



Understanding all the different beneficiaries for whom your ecosystem might create value is fundamental for ensuring that the ecosystem effectively meets the needs and aspirations of those it aims to serve. In this conversation, you’ll work with partners to identify who these beneficiaries are. The conversation will help you uncover not only who your ecosystem’s direct beneficiaries are, but also who is indirectly benefiting. You and your partners will delve into the specific types of value they seek from a healthy and effective ecosystem, providing insights into who they, in turn, are trying to deliver value to. You will probe into why entrepreneurs—as well as other key stakeholders and your own institution or organization—value a vibrant ecosystem.

Start the Conversation:

- Gather some key stakeholders in your ecosystem to explore who benefits from a healthy ecosystem. 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 asking conversation participants if they’ve ever used the “5 Whys” iterative questioning technique in a problem-solving or decision-making context. What did they find useful (or not) about this technique? Describe 5 Whys to those who haven’t experienced it—simply, it’s a technique of repeatedly asking “why?” to get at the root cause of an issue, usually a problem that needs solving. In the case of conversation, it will be used to explore the “root” benefits that your ecosystem can create, and for whom it creates them.
- You can do the exercise in small groups, but it also works well in a large group discussion format. In either case, have individuals write responses to each “why” question for themselves before calling for people to report on their responses or engaging in discussion. You might consider having individuals take the time to answer all five “why” questions before you start the larger discussion.

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.





- The first question is: Why do entrepreneurs want a healthy and effective ecosystem? After everyone has had a chance to write down a response, you can ask for a couple of people to share their responses, or direct participants now to read their own response and ask of it “Why?” Continue until a total of five “whys” have been asked.
- This first round of five whys has likely uncovered a lot of information about the value that your ecosystem needs to create in order to benefit entrepreneurs. Have participants consider also whether responses are providing any insights into other potential (direct or indirect) beneficiaries of a healthy ecosystem. Did anyone mention entrepreneurs’ customers? What about others with whom entrepreneurs partner?
- After mining the first round of 5 Whys for a list of beneficiaries and the value they seek, do the same activity with the following question: Why does/do _____ benefit from a healthy and effective ecosystem? In the blank, fill in a stakeholder category, like “the community” or “community organizations.” Other possible categories include local government, students, nonprofits, corporations, etc. You might draw the blank filler for this question from the previous conversation. Bring a list of categories you might use for this second question to the discussion.
- Have another conversation about the value that this category of beneficiaries might get from a healthy ecosystem. Again, look closely at responses to see if other beneficiaries have been uncovered.
- You might repeat the previous round of 5 Whys with other beneficiaries or categories.
- Consider including the following round, or doing this set of 5 Whys with a group of people from your institution or organization. Why is (my institution/organization) involved in helping to create a healthy and effective ecosystem? Again, mine responses not only for value sought, but also other beneficiaries.

