



# AUBURN

## TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER

### University

Auburn University

### Center Director

David Mixson

### Center Location

College of Business

### Center since 1976

### Center Activities

- Incubator services
- Product design assistance
- Entrepreneurship support
- Innovation and commercialization support
- Lean government training
- Strategic economic plans

### Clients

- Entrepreneurs
- Start-ups
- Existing businesses
- Local governments

### Assessment Techniques

- Feedback from staff
- Client video interviews
- Case studies
- Client economic impact studies

### Contact Information

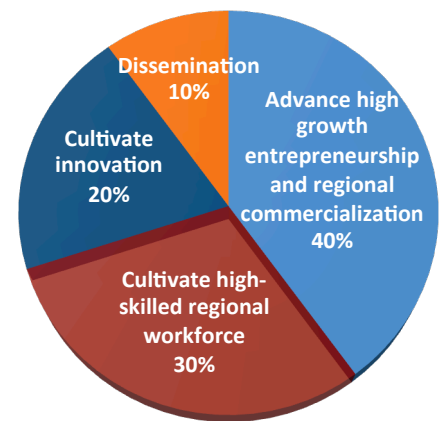
[auburnworks.org/](http://auburnworks.org/)  
[mixsoad@auburn.edu](mailto:mixsoad@auburn.edu)

Auburn University’s Auburn Technical Assistance Center provides technical assistance and training in the areas of research commercialization, innovation and entrepreneurship, and development of a high-skilled workforce. The Center strives to help "bridge the gaps" in Alabama's innovation ecosystem. The Center supports and leverages Auburn University's Commercialization Initiative to create a more intentional approach to developing Auburn's innovation ecosystem and the state's efforts of aligning external economic development partners. The Center is supported by the grant, the University, and local and state government funding. In addition, the Center leverages federal funding from the NIST Manufacturing Extension Partnership.

### Activities

In partnership with the University’s Industrial & Graphic Design Department and the Economic Development Partnership of Alabama, the Center seeks to accelerate the commercialization of Alabama start-

ups with University resources through assistance to innovative start-ups by providing product and graphic design support (see success box). In addition, the Center works with Auburn University’s Office of Technology Transfer to help identify potential faculty start-ups. The Center also aims to spur student entrepreneurship by providing early stage concept evaluation and assistance as well as early stage due diligence regarding



potential licensing of start-ups associated with a discovery.

The Center provides existing businesses with Six Sigma quality training and implementation assistance that helps manufacturers reduce variance in their products or processes and helps them remain competitive.

The Center strives to spur innovation in distressed areas and areas without innovation activity by working with existing businesses to create, communicate, and commercialize new or existing ideas.

In addition, the Center works with government to provide local officials assistance and training in lean government systems to spur process improvement and increase management efficiencies. The Center also assists towns affected by disasters by joining Economic Recovery Task Force efforts to identify financing sources

and rebuilding priorities.

### Leveraging

The Center leverages extensively Auburn's Office of Technology Transfer and the Auburn University Business Incubator. Through these organizations, the client has an

*"The center is proactive in helping local communities and takes a strong role in promoting economic development. They are willing to work with University research centers in creating new knowledge that could be used to spawn companies."*  
-- Center Stakeholder

increased the probability of success because each partner is able to provide a piece of help where the

sum is greater than its parts. The Center leverages other resources within the University, including students and faculty that provide design services and University-provided data and special equipment. Outside the University, the Center leverages its 16-year relationship with the statewide Alabama Technology Network to better understand community and business needs, challenges, and partnership opportunities. In addition, the Center leverages its existing relationships with economic development organizations and other public institutions.

## Success

### Advancing innovation in existing companies in Alabama's distressed communities

Auburn Technical Assistance Center (ATAC) is closing innovation ecosystem gaps by delivering technical assistance on innovation to existing manufacturing companies in distressed regions. ATAC has integrated Auburn University's highly ranked Industrial Design and Graphic Design Department with the center's outreach services to existing businesses. The Center uses carefully supervised student teams to combine traditional market research, manufacturing process research, user research, and form and function research with product

design. This industrial design research is offered to Alabama businesses at a substantial cost savings. In addition, the Center has partnered with the Economic Development Partnership of Alabama Foundation to support the ALABAMA Launchpad Business Plan Competition, which supports new and innovative ventures in the seed or early-growth stages and existing businesses moving into a new high-growth market. Launchpad is a competition where winners have access to business advice and start-up and development capital.

An example client is Medsnap, a high-tech start-up located in

Birmingham's Innovation Depot, which is solving a key problem of medication adherence to reduce hospital readmissions and healthcare costs. To help the company launch its offering, Auburn's Center provided key research and product design for a medicine tray through their Industrial Design Department.

**Auburn Technical Assistance Center has shown how both students and external clients can be served by a program that is targeted on client need, carefully directs student contributions, and has an impact on both new and existing businesses and communities.**