Top Tips for Working with Industry

1. **Seek a relationship, not just funding**
   Companies fund research projects that advance their business interests. These interests include finding a solution to a research problem relevant to their business, staying close to talented faculty in their field, and finding the best and brightest students to recruit.

   Discuss up front with the company what their expectations are and what they would consider a successful collaboration with you and with the university. The company may want access to your students, your department’s equipment, etc., in addition to your research collaboration. When pitching a research project, outline how the project will benefit the company.

2. **Learn about the company’s needs and keep an open mind**
   Often faculty approach a company with a specific research project in mind. When discussing a potential project with the company, spend time listening carefully to the company’s input and ask questions about the company’s needs — be willing to adapt your approach to create a project that will interest both you and the company.

3. **Build multiple contacts within the company**
   The corporate landscape can be volatile. Company representatives are reassigned, or leave the company for multiple reasons. Take the time to meet and build relationships with multiple company representatives so your relationship with the company doesn’t end because of reorganization or the resignation of one individual.

4. **Establish regular communications**
   Company collaborations are dynamic. Once your research project has been funded, establish regular and frequent communications with the company’s representative – do not rely on more passive annual or semi-annual written technical reports but ask them how often they would like to have informal briefings. If you have severe time constraints, consider designating a specific graduate student or post-doc to assure that the company receives regular informal communications.

5. **Create an “elevator pitch” for your research**
   You will often only have a brief opportunity to speak with a company representative about your research. It is important to have a short, 30-second “elevator pitch” ready to go that quickly and effectively describes your research project and its potential value to the company. Even when you have plenty of time to pitch, it is important to pique the company’s interest in the first 30 seconds to keep their attention.

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6. Be able to explain your research and its benefits at multiple technical levels
The scientific and/or technical fluency of a company representative can vary considerably. The company’s research scientists may be able to talk in depth about scientific details, but could also have Ph.Ds. in other subjects. Representatives in business positions may have only master’s degrees in science or engineering, or even non-scientific backgrounds.
Make sure you can describe your research project and its benefits clearly to both scientific peers and laypeople, and make sure you know the representative’s background before launching into the science. Ideally, if you can present your presentation by viewgraph, spend the first quarter of your talk setting the framework.

7. Once funded, become a member of the company’s “team” and build goodwill
Learn as much as you can about the company’s culture and try to adapt to it. Learn the company’s internal “language” and be on the lookout for new information that may be interesting to them, such as a new scientific article that may relate to other areas of their business, or a smart graduate student who could be a good fit for the company.

8. Keep expanding the company/UCSB relationship
Building relationships between key people in both organizations can help you expand and extend the relationship. Look for opportunities to introduce the company’s leadership to UCSB’s academic leadership to help build a strong campus-based relationship. Companies with strong and broad relationships with UCSB are much more likely to fund your research over the long term.

9. Leverage existing resources
UCSB has many resources to help you navigate industry research funding – from its Corporate Programs, which can help make that initial connection, to its Office of Technology & Industry Alliances, which can help get preliminary agreements in place (including non-disclosure agreements) and discuss potential contract terms, to senior faculty who have gained deep experiences with industry research funding and can provide valuable advice.

10. Keep an eye on the future
It is always a good idea to begin thinking about the next research project early on. If you are having a good experience with a particular company, try to have your new project already in the pipeline by the time you successfully complete the first one. Once you have established a strong level of familiarity and trust with the company, ask them whether there are other projects they want to explore with you, now that they know your areas of research expertise.