150 Sci-ROI members attend YIM2016, Chicago

A three-day Young Investigators Meeting - Chicago (YIM-C) was held at the Consulate of India, Chicago and the prestigious University of Chicago with about 150 young Indian scientists gathering in the windy city to discuss ways for getting the best of minds back to their country, India. The first YIM hosted in the mid-western United States was organized by Science and Research Opportunities in India (Sci-ROI), a volunteer not-for-profit organization comprising research scientists, postdoctoral scholars, and graduate students under the auspices of WINStep Forward (a 501(c)3 organization). YIM-C aims to be instrumental in showcasing the diversity of talent in the mid-west to policy makers, institutional heads, and talent hunters from India, while exposing Sci-ROI members, many of whom are undertaking cutting-edge research and development, to the unlimited opportunity for engagement and collaboration in various sectors thus, enabling establishment of a network between individuals and agencies in India and the US.

The Consulate General of India, Chicago, hosted over 100 YIM-C participants in the forum titled 'Indo-US Partnerships' on October 21st, 2016, at the Consulate premises to to promote multi-level collaborative initiatives across various disciplines in Academia, Industry and Government between India and the United States. Dr. Ausaf Sayeed, Consul General of India, Chicago delivered the welcome remarks and urged the young investigators to actively participate in nation building by making significant contributions to the socio-economic development of India. He also invited them to wholeheartedly participate in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Flagship Programs, including "Make in India", "Skills India", "Digital India", and "Green India". He advised the YIM-C participants to engage with the Government of India by using the portal: MyGov.in. The keynote address was delivered by Dr. R. Brakaspathy, Secretary, Science and Engineering Research Board, Government of India, New Delhi. He explained the research funding opportunities, extramural funding availability to individual researchers and fellowships for faculty members in SERB. The session was also addressed by Dr. Mangala Sharma, Program Director, Office of International Science and Engineering, National Science Foundation, Mr. Jonathan Ward, Principal Commercial Officer, United States Department of Commerce, Consulate General of United States in India, Kolkata, Dr. Shekhar Mishra, Deputy Project Manager, Indian Institute and Fermilab Collaboration, Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory and Vinod (Vinny) Gupta, Chair, Ohio Board of Regents. The speakers appreciated the importance attached to the India-US collaboration initiatives and the efforts of the Government of India to include the various segments of the scientific community and the industry to accelerate the pace of development in several sectors.

**Session 1**

The venue of the second day (October 22nd) event was the Donnelley Biological Sciences Learning Center (BSLC) on the University of Chicago campus, more than 150 participants were in attendance. The opening remarks were delivered by Professor Aseem Ansari, University of Wisconsin - Madison who is the xo-founder of WINStep Forward and serves as a mentor for the Sci-ROI committee that organized the YIM-C event. He was followed by welcome notes from Dean and Director Nancy Schwartz and Vice-Provost Melina Hale of the University of Chicago. The first session “Research and funding opportunities in India” had talks featuring Dr.R.Brakaspathy, Secretary, Science and Engineering Research Board, Government of India, New Delhi and Dr.Shahid Jameel, CEO, Welcome-DBT Alliance. Dr.R.Brakaspathy and Dr.Shahid Jameel listed the various fellowships and funding resources available to the individuals interested in moving back to India as well as the new faculty recruits in various institutes in India by their respective agencies.

**Session 2**

The second session started with an inspiring talk from Sam Pitroda, who has served as advisor to the Indian Government over the years. The session further explored emerging trends from Institutional perspectives, where participants learned about the various opportunities for research in India and got useful career tips from experienced scientist and heads of institutes. Speakers include Prof. Dipankar Chatterji (Indian Institute of Science), Prof. Ajit Chaturvedi (Deputy Director, Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur), Prof. Sudhanshu Vrati (Executive Director, Regional Center for Biotechnology), Prof. Ramaswamy (National Center for biological Sciences) and Dr. Shekhar Mishra (Deputy Project Manager, PIP-II Indian Institute and Fermilab Collaboration).

**Session 3**

The panel discussed Building a Research Career in India, the opportunities and challenges faced by young investigators actively exploring careers in India, highlighting how and why many young individuals have succeeded despite the present hurdles in India. In addition, the panel looked at some of the more recent dynamic policy changes initiated by the various institutions and government. YIM-C participants presented their perspective on the challenges they face while applying for faculty position and establishing a connection with Indian officials at various levels and stages. The panel also recommended that those seriously interested apply early and connect with host institutions in India. They were also reminded of the growing competition and the challenge for them to be truly globally competitive irrespective of their international experiences. On being asked about the serious challenges that need to be addressed, including that of basic supplies, research funds and quality of research, Dr. Brakaspathy, Secretary, SERB India said, although the government is making every effort to arrest shortcomings,it should enhance measures to attract these issues to ensure the Indian talent returns back to the country.

**Session 4**

Johnathan Ward, Principal Commercial Officer, United States Consulate in India, Kolkata emphasized that both US and India had mutual interest in generating sustainable economic growth, creating jobs, improving the business and investment climate, enhancing livelihoods, and sustaining the rules-based global order. Professor Sam Ramesh (Kellogg School of Business, Northwestern University) highlighted the need to focus on fundamental needs of the less privileged community. Michael Rosen, Managing Director of Rosen Biosciences, LLC and Co-founder and Board of Directors, Illinois Biotechnology Industry Organization (I-BIO) discussed science parks and how they fit into the life science industry in India. He explained how the parks with a mixture of small and large companies will allow for insightful commercialization. Gopal Dasika, Vice President, Biologics Development Center at Pfizer engaged the audience with his personal story of moving as faculty from UT Medical Center at Houston to India. Dr.Dasika said, “Candidates contemplating relocating need to clearly identify the motivations and strongly consider familial needs so as not to develop cold feet at the very end after having engaged in a long-tedious recruitment process.” Dinesh Jain provided an overview to the attendees of the various opportunities, initiatives and trends in India today. Finally, Dr. Lukhwinder Hundal, CTO, InNow, LLC, presented the audience with various commercial initiatives to clean water of effluents. The growing need for clean water, the large unserved population of India, and the dearth of wastewater treatment facilities were underlined as part of his presentation.

**Session 5**

The venue of the third day (October 23) event was also the Donnelley Biological Sciences Learning Center (BSLC) on the University of Chicago campus. Session 5 continued the previous day's discussion on Emerging trends based on institutional perspectives and started with Prof. L. S. Shashidhara, Dean (Research and Development) and Chair of Biology at IISER, Pune, Vice-President of Indian National Science Academy (INSA), New Delhi followed by Prof. Siddhartha Roy, Director, Bose Institute, Kolkatta, Prof. S. Ramaswamy, Senior Professor, NCBS, Bangalore, Prof. Tapas Kundu, JNCASR, Bangalore, and Prof. Yamuna Krishnan, University of Chicago.

**Session 6**

Session 6 was dedicated again to Innovation landscape - Make in India/Entrepreneurship continuing the series of talks in session 5. Prof. Arun Goyal emphasized other aspects of research where youth can play a big role and become successful entrepreneurs. He encouraged audience members to focus on sectors like waste management, food processing and disaster management which are the need of time in India. After this, Prof. Assem Ansari talked about how Sci-ROI came into existence from Bose-Khorana programme and Winstep Forward in his concluding remarks. Prof Ansari urged young scientists to come along and do science for the betterment of our society and country.

**Concluding note**

“We are always on the lookout for great talent, and this event addresses that need”, said Professor A.K. Chaturvedi, Deputy Director, Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur. “It was a very good event”, said Professor Dipankar Chatterji, Indian Institute of Science, Banglore. India is indeed rapidly becoming a global research, design and development hub. To this effect, more than 1,000 companies from around the world have set up their R&D centres in India. Ambitious bright scientists left India for better opportunities and, over the years, gained vital exposure to the best global research labs. After years of experimenting and collaborating with some of the top scientists in the world, they have now chosen to return to their homeland. There are over 2,00,000 scientists and engineers are working abroad, at least a fourth of whom have returned back to India. Several more continue to seek such opportunities. YIM-C organized by the Science and Research Opportunities in India provides a multidisciplinary platform for these young scientists to seek advanced career opportunities in India.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ftTT6WL98U&feature=youtu.be>