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Contact: Jackie Melillo
jmelillo@aesop.rutgers.edu
848-932-3555

N.J. Higher Education Institutions Launch the New Jersey Big Data Alliance at Inaugural Symposium

“Partnerships in Big Data: Pathways to Transformative Innovation in New Jersey” featured noted speakers from government, industry and academia

NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J. – Rutgers University hosted the New Jersey Big Data Alliance’s inaugural symposium last Wednesday, April 23. The event marked the official launch of the New Jersey Big Data Alliance (NJBDA) and attracted about 200 attendees from across the state, including individuals from New Jersey government, industry and academia.

The NJBDA is a consortium of New Jersey’s higher education institutions, initiated by the Rutgers Office of Research and Economic Development and [Rutgers Discovery Informatics Institute \(RDI²\)](#) to address the challenges posed by the deluge of digital data known as “Big Data.” This unprecedented alliance brings together universities and colleges from across the state, and has the overarching goals of identifying common challenges and areas of synergy, developing joint programs, and ultimately nucleating an effective alliance that will increase our state’s research competitiveness and drive economic development within New Jersey. NJBDA members include Rutgers, Stevens Institute of Technology, Kean University, Montclair State University, New Jersey Institute of Technology, Rowan University, Richard Stockton College and Princeton University.

“The alliance was formed to bring together the broad diversity of resources in advanced computation and data analytics that exists at the state’s universities and colleges, with the goal of enhancing our collective capabilities and competitiveness,” said Margaret Brennan-Tonetta, chief economic development officer at Rutgers.

Today, the proliferation of data sources and the resultant flood of digital data significantly impact all sectors of industry, academia and society. Challenges associated with the collection, management and analysis of extremely large data sets permeate many industry sectors in New Jersey. Similarly, researchers in diverse academic fields and in industry are grappling with the transport, storage and analysis of extremely large data sets. Finally, all share the challenge of identifying and recruiting candidates that possess the analytical skills necessary to thrive in today's data-driven world.

The symposium provided a forum for policy makers and individuals from New Jersey industry and academia to learn more about Big Data, featuring talks from Christopher Greer, director of the National Institute for Standards and Technology Smart Grid and Cyberphysical Systems Office and

Basel Kayyali, partner at McKinsey & Company, as well as panelists from diverse New Jersey companies who spoke on big data challenges and opportunities, and on preparing tomorrow's workforce for the Big Data economy.

The official program concluded with a panel entitled "Preparing New Jersey for the Big Data Era," which featured members of the New Jersey Big Data Alliance, George Laskaris, president of NJEdge.net, and Assemblyman Upendra Chivukula, the sponsor of legislation that will formally designate the NJBDA as New Jersey's advanced cyberinfrastructure consortium. During this panel, Laskaris spoke about his organization's efforts to bolster internet connectivity at academic and research institutions across New Jersey and NJBDA representatives unveiled the Alliance's initiatives in the coming year. These initiatives include the launch of a Big Data Resource portal, training and workforce development workshops, and industry and government outreach efforts.

Professor Manish Parashar, the Rutgers–New Brunswick NJBDA representative and director of RDI², stated that "having a big data research portal that provides seamless access to public data sources, state-of-the-art data analytics tools, publications, and other related information can be a tremendous resource for researchers, students and practitioners."

New Jersey industry also stands to benefit from the Alliance. According to David Belanger, senior research fellow at Stevens Institute of Technology, "The creation of the NJBDA, which includes individuals who have both academic expertise and commercial experience, is perfectly timed for the Big Data evolution from early users to a much broader base of participants. The NJBDA is well positioned to help New Jersey industry take full advantage of this evolution."

"The Open Data movement is also unleashing tremendous economic value for resource strapped government agencies around the world," stated Ram Gopalan, visiting associate professor in the Rutgers–Camden School of Business, "Applications range widely, from smart wastewater management to the use of citizen inspectors to report potholes. And you don't have to be a megalopolis to participate – cities ranging in size from South Bend, Indiana (population 100,000) to the Big Apple have reaped the benefits of open data. The NJBDA wants to ensure that New Jersey's state and municipal governments are able to take advantage of the insights Big Data affords."

Finally, the NJBDA's training and workforce development workshops will provide members of New Jersey's current and future workforce with the skills they need to remain competitive in the data-driven economy. "Business analytics of Big Data is a whole new paradigm on doing business – a 'game changer' as described by a McKinsey report," explained Rashmi Jain, professor and chair of Information and Operations Management at Montclair State University. "Business leaders are taking on the challenges as their strategic initiatives – similar to how they took on the dotcoms boom of the late 90's. Hiring of chief science officers, chief data officers and chief data scientists are examples of such strategic commitments. In fact, a [2012 Accenture study](#) found that two-thirds of the firms

interviewed reported having appointed a senior figure such as a chief data officer in the 18 months preceding the interview. A keyword search on ‘analytics’ on any major job search portal brings out over 75,000 results. On the other hand, the universities are ramping up programs to prepare the skilled workforce for the Big Data economy. A [McKinsey report](#) estimated a shortage of 140,000 to 190,000 people with deep analytical skills in the United State alone as well as 1.5 million managers and analysts to analyze Big Data and implement results. The NJBDA is our opportunity to work closely with the industry and government and prepare the New Jersey workforce to take full advantage of a vibrant economy in the making."

About Rutgers – Established in 1766, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, is America’s eighth oldest institution of higher learning and one of the nation’s premier public research universities. The university serves more than 65,000 students on campuses, centers, institutes and other locations throughout the state. Rutgers–New Brunswick and Princeton University are New Jersey’s only members of the prestigious Association of American Universities. Rutgers ranks #1 nationally in chemistry R&D funding.

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