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### **New Orleans-Tuscaloosa Team Awarded Federal Funding for Solar Innovation**

**Tuscaloosa Alabama – 8/17/18** Today, the National Science Foundation awarded a spot in its prestigious I-Corps program to a University of Alabama research team supported by a New Orleans area industry mentor. MTE Solar, an early-stage company, is developing a greener, lower-cost solar cell module. The I-Corps program offers funding and other resources to help the team enter the market, and MTE Solar will join the program in San Diego in the fall.

“I-Corps offers a major opportunity for market research at an early stage of our business development. We’re excited to continue the customer discovery we’ve already started at UA,” said Dr. Feng Yan, an Assistant Professor in Metallurgical and Materials Engineering who developed the technology.

I-Corps prepares scientists and engineers to reach beyond the university laboratory. The program provides infrastructure, advice, networking opportunities, training and funding to enable groups to transition their work into the marketplace. The MTE Solar team will leverage these resources to develop their patented technology for a more cost-effective, environmentally friendly product. Yan’s team focuses on thin film, a second-generation solar technology. It has potential to be integrated into building materials, such as roofing tiles or windows, or in traditional solar modules for residences, businesses and utilities.

The thin-film solar market is dominated by materials requiring high energy input during manufacturing, as well as some which require toxic or very rare elements. The MTE Solar project will explore the commercial opportunities of manufacturing panels with antimony chalcogenides. This innovative absorber material presents a potential for manufacturing a solar panel with lower cost, higher efficiency, and less energy consumption.

Dr. Yan will serve as Principle Investigator and Technical Lead during the I-Corps program. He received a Ph.D. in Materials Science and Engineering from the National University of Singapore, then worked as a Senior Development Engineer at First Solar, Inc before joining UA in August 2017.

Two UA Ph.D. students at the Department of Metallurgical and Material Engineering, Angelique Montgomery and Liping Guo, will share the entrepreneurial duties on the I-Corps project. Montgomery has a B.S. in Mathematics and M.S. in Metallurgical Engineering. Guo has a B.S. degree in Materials Science and Engineering. Together, Montgomery and Guo will lead the collection of data on customer needs to shape the product launch.

“I’m excited to be part of a project that could help reduce the cost of solar energy and boost its use in the U.S. We hope the MTE technology will support reliance on sustainable energy,” said Montgomery.

The team is well-positioned to succeed in I-Corps. In Spring, Yan and Guo participated in UA’s I-Corps Site, held by the Alabama Innovation and Mentoring of Entrepreneurs, the university’s tech incubator. “We learned a lot from our AIME experience, and the I-Corps program will take our efforts to the next level. To ensure a successful period of customer discovery, we’re now seeking contacts within solar manufacturing, utilities, corporate facilities, and other potential users of the technology,” said Guo.

Molly Kramer, a UA alum and Founder & Creative Director of marketing agency Model Content, will guide MTE Solar’s interview-based research for product configuration and customer validation. She has a B.S. in Scientific Writing & Philosophy from UA’S New College and an MA Degree in Medical Journalism from the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.

“I’m so proud to help get UA technology involved with the federal I-Corps program. It’s a fantastic way to elevate our region’s commercialization success while developing solutions for the world’s most complex problems,” said Kramer.

During the I-Corps program, the whole team will be engaged with industry: talking to customers, partners and competitors and encountering the uncertainty and excitement of creating successful innovations. Getting out of the university laboratory to explore the commercial potential of exciting innovations is what I-Corps is all about.

**About MTE Solar**

MTE Solar is an early-stage technology startup focused on renewable and sustainable energy conversion and storage. For updates on research and commercialization, visit the [UA College of Engineering news page](#).

**About Model Content**

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