Exclusive: Genentech to open Portland office, brings 300 jobs

The biotechnology company evaluated 10 other cities before selecting Portland for a call center operation

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Biotechnology company Genentech plans to open a large office in the Lloyd neighborhood next spring that is anticipated to bring more than 300 jobs to the city.

The 55,000-square-foot office will be at 825 N. E. Multnomah St. in the Lloyd Center Tower. It will house employees working in Genentech’s Access Solutions Team, mostly call center workers offering support services for patients and physicians regarding Genentech medications.

“When we were looking for locations we took into account what would be a great location in terms of connectivity with the organization and patients and community,” said Claire Scott, vice president of Access Solutions. “We loved the mission driven culture we found in Oregon and Portland.”

The company evaluated 10 other cities across the country before selecting Portland.

The South San Francisco-based company already has a substantial outpost in Oregon. It employs more than 400 people in Hillsboro on a 75-acre campus. That plant puts bulk drug substances into their final dosage form and packages and distributes them. The company is part of Swiss drugmaker Roche Group.

Between the two facilities, the company will have more than 700 employees in Oregon. The company already has a handful of Portland jobs listed on its website. It is planning a hiring fair in the city in November.

The new office will consist of current employees from South San Francisco as well as new hires, Scott said. There will also be management and leadership positions in the new office.
The team working in the Lloyd district will be interacting with Genentech patients as part of the Access Solutions Team, a business unit that helps people gain access to Genentech medications by helping them understand their insurance, and providing co-pay assistance or support if an insurance company denies coverage. They can also provide the medications for free to people who meet certain financial criteria.

Employees spend most of their time on the phones talking to patients and health care providers, and are “focused on making sure we provide the best possible support we can to patients prescribed Genentech medications,” Scott said.

Genentech did work with the state’s economic development arm, Business Oregon, on incentives for this project. The agreement isn’t yet signed, but it is expected to be a forgivable loan for roughly $500,000, said Business Oregon spokesperson Nathan Buehler. The agreement will require the creation of new jobs at specified wages and is based on income tax revenue of those new jobs over two years.

According to the state’s program, beneficiaries from the Business Expansion Program must create 50 or more full-time jobs. Fifty of those new employees must earn 150 percent of the state or county average wage, whichever is less.

Scott declined to give specific salary ranges for Portland, saying that the workers are a mix of front-line and management. She noted, however, that “Genentech has a robust benchmarking process to develop compensation for roles. We pride ourselves for being a top employer and offering robust compensation and benefits."

The city did not offer incentives for this facility but has been talking to the company, said Prosper Portland spokesperson Shawn Ulhman. The city plans to work with the company to develop a workforce pipeline.

Janet LaBar, president and CEO of Greater Portland Inc., a regional economic development organization, said Genentech’s decision to boost its investment in the area shows the region’s appeal for global firms.

“A competitive cost of doing business and livability attracts the world’s industry leaders, and we’re thrilled to welcome Genentech’s growth and employees to our region,” she said in a written statement.

Genentech first landed in Oregon in 2006, when it selected the Hillsboro site for its manufacturing expansion. That facility, which also received state incentives, opened in 2008.

Placing the Access Solutions team in Portland also plays into the region’s resurgence as a destination for high-tech customer service centers, driven in part by the city’s highly educated workforce. Companies including short-term rental marketplace Airbnb, website maker Squarespace, ticket seller SeatGeek, cryptocurrency exchange Coinbase, and resale shopping app Mercari all have customer care offices in Portland and collectively employ hundreds of employees.

Correction/Clarification

Genentech’s Hillsboro facility opened in 2008. A previous version of story had misstated the opening date.

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