

Ecosystem Support Organizations: Your Extended Team

Introduction

Startups don't grow in isolation. Even the best ideas need a support system—people and programs who know what it means to go from concept to company. That's where Ecosystem Support Organizations (ESOs) come in.

What is an ESO?

These are programs, centers, or networks—often outside the University—that exist to help entrepreneurs build ventures. Some help you test your ideas with real customers. Others provide workshops, mentorship, or connections to capital. Some are regional; others are national. A few are specialized in biotech, education, or government contracting. Think of them as coaches, connectors, and cheerleaders.

Why They Matter:

Whether you're working from a lab, a laptop, or a makerspace, ESOs can be your on-ramp to the broader entrepreneurial world. They can:

- Help you validate your idea with real users or customers
- Guide you through federal grant applications or local pitch competitions
- Connect you to experienced founders, advisors, and investors
- Offer accelerator programs or founder residencies
- Provide visibility and feedback from the community

A Few Examples You Might Encounter:

- **Customer Validation Programs** (e.g., I-Corps, Launchpad): Focused on testing your idea in the market
- **Accelerators** (e.g., 434 Accelerator): Structured, time-bound programs to help you build and scale
- **Funding Sources** (e.g., CAV Angels, SBIR/STTR): From local angel groups to federal research dollars
- **Entrepreneurship Support Organizations** (e.g., CBIC, CIC, The Hub CVA): Great for networking, workshops, and pitch nights
- **University Units** (e.g., i.Lab, Batten, LVG): UVA-led programs and organizations offering capital, coaching, and community

How to Engage:

You don't need to know where to start. That's our job. Come to the Enterprise Studio, and we'll help you figure out which programs match your goals, stage, and venture type.

You've got the idea. Let's find the right people to help you build it.