

Tetra Discovery Partners affirms the significant role Michigan investment offers

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Dr. Mark E. Gurney, CEO and Chairman of Tetra Discovery Partners LLC, was asked to participate in the Michigan Biosciences Day at the Capitol 2016 in Lansing, Michigan. [MichBIO](#) is the statewide voice of Michigan's biosciences industry. During meetings with legislative staff for State Senators [Dave Hildenbrand](#) and [Margaret O'Brien](#) and State Representative [David LaGrand](#), Dr. Gurney emphasized the importance of state-based investment in early stage biotechnology startups. Dr. Gurney based his comments on his own experience launching Tetra Discovery Partners in 2011 "with \$2,000 in a business checking account," he said.

Tetra Discovery Partners, founded in West Michigan, uses affordable laboratory space in high quality life science incubators located at Grand Valley State University (Grand Rapids) and the [Southwest Michigan Innovation Center](#) (Kalamazoo). "Rather than investing in bricks and mortar and expensive equipment, we were able to invest every early dollar in product development," Dr. Gurney explains.

Jobs that pay well have been another outcome of this drug discovery company, whose leading patented compound is a potential memory drug for use by patients with Alzheimer's disease. Reports Dr. Gurney, "Our scientific staff have a median salary of \$90,000/year since launch, and we have brought nearly \$2 million to the state."

Tetra has recruited top talent to assist the company's high growth trajectory: "All of our staff have PhD or MS degrees. We have been able to recruit talented graduates from the University of Michigan and Grand Valley State University. We benefit from a network of experienced, Michigan-based biotechnology consultants for FDA regulator affairs, clinical operations, and preclinical animal studies. We also benefit from proximity to contract research organizations such as MPI Research in Mattawan. Our initial human clinical trials of our Alzheimer's drug was conducted by Jasper Clinic in Kalamazoo."

Tetra's success has been due to matching investments through the [Michigan Economic Development Corporation \(MEDC\)](#). Matching funds from the [Michigan Emerging Technologies Fund](#) (governed by the MEDC) leveraged a total of \$16M from the federal Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program of the National Institutes of Health. Furthermore, the [Biomedical Research Commercialization Center \(BRCC\)](#) at Western Michigan University, [Ann Arbor SPARK](#), and [Invest Michigan](#) have all invested in Tetra in early seed rounds.

Michigan-based investment has allowed Tetra to pursue research and drug development more quickly. While \$16M in SBIR funding has been the primary source of funding to move Tetra through its first phase of human clinical trials, the matching funds from the Michigan Emerging Technologies Fund covered commercialization costs that did not qualify for grant funding.

Dr. Gurney urged that the Michigan Emerging Technologies Fund be expanded. “Increasing the match to \$100k for Phase I SBIR grants and \$500K for Phase II grants will help small companies like ours that have years of research and human clinical trials to endure, without having a sellable product. Expansion of other MEDC investment programs is key, as startups face patenting and other costs that cannot be covered through federal grants alone,” Dr. Gurney stated.

Dr. Gurney also advocated for reinstatement of the Angel Investor Tax Credit. “These measures will allow the state of Michigan to maintain a biosciences cluster, and within Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo, to assure that biotech entrepreneurs who come along after Tetra will have access to lab space and venture capital. Let’s enable the next wave of bioscience innovation in Western Michigan.”

For more information about Tetra Discovery Partners, including its board of directors and scientific advisors, visit www.TetraDiscovery.com.