

# OPEN



**VENTUREWELL™**  
idea to impact

**MARCH 18-20, 2024**  
**SAN DIEGO, CA**

## **Event Report**

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## Innovating Futures Together

The VentureWell OPEN 2024 conference took place March 18-20 in San Diego, CA and brought together over 355 attendees from across the United States, Puerto Rico, Canada and Singapore, including innovation and entrepreneurship (I&E) higher education faculty, staff, administrators, researchers, and leaders in the STEM fields. Our theme this year was Innovating Futures Together and our welcoming and inclusive community shared the latest trends in I&E research and best practices, while leaving ample time for attendees to network with inclusive innovation and sustainability changemakers from across the nation.



## OPEN 2024 by the Numbers

**355** individuals attended, 61% first-time attendees, and nearly 70% having more than five years in the I&E field

**10,000+** unique visitors to the OPEN webpages between August 2023 and March 2024

**45%** of attendees from U.S. Institutions were from Minority Serving Institutions

**44** sessions offered at OPEN 2024

**94%** of respondents said the conference fulfilled their reasons for attending

**140** presenters spoke at OPEN 2024



“ It was a high energy environment with people looking to do the work and not just talk about it.”

– OPEN 2024 attendee

## Pre-conference Workshops & Off-Site Tour to the University of California San Diego (UC San Diego)

The convening opened with two pre-conference workshops: the **Innovation Futures Fellowship** workshop, where VentureWell Course & Program grantees delved into the Universal Design for Learning educational framework and equity-centered design as tools for fostering belonging in higher education settings; and the **Reimagining STEM I&E by Centering DEI** workshop, which gathered STEM I&E DEI experts from underrepresented groups to design a new vision for STEM I&E that will be welcoming, comfortable, engaging, safe, and inspiring for all. A small group also went on an off-site I&E tour at UC San Diego where they experienced the Design & Innovation building, a 74,000-square-foot space dedicated to sparking disruptive ideas and teaching entrepreneurship and design. Additionally, they heard from multiple UC San Diego leaders about the latest developments and exciting initiatives at their institution. The waitlist for this tour was over 100 people!



### Top 3 organization types by attendee

**73%** U.S. Higher Education Institutions

**14%** Business & Industry

**7%** Philanthropic & Nonprofits

### Top 3 organizational roles by attendee

**32%** Faculty

**18%** Higher education administrator

**14%** Staff

### Top conference aspects that drove satisfaction

Networking • Learning new content

## Conference Program

From highly immersive sessions to a mix of networking opportunities that ranged from content-rich and topically focused to fun and informal, OPEN 2024 once again demonstrated why it is the premier innovation and entrepreneurship experience in higher education.

OPEN 2024 kicked off with an engaging and interactive main stage panel focused on the rise of artificial intelligence and virtual reality in higher education I&E featuring speakers from Qualcomm, Morgan State University, Cal State University, UC San Diego and Luminosity Labs. Subsequent main stage sessions throughout the event continued to inspire and engage attendees. These sessions showcased faculty and student speakers discussing topics such as a creating immersive learning environments, the roles of HBCUs, MSIs, and TCUs in STEM ecosystems, and building an interdisciplinary framework for assessing the impact of STEM entrepreneurship education programs.

This year's conference featured 44 dynamic and interactive breakout sessions encompassing a range of leading-edge content in higher education innovation and entrepreneurship, as well as a selection of hand-curated foundational topics for those new to the field.

## Most Highly-Rated OPEN Sessions

How **Integrated Generative AI** Resources Can Accelerate the Time to Truth for Customer Discovery Process and Product-market Fit

Beyond the Buzzwords - The Rise of **Artificial Intelligence and Virtual Reality** in Higher Education Innovation & Entrepreneurship

The **Power of AI** in the Innovation & Entrepreneurship Classroom

Creative Approaches to Encourage **Entrepreneurial Mindset**

**OPEN Ignites:** Round Table Discussions



As a team, we don't always see each other [and] much is done via email and zoom/teams. It was nice to be together with members of our own university which led to many brainstorming ideas thinking about applying information we just learned about. That was very powerful. Now comes the tough part, pulling through on our ideas!"

- OPEN 2024 attendee

# Sustainable Practice Impact Award

Rejoule was honored with VentureWell's 2024 Sustainable Practice Impact Award for creating a circular economy for lithium-ion electric vehicle (EV) batteries. As EV sales skyrocket, the need to measure EV battery life and find uses for partially depleted batteries has become more urgent: these are the problems Rejoule has stepped in to solve.

The award, presented in partnership with The Lemelson Foundation, honors individuals, companies, or institutions that have made an exceptional contribution toward developing clean technologies, implementing sustainable practices in their businesses, or providing sustainability-focused educational opportunities to university students.



Zora Chung, Co-Founder and COO of Rejoule

Read more about ReJoule's story [here](#)

# Innovating Futures Spotlight Poster Session

During this 90-minute reception-style session, presenters shared their research or teaching practice spotlighting unique, innovative, and future-focused approaches for engaging in I&E within higher education. Participants casted their votes for the "most likely to adopt" and "most innovative" ideas.

“ The networking environment is really strong and positive.”  
 – OPEN 2024 attendee



## OPENminds

Every year our OPEN conference concludes with the OPENminds Innovator Showcase—a signature event celebrating the work of VentureWell E-Team Program grantees. Each student team presents their innovation and practices their pitch with hundreds of OPEN attendees, who then invest up to \$3 million “Venture Bucks” in the team whose invention they find most promising.

**Audience Choice Prize:**  
**Car Seat Companion from Elizabeth City State University**  
*\$4,000 prize*

Their invention, aimed at reducing child hot-car deaths, uses a Bluetooth-enabled pad that fits underneath a child in a car. The pad sends an alert to a parent or guardian via smartphone to notify them that a child is still in their car seat if the adult gets more than five meters away.

**Second Place:**  
**WAVED Medical from the University of Maine**  
*\$2,000 prize*

Their innovation is an image-based algorithm technology that identifies areas of high risk for patients who are more likely to develop breast cancer. This will identify more patients who could benefit from preventative care.

**Third Place:**  
**U-Care from Texas A&M University**  
*\$1,000 prize*

Their invention is a reusable biosensor that detects ions based on changes in electrical currents, notifying users if a catheter-associated urinary tract infection (CAUTI) is present. Too often, CAUTIs in older people are misdiagnosed, leading to hospitalization, sepsis, and even death; this invention helps prevent misdiagnoses.



Great group of attendees with useful knowledge and willing to share and develop networks.”

– OPEN 2024 attendee



We deeply appreciate our sponsors, whose generous support makes this conference possible.



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