

The NGA and the commercialization of graphene

Dr Zina Cinker is doing something rather interesting in the world of graphene. She is the Executive Director of the National Graphene Association (NGA) based in Nashville, TN, USA. Read on to find out why this is important...

The big picture

Thinking globally, Europe and the USA are friends as well as rivals. When it comes to graphene, Europe is leading the world in collaboration with its €1billion funded Graphene Flagship Project. The core consortium connects over 150 academic and industrial research groups in 23 countries working in the field of graphene and other 2D materials.

There is no direct equivalent in the USA, the National Science Foundation (NSF) funds research in 2D materials through its Emerging Frontiers in Research and Innovation (EFRI) programme. However the NSF strategy is explicitly bottom up. This means that national government funding has been spent identifying and supporting individuals and teams in major universities across the nation. There is good work being done, but much silo working has evolved. People are not talking and collaborating as they are in Europe.

This is why Zina and her colleagues at the NGA have decided to start connecting people in a meaningful way.

Zina is well placed to lead this effort. She is a very credible scientist. A PhD in the field of graphene optoelectronics and ultrafast spectroscopy from Vanderbilt University commands respect. Add to this academic ability her entrepreneurial experience as Chief Technology Officer (CTO) of G.Element, a nanotechnology company and you can see why she

was the natural choice for this new role.

The NGA Strategy

As Executive Director, Zina oversees the direction, focus and operation of the organization. The strategy of the NGA is not to duplicate the Graphene Flagship or the NSF. It is not sensible to try to copy multiple billion-dollar government funded organisations. The National Graphene Association has a more intelligent approach; it aims to bring together researchers, entrepreneurs, and government officials to further the commercialization of graphene.

A commercial intent

The NGA plans a more facilitative approach. It wants to connect current and future graphene stakeholders – entrepreneurs, companies, researchers, developers and suppliers, investors, venture capitalists as well as government agencies. The aim is to drive innovation, by giving its members better access to critical industry information. They also promote and facilitate the commercialization of graphene products and technologies in the United States by giving opportunities to collaborate and stimulate partnerships. Their next major event will be the Graphene Innovation Summit and Expo 29th – 31st October 2017 Nashville, TN USA.

This means they won't just be talking with the 'usual suspects' the NGA is broadening its approach to include smaller entrepreneurial organisations, as well as academics. To support this they have already established a subsidiary digital news and information platform called graphene entrepreneur to provide up-to-the-minute news on graphene developments worldwide.

I wish Dr. Zina Cinker and her colleagues well at the NGA. It seems to me they are doing the right thing at the right time

in the USA. The tarnished hype around graphene is starting to give way to emerging commercial opportunities for graphene and other 2D materials. A membership organisation like this is ripe for success. The quality of the people I see getting involved means they are well placed to make a big difference in the USA and beyond.

Disclosure: *Adrian Nixon is an advisory board member of the National Graphene Association (NGA)*