



Application Guidelines

Introduction

VentureWell is on a mission to cultivate a diverse and inclusive pipeline of inventors, innovators, and entrepreneurs driven to solve the world’s biggest challenges and create lasting impact. We have pursued this work—at the intersection of science and technology and innovation and entrepreneurship (I&E)—for over 28 years. During this time, we have supported faculty development to advance involvement in STEM I&E, and we are dedicated to evolving our programs to meet the emerging needs of our higher education audience. We strive to do so in a way that fosters institutional change in I&E ecosystems, advances diversity and inclusion, and promotes environmental and social sustainability. We consistently uphold our organizational values: to collaborate for impact, to live innovation, to bring integrity always, to interact with consideration and candor, and to deliver excellence.

Commitment to Sustainability and Inclusive Innovation

As climate change intensifies, we are strengthening our organizational commitment to sustainability and prioritizing environmental and social impact in all of our higher education fellowships and grants. Additionally, greater priority is being placed on STEM I&E ecosystem building efforts that encourage research translation integrated with environmental and social sustainability. Our grants and fellowships also emphasize inclusive innovation, recognizing that solutions to complex sustainability problems will require insights drawn from diverse perspectives, as well as the removal of systemic barriers that limit inclusive I&E. For definitions of each of these terms, see the [Ecosystem Futures Fellowship Proposal Sandbox](#).

Overview

The VentureWell Ecosystem Futures Fellowship (referenced herein as the fellowship) is a one-year experience that supports higher education leaders as they advance STEM I&E ecosystem growth centered in core themes of environmental and social sustainability and inclusive innovation. Fellowship teams consisting of at least one faculty member and one other institutional employee will create STEM I&E ecosystem growth plans that integrate sustainability as well as access and participation for traditionally underrepresented, underestimated, and emerging groups, specifically those who identify as Black, Latinx, and Indigenous, women from all backgrounds, individuals who identify as coming from low-income backgrounds, and others who are marginalized due to racism, sexism, classism, and/or other forms of marginalization (referenced herein as URGs).

The central goal of the fellowship is to build institutional support with faculty and university leadership to embed I&E in courses, co-curricular and extracurricular activities, and policies and structures. This will create a robust campus environment that offers multiple opportunities for student engagement, enhancing their learning in and outside the classroom and through various community settings. This approach will expand students' pathways and participation in I&E activities, showcasing the inventive mindset of emerging talent in STEM. We are dedicated to the future of STEM innovation and entrepreneurship and understand the crucial involvement of student innovators on their journeys.

VentureWell Ecosystem Futures Fellows will each receive a \$10,000 award along with a \$7,500 travel stipend for their commitment to engage in leadership development activities, on-campus immersive experiences (OCIEs), communities of practice, and VentureWell convenings, in order to prepare for future I&E funding opportunities and to implement their ecosystem growth plans, for a total of \$35,000 per team.

Overview continued

During the fellowship year, fellows will:

1. **Analyze** their campus STEM I&E ecosystem through the lens of equity and inclusion, and social and environmental sustainability
2. **Identify** currently existing campus strengths, assets, gaps, and barriers to a robust STEM I&E ecosystem
3. **Create** a STEM I&E ecosystem growth plan that addresses their campus gaps and barriers with the goal of strengthening their ecosystems, using a multi-collaborator approach
4. **Prepare** to apply for the VentureWell 2026 ecosystem impact challenge grant or other funding opportunities that will support fellows in executing their STEM I&E ecosystem growth plans

Requirements

Time Commitment

The VentureWell Ecosystem Futures Fellowship's strict time commitment guarantees that participants are fully engaged and immersed, enhancing their learning and growth. The structured schedule of activities and deliverables outlined below fosters dedication, creating an environment where fellows can deeply collaborate with mentors and peers. By meeting this commitment, fellows showcase their dedication and gain maximum benefit from the program, equipping themselves with the skills and insights essential for future I&E leadership.

To ensure the best chance of facilitating meaningful change on your campus, VentureWell requires that fellowship applicants commit to full participation in all fellowship activities. If your fellowship team is selected, **both members of your team will be required to actively participate in the following events:**

- kickoff meeting (via Zoom) in March 2025
- three on-campus immersive experiences (OCIEs)
- VentureWell's annual conferences
- at least eight Community of Practice sessions (via Zoom), beginning April 2025

VentureWell Ecosystem Futures Fellowship Virtual Kickoff Meeting

VentureWell staff will facilitate a two-hour virtual kickoff via Zoom with orientation activities that will prepare you for a successful fellowship year. The date and time in March 2025 will be determined based on fellow availability.

On-Campus Immersive Experiences (OCIEs)

During OCIEs, fellows will travel to three higher education institutions to engage in experiential learning on campuses situated within STEM I&E ecosystems at various developmental stages. OCIEs will include campus tours, workshops, panel discussions, and growth plan work sessions. The dates and location of the first OCIE will be announced in January 2025.

Each fellow will receive a \$2,500 travel stipend before each of the three OCIEs (for a total of \$7,500) to support travel, lodging, and food costs associated with OCIE attendance.

VentureWell Annual Conferences

Fellows will have the opportunity to attend at least one VentureWell conference, where they will connect with others across disciplines and roles who are doing related STEM I&E ecosystem growth work. VentureWell conference registration fees will be waived for fellows.

Community of Practice

As part of the Ecosystem Futures Fellowship, fellows will join a Community of Practice that meets every four to six weeks via Zoom, beginning May 2025. Fellows must attend at least eight 50-minute sessions.

Community of Practice continued

[Wenger \(2011\)](#) describes Communities of Practice (CoPs) as “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.”

This definition succinctly captures three fundamental features of a CoP:

- The shared concern or passion of the participants
- The regular interactions among participants
- The learning and the improvements in “doing” that result

Fellows will play an active role in shaping the content and focus of CoPs to ensure that these meetings successfully support their fellowship work, connecting fellows to relevant resources, solutions to challenges, and other professionals doing similar work.

STEM I&E Ecosystem Growth Plan Creation and Collaborator Dialogue

A core requirement for the VentureWell Ecosystem Futures Fellowship is the creation of a STEM I&E ecosystem growth plan. Successful plan development will depend on each team’s ability to gather input from key ecosystem collaborators; therefore, fellows will engage in ongoing collaborator dialogue, including relevant campus administrators, students, and members of industry and government. Key collaborator input will inform initial ecosystem assessments; aid analysis of ecosystem strengths, gaps, and barriers; and support the creation of a sound STEM I&E ecosystem growth plan that centers environmental and social sustainability and inclusive innovation and is aligned with the needs of diverse collaborator groups. Fellows will be supported in these dialogues through the VentureWell Ecosystem Futures Fellowship resource library, OCIE workshops, and Communities of Practice.

Plan Presentation and Surveys

Fellowship teams will present their final STEM I&E Ecosystem Growth Plans to the public at the end of the fellowship year, demonstrating their learning and proposed implementation methods.

Fellows will also complete pre- and post-surveys, with the post-survey serving as the fellowship final report. The post-survey will ask fellows to submit their STEM I&E Growth Plan, reflections on their learning, feedback on the fellowship program, and information about how their work has changed over time. Report due dates and detailed requirements will be specified in the fellowship award letter. Fellowship team members will be prompted via email to complete required reports online. Failure to submit reports may jeopardize their eligibility for future awards.

Key Dates

August 28, 2024 – Applications open

September 12, 2024 – Fellowship information session #1

October 2, 2024 – Fellowship information session #2

October 30, 2024 – Applications close

January 2025 – Fellows notified of selection and publicly announced

March 2025 – Fellowship kickoff meeting (date TBD)

June 9-10, 2025 – OCIE #1 and VIA Summit in New Orleans, LA

April 2025-February 2026 – Communities of practice

Fall 2025 – OCIE #2 (October date and location TBD)

Spring or Summer 2026 – OCIE #3 and VIA Summit; Presentation of I&E Growth Plans and learnings (date TBD)

Eligibility

Fellowship team eligibility requirements are as follows:

- Applications must include two team members with affiliation at one or more accredited United States-based college or university.
- At least one team member must hold a faculty position.
- The second team member may be faculty, an I&E administrator or staff member, a representative from the president's or provost's office, a dean, or other relevant higher education staff member.
- VentureWell membership is required for institutions affiliated with applying teams. Membership is currently available at no cost. If you are unsure whether your organization has an active VentureWell membership, [check your status in our Membership Directory](#). If you have questions or need assistance, please contact membership@venturewell.org.

The following additional eligibility requirements apply:

- During each fellowship application cycle, proposals may be submitted by multiple teams from the same higher education institution. However, only the first two received submissions from the same institution will be reviewed.
- If not accepted the first time, proposals may only be resubmitted once.

We encourage submissions from the following groups:

- Historically Black Colleges and Universities; Tribal Colleges; Predominantly Black Institutions; Hispanic-Serving Institutions; Emerging Research Institutions; other institutions that demonstrate clear support for students from URGs in science and technology I&E
 - Community colleges
 - Teams with one or more members who voluntarily self-identify in their proposal narrative as members of one or more URGs in innovation and entrepreneurship, including Black, Latinx, Indigenous, women of any racial background, and people from low-income backgrounds
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How To Apply

Note: Applying to the VentureWell Ecosystem Futures Fellowship requires three actions: (1) verification of your institution's membership, (2) completion of the application questions, and (3) verification of support from leadership at your institution. The steps below walk you through this process. We highly recommend that you begin well in advance of the October 30th deadline to ensure all parts are successfully in place with time for you to reach out for help if issues arise.

1. Make sure your institution is a [VentureWell member](#). (Check your membership through our [member list](#). If you are not yet a member, apply for membership at least three days before the fellowship deadline—October 30, 2024—to ensure it is approved in time for you to submit a timely proposal.)
2. Make a copy of the [VentureWell Ecosystem Futures Fellowship Proposal Sandbox](#), and work on answering the questions with your fellowship partner. This step ensures that you have thoroughly considered all aspects of your proposed idea and that you have collaborated with your partner to provide the best possible information to reviewers.
3. Create an account or sign in to the [VentureWell Community Portal](#), locate the fellowship opportunity, and fill out the short application, copying and pasting the answers from your proposal sandbox. Note that you will be required to provide the email address of someone in a leadership role at your institution who can verify their support of your proposal. They will receive an automated email asking them to submit their initials as an indication of support. Your application cannot be submitted until this verification of support is provided. Please notify this person well in advance to expedite the process.
4. Submit your complete application no later than October 30, 2024 at 11:59 pm ET.

All communications related to your proposal will come from grants@venturewell.org. It is advised that you add this email address to your safe sender list in order to avoid important messages regarding your proposal being routed to spam folders.

Proposal Review and Selection

Proposals are evaluated by a group of reviewers who are external to VentureWell (i.e., not employed by VentureWell). They share recommendations with VentureWell staff, who make the final decision about who will be selected for each year's cohort based on factors such as likelihood of long term impact, cohort composition, and diversity of institutions. We are committed to creating a representative and diverse reviewer pool, and it is our goal that at least 50% of grant reviewers per cycle be women, underrepresented faculty in STEM I&E, and/or representatives from Minority Serving Institutions.

Review Criteria

Note: The parentheticals in this section refer to the questions in the [Fellowship Proposal Sandbox](#).

1. STEM I&E Ecosystem Development Plan (25%)

- a. Proposed plan and activities fit within the scope of the fellowship program. (Q2, Q3)
- b. Plan outlines what is new about their approach and why they believe this new approach will be successful. (Q5)
- c. The proposal will expand opportunities for students to participate in classroom activities and co- and extracurricular programs that allow them to explore their interests in I&E initiatives. (Q2, Q6, Q9)

2. Environmental and Social Sustainability (25%)

- a. Plan centers environmental and social sustainability as they are defined on page 1 of the proposal sandbox. (Q3)
- b. Environmental and social sustainability are considered in the collaborator impact statement. (Q9)

3. Inclusive Innovation (25%)

- a. Plan centers inclusive innovation as it is defined on page 1 of the proposal sandbox. (Q3)
- b. Inclusive innovation practices are considered in the collaborator impact statement. (Q6, Q9)
- c. Improvements to equitable access within STEM I&E are explicitly noted. (Q6)

4. Ecosystem Analysis (12.5%)

- a. Past attempts at ecosystem growth and limitations are described. (Q4)
- b. Potential challenges are identified. (Q8)

Review Criteria continued

5. Resource Identification (12.5%)

- a. Collaboration with university leadership is described as a method of scaling I&E impact and enhancing student pathways. (Q7)
- b. Narrative outlines potential costs, time, people, infrastructure, and other resource needs associated with accomplishing the team's goals. (Q10)

Award Notification

In January 2025, VentureWell will announce the 10 fellowship teams that will make up the 2025 cohort. Each fellowship team (two fellows) selected for the 2024 VentureWell Ecosystem Futures Fellowship will receive an award letter via email. The award letter agreement must be signed and submitted to Janna Walters-Gidseg, Grants Administration Officer, at grants@venturewell.org. Each fellowship team receives \$35,000 of funding (\$10,000 award and \$7,500 travel stipend per team member). Award funds will be disbursed directly to team members after the award letter is signed and returned to VentureWell. The \$7,500 travel stipend will be issued in three \$2,500 installments before each On-Campus Immersive Experience to offset the cost of travel.

Contact

- For questions related to your proposal: Jaime Wood-Riley, senior program officer, at jwoodriley@venturewell.org or Ernie Davis, senior program officer, at edavis@venturewell.org
- For questions related to the VentureWell Community Portal: support@venturewell.org

For award management questions: Janna Walters-Gidseg, grants administration officer, at grants@venturewell.org.



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