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Digital City RI / Education

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Study recommends better public-private coordination to accelerate state's efforts in digital-media production, entrepreneurship; Goal to attain national prominence by 2020

PROVIDENCE, R.I. , Feb. 20, 2014 -- Rhode Island government, educators and business have work to do in concert with each other if the state is to reach a goal of being a nationally known center of digital-media excellence and entrepreneurship by 2020, a new report concludes.

"The state needs to break down the silos among higher education, K-12 education, government and business in order to produce an enhanced knowledge economy for everyone," concludes a report funded in part by the Rhode Island Foundation and developed over six months of meetings and research.

"Going Digital: Developing Business and Education Strategies for a 21st-century Rhode Island," is one outcome of a \$50,000 foundation grant to an ad-hoc group called Digital City-Rhode Island (digitalcityri.org). Another outcome is the opening by DC-RI of a co-working space for digital-media entrepreneurs in downtown Providence.

The report was to be unveiled on Thurs., Feb. 20, at an evening public meeting at AS220, where the co-working space has been established at 131 Washington St., in the Mercantile Building.

The 43-page report was drafted as part of the education component of Digital City-Rhode Island in a process led by the Harrington School of Communication and Media at the University of Rhode Island. Authors gathered input at more than a half dozen meetings and community gatherings. Representatives of all three sectors – government, education and business – played a role.

"Higher education has a key role to play in stimulating Rhode Island's digital future," said Gary Glassman, president of Providence Pictures Inc., a distinguished documentary film production company.

The new report includes three key recommendations:

- Develop coordinated learning outcomes, standards and assessments for digital-media literacy in K-12 classrooms, colleges and in workplace development skills. The guidelines need to include measurements of digital-media literacy that enable the state's current and future workers to be well-qualified for jobs in a knowledge-based economy.

- Create a digital-media education center – both a physical location and a set of “virtual” online and traveling services – which focuses on helping mid-career and transitioning citizens to acquire relevant knowledge and skills. While the state might seed creation of such a center, its efforts must be sustained primarily by business, which will most benefit from its ability to create a technology and media-savvy workforce.
- Restart Rhode Island NEXUS (rinexus.com), a public-private initiative of the Rhode Island Commerce Corp., to inform, support and grow the state’s info-tech and digital-media sectors. NEXUS, or a replacement for it, should be a platform for news exchange about the state’s digital future, and a way to help link initiatives currently operating independently and without knowledge of each other.

The three policy recommendations are buttressed by five other suggestions developed over a six-month process involving more than 100 stakeholders from across the digital-media sectors – education, business, government and nonprofit. A key meeting organized by the Harrington School took place Jan. 7 at BetaSpring, the Providence-based new-business incubator facility.

“The Harrington School looks for ways to move on the suggestions over the next six months,” said Renee Hobbs, professor and founding director of the school. “We need help on all of these ideas – visibility, convening, collaboration,” says Hobbs. She urges educators, entrepreneurs and other business leaders with ideas or existing efforts to be in touch with the Harrington School by submitting ideas to <http://harrington.uri.edu/event/digital>

The five suggestions:

- Create a promotional video that explains the power of digital media in the lives of all Rhode Islanders using a series of short 90-second video segments that feature existing programs and initiatives in formal and informal learning.
- Develop a shared, online calendar of digital-media activities to maximize and create synergy in what’s already happening in Rhode Island.
- Host a series of monthly events, similar or in collaboration with the Providence Geeks dinners or gatherings of Newport Interactive Marketers, to build awareness of community talent and create networking opportunities.
- Host an annual collaborative event where digital-education, and digital-entrepreneurship initiatives in Rhode Island are showcased.
- Develop a strategy for integrating a membership database with updates on current projects.

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