

Program Aims to Mentor Women Inventors

In her career working with technology companies, Jane Muir said she is often the only woman in the room.

The STEM fields - science, technology, engineering and math - have historically been dominated by men and less than 10 percent of venture-backed technology startups are headed by women, according to a press release from the University of Florida Office of Technology Licensing.

As director of the UF Innovation Hub, Muir started a program to address the disparities.

Empowering Women in Technology Startups - or eWiTS - featured 55 women mentored by local business women in how to form a company around university research inventions with at least one woman as co-inventor.

The program ended Tuesday with a business-plan competition judged by a panel of six female investors who came from as far as Ohio, North Carolina and South Florida.

Muir said the odds are “very high” that one or more companies will come out of the program, with one of the investors asking that some of the projects submit pitches to her firm.

In December, the tech licensing office will help interested teams incorporate, license technology and meet investors, she said.

The winning projects included a middle ear prosthesis to address hearing loss, a device that measures glucose levels in saliva and transmits the data to a clinician, and a flavor additive to improve the appetites of Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s disease patients.

Participants included postdoctoral researchers and graduate students, engineers, scientists, Realtors and other professional women, with and without current jobs, Muir said.

“They’re graduating from this program with training and skills that will empower them for the rest of their lives,” she said. “From our perspective, we’ve developed a talent pool of potential entrepreneurs who will help the university commercialize research discoveries.”