

EISENHOWER FELLOWSHIPS – 2009 Multi Nation Program

www.eisenhowerfellowships.org

Seamus O’Prey
General Manager
Ortus – The Business Development Agency
Belfast, NORTHERN IRELAND

Recipient of the Developing Belfast-Top 50 Business Person Award and the Invest Northern Ireland SMART Award for Innovation, Seamus O’Prey is one of the foremost experts on small business development in Northern Ireland. Under Mr. O’Prey’s leadership, Ortus – The Business Development Agency has facilitated the creation of 5,000 jobs and 2,000 new businesses, and continues to manage a substantial property portfolio while building the organization’s suite of business start-ups and expansion programs. Mr. O’Prey works with clients on business improvement and management strategies, leadership, and securing start-up financing from private, public, philanthropic, and banking partners. As a private management consultant, his expertise is widely sought by universities, firms, and NGOs. During his fellowship, he explored corporate social responsibility, environmental and sustainable development, innovation and entrepreneurship, and methods and sources of public and private venture financing.

Mr. O’Prey visited a broad spectrum of nonprofit organizations, universities, and both public and private institutions to learn about their efforts to enhance small business development, encourage entrepreneurial endeavors, and increase early stage capital. Highlights on the corporate side included visits to Starbucks, Chicago’s ShoreBank and Microsoft. He noted that “Starbucks is an interesting example of ‘global responsibility’ and one that could and should be copied. They have a long-term commitment to providing incentives for improved CSR practices and insisting on supply chain CSR management, responsible practices for the hiring and conditions of workers, and how franchises adapt to their local communities.”

During a visit to North Carolina, Mr. O’Prey had the opportunity to visit key organizations in the Research Triangle area, including the Small Business and Technology Development Center, with which he plans to explore future joint ventures, as well as the Council for Entrepreneurial Development and the Southern Growth Policies Board. USA Fellows in the region hosted him for a Durham Bulls Game, as well as dinners and a tour of the region. Complementing his individual meetings, Mr. O’Prey attended two conferences featuring high caliber presenters, the Milken Institute Global Conference and the National Business Incubator Association (NBIA).

Numerous organizations working with Northern Ireland and the UK hosted Mr. O’Prey, including the Northern Ireland Bureau, ICCUSA, Invest Northern Ireland, the UK Trade and Investment Council, and the Consuls General of Ireland and Northern Ireland. He returns with numerous solid contacts and replicable ideas to explore, particularly in the area of small business financing. Mr. O’Prey stated that “One of the differences, and it’s a substantial one, is the access to finance and investment for business ideas in the U.S. This is completely different from that in the UK or Ireland. Access to capital here is readily available and helps to build scalability and progress much more quickly. This is something that we need to develop and foster in Northern Ireland, and it’s something I am keen to explore with banks and angel investors when I return home.”

Mr. O’Prey concludes: “I cannot emphasize enough, the importance of the networking and discussion with the rest to the EF Fellows. This has been both challenging and inspirational. To be in rooms discussing complex world issues has been a wonderful experience and one that I may never have the opportunity to do again. To have shared the opening speech with someone from Mongolia in itself has left a lasting impression on me. I am also confident that I have made friends and colleagues for life, and that we will be active in communicating and developing joint initiatives in the years to come.”