



Meagan McLeod has been an employee of Illumina since 2017.
Photo by Ian Tuttle

Illumina careers: Expanding access to NGS in emerging markets

How Meagan McLeod helped introduce the MiSeq i100 Series to the world in pursuit of genomics for all

THE ILLUMINA MISEQ i100 and MiSeq i100 Plus Systems,¹ two powerful, compact benchtop sequencers,² are revolutionizing sequencing for all labs—especially smaller, decentralized labs. The instrument itself is customer installable, so any lab can independently set up and operate it without extensive support or resources. It also brings next-generation sequencing to labs in regions that don't have dry ice shipping, since its reagents can be transported and stored at room temperature.

But how do customers get access to this instrument and enjoy all the benefits? How does a researcher in Thailand find a user document in the Thai language, or a scientist at a Peruvian university get his hands on this new technology?

Meagan McLeod, Illumina staff global market entry manager, specializes in country readiness for new product launches. As part of a global launch excellence team, she supports the commercialization of new products to make sure Illumina and its partners can sell and ship to countries around the world.

McLeod and her team tackled a list of 172 countries

for the MiSeq i100, about 150 of which needed to be available right at launch. This represents the most countries ever enabled for an Illumina platform launch. Each country (or group of countries) can have many different compliance requirements with varying lead times based on their complexity. McLeod starts by performing a market entry assessment and building a timeline for country-specific readiness in partnership with Illumina product management.

To achieve country readiness, including market access approvals, McLeod and her colleagues collaborate with multiple groups at Illumina. They work with instrument and trade compliance, regulatory, and regional commercial teams. For some countries, the application process could take six months, and regulatory bodies might change their requirements at any time. McLeod's job means constantly reviewing the country list and assessing changing needs. She was particularly excited about South Africa: The team had initially forecast a very long lead time based on the market entry requirements. They'd estimated that they wouldn't be ready by full

1. [illumina.com/systems/sequencing-platforms/miseq-i100.html](https://www.illumina.com/systems/sequencing-platforms/miseq-i100.html)

2. [illumina.com/systems/sequencing-platforms/benchtop-sequencers.html](https://www.illumina.com/systems/sequencing-platforms/benchtop-sequencers.html)

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commercial release. But they worked diligently with Illumina's instrument compliance team to reassign priorities and start early on countries with complex requirements. In the end, they closed the gap in time. "It was exciting to provide this update to the commercial team, to say we'd unlocked South Africa, as there was an immediate opportunity to sell in country."

Once they have the instrument, customers also need clear directions to use it. The product documentation for the MiSeq i100 Series was translated into more than 40 languages. "I enjoyed working with our technical communications team, who spearheaded this effort," she says. "It was a significant milestone because it enables our customers and partners to install it independently, using resources in their own language, and it was available immediately upon the full commercial release."

For all MiSeq i100 Series product documentation, go to: support.illumina.com/sequencing/sequencing_instruments/miseq-i100-plus/documentation.html

For the MiSeq i100, the launch team also focused on unlocking countries early for prelaunch customer testing and feedback. From Canada to France to Australia, specific labs received early access to the new instrument.³

"I find the work incredibly valuable. It ties back to the efforts with the Global Health Access Initiative,"⁴ she says, referring to the program that supports access to pathogen sequencing tools for public health in low- and middle-income countries. "We're giving access to a wider range of customers and providing the tools they need to make these important discoveries."

McLeod is also passionate about representing Illumina employees in their regions. Having a global role means advocating for commercial teams everywhere. "Part of my job is amplifying their voices throughout the market entry process. The regional teams provide valuable cultural and commercial considerations, which I then communicate back to my leaders. For instance, they provided crucial feedback on engaging our channel partners early for country readiness."

Career path to the present

McLeod has enjoyed several roles at Illumina. She began in customer care for the Americas in 2017. It was a lightning-fast education in Illumina's products

and processes, as well as its customers. She became a jack of all trades, solving problems, entering orders, answering customer inquiries, and supporting system updates. McLeod also interacted with Illumina's supply chain teams, sales, marketing, finance, global information services, and others.

She saw firsthand how serious customers are about getting their consumables shipped quickly and reliably, and it really impressed on her the importance of their work in advancing genomics and improving human health. "I was one touchpoint in the customer journey, and I heard from our customers the importance of receiving orders on time. It enabled them to keep making progress. And we're there to support them in doing this amazing work."

After a year, she joined a specially focused customer care team and was chosen to be a part of the commercial integration team for Illumina's acquisition of Edico Genome, the original developers of DRAGEN secondary analysis software. The acquisition required her to dive deeply into the order-to-fulfillment processes for Illumina software informatics products—and in 2019, she became the global customer care lead on a project to enhance them. "First, I learned about our portfolio, and about building processes and improving systems to support our future roadmap," she says. "Second, I had to be the point person on a global scale. I enhanced my communication and leadership skills and gained an understanding of the nuances of how we operate in different regions."

In 2020, she joined another process improvement team and continued what she calls her "journey with informatics," which only grew more valuable as Illumina acquired new software technologies. She was part of the commercial integration team for Illumina's acquisitions of both BlueBee and Emedgene and she consulted on new product launches, which led to her current role.

McLeod credits her rise through the ranks to her openness—not her formal education: "I have a business degree; I don't have a life sciences background. I said yes to opportunities that were scary because they required skills I hadn't yet developed. Along the way, my managers supported my career growth." She believes a person can achieve a program management role by being adept at problem solving and willing to build relationships. "Focus on the people aspect of a job. Being able to work with diverse stakeholders in different positions and influencing without authority is not always taught in school, and it has a significant impact in achieving your goals."

3. illumina.com/company/news-center/feature-articles/MiSeq100-three-testimonials.html

4. illumina.com/company/news-center/press-releases/press-release-details.html?newsid=433da4b8-ab13-4d04-a4ab-9e65cc3341c4

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McLeod has also been able to build relationships and try on several hats through her involvement in the Women at Illumina Network, or WIN. Over the last four years, she has gone from its program lead to co-chair to chair, as of January. Employee resource groups like WIN formally engage people to grow professionally and positively impact the company. In March, they held networking and volunteer events to celebrate International Women's Day. "Our mission is to catalyze gender equity at all levels of the organization through engaging, connecting, and growing current and potential employees. We need everyone's support to make progress. I am passionate about the work we do in WIN. The opportunity to connect with colleagues and provide support across the organization is a valuable experience." ♦

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To read about Illumina staff UX designers, go to: illumina.com/company/news-center/feature-articles/MiSeq-i100-UX-Design.html

To read about Illumina systems integration scientists, go to: illumina.com/company/news-center/feature-articles/how-two-systems-integration-scientists-ensure-a-successful-end-t.html
