

THE LEMELSON FOUNDATION

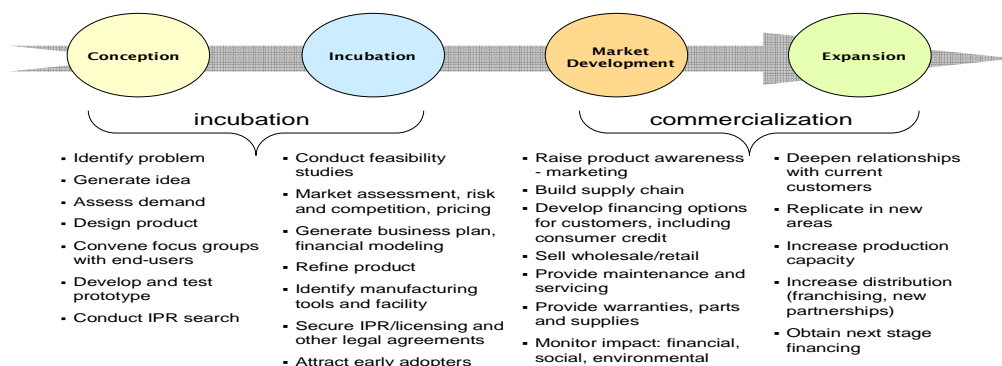
Recognition and Mentoring Program (RAMP) for Inventors, Innovators and Entrepreneurs

Inventors and innovators exist not only in established institutions, but also in villages, schools and informal settings such as a machine-shop or an agricultural field. Tamon Iwasa was just a school boy in 1960s Japan when he invented a new highway reflector that caused a plummet in Japan's alarmingly high accident rate¹. The first self-governing windmill – that made possible a series of inventions which drastically reduced a farmer's work time in the late 1800s – was invented by Daniel H. Halladay, a New England machinist². There are numerous such student and grassroots inventors around the world, but they seldom receive the recognition or mentoring support needed to develop their ideas into viable prototypes that could in turn be converted into viable enterprises.

To address this gap in translating ideas to impact, The Lemelson Foundation (ILF), with a decade of experience in recognizing and mentoring inventors in the United States, is in the process of developing Recognition and Mentoring Programs (RAMP) for inventors, innovators and entrepreneurs around the world. **The goal of this program is to support local inventors, innovators and entrepreneurs as they develop invention based social enterprises that help to meet basic human needs³ such as access to potable water, energy, health, agriculture, biodiversity and shelter.**

This concept note describes the possible spectrum of activities to be supported by the RAMPs. It also serves as a point of reference for further discussion for The Lemelson Foundation's Board of Directors and advisors, co-funders and other current and potential partners.

Conceptually, RAMPs were born out of a 2003 meeting convened by the Foundation that resulted in the Invention for Sustainable Development Program⁴ (ISDP). The ISDP guides the Foundation's two international programs: Recognition and Mentoring Programs (RAMPs) and the Technology Dissemination (TD) program. Both programs support activities that relate to steps within the Idea to Impact process, described below.



1 Drucker, Peter, Innovation and Entrepreneurship, 1985, page 73

2 Harvest of Change, Great Inventions – Geniuses and Gizmos: Innovation in our Time, Time Inc, 2003

3 Based on the United Nation's five priority areas in which progress would offer all human beings a chance of achieving prosperity.

4 see <http://www.lemelson.org/pdf/InvforSusDevProStrat.pdf> for further information

Geographic Focus & Direct Beneficiaries of RAMP

Pilot RAMPs were launched in India (September 2004) and in Indonesia (May 2006). A RAMP in Peru was launched in January 2007. RAMPs target two key inventor-entrepreneur groups: **students and youth** with or without formal education and **grassroots** innovators, defined as anyone – including practitioners, professionals and academicians - without access to networks, markets and funding critical to successfully starting up invention-based enterprises.

How RAMPs Support Inventor-Entrepreneurs

Recognition

RAMPs identify inventors and entrepreneurs through a **competitive process** in their respective countries or regions. The selection of inventors and entrepreneurs serves to raise the profile of these role models in their communities and to highlight the role invention, innovation and creativity play in a country's socio-economic development and in meeting basic human needs.

Mentoring

Inventors require training in fields as varied as concept development, prototype development, technology validation, venture financing, property right protection and business development. The RAMPs develop, nurture and leverage their unique network of experts to create a comprehensive mentoring team and program that helps innovators progress along the idea to venture continuum. The RAMPs act as business incubators for technology-based enterprises from concept to commercialization. Examples of the types of incubation services RAMPs coordinate and support are:

Technology and prototype development and testing – The RAMPs facilitate inventor access to appropriate facilities to develop and test their products in a professional, affordable and efficient manner.

Entrepreneurship & leadership capacity building – The RAMPs create partnerships with local institutions that provide entrepreneurship training for grassroots and student inventors or their entrepreneur partners. The program also facilitates linkages with corporate, governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that have the ability and capacity to mentor individuals or teams.

Business incubation and development services – The RAMPs act as incubators helping inventors to commercialize their products in part through partnerships with local, national governmental and non-governmental entities. These partners provide business development support in critical areas identified for RAMP incubatees such as business planning, accounting systems, bookkeeping or market analysis.

Intellectual Property Rights/ Legal support – As the innovators progress from prototyping to the business development stage, legal guidance for patenting and venture creation becomes crucial. The RAMPs mentor inventors by providing such advice and guidance.

Financing – The RAMPs help develop **networks of local, national and regional sources of financing and support** at all levels of a particular supply chain – for RAMP participant enterprises, for retailers as well as for end-users of the products distributed by RAMP enterprises. In addition, **RAMP financing** may be made available to those participants that are not yet able to attract traditional sources of capital. Forms of this type of financing support include any mix of **grants, loans or equity**.

Networks for further market development & expansion – RAMPs will support access to downstream financing and other resources for expansion and scaling, such as ideally, the Lemelson Foundation's Technology Dissemination portfolio.

Learning

The Lemelson Foundation is dedicated to being a learning organization. As such it systematically engages in learning activities within its programs. Specific activities within RAMP that fulfill this learning goal are:

Internal learning – At key junctures, RAMPs will conduct research, engage in focused networking and document best practices on invention, innovation and invention-based social enterprise in RAMP countries. Cross-RAMP learning will be encouraged through study tours, trainings, and other opportunities for RAMP implementers and participants to share lessons and create support networks, such as linkages to Ashoka-Lemelson Program entrepreneurs. Other operational learning activities such as quarterly RAMP conference calls and annual RAMP meetings rotated between RAMP sites will be explored.

Exchanges – To encourage North-South/South-South learning, RAMPs may arrange fellowships for students and practitioners from the North and South, to contribute to and learn from the Program's work in a given region or country.

Advancing the field and learning with enabling partners – The Lemelson Foundation may facilitate cross-learning among grassroots, student and professional inventors and innovators by establishing formal programs such as RAMP Thought Leaders Convenings.

Enabling Environment – RAMPs will implement activities at appropriate junctures to inform local, national and/or regional policy-makers in the fields of invention, innovation and small business development. The cases and best practices documented by RAMP will add value to policy by rooting discussion in the reality of invention-based social enterprise.

Program Implementation

Key approaches to develop RAMPs around the world are:

Working via local partners – TLF, based in Portland, Oregon, works via partnerships with local organizations who know best their local reality, region and environment.

Diversity of experiences – The team of organizations tasked with implementing a RAMP should represent a variety of key competencies including: proven business **incubation** experience, development of **technologies** or products addressing sustainable development needs, business plan **competition** administration, experience with **student and grassroots entrepreneurs**, and appreciation and/or experience with micro-venture **finance**. Accordingly, RAMPs will necessarily engage a diversity of organizations, including experienced incubators, universities, academic institutions, NGOs and the private sector.

Established, relevant networks – A key role of RAMPs is to build and enable RAMP participant access to networks in areas such as engineering, science, agriculture, business and law. These experts will assist with concept development, prototyping, and commercialization of ideas advanced by inventors in a given region. In addition, experts are used in the initial vetting of RAMP applicants.

Sustainability – While TLF has assumed the role as a primary donor for testing this concept around the world, we are committed to pursuing co-funding relationships with other foundations, the private sector and other regional and national sources of support for RAMP related initiatives. As such, each RAMP will develop a detailed sustainability plan that describes the actions they will take to assist in generating co-funding or revenue generation to support the financial needs of RAMP.