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**EXCLUSIVE**

## **\$1 million federal grant to boost fuel cell research in Columbia**

**EngenuitySC plans to spend most of the money on infrastructure**

**By C. GRANT JACKSON**  
**Business Editor**

Columbia's effort to become a center for the hydrogen/fuel cell industry has received a boost from the federal government.

EngenuitySC will get \$1 million in federal money to help create the National Institute of Hydrogen Fuel Cell Commercialization.

The money for Engenuity, the umbrella group working to bring a knowledge-based economy to the Midlands, comes from a federal budget measure passed in November.

The National Institute of Hydrogen Fuel Cell Commercialization, a nonprofit organization, will work to find commercial opportunities for USC and other state research institutions doing fuel cell research.

The money becomes available July 1. Engenuity will spend the next six to 12 months determining how to spend the money, but the funding is actually fairly open, executive director Neil McLean said.

He said Engenuity plans to spend most of the money on facilities. "We want to invest in infrastructure that will serve the area for a long time." None of the money will pay Engenuity's operating budget, he said.

Some of the money could be used for specially outfitted space, such as wet labs, in a new building in the Horizon Center. The center is part of the Innovista, the USC research campus.

"One of our key goals is to attract the best scientists and entrepreneurs in fuel cells in the world to come here. And we are going to need resources to do that," McLean said.

USC president Andrew Sorensen said the city, businesses and USC will use the money "to continue our progress toward building a 21st century economic engine that is powered by research from USC's Innovista and commercialized right here in the Midlands."

Mayor Bob Coble said the money "will be used to support the creation of private knowledge-based companies that will return many times this amount in economic growth in our region."

The S.C. Next Energy Initiative has outlined a 20-year hydrogen and fuel cell economy strategy for the state. It calls on each of the state's regions to capitalize on its assets.

The Midlands core competency is fuel cells. But ICF Consulting, the firm that helped develop the strategy, said the state has great researchers but needs more infrastructure to support commercialization.

"Our (out-of-state) competition is also investing in the infrastructure that will help companies be in a position to turn a profit on fuel cells. Once the Midlands is host to several of these companies, we hope to see increased commercial movement in our region," Sorensen said.

Over the next six months, Engenuity will concentrate on helping create a regional organization that will help make Columbia a fuel cell city.

That regional organization will have a big influence on how the money is used, McLean said.

The state's congressional delegation was interested in funding the project, McLean said, because "they know we need to have facilities and infrastructure in place that will enable us to commercialize research and realize the economic benefit here."

They don't want to see research that is created at USC going out of state, McLean said.

McLean and Kyle Michel, a Columbia-based attorney who works with Engenuity on federal relations, put the proposal together. Michel helped guide it through Washington.

This is the second federal appropriation for EngenuitySC, which was awarded \$400,000 in the omnibus appropriation bill for 2005. That money is being used to support incubator infrastructure.

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