

Seeding Labs

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Nina Dudnik, a molecular biologist from Harvard, is the founder and CEO of the Boston-based [*Seeding Labs*](#). The non-profit organization tries to bridge the resource gap between research labs in the U.S. and the developing world, starting with lab equipment. This social entrepreneur is on the Mass High Tech council's list of women to watch in 2011.

As a Fulbright scholar, Dudnik did a research stint in the Africa Rice Center in Cote d'Ivoire. This was in 2000. She realized that the technicians at the lab – some of whom did not even have a college degree -- were no less skilled at scientific work compared to their peers elsewhere. But they lacked material resources to go further. When she returned to the U.S., she spoke about this resource-crunch to her colleagues. She told them about African researchers who would carefully rinse out disposable pipette tips and re-use it several times.

Dudnik realized she could help even as a student. She and her lab friends would scour the hallways of Harvard labs for old but serviceable scientific equipment that researchers leave right outside their labs. That was a common occurrence whenever they upgraded, or when they did a spot of spring-cleaning. The first shipment went to schools in South America. As word got around, researchers began to contact this core group with donations. Dudnik decided to take the idea further. In 2007, she received the [Echoing Green fellowship](#) to officially launch *Seeding Labs* and expand its operations. Nina is a [2010 TED Global Fellow](#).

Seeding Labs does not randomly send out containers full of research equipment to the Third World, hoping they will make good use of it. Instead researchers from elsewhere send an application. When a match is found for items on their wish list, they pay a small percentage of the original cost of the equipment. That covers shipping and handling and they are responsible for clearing it from customs. Thus far, Dudnik has worked with labs in 16 countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America and also helps recipients get training to fix the equipment when it breaks down.

Working in the lab is not the solitary experience many imagine it to be, but work interactions are limited to a small subset of people, says Dudnik who considers herself a people person. “Running *Seeding Labs*, I get to spend time with an incredible range of people across the world and across many sectors. On any given day, I might talk to a pharmaceutical executive in Boston, a bench scientist in Ghana, a student in Cambridge or Kenya, social media marketers, lawyers, accountants, warehouse managers... I learn so much every day, and get to have conversations I never imagined,” she adds.

