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Conference to help forge biz ties to China, India

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W. Marc Bernsau

UMass President Jack Wilson said a major priority for the school is expanding its partnerships in China and India.

Local business, university and public-sector officials are in the early stages of planning a conference intended to boost Massachusetts' business opportunities with China and India.

The invitation-only conference has been scheduled for the week of Dec. 8 at the **Hynes Convention Center**.

The effort is being led by the Boston consultancy **Mass Insight**, and it has the backing of other area institutions including the **University of Massachusetts, Boston University**, the **John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University**, **Biogen Idec**, **Novartis**, the **Dana-Farber Cancer Institute**, The **Bank of New York Mellon Corp.**, **Bank of America Corp.** and **Fidelity Investments**.

Julian Chang, executive director of Asia programs at Harvard's Kennedy School, said collaboration at this level is long overdue.

"It's rare. And it's sorely needed," he said.

Mass Insight President William Guenther said the conference stems from studies released over the last 18 months to identify ways Massachusetts can continue to grow and protect its prominence in the life sciences, financial services and energy industries.

Boston consultancy **McKinsey & Co.** has provided much of the research and support for those reports, part of Mass Insight's Massachusetts 2015 initiative.

One of Mass Insight's findings -- that the state should partner with other industry clusters in Asia and elsewhere -- forms the basis for the China-India conference now being planned.

Guenther said those countries have been targeted because of their emergence as major economic forces and existing ties to American companies. Officials from China and India are expected to attend the conference.

"If we are successful, the leadership of the universities and businesses in these major sectors in Massachusetts will have expanded their relationships with Chinese and Indian universities and companies and identified individual partnership opportunities," Guenther said.

It won't be cheap. The estimated conference cost of "a couple million dollars" will be covered by "partners" who sign on for the event both here and overseas.

Mass Insight and other organizers are currently negotiating with sponsors.

The conference would build on Gov. Deval Patrick's trip to China late last fall. That event was intended to jump-start efforts to build economic relationships between Massachusetts and Chinese organizations.

State officials could not be reached for comment about the Mass Insight project.

Conference organizers say they plan to build on already established momentum.

"It has been a priority of the University of Massachusetts to expand its international partnerships in China and India," said UMass President Jack Wilson, who chairs the China-India steering committee for the Global Massachusetts 2015 initiative. "This is the first effort that will bring all the players together for a statewide effort."

Ulrich Stoll, director of strategic initiatives for Biogen Idec (Nasdaq: BIIB), said the company is eager to expand its footprint in Asia and was glad that Mass Insight asked it to participate in the conference.

"Our goal in participating is to foster relationships in corporate, academic and public circles in a region we consider critical to the future success of the biotech industry," Stoll said.

Harvard's Chang, who is helping organizers develop conference ideas as well as contacts in Asia, said he looks forward to getting officials from both continents together in the same location.

"We want to introduce to everyone in the same room some of the really important issues that globalization is allowing us to examine," he said.

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