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Status change means pipeline can cast wider net for funding

BY JERRY SIEBENMARK
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A program started by Kansas Technology Enterprise Corp. to groom the state's most promising technology and bioscience entrepreneurs has become its own entity.

Pipeline, formerly known as KTEC Pipeline, has become a 501(c)3 nonprofit, allowing it to seek funding from other sources other than just KTEC, a state agency.

"The plan all along with Pipeline... was that if it really, truly established itself as an effective and needed entity, it would become part of the (KTEC) network," said Joni Cobb, Pipeline's president. "It allows us to think about possible funding diversification and sustainability over the long haul."

The change comes at a time when the budgets of many state agencies are being cut because of declining tax revenue.

Cobb said Pipeline, launched in 2006, will continue to receive funding from KTEC, about \$500,000 annually.

But the move means that Pipeline won't easily go away if budget cuts affect KTEC's ability to continue supporting it.

Cobb said the decision to become a nonprofit was made easier through a study by Washington, D.C.-based EntreWorks Consulting, which said the program was providing value based on its assessment and that it stood a good chance of being successful in raising money outside of KTEC, Cobb said.

It may begin to pursue those outside funding sources once the economy improves.

Eighteen Kansas entrepreneurs passed through the program in its first two years. Another eight — including Gary Mason of Wichita-based iSi Environmental Services — are finishing up the yearlong program, which provides three-day-long education sessions each quarter, mentors and access to venture capitalists.

Kevin Carr, interim CEO of KTEC, said it was his agency's hope to "try to get it into position to expand and diversify its funding sources."

Even though Pipeline is beginning a move away from being totally dependent on KTEC for funding, Carr and Cobb said it will remain a part of the "KTEC network" — a collection of organizations that support KTEC's mission of helping to develop and grow technology-based companies across the state.

Reach Jerry Siebenmark at 316-268-6576 or jsiebenmark@wichitaeagle.com.

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