Naval Expeditionary Creates Five ‘Tech Bridges’ to Spread Workforce Agility



James F. Geurts (center), assistant secretary of the Navy for research, development and acquisition, announced on Sept. 3 a plan to rapidly expand collaboration capabilities through the creation of “tech bridges.” U.S. Navy/Bobby Cummings

ALEXANDRIA, Va. – In its effort to spread innovation and procurement agility across the workforce, the U.S. Navy has created regional “tech bridges” in five areas of the country that will serve as “combustion chambers” of ideas and encourage collaboration among stakeholders.

The tech bridges, with support from the Office of Naval Research and the Navy’s Systems Commands, will partner with start-ups, academia, nonprofits, government entities, small businesses and large corporations to share ideas, experiences and best practices that can make the Navy and U.S. Marine Corps faster and more agile at developing and acquiring problem-solving technologies, according to the Naval Expeditions (NavalX) agility office.

NavalX was created last February by Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research, Development and Acquisition James Geurts. The central idea was to create a workforce “super-connector” that could link people with

ideas to individuals and organizations with needs, across all the sea, air and space domains. Successes, lessons-learned and subject-matter expertise could be shared servicewide and eventually across the Defense Department.

“Everything from Marines learning how to 3-D print to writing software to getting folks who don’t normally interact with the military to learn from each other,” Geurts told reporters during a media roundtable Sept. 3 at the NavalX’s temporary offices in Virginia.

The first five tech bridges (more are planned) are in Newport, Rhode Island; Keyport, Washington; San Diego; Orlando; and Crane, Ind. All the bridges must have a local Navy Department sponsor willing to dedicate funding, personnel or programming. For example, Newport is home to the Navy War College as well as a Naval Undersea Warfare Center, said Navy Cmdr. Sam Gray, the tech bridge director at NavalX. Additionally, the regional bridges must have non-Navy local or regional partners providing funding or in-kind services and a sustainable business plan independent of NavalX support after 12 months.

The tech bridges will operate on a “franchise” model, allowing each region to develop their own way to connect to their unique innovation ecosystem. Geurts stressed that the tech bridges will not create platforms or systems. “This is not the place to invent things, this is the place to share knowledge, so others can invent,” he added.

The idea of tech bridges is to create “a gathering spot, kind of a combustion chamber” for innovative ideas that “close that

distance” between the end-user, developer and acquiring agency, Geurts said.