

Cohabitation Anyone?

By: Sabra Botch-Jones (AWIS Member since 2007)



All images courtesy LabCentral, Inc.

If you're an entrepreneur, start-up, consultant, or scientist looking for a space to transform your dreams into reality, numerous options in shared laboratory space are available.

Like speed dating for laboratories, the Venture Development Center at the University of Massachusetts Boston, Lab Central, Inc., and Cambridge Biolabs (CBL) offer entrepreneurs and start-ups an alternative to raising the large amount of capital required to outfit an entire laboratory with necessary equipment and supplies, as well as the space needed for hands-on research. In addition to laboratory space, some of these companies also offer conference rooms, including offices and shared work desks. Lab Central, Inc. provides fully equipped, ready-to-go laboratories with centrifuges, vortex, shakers, glassware, autoclave, deionized water, vacuum/gas supply, ventilation hoods, freezers, storage and basic consumables in Cambridge, MA. They plan to open another shared laboratory space in New York, NY. Also in the city of New York is Harlem Biospace, which offers shared wet-lab space for competitively selected entrants. Often these groups operate as grant funded (at least in part) non-profits and collaborate with instrument

manufacturers in exchange for securing high-end equipment. Even large companies are considering this approach to encourage new discoveries. Bayer has developed the CoLaborator™: a shared workspace offering “basic equipment for life science startups to quickly begin putting their ideas to the test”. Organizations like San Diego Entrepreneurs Exchange offer laboratory space listings from a single bench to an entire laboratory. Scientists can even list what they are looking for and search to find the perfect match.

For the scientist consultant who no longer dons a lab coat on a regular basis, but wants the stimulation of an office environment, they can look to the Cambridge Innovation Center (CIC), which offers a variety of cohabitation space options. Whether you’re a one-woman show or a small group, over 1,400 companies have called CIC home since 1999. Scared of commitments? Companies like ShareDesk and Workbar offer hourly, daily, monthly (and more) cohabitation options that come with a variety of amenities such as printing services, conference spaces, meeting rooms, office supplies, mail services, Wi-Fi, and (most importantly) bottomless coffee. Women in the San Diego area have a unique option with Hera Hub offering a “spa-inspired co-working space for female entrepreneurs”. From coast to coast, companies offer unique spaces along with unique names to get the job done, for example: Office Nomads in Seattle, WA, Oficio in Boston, MA, Kleverdog in China Town-Los Angeles, CA, The Enclave in Colorado Springs, CO, and Affinity Lab in Washington, DC. Many of us choose to leave large companies or laboratories to find a better work-life balance for our families. In the San Francisco area Nextspace and Nextkids blends the shared workspace with childcare when you need it. Many of these workspaces also offer educational events, networking opportunities, and even game nights.

The citizen scientist has a number of Do-It-Yourself Biologist (DIY Bio) community laboratories options across the United States and around the world. Most of these community laboratories are membership based and operated by volunteers to offer low-cost space. One of these companies, BioCurious in Sunnyvale, CA, has the goal “to make the world a better, more ‘sciency’ place”. HiveBio in Seattle, WA is a non-profit DIY Bio laboratory offering the science community a central hub to meet and share ideas. HiveBio has had great support from the local biosciences industry with the groups of enthusiasts being far larger than ever anticipated. HiveBio has partnered with education institutions in Seattle to bring students into the laboratory 5 days a week. The non-profit BUGSS, located in Baltimore, MD, tout that it’s for “people interested in biotechnology to learn, practice and hang-out with others fascinated by the world”. They offer equipment, courses on laboratory safety, as well as the “Build-a-BUG” course on bioengineering techniques. Laboratory space is offered for the budding



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and seasoned scientist to work on solo projects or collaborate with other like-minded individuals. For New Yorkers, Genspace provides educational outreach, cultural events, and a platform for science innovation at the grassroots level. Boston is home to BOSSLAB whose mission is to empower people to understand and solve problems through the lens of biology. If you want to do it all from home, organizations like Open PCR offer the citizen scientist not only their own personal PCR machine, but have kept the software and design open sourced. For a look at a DIY Bio project heading towards commercialization, we can turn to Amplino, a mobile point of care diagnostic tool based on real time PCR technology. Developed by three independent scientists in their spare time, the “affordable quantitative PCR device” has the potential to impact healthcare in geographic regions hard hit by malaria.

Whether you are a rogue scientist who doesn’t necessarily want to be alone, a scientist-tinkerer who wants to find other like-minded soul mate(s), or the next big biotech guru looking for a mutually beneficial relationship, cohabitation of spaces equipped for life sciences discovery comes in many forms and options. ■

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