SDI ScienceDocs Inc.
Research • Funding • AI Strategy • Est. 2004

University Licensing Guide

A practical ScienceDocs worksheet for evaluating, preparing, and negotiating university technology licenses.

This guide helps founders, university spinouts, commercialization teams, and scientific organizations prepare for a university license discussion. It is designed as a planning worksheet, not legal advice. Use it to organize the technology opportunity, clarify institutional requirements, identify negotiation priorities, and convert a promising university invention into a practical commercialization pathway.

How to use this guide: Complete the worksheet before or during engagement with a technology transfer office. Mark unknown items as follow-up questions, then convert the highest-risk issues into the action plan at the end.

1. License Opportunity Snapshot

Technology / invention name	
University / institution	
Technology transfer contact	
Inventor(s) / lab / department	
Company / spinout / team reviewing the license	
Primary application or use case	
Target market or customer segment	
Desired licensing outcome	☐ Option agreement ☐ Exclusive license ☐ Non-exclusive license ☐ Field-limited license ☐ Other:

2. Initial Licensing Readiness Checklist

Area	Readiness Question	Status	Notes / Follow-Up
Technology	Can the technology be explained clearly to a non-specialist buyer, investor, or partner?	☐ Yes ☐ Partial ☐ No	
Technology	Is there enough technical evidence to justify further diligence?	☐ Yes ☐ Partial ☐ No	
IP	Has the relevant invention disclosure, patent application, or issued patent been identified?	☐ Yes ☐ Partial ☐ No	
IP	Are inventorship, ownership, and sponsor obligations understood at a practical level?	☐ Yes ☐ Partial ☐ No	
Market	Is there a specific customer problem, use case, or unmet	☐ Yes ☐ Partial ☐ No	

Area	Readiness Question	Status	Notes / Follow-Up
	need connected to the invention?		
Market	Are current alternatives, competing technologies, or workaround behaviors known?	☐ Yes ☐ Partial ☐ No	
Commercial	Is there a realistic path to product, service, platform, or internal capability development?	☐ Yes ☐ Partial ☐ No	
Commercial	Can the team identify early adopters, strategic partners, or pilot sites?	☐ Yes ☐ Partial ☐ No	
Funding	Is there a funding pathway for licensing fees, development work, proof-of-concept work, or startup operations?	☐ Yes ☐ Partial ☐ No	
Team	Are the commercial lead, technical lead, and decision-maker roles clear?	☐ Yes ☐ Partial ☐ No	

3. Technology Package Review

Use this section to determine whether the university technology package is developed enough for a serious licensing discussion, investor conversation, pilot, or grant-funded commercialization plan.

Package Element	Available?	Quality / Gaps	Follow-Up Needed

Suggested package elements to evaluate include: non-confidential summary, confidential technical data, patent status, figures or diagrams, publications, prototype information, TRL/MRL estimate, prior funding, sponsor restrictions, animal/clinical/field data, software/code status, and inventor availability.

4. IP and Rights Questions

Question	Current Answer	Risk Level	Owner / Next Step

Question	Current Answer	Risk Level	Owner / Next Step

Questions to consider: What patents or applications are included? Are there background rights? Are there government rights, Bayh-Dole obligations, third-party sponsors, material transfer restrictions, open-source software issues, biological materials, data rights, or publication timing concerns?

5. License Structure Planning

Preferred license type	☐ Option ☐ Exclusive ☐ Non-exclusive ☐ Field-limited ☐ Territory-limited ☐ Evaluation license
Desired field of use	
Geographic scope	
Sublicensing needs	☐ Yes ☐ No Notes:
Development timeline	
Likely diligence milestones	
Minimum viable license position	
Terms that may be difficult to accept	

6. Common License Term Checklist

Area	Readiness Question	Status	Notes / Follow-Up
Financial	Has the team considered: Upfront fee or option fee?	☐ Yes ☐ Partial ☐ No	
Financial	Has the team considered: Patent cost reimbursement?	☐ Yes ☐ Partial ☐ No	
Financial	Has the team considered: Running royalty or revenue share?	☐ Yes ☐ Partial ☐ No	
Financial	Has the team considered: Equity consideration, if applicable?	☐ Yes ☐ Partial ☐ No	
Financial	Has the team considered: Annual minimums or maintenance fees?	☐ Yes ☐ Partial ☐ No	

Area	Readiness Question	Status	Notes / Follow-Up
Diligence	Has the team considered: Development milestones?	☐ Yes ☐ Partial ☐ No	
Diligence	Has the team considered: Commercial launch timing?	☐ Yes ☐ Partial ☐ No	
Diligence	Has the team considered: Reporting obligations?	☐ Yes ☐ Partial ☐ No	
Rights	Has the team considered: Field-of-use restrictions?	☐ Yes ☐ Partial ☐ No	
Rights	Has the team considered: Territory restrictions?	☐ Yes ☐ Partial ☐ No	
Rights	Has the team considered: Sublicensing rights?	☐ Yes ☐ Partial ☐ No	
Rights	Has the team considered: Improvements and future inventions?	☐ Yes ☐ Partial ☐ No	

7. Market and Commercialization Fit

A university license should be tied to a practical commercialization thesis. Use this matrix to connect the technology to customers, evidence, partners, and funding paths.

Market / Use Case	Customer or Stakeholder	Evidence Available	Gaps or Risks	Next Step

8. University / TTO Engagement Planner

Meeting / Contact	Purpose	Questions to Ask	Materials to Prepare	Outcome

Potential questions include: What is the institution's preferred licensing process? Are there standard option terms? What diligence milestones are expected? Are patent expenses current? Are there startup-friendly terms? Is the inventor available for technical consultation? Are there sponsored research or proof-of-concept options?

9. Negotiation Preparation Worksheet

Issue	Preferred Position	Fallback Position	Rationale / Evidence	Decision Owner

10. Red Flags and Mitigation Planning

Potential Red Flag	Why It Matters	Mitigation / Follow-Up
Unclear ownership or inventorship	May affect license value, timing, investor confidence, or commercialization feasibility.	Confirm inventorship, sponsor rights, and background IP before relying on the license.
Broad patent claims not yet supported	May affect license value, timing, investor confidence, or commercialization feasibility.	Ask for claim status, office actions, and technical evidence supporting the core claims.
Large patent reimbursement burden	May affect license value, timing, investor confidence, or commercialization feasibility.	Model cash impact and negotiate deferral, cap, or staged payments where appropriate.
Unrealistic diligence milestones	May affect license value, timing, investor confidence, or commercialization feasibility.	Tie milestones to funding, regulatory, technical, and market realities.

Potential Red Flag	Why It Matters	Mitigation / Follow-Up
Field-of-use too narrow or too broad	May affect license value, timing, investor confidence, or commercialization feasibility.	Align field scope with the actual business model and expected product roadmap.
No clear commercial operator	May affect license value, timing, investor confidence, or commercialization feasibility.	Define who will lead funding, product development, BD, pilots, and operations.

11. Licensing Readiness Scorecard

Score each dimension from 1 to 3. A total score of 15 or higher suggests the team may be ready for deeper licensing discussions. A lower score does not mean the opportunity is poor; it means the team should resolve specific gaps before investing heavily in negotiations or commercialization execution.

Dimension	1 = Early / unclear	2 = Some progress	3 = Ready to proceed	Score
Institutional process	Disclosure and TTO process unknown	TTO contacted, but process incomplete	Process, contacts, and next steps are clear	
IP ownership	Ownership or inventorship unclear	Ownership partially confirmed	Ownership/ inventorship issues identified and manageable	
Technology package	Only general concept available	Some technical data and summary materials exist	Compelling non-confidential and confidential package available	
Market fit	Use case and customer unclear	Early customer/problem evidence exists	Clear use case, customer segment, and adoption rationale	
License strategy	No target terms or diligence plan	Preferred license type and milestones drafted	Term priorities, diligence milestones, and negotiation position defined	
Commercial team	No team or operating plan	Partial team/advisor coverage	Clear team, roles, and partner/operator plan	

12. Next-Step Action Plan

Priority	Action Item	Owner	Due Date	Status

Priority	Action Item	Owner	Due Date	Status

ScienceDocs Support

Need help applying this tool? ScienceDocs supports commercialization, change management, AI adoption, grant strategy, and operational optimization. We help teams turn early-stage technologies, university inventions, and research-backed ideas into practical commercialization plans, fundable strategies, and implementation roadmaps.