



Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Proposed West Coast USA Tech Mission 2014
Date:	15 April 2014
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1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	Members will be aware that Belfast City Council recently supported the Belfast Tech Mission which took place in October 2013. This was the first business mission led by Council to the west coast of America.
1.2	The mission provided an opportunity for 20 companies to travel to San Francisco and San Jose to showcase and network with leading companies, investors and venture capitalists from the west coast of America. The mission targeted Belfast-based digital media, software and hi-tech IT companies who offer a globally focused product or service and were considering expansion or increasing sales and investment opportunities in the west coast area.
1.3	The mission achieved a number of significant successes including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One company who surpassed its Kickstarter £100,000 fundraising target during the mission - One company announced a new \$800,000 funding round - One company established a partnership with PayPal and will roll out their software in the US in 2014 - One company secured 5 new US based clients while another secured its first US client as a result of meetings that took place during the mission.
1.4	A number of other participating companies have also secured additional investment in their companies since returning from the mission through crowdfunding campaigns and business angel investment.
1.5	Due to the positive feedback received from participating companies as well as subsequent discussions with Invest Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Science Park, it is clear that an opportunity exists to support another tech mission in November/December 2014, as a collaborative event with those organisations.

2	Key Issues
2.1	Based on the success of the 2013 tech mission, Northern Ireland Science Park and stakeholders in the Northern Ireland tech community have recommended that the mission becomes an annual event and that NISP, Belfast City Council and key partners such as the University of Ulster, Queen's University and Invest Northern Ireland, combine to organise a joint tech mission to Southern California.
2.2	In 2014 NISP CONNECT launches INVENT, an evolution of the 25K Awards, which, for the first time, will be open to the public as well as NI's HE research institutions. INVENT aims to identify the new product inventions with the highest commercial potential in six categories: electronics, creative media and consumer internet, enterprise software, agri-food, engineering and life and health sciences. INVENT category winners will be supported by NISP to travel to the west coast of America as part of the tech mission and will take part in up to 10 meetings in a number of west coast locations.
2.3	As with the 2014 mission, Belfast City Council will help in generating contacts and business leads through our existing networks and those provided through the partner organisations. A showcase, pitching sessions and a series of one to one meetings will be organised, providing a platform from which local companies can target key businesses and potential clients based in the United States, with the aim of securing new business.
2.4	It is intended that this trade mission will become an annual event and will be built into the support ecosystem for hi-tech and growth focused businesses in Belfast. It will help them explore new markets and develop collaboration with US-based partners. It may also offer an opportunity to explore the potential for residencies for the companies within incubators and workspace on the west coast, and to develop linkages with those incubators so that exchanges can be explored, for example, when the Belfast Creative Hub is operational.
2.5	It is proposed Belfast City Council's contribution to the trade mission will be up to a maximum of £30,000. If agreement can be secured from all the partners, Council officers will work with Invest NI, NISP and the universities to develop a targeted programme of meetings and showcase events and to recruit local businesses to take part in the event. While the details are still being finalised, it is likely that the event will take place towards the end of November/start December 2014.
2.6	Given that the Lord Mayor led the 2013 Tech Mission, it is proposed that there is also civic engagement in the 2014 event, in order to ensure continuity and to demonstrate civic commitment to this venture.

3	Resource Implications
3.1	<u>Financial</u> Contribution of up to £30,000 required from Belfast City Council to support the mission.

4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
	There are no specific equality and good relations considerations attached to this report.

5	Recommendations
	<p>Members are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Note the proposal to develop and implement a trade mission to the west coast of America in partnership with NISP, Invest NI and HE partners in November/December 2014 - To approve a total budget of up to £30,000 to support the trade mission - To approve the participation in the event of the Lord Mayor/relevant elected representatives.

6	Decision Tracking
	<p>Progress report on plan, budgets and itinerary to be presented to Committee in August 2014.</p> <p>Timeframe: August 2014 Reporting Officer: Lisa Toland</p>

7	Key to Abbreviations
	NISP – Northern Ireland Science Park