

## Notes from ORI@UT ideation session with Oak Ridge National Laboratory

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An ORI@UT presentation and Q&A session was held at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory (ORNL) on Wednesday, September 4, 2019. The purpose of the meeting was to:

- Communicate information about ORI@UT → its purpose, rationale for its formation and ORNL's expectations,
- Answer questions,
- Collect comments and feedback.

The following provides a summary of the main themes and discussion points from the meeting.

ORNL's vision is that ORI@UT will be a transformative force that takes ORNL and UT's partnership to the next level and creates something that's a "difference maker." It is ORNL's expectation that ORI@UT will create great programs that will attract the best students and faculty, that it will be nimble, interdisciplinary and produce a new generation of scientists and entrepreneurs.

The point was made that there is a net migration of jobs and population to the Southeast United States, and with that a clear recognition by the country that we need to have more hubs of innovation, technology and education beyond the usual coastal suspects.

East Tennessee has the potential to become one of these hubs, primarily because of the unique history of and relationship between ORNL and UT. These two institutions have already had tremendous impact on the world. ORI@UT can be an enabling factor to do that once again. In fact, it was stated that ORI@UT is the most consequential thing ORNL can be a part of with UT.

In general, there was enthusiasm for ORI@UT and consensus that ORI@UT should be transformational and strategic—we are missing an opportunity if ORI@UT maintains a "business as usual" approach to partnership building and fosters nothing more than a transactional relationship between UT and ORNL.

### Theme #1: Focus

Attendees agreed ORI@UT should start with a few key areas of focus in order to be the transformative force that takes ORNL and UT's partnership to the next level. It was suggested that the focus should extend beyond basic science to big problem solving. Defining ORI@UT's focus in terms of "a grand challenge or problem to solve" immediately establishes a system that requires interdisciplinary research, collaboration, a shared vision and attracts top talent.

### Theme #2: Educational experience

Several times, attendees expressed that the opportunity exists to further enhance the educational experience of students conducting graduate research at ORNL. This demographic requires a different type of engagement and mentoring than a typical new employee at ORNL. As such, it was suggested that ORI@UT could be the entity that coordinates UT faculty and ORNL staff to identify the best means of ensuring strong mentorships.

### Theme #3: Cultural experience

Equally as important to business operations and research outcomes, ORI@UT needs to establish the right culture so the talent it attracts stays in the region. Attendees observed that other coastal technology hub cities provide an outlet for scientific creativity and draw people in so they never want to leave. Knoxville/Oak Ridge/Tennessee have the research assets and quality of life amenities similar to large coastal cities with technology hubs, but we have a unique advantage (that we do not fully leverage). Talent can be embraced and supported by our community in a way that might be impossible in a big city environment. It was suggested that ORI@UT prioritize the creation of a culture that encourages talented individuals to create a future for themselves in East Tennessee.

### Theme #4: Organizational structure and operating principles matter

Attendees indicated that facilitating collaborations between UT and ORNL has at times been too complicated, and a concern was raised as to whether ORI@UT might simply add another layer of bureaucracy. It was clarified that the purpose of ORI@UT is to have someone (or a group of people) wake up every day to standardize, facilitate, and enhance UT and ORNL's partnerships, serving as a central resource to faculty and staff and thereby ensuring that the partnership is easier and more efficient.

### Theme #5: Communication

Enhanced methods of communication was discussed in terms of closing the 33-mile distance between UT and ORNL, developing a common language to discuss major UT/ORNL partnerships, and operations (outlined in Theme #4). The point was made that communication (and therefore collaboration and learning) could be more effective between ORNL and UT if technology platforms were used to foster constant, real-time communication. Webinars were mentioned as an option, so ORNL researchers and UT faculty could see and hear lectures at the others' location without losing precious time to a commute.

There is strong enthusiasm for making ORI@UT a transformational force that takes ORNL and UT's partnership to the next level. Focus, organizational structure and operating principles are central to that transformation. Fostering the right cultural and educational experience and enhancing communication will ensure UT and ORNL can continue their joint legacy of world changing research.