



Technology already plays a role in your ecosystem. You may have innovation-based start-ups that are developing digital products, and enterprises of any size and sector rely on technology in their day-to-day work. It's sometimes overlooked that technology can also provide a means to advance ecosystem building, enabling, and improving the conversations that participants have as they create connections and build successful initiatives. This conversation guide provides a framework for understanding and talking about existing and potential technology approaches to ecosystem building and will help you address some common pitfalls in using technology to build collaboration.

Start the Conversation:

- Gather some key stakeholders in your ecosystem to explore ways that technology can support your ecosystem work. You can gather stakeholders in a face-to-face or virtual meeting. You might also consider whether it's possible to carry out this "conversation" asynchronously via email, a discussion board, or across a series of one-on-one or small group discussions.
- Be sure to include at least one entrepreneur in your conversation. As the primary beneficiaries of the value that your ecosystem creates, it's vital that entrepreneurs participate in the conversation.
- Start by surveying the environment yourself. Review the communication and collaboration technology that you use in your work directly, and that is used by those you already collaborate with. Keep this simple, just jot down the tools you use most often, be they email, texts, a collaboration environment like Google docs, Slack, Teams, etc. Speak with 1 or 2 colleagues outside your immediate office or institution—or send an email—and ask them to list the same. Make a list with all these tools (and any comments that people shared with you about these tools).
- Bring a group (no more than 15 is ideal) of ecosystem stakeholders from diverse roles and perspectives together to talk about how technology could help the ecosystem collectively. As an initial activity, share the list of tools (and comments if any) you have collected in the survey and explain that the goal of this work is to create a plan for leveraging technology tools (both those discussed and potential new ones) for ecosystem building. Guide the conversation about tools towards identifying opportunities, rather than letting it become a gripe session. After about 15 minutes, move to the next stage.

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.





- With the context that you've set, ask the group to brainstorm ideas about specific ways in which technology is aiding in ecosystem building or could help. Examples can be existing practices that could be expanded or improved as well as new ideas.
- Begin organizing each of these ideas into a Technology Impact Canvas using a format similar to the one below—recreate the canvas on a whiteboard or in a shared online space. Use a separate canvas for each ecosystem challenge or opportunity that the group would like to explore.
- Building on the earlier discussions, incorporate the ideas into the canvas structure including the challenge/opportunity box and other boxes if information comes up (there will be a later opportunity to work through those columns). The canvas will be used in small group work and will become the framework for a technology plan.
- Work as a large group to identify three key challenges/opportunities that are the most important to address for maximum ecosystem impact and enter these into three separate canvases. After these three are identified, form three small groups, and have each work on a specific challenge or opportunity—the charge for these groups is to imagine they are a team assigned to work out a plan for implementing technology for this challenge.
- The groups should discuss the challenge, and complete as much of the canvas as they can, not neglecting consideration of risks and barriers and how they might be addressed. As they work, they should select a person who will report out to the larger group when everyone comes together.
- After the groups have worked on their canvas, bring everyone together to report out, and invite one person from each group to summarize their discussion. Encourage conversation and feedback on the feasibility and potential impact of each approach.

After this report-out is complete, it's time to discuss putting these technology plans into action. There are several key points for the group to discuss:

- What next, who can turn these plans into action, on what timeline and with what resources?
- How do the plans developed in these conversations align with ecosystem goals in general?
- How will these plans dovetail with other activities already underway—integrating into existing programs? In what ways will they require new activities?
- What will success look like? What measures of effectiveness will be used? How will data be collected and whom will they be reported to?





- Technology's capacity building potential is often hobbled by insufficient training, unrealistic timelines, and resistance to change. How can you be intentional about building buy-in and giving the users of the technology the support they need.
- How does technology relate to other ecosystem building activities you are undertaking, whether based in conversation guides from this toolkit or other sources?





Technology Impact Canvas

Ecosystem Challenge or Opportunity		Objectives
Technology-Based Strategies	Technology-Based Resources	Technology-Based Activities
Risks and Barriers		Notes/Questions

