advancing equity: navigating new terrain

▶ mapping inclusive pathways
to entrepreneurship

VENTUREWELL™
idea to impact

about VentureWell

At VentureWell, we envision a world in which science and technology innovators have the support, training, and access to networks and resources they need to solve the world's most difficult problems. We foster collaboration among the best minds from research labs, classrooms, and beyond to advance innovation and entrepreneurship education and to provide unique opportunities for STEM students and researchers to fully realize their potential to improve the world.

Since our founding in 1995, we've supported more than 12,000 early-stage innovators and helped launch over 2,300 ventures that have raised $1.8 billion in funding. These ventures have reached millions of people in over 50 countries with technological advancements in fields such as biotechnology, healthcare, sustainable energy and materials, and solutions for low-resource settings.

We are proud that leading institutions, from foundations to government agencies to major businesses, support our mission to transform higher education and technology entrepreneurship. The Lemelson Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, National Science Foundation (NSF), the U.S. Department of State, National Institutes of Health (NIH), and USAID are among those who recognize ours as a powerful model for supporting emerging STEM innovators and the entrepreneurship ecosystems that are critical to their success.

Visit **www.venturewell.org** to learn more.

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introduction

As faculty members and entrepreneurship center directors, our collective responsibility is to create equitable and inclusive spaces that provide direction and support to advance the ideas of our students. Individuals from groups that are underrepresented in S&T I&E and who do not self-identify as entrepreneurs need to be invited, validated, and shown how the skills, knowledge, and networks they can access through entrepreneurship programs and resources can enable them to meet both their personal goals and their goals as innovators.

To ensure there is broad access to your center or program and to engage more students, it's important to first establish conditions and mindsets that enable you and your staff to promote and support ever-broadening versions of entrepreneurship. The following strategies can help to establish a welcoming environment in which to introduce all of your students to new concepts, pathways, strategies, and ways of thinking, in order to support them in designing their own entrepreneurial journeys:

- **Acknowledge, listen, and be willing to unlearn** previous assumptions about who represents and drives innovation—and how they do it.

- **Design your space to foster a sense of belonging** for students from any background, lived experience, or understanding of innovation and entrepreneurship.

- **Build your staff to include people from a range of identities**, and reflect diversity and inclusion in the visuals and content of your program materials, website, and social media.

- **Use welcoming and inclusive language** that embraces diverse descriptors and definitions of entrepreneurship and success (e.g. problem solvers, changemakers).
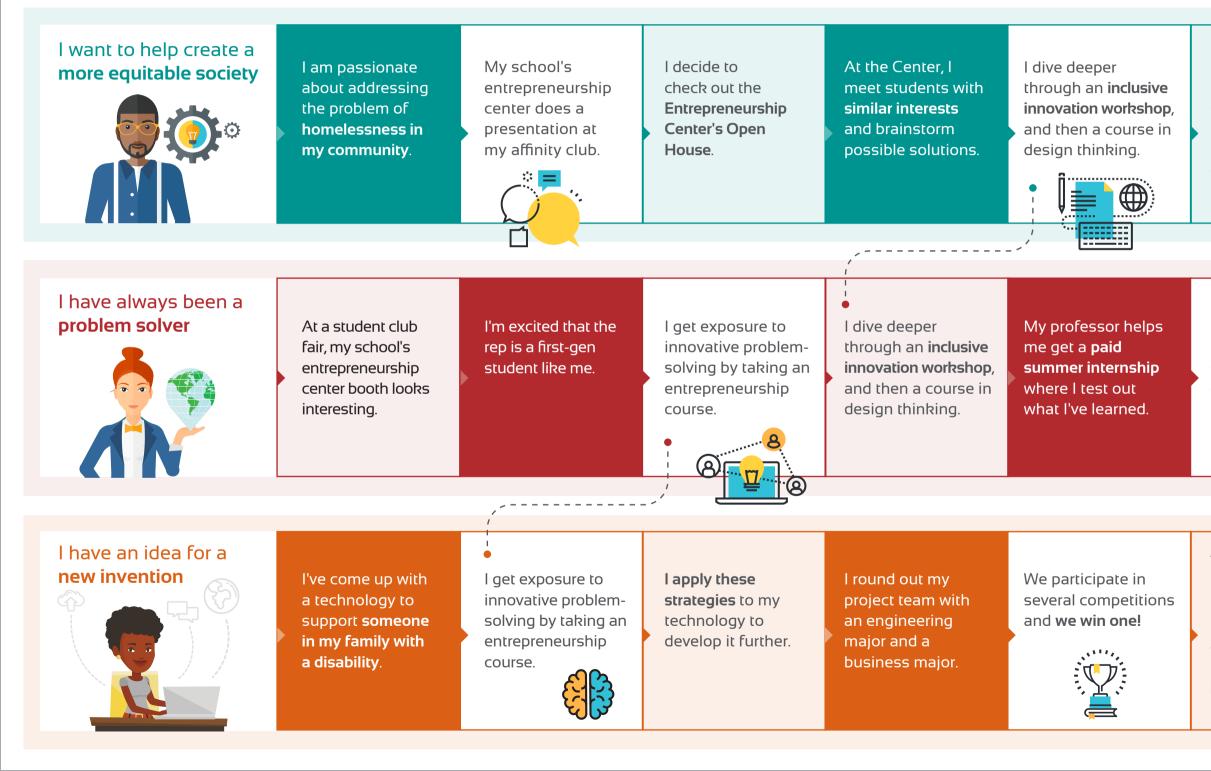
inclusive pathways to entrepreneurship

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Early-stage innovators thrive when their diverse motivations and personal measures of success are validated. Often described as "filling the pipeline," this concept is perhaps better framed as "building pathways to success for people with great ideas." **Anyone can be an entrepreneur**, and providing signposts to guide those who self-identify as problem solvers, social activists, innovators, and founders towards joining your programs—or creating their own pathways to and through I&E—can and should take multiple, fluid forms. Here are three examples.

I want to help create a more equitable society

I am passionate about addressing the problem of **homelessness in my community**.	My school's entrepreneurship center does a presentation at my affinity club.	I decide to check out the **Entrepreneurship Center's Open House**.	At the Center, I meet students with **similar interests** and brainstorm possible solutions.	I dive deeper through an **inclusive innovation workshop**, and then a course in design thinking.	I apply inclusive thinking and problem solving strategies to build out my solution through a field experience.	After graduation, I plan to implement my solution and **make a social impact in my community**.

I have always been a problem solver

At a student club fair, my school's entrepreneurship center booth looks interesting.	I'm excited that the rep is a first-gen student like me.	I get exposure to innovative problem-solving by taking an entrepreneurship course.	I dive deeper through an **inclusive innovation workshop**, and then a course in design thinking.	My professor helps me get a **paid summer internship** where I test out what I've learned.	I realize I can apply my entrepreneurial skills in an existing company.	I accept a job on a team where we use an inclusive, entrepreneurial mindset to **develop creative solutions to problems**.

I have an idea for a new invention

I've come up with a technology to support **someone in my family with a disability**.	I get exposure to innovative problem-solving by taking an entrepreneurship course.	**I apply these strategies** to my technology to develop it further.	I round out my project team with an engineering major and a business major.	We participate in several competitions and **we win one!**	The prize money helps us to start building our idea; then we attend an accelerator program to **validate our value proposition**.	**We launch our venture.**