.” ⚡

—April McClellan-Copeland