



Colleges and universities aiming to bolster their entrepreneurial ecosystem support will find significant value in the internal alignment and harmonization of entrepreneurship programs and initiatives. Within the academic landscape, institutions often operate these programs independently, leading to missed opportunities for collaboration, resource optimization, and a unified culture conducive to entrepreneurship and innovation. This conversation guide is designed to facilitate purposeful discussions among stakeholders, including faculty, students, administrators, and external partners, with the aim of identifying, defining, and harmonizing entrepreneurship programs within your institution.

* NOTE: This conversation guide has been written with colleges and universities in mind. However, it can be easily adapted to any organization, especially larger ones, that participate in ecosystem building. All organizations, not only colleges and universities, can benefit from creating stronger internal connections.

Start the Conversation:

- To ensure a productive conversation, it's essential to assemble a diverse group of participants representing various academic departments and administrative units within your institution. Prior to sending out invitations, compile a comprehensive list of sub-communities and departments that play a role in supporting entrepreneurship and the broader ecosystem. Identify key individuals within these subgroups who are actively involved in leadership roles. The success of this discussion relies on engaging a broad cross-section of stakeholders. Consider the inclusion of external perspectives, particularly those of entrepreneurs, to gain insights into existing connections or missed opportunities within the institution from an external stakeholder viewpoint.
- Convene your internal stakeholders (and external stakeholders, if appropriate) to explore ways to strengthen internal connections for better support of the external ecosystem. You have the flexibility to organize this conversation in various formats, such as face-to-face or virtual meetings, asynchronous discussions through email or discussion boards, or even one-on-one or small group discussions.

Just Getting Started?

If you and your colleagues are just beginning to engage your college or university in ecosystem building, you may feel the need to do some groundwork before you dive into conversations. Take a look at [Getting Ready for Ecosystem Conversations](#) for ideas and considerations for engaging both your internal ecosystem as well as with external partners.

Build an Equitable Ecosystem!

Ecosystems thrive when they are inclusive, fostering connections, conversations, and cultures that embrace the entire community. Before undertaking this or any of the conversations on C-CUBE, review [Centering Access, Belonging, Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity in Ecosystem Building](#). Apply the five questions under "Putting it into Action" as you plan this conversation.





- Ensure your participant list includes individuals who have been actively engaged in the local ecosystem and may have encountered communication breakdowns or untapped collaborative possibilities. This may encompass student entrepreneurs, faculty researchers, and community members who have interacted with the university's existing programs.
- Start by introducing some ideas and topics related to creating better connections between and among entrepreneurship programs:
- Resources and Infrastructure: The infrastructure supporting entrepreneurship and innovation, such as technology transfer offices, innovation hubs, and incubators. Note that one outcome of the conversation might be highlighting how these resources interact with various departments on campus and identify areas for improved connections to ensure accessibility for students and faculty across all disciplines.
- Curricular Connections: The integration of entrepreneurship education into the curriculum and its availability across majors. The ensuing conversation might explore ways to foster interdisciplinary collaboration to enhance entrepreneurial thinking.
- Research and Creative Activity: How the institution's research and creative activities contribute to ecosystem building. Part of the conversation that will follow could be examining whether research support activities, such as innovation and entrepreneurship offices, need better integration with other units.
- Community Engagement: Strategies for gaining a comprehensive understanding of the institution's connections with the community. As part of the conversation that is to follow, participants might identify areas where improved internal connections can strengthen relationships with community stakeholders and address varying perspectives on the community across campus.
- This conversation guide uses a “triad conversation” method to help participants explore connections across different programs or initiatives, three at a time. Participants will be assigned to triads (be strategic about which programs and initiatives will benefit most from exploring connections), and in three rounds of discussion, 10 - 15 minutes each, they will alternate playing three roles:
 - Speaker: The speaker talks about what they see as opportunity for better alignment with other programs/initiatives at the institution, in particular highlighting alignment with the efforts that the Listener and Observer represent. The speaker can talk about potential barriers to alignment, resources available to improve alignment—whatever comes to mind.

Consider instructing speakers to start by identifying existing internal connections that actively support entrepreneurship and innovation. Starting with some examples can not only highlight successes but also to identify opportunities for replication or expansion, enabling broader campus coverage.





- Listener: The listener's role is simply to hear what the speaker has to say and ask clarifying questions. The listener's role is not to respond to or counter what the speaker says—just to help clarify and deepen the speaker's comments.
 - Observer: The observer's job is simply to watch how things unfold between the speaker and listener, and to capture the conversation. They should be mindful not only of what is said, but also body language and facial expressions, noting their observations about what might not be surfacing.
- Across three rounds, exploring collaborative opportunities and shared needs, participants play a different role for each of the 10 - 15 minutes rounds. After the three rounds (30 - 45 minutes), provide time for participants to de-brief, starting with what people noticed when they were in the observer role.
 - Depending on available time, you could consider doing multiple sets of triad conversations, with participants switching groups for each set.
 - To enhance the triads, consider inviting ecosystem partners, especially entrepreneurs, to speak before the rounds begin. By sharing their experiences and insights, external partners might pinpoint instances where improved interconnectedness across the university could have expedited their ecosystem building efforts. External stakeholders' input can provide valuable context and framing for the triad conversations.
 - Following the triad conversations, including triad debriefs, reconvene the larger group to share the ideas generated regarding internal connections. As participants share their insights, look for common themes and patterns that can inform high-impact investments. Identify potential new programs, partnerships, and resource allocations that can extend the reach of entrepreneurship initiatives across campus. Develop an action plan for testing and implementing these ideas when they are ready for deployment.

