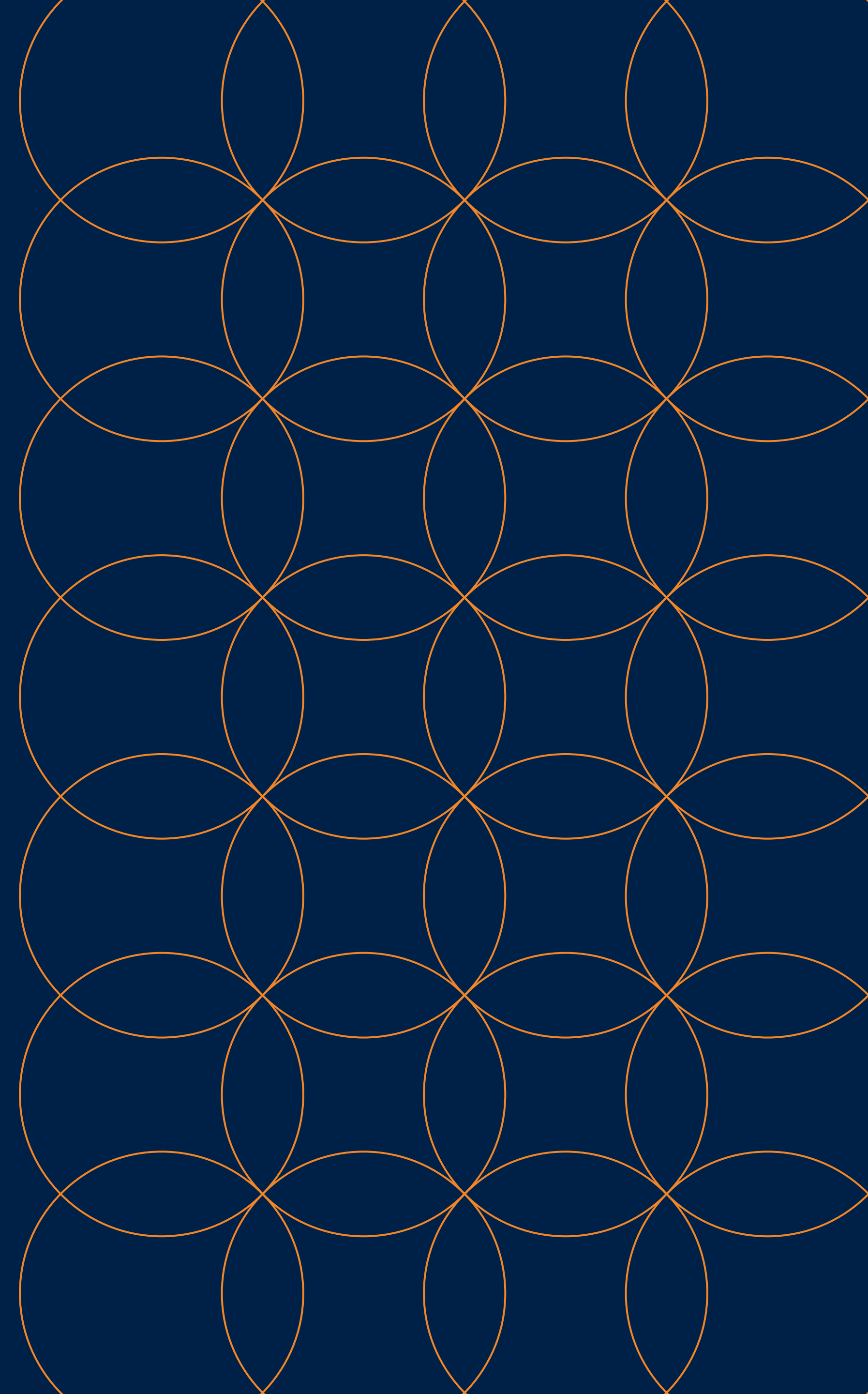




Building Social Innovation Ecosystems for Change

Bridging diverse stakeholders to shape
ecosystems for social impact

September 2026



About the authors



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Cynthia is a researcher exploring how organisations, governments, businesses, and communities work together to shape social systems. Cynthia’s passion is qualitative research that reveals the power and potential of collective action. Cynthia has held positions at the Collective Change Lab, DG Murray Trust, Generation Ubuntu, mothers2mothers, and the Starfish Greathearts Foundation, among other organisations.



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Jessica leads the Skoll Centre’s research portfolio, which brings together academic research and expertise from social impact practitioners globally, to develop insights and best practices to catalyse social impact.

About the case studies



Fairtrasa

Fairtrasa is one of the largest fair trade, organic fresh fruit exporters in Latin America. Through a vertically integrated model, Fairtrasa supplies fresh, organic fruit to Europe and North America year round while enabling small-scale farmers to grow their operations sustainably and lift themselves out of poverty. Fairtrasa’s support model provides organic growing training, logistical support, financing, and market access, depending on the farmer’s level of development. Ultimately, farmers become independent agro-entrepreneurs who organise and manage cooperatives, applying sustainable practices that enhance both their livelihoods and the health of the land.



Peek Vision

Peek Vision is a data and technology social enterprise dedicated to ensuring that everyone has access to quality eye care services, no matter where they live. Its platform combines diagnostic tools, data collection, and patient referral management to support timely treatment and prevent avoidable vision loss. Working in partnership with international NGOs, governments, and hospitals, it equips eye health services with the tools, training, and software to screen vision, monitor patient adherence to referrals, and connect people to the care they need. Peek Vision’s mission is to make eye health services more efficient and equitable worldwide, preventing avoidable vision loss and improving communities’ wellbeing overall.



SmartStart Early Learning

SmartStart is dedicated to ensuring that every child aged three to five in South Africa has access to quality early learning opportunities while creating meaningful livelihoods for women in communities across the country. SmartStart comprises a national hub and a network of branches and franchisors (implementing partners), which support franchisees — predominantly women who set up and operate local early childhood learning programmes (ELPs) as micro-enterprises. Local women are equipped with training, tools, connection, and support to deliver play-based programmes that build young children’s foundational skills. SmartStart’s work simultaneously co-creates a more coherent early childhood development (ECD) ecosystem while contributing to gender equity by enabling women caregivers to pursue purposeful work.



Shikshagraha

Shikshagraha is a people’s movement in India dedicated to building a community-led, locally empowered, continuously improving public school system. Building on state-wide collectives and district- and community-led missions, it brings together student leaders, teachers, administrators, parents, and local leaders to co-create and implement microimprovements tailored to their specific regional contexts. Shikshagraha’s mission is to transform all public schools across India by 2030, ensuring that every child receives an education that prepares them for the future.



WeRobotics

WeRobotics is an international social enterprise amplifying and connecting local experts who use drones, data, and AI technologies to implement long-term solutions for sustainable development. Through its Network of Flying Labs in more than 35 countries, it develops local-global partnerships to apply emerging technologies to areas such as disaster and climate resilience, agriculture, health, urban planning, and environmental protection. By co-creating ecosystems, models, and pathways between local and global actors to sustainably integrate technologies into local solutions, WeRobotics is also promoting a replicable model to redefine localisation and power balances between grassroots and global actors through a locally led, globally supported approach.



Acknowledgements

About the Skoll Centre

Based at Saïd Business School, University of Oxford, the Skoll Centre equips entrepreneurial leaders to catalyse systemic change within and beyond business. Over the past 20 years, the Centre has become a global hub for social entrepreneurship, innovation, and impact. We bring researchers and practitioners together to generate insights on leading and organising, financing, measuring, and scaling impact, and we incorporate these insights into learning programmes for entrepreneurial leaders at Oxford and worldwide.

We would like to thank the following organisations and individuals for generously providing their time and insights:

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WeRobotics

Sonja Betschart

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01

Introduction





Peek Vision / Rolex

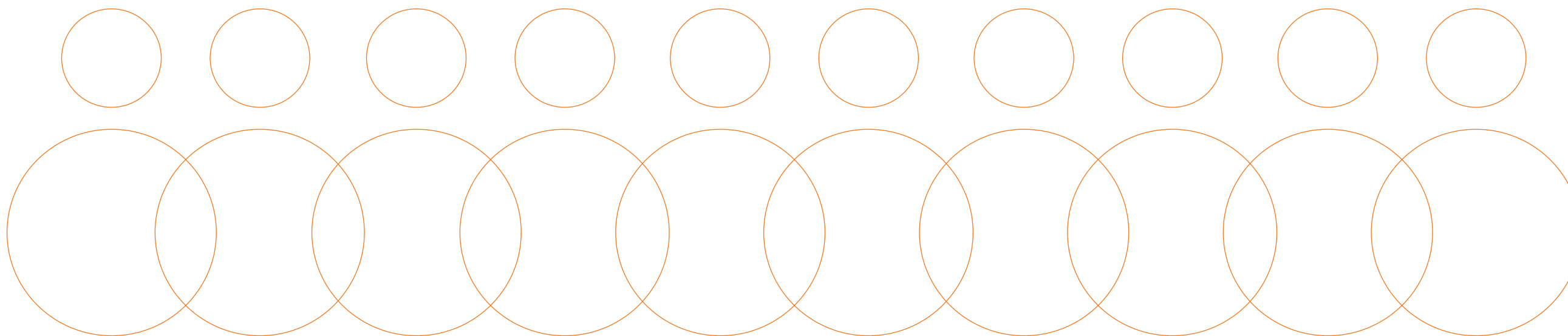
Introduction

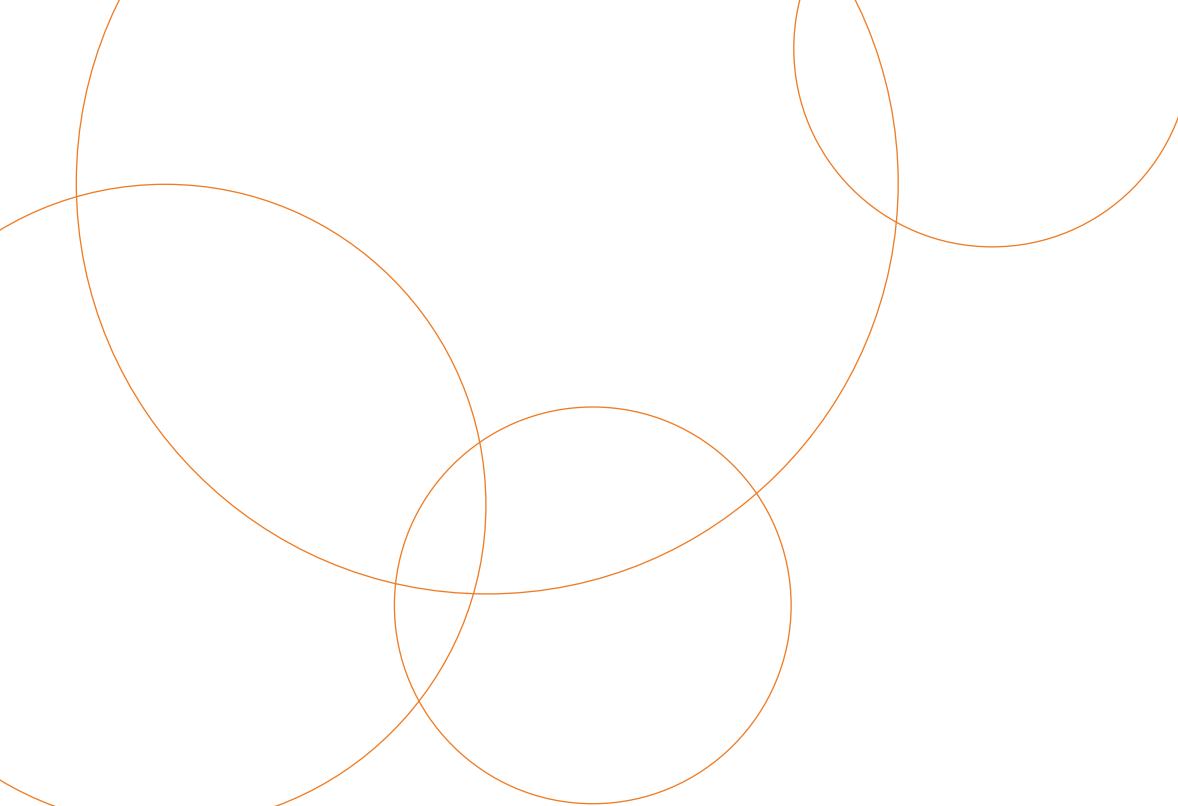
Social innovators and entrepreneurs pursue novel approaches to tackling challenges facing people and planet.¹ They identify creative solutions that address challenges such as poverty, climate change, financial inclusion, and access to quality health and education. Yet social innovators and entrepreneurs cannot solve societal challenges alone.

Innovative solutions require an ecosystem of diverse stakeholders to be scaled and sustained. Governments, businesses, non-profit organisations, communities, investors, academic institutions, and philanthropists all play critical roles in creating enabling environments so that isolated interventions can become integrated into social systems.

Addressing complex social problems requires innovation not just in the solutions designed to address societal challenges, but also in the ways that diverse stakeholders work together. However, in our increasingly polarised world, aligning diverse stakeholders is growing more challenging.² In recent years, we have witnessed social innovators around the world embarking on a new set of activities to support, connect, and convene stakeholders across sectors with the aim of creating large-scale social change. We use the term ecosystem building to describe these initiatives.

Drawing on learnings from social innovators in the Skoll Centre community, this playbook unpacks what it takes to do the work of ecosystem building, detailing key practices for moving beyond isolated interventions and forging connections that drive large-scale social change.





What is ecosystem building?

The term ‘ecosystem’ is borrowed from biology. In this context, an ecosystem is the nexus of different stakeholders—including businesses, non-profits, governments, communities, academic institutions, investors, and philanthropists—coming together to create value and make change happen.

Ecosystems take different forms depending on their purpose. Business ecosystems are oriented toward the success of individual firms,³ while innovation ecosystems foster collaboration among firms to deliver products or services.⁴ Beyond these commercially focused models, social innovation ecosystems create value beyond firms and markets, encouraging outcomes that benefit society as a whole, such as greater socio-economic equity, sustainability, and access to essential services.^{5 6 7}

In the social innovation field, ecosystem building approaches are associated with many terms, including collective impact,⁸ collective social innovation,⁹ collectively owned strategies,¹⁰ field

building,¹¹ and systems orchestration.¹² Despite important differences, these terms share a common aim of achieving systems-level rather than incremental change. They also share a general approach for achieving this change: bringing together multiple stakeholder groups to create a supportive context for addressing complex societal challenges, including resources, supportive policies, data, knowledge, and infrastructure.

While ecosystem building efforts draw upon new strategies (often enabled by technology), they also derive from historical traditions, such as collective action, community organising, and social movements. Ecosystem building practices also make use of established interorganisational forms of collaboration and governance, such as strategic alliances, cross-sector collaborations, multi-stakeholder initiatives, and public-private partnerships.



Smoking cessation in Brazil

Starting in the late 1980s, the Brazilian Ministry of Health, in collaboration with the World Health Organisation, civil society organisations, and the private sector, implemented a comprehensive tobacco control strategy that combined public policies, mass media campaigns, taxation, and healthcare interventions. By engaging multiple sectors, the initiative addressed social norms, accessibility, and education around smoking. This multi-level approach led to a significant reduction in national smoking rates over time (a nearly 50% reduction over 20 years), demonstrating the power of coordinated, population-wide interventions.¹³



Digital public infrastructure in India

In 2009, India began the rollout of its Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) initiative, creating an interoperable “digital stack” to enable inclusive access to public and private services at scale. Rapid development and adoption were made possible by close collaboration between the public sector, which provided open standards and governance, and the private sector, which built applications and services on top of these shared platforms. The initiative began by providing every citizen with a unique biometric identity (the “identity layer”), followed by a unified payments interface (UPI) enabling mobile-based digital payments (the “payment layer”), and the creation of a framework that ensures each citizen has access to and control over their digital footprint (the “data layer”). It is estimated that the economic impact of DPI initiatives will rise to 2.9-4.1% of Indian GDP by 2030.^{14 15}



Shikshagraha, Mantra4Change, 2026



SmartStart, July 2025

Focus of this playbook

Even the organisations and individuals deeply committed to doing this work often struggle to identify the critical roles, capabilities, activities, infrastructure, relationships, and knowledge required to bring different actors together to achieve progress within shared issue areas or geographic communities. They also struggle to communicate their ways of working and the impact of this work to prospective partners, funders, investors, and policymakers, who are instrumental in supporting these approaches.

The aim of this playbook is to offer actionable insights for navigating these questions about ecosystem building and to support social innovators who are interested in pursuing this work. By cataloguing the practices used by exemplary organisations, as well as the opportunities for funders and policymakers to support these efforts with greater intention and skill, we hope the playbook will ignite new conversations and inspire social innovators and those who can support them to achieve even greater impact.



02

The what, who, and how of ecosystem building



The what, who, and how of ecosystem building

[➔ See the next page for detail](#)

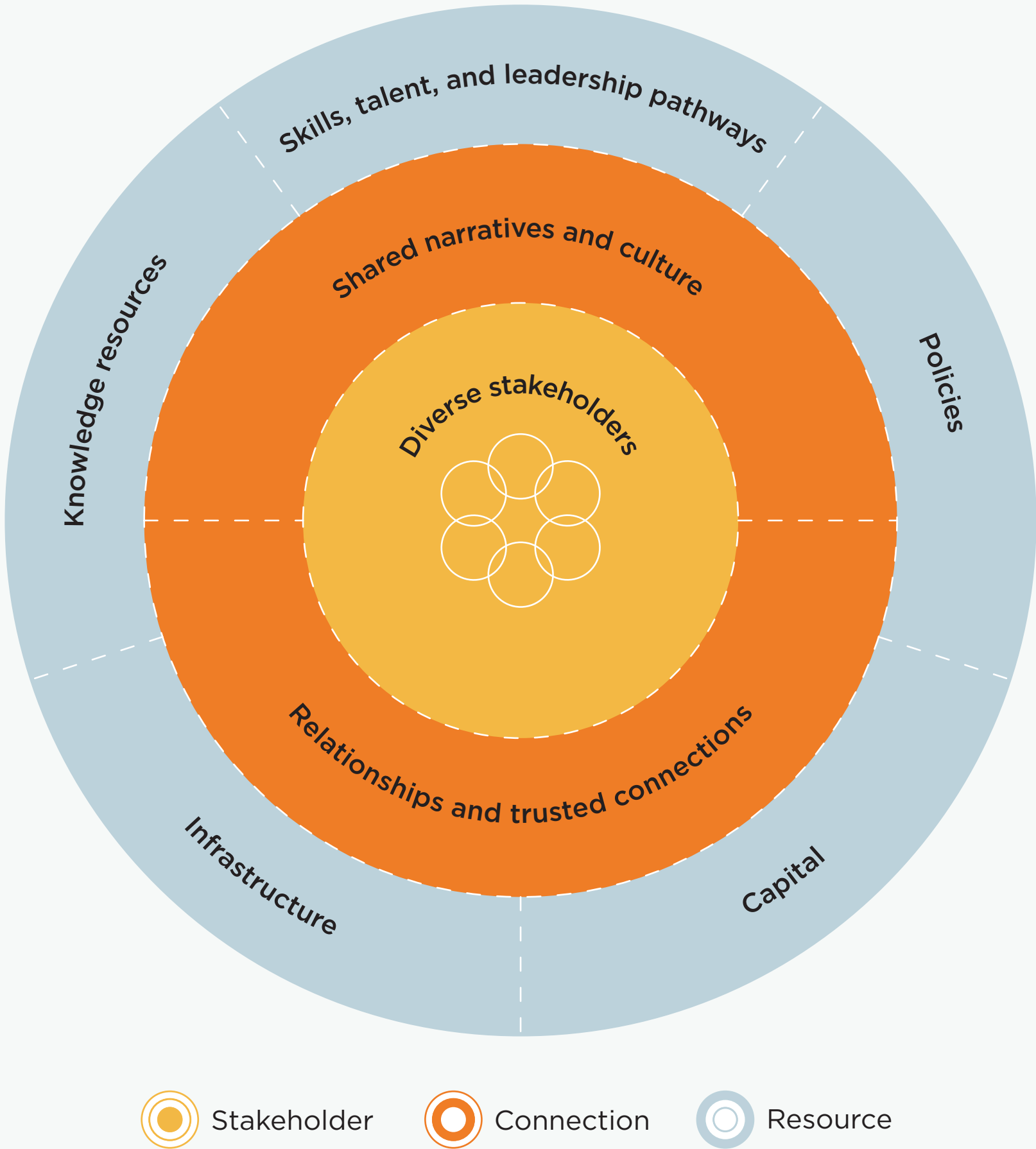


A social innovation ecosystem exists to create societal value. It is the nexus where different stakeholders—including businesses, non-profits, governments, communities, academic institutions, investors, and philanthropists—collaborate to develop and scale new solutions that address complex social and environmental challenges.

It is an environment that nurtures and channels knowledge, talent, resources, and capital toward the most promising ideas, turning them into real impact. Ecosystems also require supportive infrastructure and policies that provide foundations for social innovation to flourish. Like a natural ecosystem, a social innovation ecosystem is built through relationships and collaboration, helping each part achieve more together than they could alone.

At the Skoll Centre, we visualise a social innovation ecosystem as three concentric circles, each with a set of key components, as depicted in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1 – SOCIAL INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM COMPONENTS



Social innovation ecosystem

1 Diverse stakeholders

An ecosystem requires businesses, non-profits, governments, communities, academic institutions, investors, and philanthropists to work together, each contributing unique perspectives and strengths.

2 Shared narratives and culture

Ecosystems are supported by shared culture, which is composed of common narratives, definitions, and norms.

3 Relationships and trusted connections

Ecosystems also need trusted connections to create dynamic interactions between the diverse stakeholders and resources. These relationships and networks provide channels for diverse stakeholders to connect and for resources, skills, talent, and capital to move between them.

4 Skills, talent, and leadership pathways

Ecosystems thrive when leaders, innovators, skilled experts, and people with lived experience bring the creativity, knowledge, and experience needed to design and scale solutions.

5 Policies

Ecosystems also require supportive regulations, incentives, and public-sector commitments that create an enabling environment for innovation.

6 Capital

Ecosystems are developed with supportive capital (investment, philanthropy, and public funding) that is designed for the needs of social innovators.

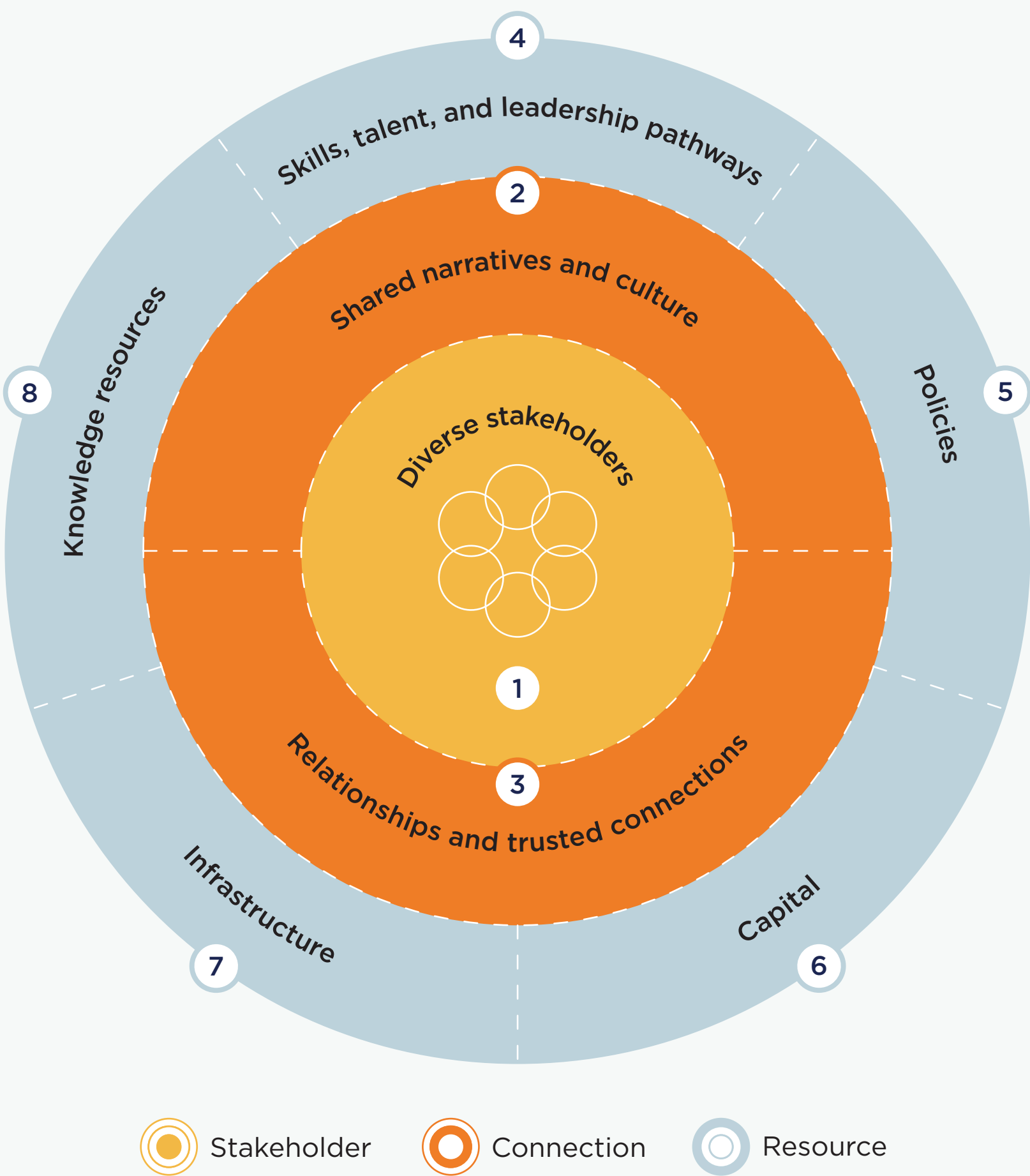
7 Infrastructure

Ecosystems are built upon physical structures (transport, real estate, etc.) and social structures (education, health, legal, etc.) that provide support for innovation.

8 Knowledge resources

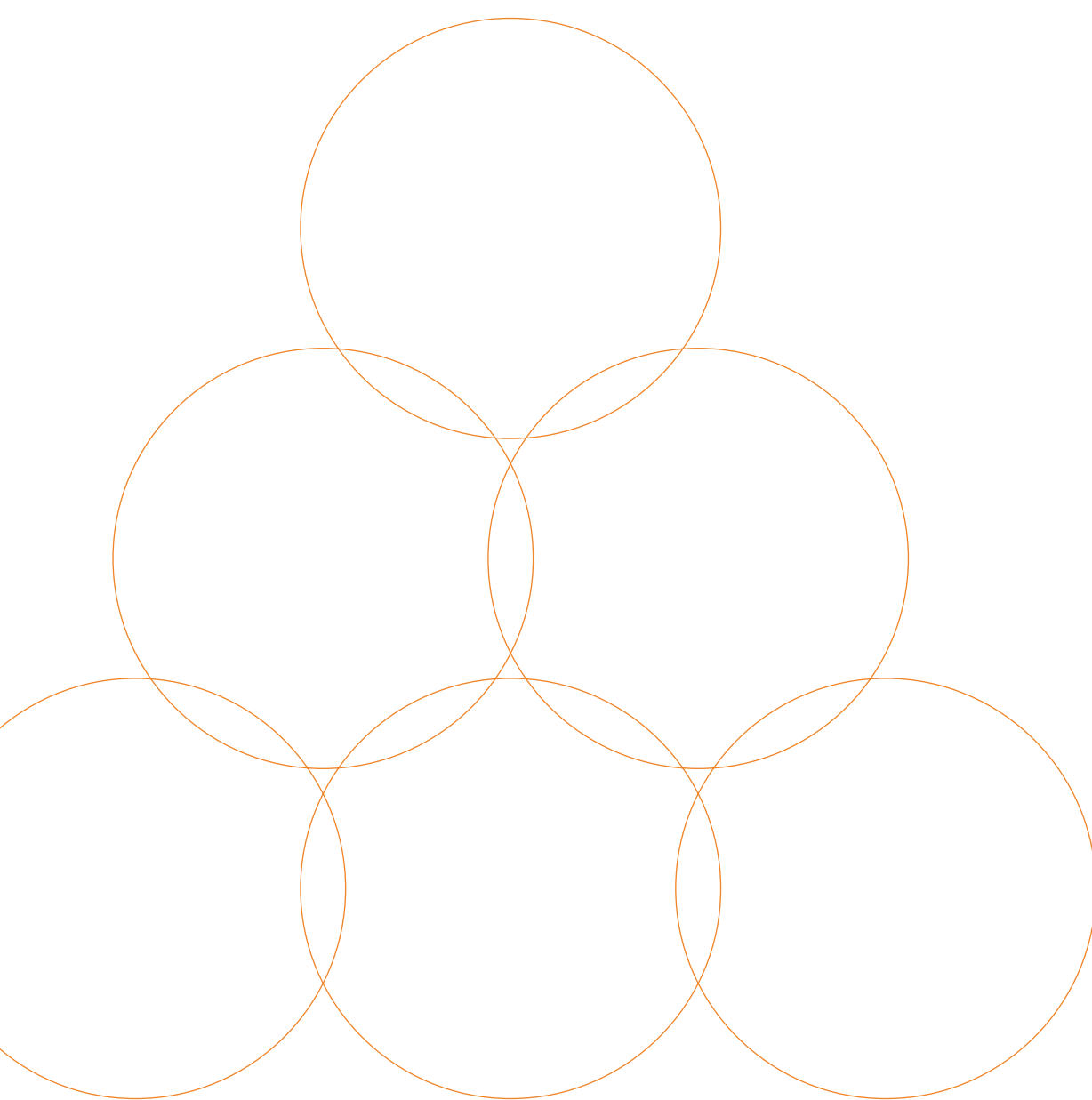
Ecosystems are supported by knowledge, data, and technology that help new ideas develop and grow.

FIGURE 1 – SOCIAL INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM COMPONENTS



Who builds social innovation ecosystems?

Ecosystems are rarely built by individuals or single organisations. Instead, they are constructed by many organisations in both coordinated and organic ways.



A significant amount of attention has been given to ecosystem orchestrators who are often credited with building entire ecosystems. However, orchestrators typically work more quietly and steadily as ecosystem builders before having that level of impact. Ecosystem building is often a journey for social innovators as they build the components and relationships of an ecosystem over time alongside other actors in the system.

Ecosystem builders come in all shapes and sizes. They can be grant-funded, publicly funded, or investor-funded. They might be non-profits, for-profits, or corporate entities. What unites these organisations is their interest in what Lija Farnham at social impact consultancy The Bridgespan Group describes as ‘being in service to the field’¹⁶. This makes them a bit like

chameleons — they may change their “colours” (strategies, objectives, and approaches) if it is required for advancing the goals of the ecosystem.

One instructive way to identify different types of ecosystem builders is to understand how they originate. Bridgespan identifies three types of “origin stories” for ecosystem builders or “field catalysts”¹⁷: 1) **evolved**—the work of an existing organisation pivots or evolves; 2) **fresh start**—a leader or team launches a new effort; and 3) **funder-funded**—a funder drives the creation of a new effort.

In addition to these three “origin stories”, we would add one more: 4) **public-generated**—government agencies or policymakers develop an ecosystem around a shared challenge¹⁸.



WeRobotics

How do social innovators bridge diverse stakeholders to build ecosystems?

Since social innovation ecosystems operate to address complex social challenges, they can develop in a number of different ways. Typically, ecosystems develop around one or more of three distinct bases:

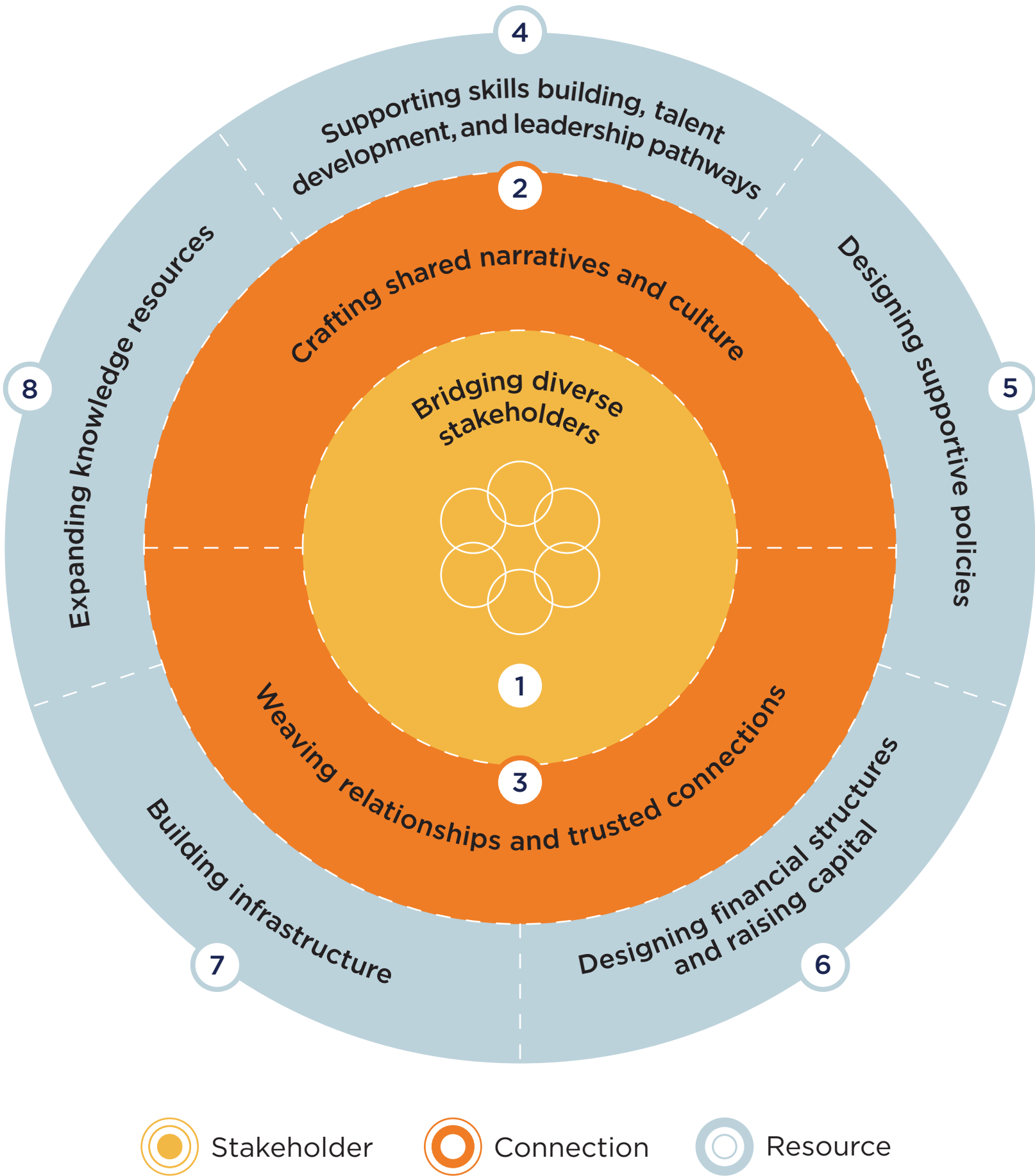
Problem-based
Ecosystems bring together stakeholders around a specific societal challenge (e.g., access to housing; access to early childhood education).

Place-based
Ecosystems bring together stakeholders around a specific geographic location where societal challenges manifest (e.g., broad-based development in Cape Town; community revitalisation in Oxford).

Solution-based
Ecosystems bring together stakeholders around a specific type of solution to a societal challenge (e.g., “housing-first” approaches in the unhoused sector; fair trade in the agriculture and food distribution sector).

In our conversations with ecosystem builders, we have identified eight key practice areas involved in ecosystem building as depicted in Figure 2. These practice areas are directly related to the stakeholder, connection, and resource circles that comprise social innovation ecosystems.

FIGURE 2 – EIGHT KEY PRACTICE AREAS INVOLVED IN ECOSYSTEM BUILDING





Bridging diverse stakeholders

Ecosystem builders identify and assemble diverse stakeholders who have an interest and expertise to contribute to a problem-, place-, and/or solution-based initiative.

In a nascent ecosystem, stakeholders operate in silos and are largely unaware of each other. In a mature ecosystem, stakeholders are largely aware of each other and can identify the principal organisations and individuals operating in the system.

Diverse stakeholders include:

- Non-profit and non-governmental organisations
- Private sector companies
- Public agencies
- Community-based organisations
- Academic institutions and researchers
- Impact- and commercially oriented investors
- Philanthropy-oriented funders

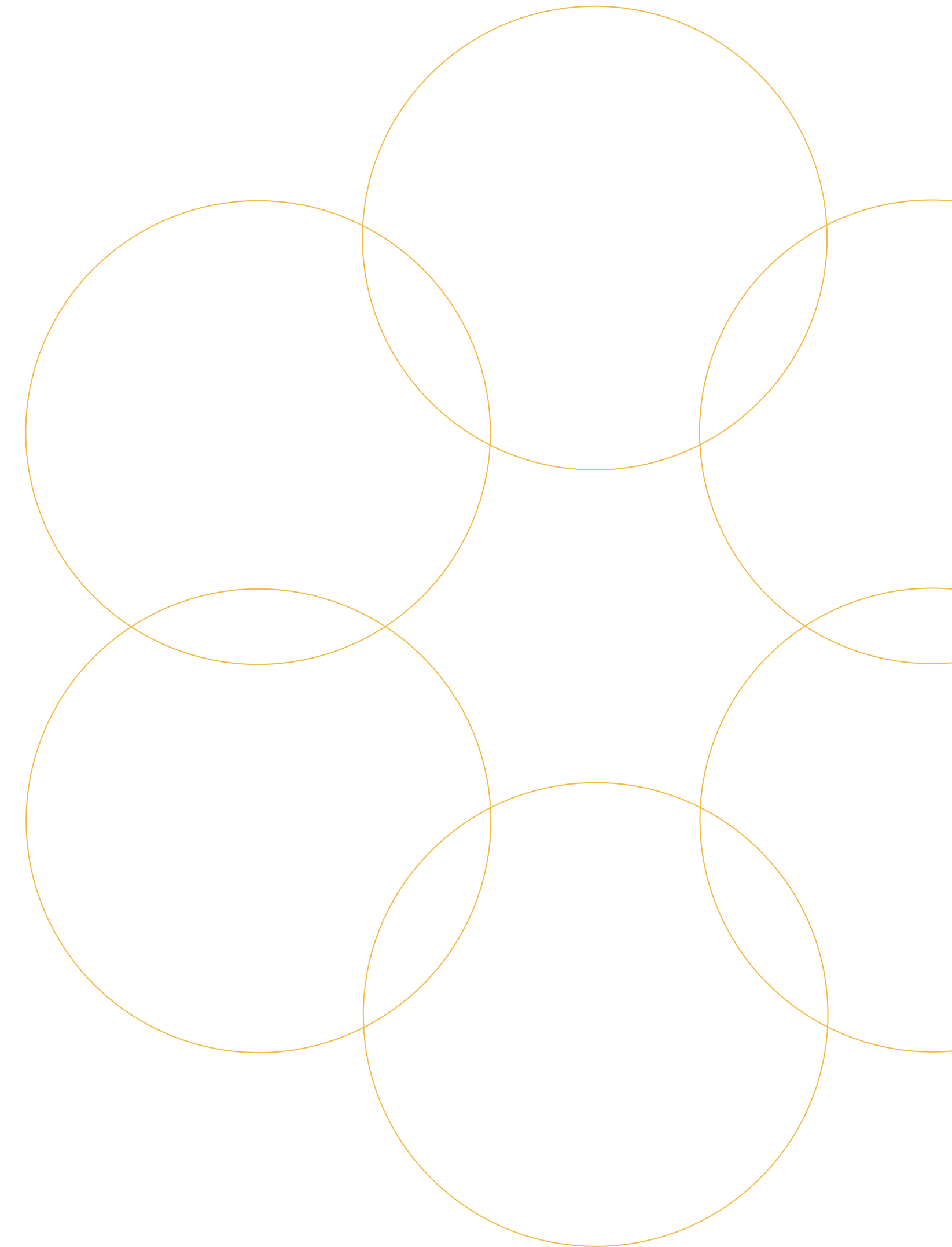
Lessons from ecosystem builders

Identifying stakeholders

A first step is to develop a database of relevant stakeholders and conduct an initial convening to gather these organisations together. Initial convenings may be easier to facilitate on the back of other significant events.

Build trust and share information

Don't move straight into agenda-setting and solutions identification as this may set the stage for competition and power positioning. Rather, position primary goals as trust building and information sharing.





Crafting shared narratives and culture

Ecosystems are sustained not only through structures and resources, but also through shared culture — a sense of collective identity that allows diverse actors to see themselves as part of the same effort.

In a nascent ecosystem, culture and narratives may be fragmented, with stakeholders struggling to align around a common story or shared values. In a mature ecosystem, this culture is reinforced through common narratives, definitions, and norms.

Shared narratives and culture are expressed through:

- Narratives that highlight purpose and vision
- Definitions that enable inclusion rather than exclusion
- Rituals, milestones, and celebrations that reinforce collective identity

Lessons from ecosystem builders

Co-create shared narratives

Narratives are strengthened by bringing together individual perspectives and identifying areas of common ground. Collect stakeholder insights and share them widely to build understanding before moving forward.

Develop enabling definitions

Use terms and concepts that are broad enough to welcome diverse actors but clear enough to provide direction. This kind of inclusive framing helps more people see a place for themselves in the ecosystem.

Celebrate milestones

Recognise progress and wins, both big and small. Celebrations reinforce solidarity, signal momentum, and sustain optimism over the long term.



Weaving relationships and trusted connections

Ecosystems are powered by social capital — the trust, relationships, and informal networks that make it easier for people and organisations to collaborate across boundaries.

In a nascent ecosystem, relationships may be shallow or siloed, with limited opportunities for cross-sector connection. In a mature ecosystem, these networks are dense and resilient, with stakeholders who know and trust one another.

Trusted networks are built through:

- Repeated interactions that strengthen familiarity
- Informal and formal opportunities for connection
- Trust-based relationships across organisations and sectors
- Bridge-builders who help maintain cohesion in diverse groups

Lessons from ecosystem builders

Keep stakeholders coming back together

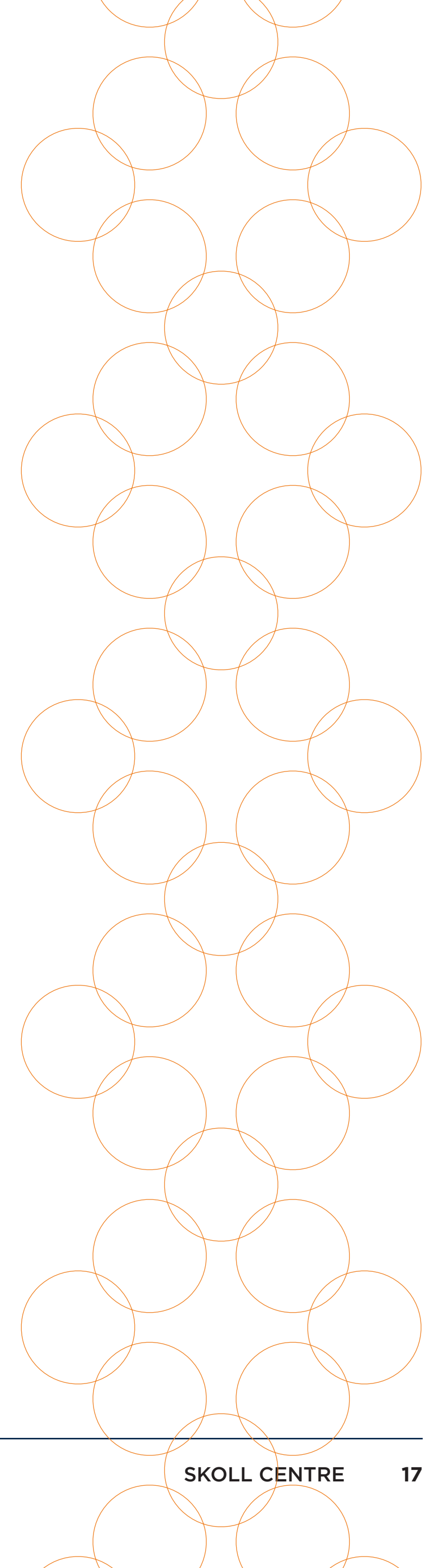
Trust doesn't develop overnight; rather, it's the result of repeated interactions over time. Regular convenings, check-ins, and informal coffee chats help build that continuity.

Make it easy to get started by doing simple things together

Co-hosting events, running small projects, or organising learning sessions gives stakeholders a low-stakes way to build relationships while getting something done.

Mix personality types within working groups

Groups benefit from having not just experts or decision-makers but also bridge-builders — people who naturally create trust, smooth tensions, and maintain group cohesion.





Supporting skills building, talent development, and leadership pathways



Healthy ecosystems depend on people who bring the creativity, knowledge, and perspective needed to design and scale innovative solutions, including social entrepreneurs, skilled experts, and those with lived experience of a societal issue.

In a nascent ecosystem, talent may be present but lacks clear routes for growth or recognition. In a mature ecosystem, there are visible pathways for talent development, supported by training opportunities, clear job descriptions, and milestone moments, such as fellowships and awards.

Skills and talent development include:

- Leaders and innovators who set vision and direction
- Skilled experts with technical and domain knowledge
- Practitioners and professionals who implement solutions
- Pathways for people with lived experience to participate in and accelerate learning

Lessons from ecosystem builders

Host learning communities and communities of practice

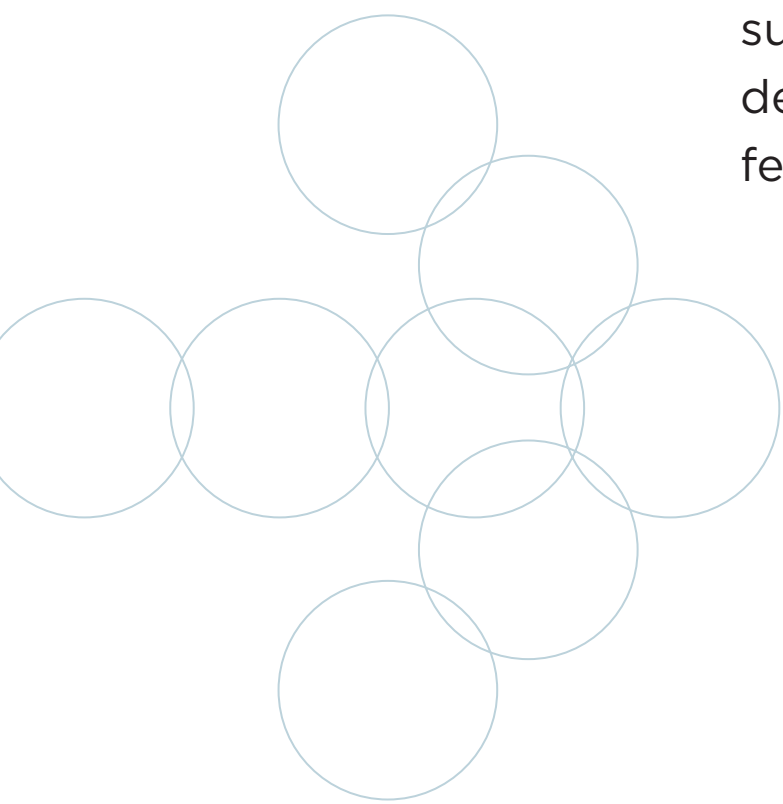
These can be spaces with low barriers to entry for people to share experiences, exchange lessons learned, and support one another across sectors.

Partner with academic institutions

Create long-term relationships with higher education institutions to develop curricula and qualification programmes, ultimately professionalising the roles that the ecosystem requires.

Develop leadership pathways using recognition and awards

Offering fellowships, apprenticeships, and recognition and awards can signal that talent is valued and that there is a future in contributing to the ecosystem.





Designing supportive policies

Ecosystems also depend on supportive regulations, incentives, and public-sector commitments that create an enabling environment for innovation.

In a nascent ecosystem, policy frameworks may be outdated or misaligned, creating barriers that slow experimentation and collaboration. In a mature ecosystem, policies are flexible, responsive, and co-designed with the people they affect.

Supportive policy environments include:

- Regulations that enable innovation while protecting the public interest
- Public commitments that signal support and priority for ecosystem activities
- Incentives that encourage collaboration, risk-taking, and investment

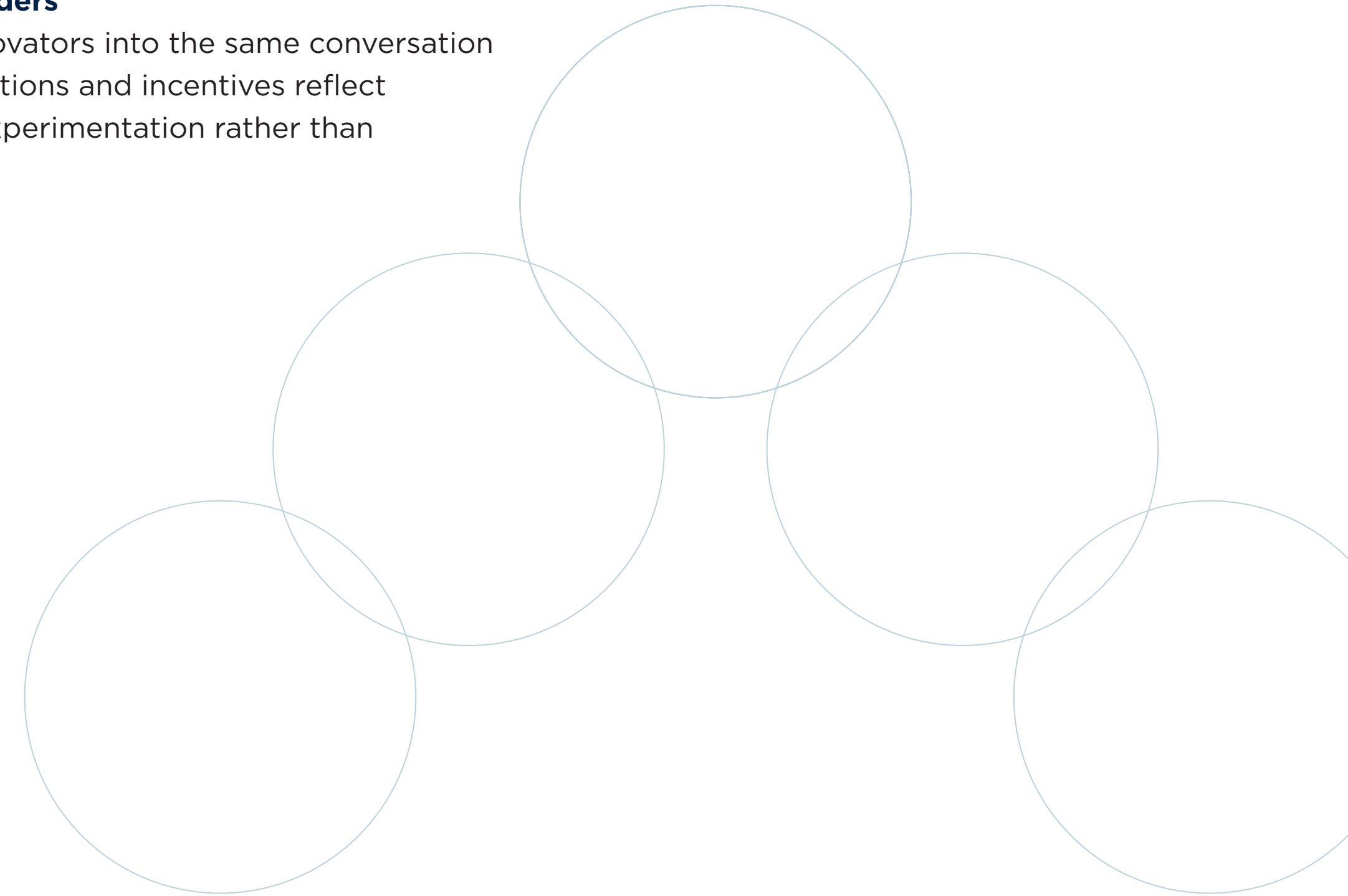
Lessons from ecosystem builders

Co-create policies with multiple stakeholders

Bring policymakers, practitioners, and innovators into the same conversation early. Co-creation helps ensure that regulations and incentives reflect on-the-ground realities and encourages experimentation rather than constraining it.

Collaborate across jurisdictions

Other geographies often face similar challenges — learn from them. Borrowing and adapting existing policy models can save time, build momentum, and help avoid common pitfalls.





Designing financial structures and raising capital

Ecosystems thrive when social innovators have access to the right kinds of capital tailored to their needs and stage of growth.

In a nascent ecosystem, capital may exist but is often fragmented, hard to access, or designed for more traditional ventures rather than tailored to the social innovation ecosystem. In a mature ecosystem, diverse funding sources are available, requirements to access funding are relatively predictable, and financing structures are designed to meet social innovators' needs.

Financial structures and capital sources include:

- Traditional and impact investment
- Concessionary capital or blended finance vehicles
- Philanthropic grants
- Collaborative funds
- Public funding streams and subsidies

Lessons from ecosystem builders

Develop new financing structures that attract diversified capital streams

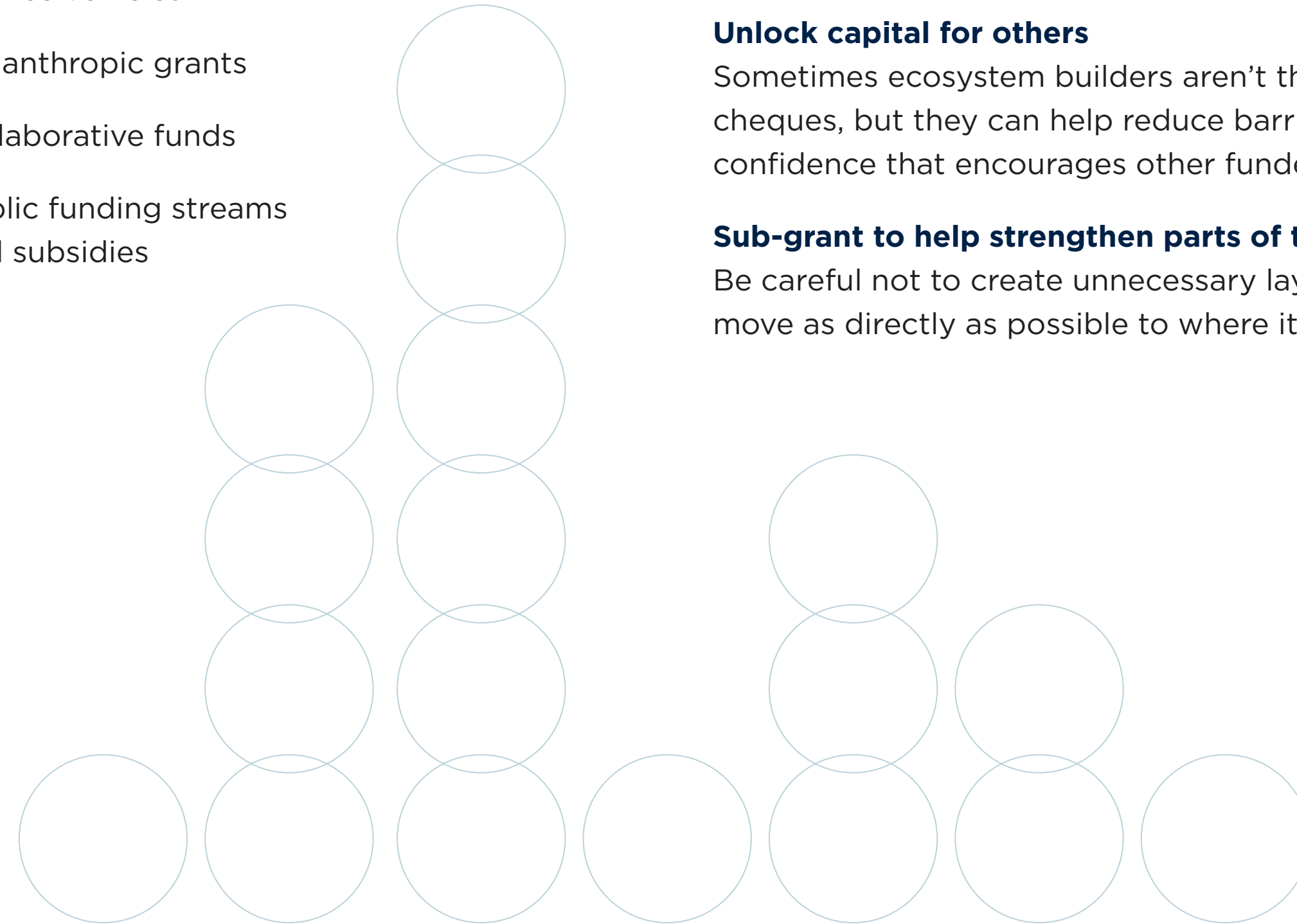
Combining philanthropic risk-taking, public guarantees, and private investment can create financing vehicles that work better for social innovation than any single source can on its own.

Unlock capital for others

Sometimes ecosystem builders aren't the ones deploying the largest cheques, but they can help reduce barriers, de-risk investments, or build the confidence that encourages other funders to step in.

Sub-grant to help strengthen parts of the ecosystem that need support

Be careful not to create unnecessary layers or bottlenecks — capital should move as directly as possible to where it can have the most impact.

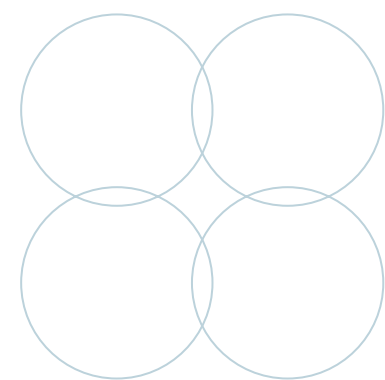




Building infrastructure

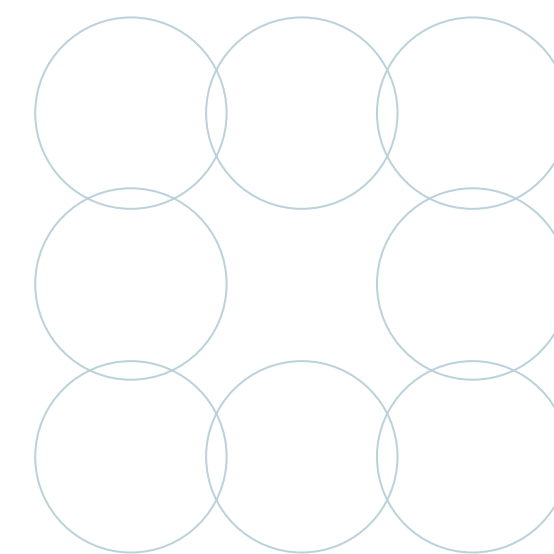
Ecosystems rely on both physical and social infrastructure — the tangible and intangible systems that make collaboration and innovation possible, and create the conditions for people to participate fully.

In a nascent ecosystem, infrastructure may be limited or fragmented, creating friction for those trying to grow new solutions. In a mature ecosystem, these supports are well developed and responsive to the needs of innovators.



Infrastructure for innovation includes:

- Physical assets such as transportation networks, workspace, and digital connectivity
- Social systems such as education, health, and legal frameworks
- Shared facilities or services that reduce costs and enable collaboration



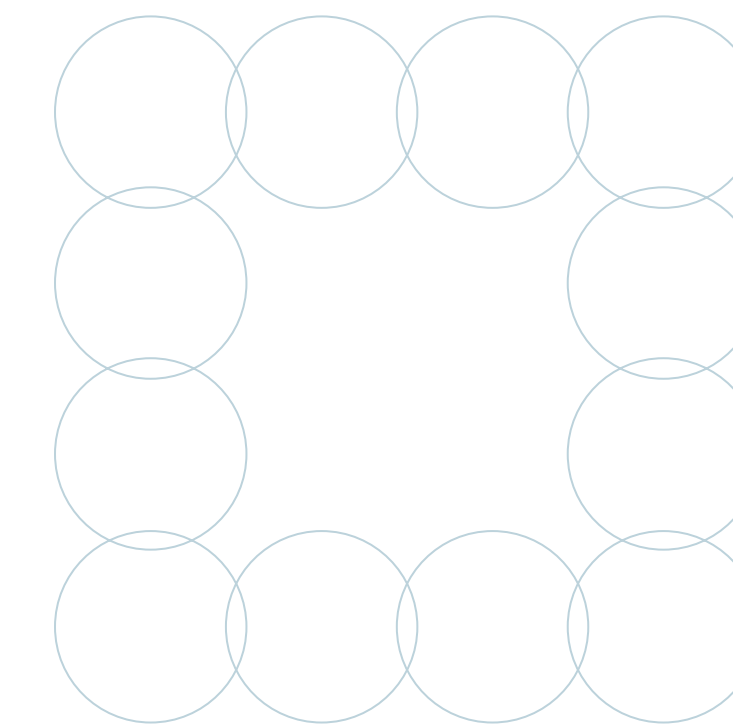
Lessons from ecosystem builders

Leverage the infrastructure that already exists

Mature ecosystems — whether in research, technology, or industry — often have assets that can be shared or repurposed. It's usually more effective to connect and adapt existing infrastructure than to build everything from scratch.

Build new infrastructure iteratively

Building the right supports takes time, and ecosystem orchestrators often learn what is needed only by doing. Start small, test ideas, and adapt as the ecosystem evolves.





Expanding knowledge resources

Ecosystem builders identify, attract, and expand the range of knowledge resources — such as data, technology, and evidence — that help new ideas to grow and scale.

In a nascent ecosystem, resources are scattered, proprietary, or siloed, leaving innovators with limited access to the knowledge and tools they need. In a mature ecosystem, by contrast, a strong resource base is available and accessible, with robust and open-source datasets, common technology tools, and clear evidence that innovators can use with reliability and ease.

Support resources include:

- Open access research and data repositories
- Shared learning and knowledge networks
- Digital platforms and technological infrastructure
- Technical assistance providers for research and evaluation

Lessons from ecosystem builders

Audit the existing data, technology, and evidence

This may include surveying universities, research institutes, government data portals, and private sector initiatives that are willing to share resources. Convenings or workshops can then be used to showcase available resources and identify gaps.

Build the knowledge base

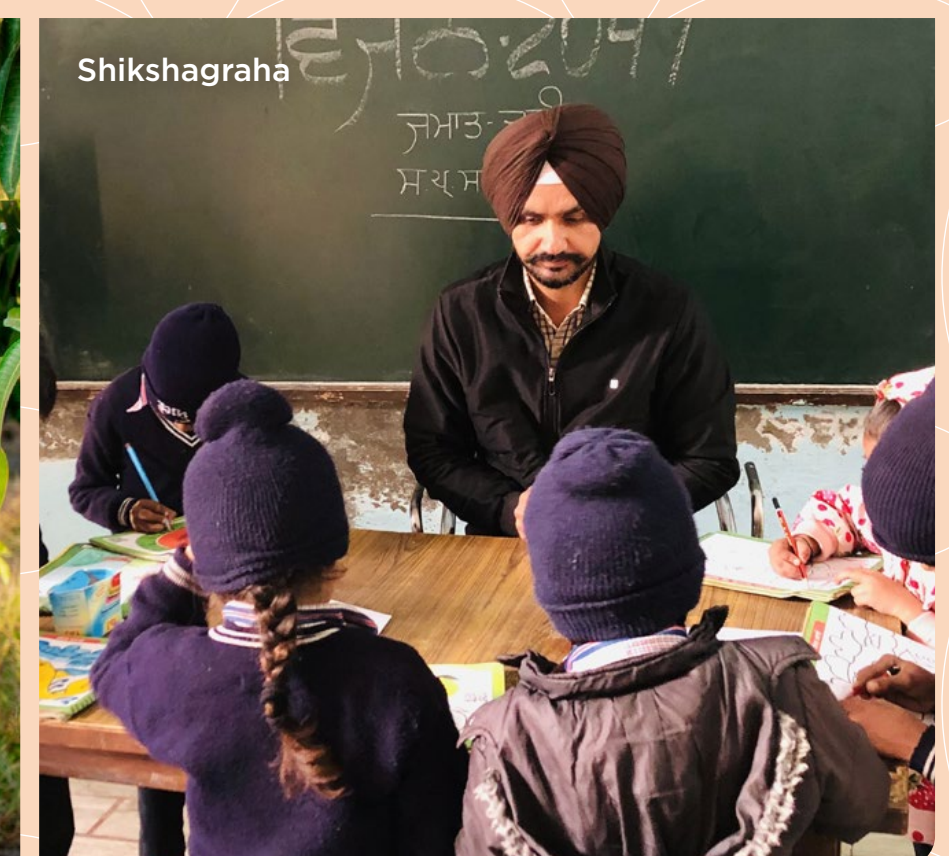
Partner with practitioners and academic institutions to grow the knowledge base further through collaborative research projects and reviews.

Don't prematurely centralise resources

This can alienate contributors or create bottlenecks. Instead, expanding the resource base should focus on making existing resources visible and accessible, encouraging voluntary sharing, and building a culture of openness and collaboration.

03

Case studies of ecosystem building



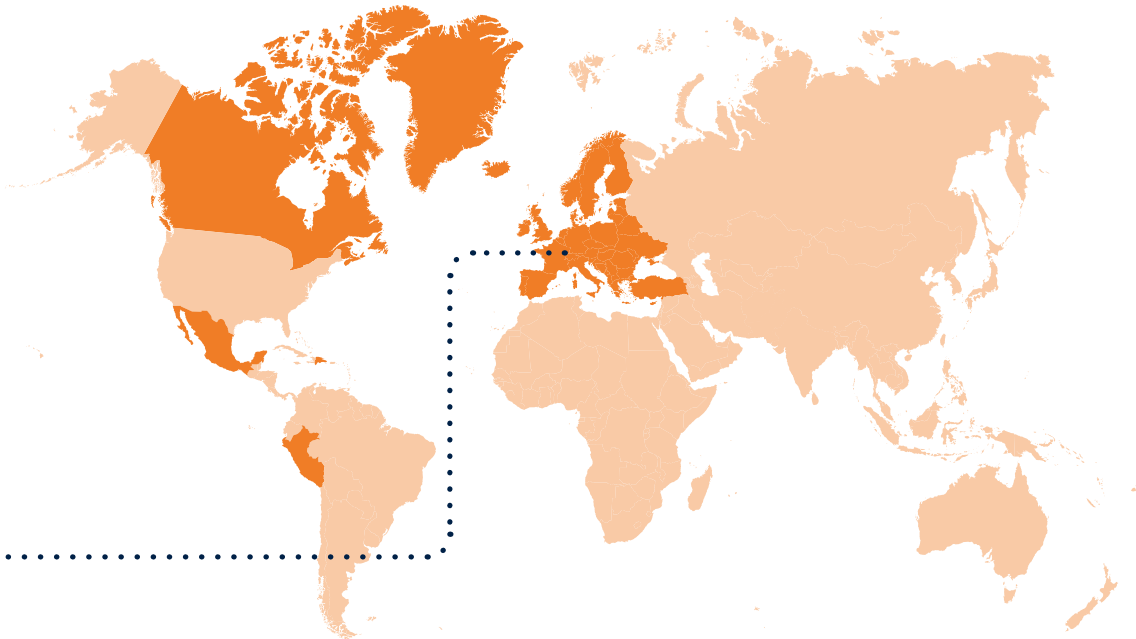
Nourishing the world and uplifting lives with fair trade, organic fruit

Overview
Fairtrasa is one of the largest fair trade, organic fresh fruit exporters in Latin America. Through a vertically integrated model, Fairtrasa supplies fresh, organic fruit to Europe and North America year round while enabling small-scale farmers to grow their operations sustainably and lift themselves out of poverty. Fairtrasa’s support model provides organic growing training, logistical support, financing, and market access, depending on the farmer’s level of development. Ultimately, farmers become independent agro-entrepreneurs who organise and manage cooperatives, applying sustainable practices that enhance both their livelihoods and the health of the land.



Geography

European and North American distribution, with field offices in Dominican Republic, Mexico, and Peru.



Headquarters

Zurich, Switzerland

Social theme

Agriculture and fresh food distribution



Number of employees

52



Legal entity

Fairtrasa International AG is a Swiss for-profit company. There are also legal companies registered in five additional countries.



Governance structure

Fairtrasa is governed through a transparent structure that integrates board-level oversight, executive management, and strong local leadership, ensuring effective operations across all regions.



Population target

Small-scale farming supports the livelihoods of approximately **2 billion people** worldwide; Fairtrasa aims to reach **1 million farmers by 2033**.



Current impact

Fairtrasa is impacting approximately **70,000 lives** in marginalised rural communities, **increasing incomes by 10–50%** and **empowering a workforce that is 41% female**.



Journey to ecosystem building



2005-2009
Fairtrasa begins organising smallholder farmers into cooperatives in order to help them gain organic certification and export directly to international distributors.

2010-2021
Fairtrasa expands its model to become vertically integrated, opening field offices in three Latin American countries and acquiring a European organic importer in order to manage the entire supply chain.

2021-2025
Fairtrasa reaches a new level of sustainability, achieving the world’s first 100% Regenerative Organic Certified® banana farm in Ecuador.

2025 onward
Fairtrasa is now scaling its three-tier farmer development model, aiming to reach 1 million farmers over the coming years.





Value creation

There are approximately 500 million small-scale farms globally which support the livelihoods of 2 billion people. Fairtrasa facilitates a supply chain of trusted partnerships that increase farmer incomes, expand regenerative agricultural practices, and facilitate greater availability of fresh organic fruit worldwide.



Stakeholders

1 Bridging diverse stakeholders

Fairtrasa brings together farmers, cooperatives, retailers, distributors, financiers, and local service providers into collaborative partnerships that align incentives to ensure fair pricing for farmers and promote sustainable agricultural practices.



Connections

2 Crafting shared narratives and culture

Fairtrasa champions a new narrative in which small-scale farmers become agro-entrepreneurs, capable of managing cooperatives and deploying regenerative practices that enable them to become productive stewards of the land.

3 Weaving relationships and trusted connections

Fairtrasa ensures trust and transparency between farmers and global partners, building credibility and long-term relationships that enable farmers to adopt new practices and access investment and support.



Resources

4 Supporting skills building, talent development, and leadership pathways

Fairtrasa’s three-tier model provides small-scale growers with a pathway to improve the quality, sustainability, and productivity of their farms and ultimately achieve export-grade, certified organic crops for international export.

5 Designing supportive policies

Fairtrasa contributes to policy change by bringing smallholder farmers’ realities into national and global discussions, advocating for fairer market conditions and stronger rights. Through evidence from its field experience, Fairtrasa helps to shape standards that protect and empower rural farming communities.

6 Designing financial structures and raising capital

Fairtrasa helps farmers access financing by connecting them to impact investors, banks, and other financial partners. Financial partners deliver funding solutions that are tailored to farmer needs, including pre-harvest financing, performance-linked payments, insurance products, and guaranteed buying terms.

7 Building infrastructure

Fairtrasa is creating digital infrastructure through partnerships that develop platforms and tools tracking farm performance, managing market access, sharing knowledge, and connecting consumers to growers. This infrastructure enables farmers to connect with the global market and operate more efficiently and transparently.

8 Expanding knowledge resources

Fairtrasa works with local experts to capture and share best practices, training, and technical guidance. Fairtrasa also partners with specialists in regenerative agriculture to make growers more climate resilient and transform their farms into carbon sinks.

Peek Vision

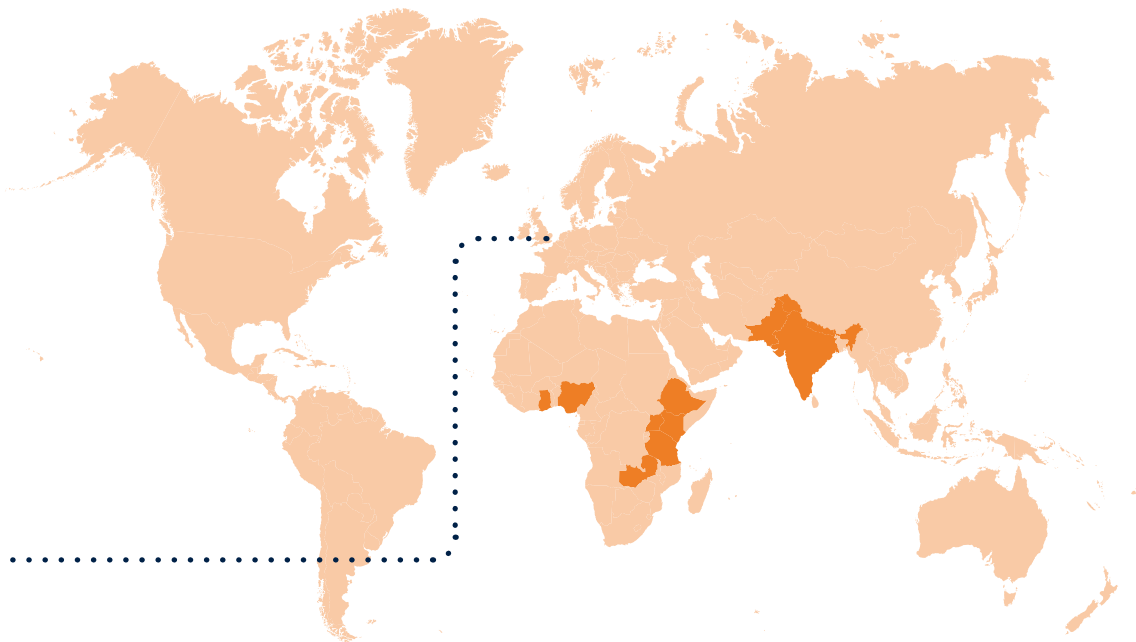
Deploying technology and data insights to make eye health services efficient, effective, and equitable

Overview
Peek Vision is a data and technology social enterprise dedicated to ensuring that everyone has access to quality eye care services, no matter where they live. Its platform combines diagnostic tools, data collection, and patient referral management to support timely treatment and prevent avoidable vision loss. Working in partnership with international NGOs, governments, and hospitals, it equips eye health services with the tools, training, and software to screen vision, monitor patient adherence to referrals, and connect people to the care they need. Peek Vision’s mission is to make eye health services more efficient and equitable worldwide, preventing avoidable vision loss and improving communities’ overall wellbeing.



Geography
Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Kenya, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Uganda, Zambia

Headquarters
London, United Kingdom



Social theme
Eyesight and eye health



Number of employees

62



Peek Vision

Legal entity
Peek Vision is a social enterprise that consists of three entities: The Peek Vision Foundation (UK Foundation), Peek Vision Ltd (UK not-for-profit company) and Peek Vision Pty Ltd (Botswana).



Governance structure
The Peek Vision Foundation is guided by a Board of Trustees and Peek Vision Ltd is governed by a Board of Directors accountable to The Peek Vision Foundation’s Board of Trustees.



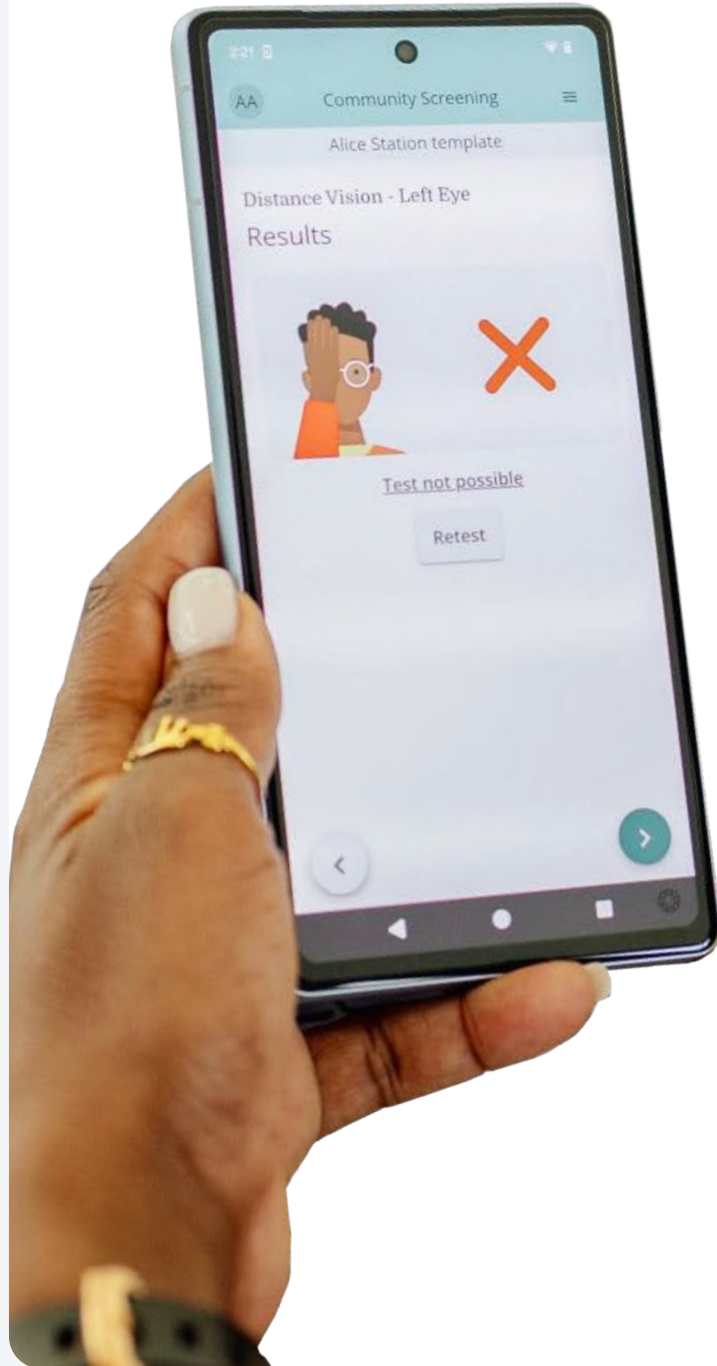
Population target
Reach **1.1 billion people** currently living with avoidable vision loss.



Current impact
Peek Vision currently powers **97 programmes in nine countries**. To date, Peek’s partners have screened **21.9 million people**, identified **3.7 million eye health needs**, and connected **2.1 million people to care**.



Journey to ecosystem building



2014-2018

Peek launches its mobile screening app, Peek Acuity, in 2014. Over the next three years, the app is validated in several rigorous trials. Studies show the app to be as effective as conventional vision tests.

2018-2022

Peek begins its first partnership with international NGO CBM. By expanding its software and data platform, as well as partnerships, Peek can reach 1 million people with eye screenings.

2022-2025

Peek partners with the government of Botswana in its first public partnership. Greater efficiency in training and support and a focus on strategic partnerships allow Peek to screen 14 million more people in just three years.

2025 onward

Eye health programmes are facing constraints that limit care for those screened, including a lack of surgeons and a growing backlog. Peek is now developing new models that create markets to expand access and overcome these bottlenecks.



Peek Vision / Dr Shroff's Charity Eye Hospital



Peek Vision / Rolex



Peek Vision



Peek Vision



Value creation
Currently, 1.1 billion people worldwide live with avoidable vision loss. Avoidable vision loss limits people’s ability to work, learn, and fully participate in society, placing economic and social burdens on families and communities. Peek Vision equips eye health providers and governments with software and data intelligence that enable them to deliver services more efficiently and equitably.

Stakeholders

- 1 Bridging diverse stakeholders**
Peek Vision’s software and data intelligence platform brings together governments, NGOs, healthcare providers, and local communities to coordinate efforts, share insights, and deliver comprehensive eye care programmes.

Connections

- 2 Crafting shared narratives and culture**
Peek Vision unites stakeholders around a culture of ‘no one left behind’ in eye health. Using a rigorous, data-driven approach, eye health partners are equipped to track and motivate patients to access care while overcoming obstacles along the journey, ensuring that no patient is lost to follow-up and care.
- 3 Weaving relationships and trusted connections**
Peek Vision helps bring together and support the coordination of different stakeholders — including healthcare providers, community leaders, NGOs and government partners — so that technology and local expertise work together toward the shared goal of accessible eye care.

Resources

- 4 Supporting skills building, talent development, and leadership pathways**
Peek Vision supports skills and talent development by training and certifying local health workers to use its tools effectively, while also funding scholarships for emerging eye-health professionals to build leadership and specialist capacity in underserved regions.
- 5 Designing supportive policies**
Peek Vision influences government policy development by generating robust data, evidence, and practical insights from its programmes, helping policymakers design, implement, and scale effective national eye-health strategies.
- 6 Designing financial structures and raising capital**
Peek Vision is currently piloting a new financial model that engages mission-driven financial partners to provide flexible payment plans to patients while ensuring hospitals receive timely income. Peek Vision’s market-driven model increases patients’ income by restoring their vision, while providing hospitals with timely payments for treatment, creating a system that benefits both patients and providers.
- 7 Building infrastructure**
Peek Vision works with NGOs and governments to design end-to-end care pathways from initial screening to tertiary services, while actively tracking patient journeys through timely data reviews. These systems help healthcare teams identify obstacles early and implement solutions more quickly.
- 8 Expanding knowledge resources**
Through its software and data analytics, Peek Vision provides eye health NGOs, governments and hospitals with access to real-time data from screening to provision of care. Peek Vision also conducts rigorous studies, including randomised controlled trials, to validate its technology and programmes.

Shikshagraha

Growing a people-powered movement to improve 1 million public schools in India

Overview
Shikshagraha is a people’s movement in India dedicated to building a community-led, locally empowered, continuously improving public school system. Building on state-wide collectives and district- and community-led missions, it brings together student leaders, teachers, administrators, parents, and local leaders to co-create and implement microimprovements — small, manageable changes initiated by school and community leaders to achieve the larger goal of education equity in India — tailored to their specific regional contexts. Shikshagraha’s mission is to transform all public schools across India by 2030, ensuring that every child receives an education that prepares them for the future.

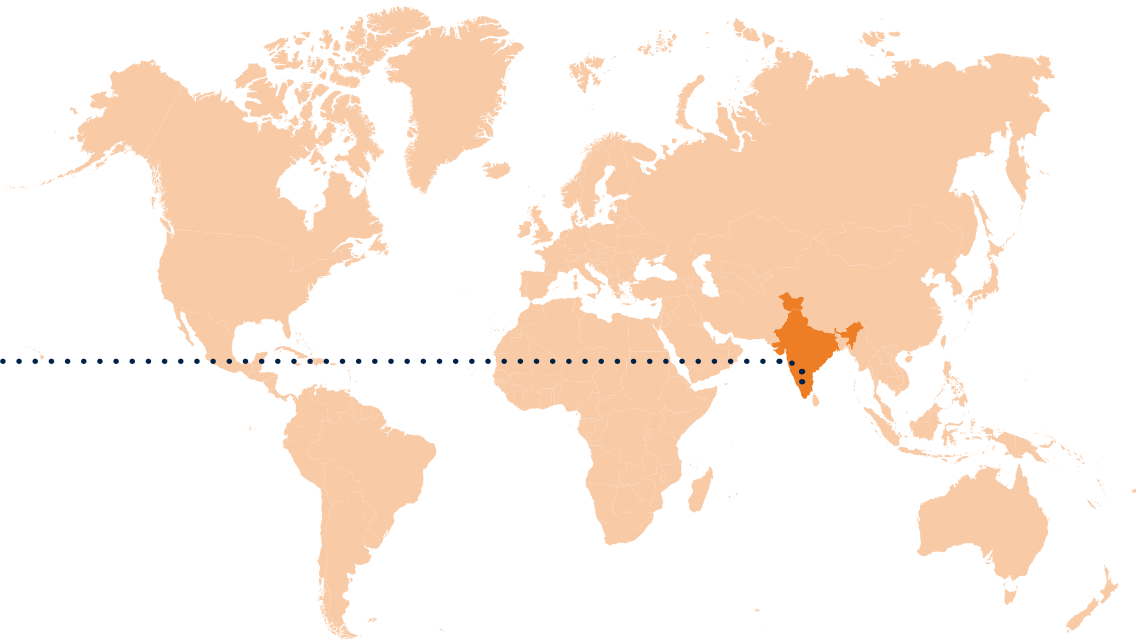


Geography

India
(nationwide)

Headquarters

Bengaluru, India



Social theme
Public education



Number of employees (through Co-Builders)

185



Legal entity

Shikshagraha is not registered as a legal entity, but rather operates through its member entities.



Governance structure
Shikshagraha is governed through a three-tiered leadership structure, including a leadership group with representatives from partner organisations to ensure shared governance and accountability.



Population target
Improve **1 million public schools** serving over **127 million children** in India.



Current impact
Currently reaching **213,539 schools** with **1,665,868 micro-improvements** led by **393,205 school and community leaders**.



Journey to ecosystem building



2013-2017

In 2013, Mantra4Change, a precursor to Shikshagraha, begins working on school improvement in Bangalore. The founding of ShikshaLokam — a manifestation of Societal Thinking — in 2017, with a vision to develop leadership for school improvement at scale, expands this effort. Together, they start nurturing an ecosystem of partners for systemic school improvement.

2019-2022

In 2019, these two organisations join Sanjhi Sikhiya and Samarthya (part of the EduMentum network) to form the Punjab Education Collective, which collaborates with the state government to implement over 25 microimprovements across 19,000 schools — contributing to Punjab taking first place nationally in education performance.

2023 onward

Building on this success, more statewide collectives are formed, and, in 2024, the idea evolves into Shikshagraha, a nationwide movement to transform India’s public education system and impact 127 million children.





Value creation

Shikshagraha’s ecosystem building activities are focused on improving public schools in India. The value created is microimprovements — small, manageable changes initiated by school and community leaders to achieve the larger goal of education equity in India — as well as school and community leadership, built around the core idea of restoring agency.



Stakeholders

1 Bridging diverse stakeholders

State-level collectives and district- and community-level missions under Shikshagraha bring together diverse stakeholders — civil society organisations, government, businesses, and communities — to pursue shared priorities and co-create action plans.



Connections

2 Crafting shared narratives and culture

Shikshagraha works to shift long-held narratives and norms about the purpose of education and public schools, reorienting government-run schools as vibrant centres of learning, school leaders as innovators, and communities as vital education partners. These new, shared narratives are anchored in the unified approach of microimprovements.

3 Weaving relationships and trusted connections

Shikshagraha creates repeated opportunities for diverse stakeholders to connect and collaborate through communities of practice calls, regional co-creation meet-ups, and convenings such as Shiksha Samvaad and Collab-a-thon. These touchpoints build familiarity and trust among partners. By ensuring partners have a role and voice in the movement through programmes, as well as leadership and governance structures, Shikshagraha ensures strong representation and connection across sectors and organisations.



Resources

4 Supporting skills building, talent development, and leadership pathways

Network partners provide training and support to state-, school-, and community-level leaders. Peer learning communities for each collective enable shared learnings across schools and classrooms.

5 Designing supportive policies

Shikshagraha partners take up different roles: some work with the national government on policies related to education leadership, while other partners align policy and state priorities with movement principles at the state and district levels.

6 Designing financial structures and raising capital

Building on its core principle of systemic action, Shikshagraha partners tap into state and district education budgets for school improvement initiatives, while the Shikshagraha funding orchestration team mobilises philanthropic capital for and with partners while also building a shared funding pool to support collective efforts.

7 Building infrastructure

ShikshaLokam — one of the Shikshagraha partners — was instrumental in co-developing DIKSHA, the National Digital Infrastructure for Education by the Ministry of Education, Government of India. This platform creates an open, shared infrastructure for learning and microimprovements across the country.

8 Expanding knowledge resources

Shikshagraha grows the ecosystem’s knowledge base by crowdsourcing resources from partners on the Shikshagraha Commons platform and sharing them openly under Creative Commons. It also aggregates important data from the collectives and missions on the Shikshagraha dashboard to inform action and reinforce a credible, evidence-based narrative of progress.

SmartStart Early Learning

Scaling access to quality early learning programmes for 1 million children in South Africa

Overview
SmartStart is dedicated to ensuring that every child aged three to five in South Africa has access to quality early learning opportunities while creating meaningful livelihoods for women in communities across the country. SmartStart comprises a national hub and a network of branches and franchisors (implementing partners), which support franchisees — predominantly women who set up and operate local early childhood learning programmes (ELPs) as micro-enterprises. Local women are equipped with training, tools, connection, and support to deliver play-based programmes that build young children’s foundational skills. SmartStart’s work simultaneously co-creates a more coherent early childhood development (ECD) ecosystem while contributing to gender equity by enabling women caregivers to pursue purposeful work.



Geography
South Africa
(nationwide)

Headquarters
Johannesburg,
South Africa



Social theme
Early childhood development (ECD)



Number of employees

159



Legal entity
SmartStart is a registered non-profit organisation in South Africa.



Governance structure
SmartStart has a Board of Directors with four members, all representing founding investor partners, and the CEO as Executive Director.



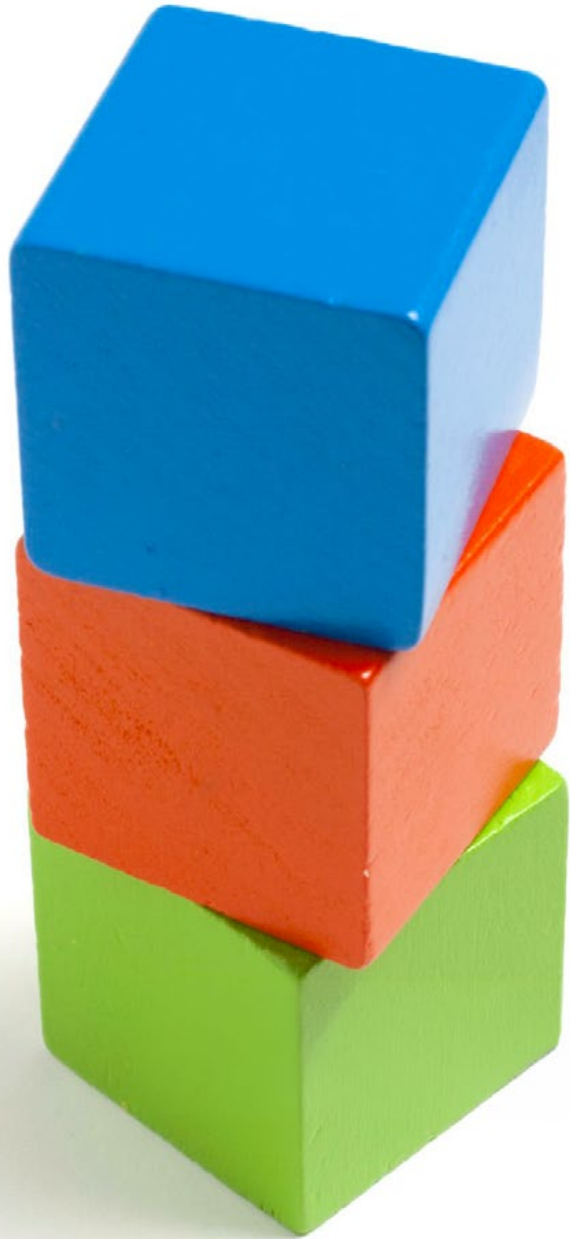
Population target
Reach **1 million children (out of 1.3 million)** currently not being served by early learning programmes in the country.



Current impact
As of the end of October 2025, SmartStart was **enrolling 164,963 children in 14,701 early learning programmes** nationwide. Since inception, SmartStart has reached **314,004 children** and supported over **24,000 new early learning programmes**.



Journey to ecosystem building



2013-2017

SmartStart focuses on building a scalable and affordable social franchise model for early learning programmes. The number of franchisees grows rapidly.

2018-2022

A rigorous evaluation shows significant absolute and relative developmental gains for children attending SmartStart programmes, revealing that children are on track for school readiness. However, growth moderates due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

2023-2025

SmartStart partners with government to shape policy and funding, driving stronger growth and catalysing major policy shifts toward ECD. A second child outcomes evaluation shows similar developmental gains even with SmartStart’s much greater scale.

2025 onward

SmartStart is now pivoting from organisational growth to paving the way for national scale. SmartStart will increase its impact through new partnership models that bring together diverse stakeholders across the country and beyond.





Value creation
South Africa aims to achieve universal coverage of early childhood development services by 2030. This requires provision of early childhood learning programmes to 1.3 million more children than are currently being served. SmartStart’s model ensures high quality programmes built upon available local resources and people, which enables affordability and contextual variation. Simultaneously, SmartStart is working to realise and position ELPs as engines of livelihood, enterprise, and women’s economic empowerment.

Stakeholders

- 1 Bridging diverse stakeholders**
SmartStart brings together thousands of women-led micro-enterprises, NGOs, government departments, and local leaders. Historically, this was performed through a social franchise model; going forward, this will be performed through an open platform and network.

Connections

- 2 Crafting shared narratives and culture**
SmartStart demonstrates that local women can deliver high-quality early learning programmes with existing community resources. This narrative supports a culture of possibility, rather than chasing after scarcity.
- 3 Weaving relationships and trusted connections**
SmartStart’s platform enables a nationwide network that links communities (community leaders, caregivers, practitioners, and children) and national support structures (partner NGOs, provincial education departments, strategic partners, national government departments, and the SmartStart national hub).

Resources

- 4 Supporting skills building, talent development, and leadership pathways**
SmartStart trains, supports, and collaborates with NGO partners (franchisors) to activate and amplify the skills and development of new early learning practitioners (franchisees). Practitioners are supported to run ELPs as micro-enterprises and to see themselves as business professionals connected in a national network.
- 5 Designing supportive policies**
SmartStart works in collaboration with other national partners to translate insights from community practice into national dialogue. This policy work has resulted in tangible progress for the sector, including a mass registration drive to enrol tens of thousands of practitioners, and significantly increased funding for ECD overall.
- 6 Designing financial structures and raising capital**
SmartStart is working closely with national partners and government to design a subsidy structure that fully supports ELPs and children. In the past, subsidies were underutilised since ELPs found it difficult to register their programmes. Today, easier registration and more generous subsidies are helping to increase the number of children accessing support.
- 7 Building infrastructure**
SmartStart’s platform, and the network it enables, are necessary for the ECD ecosystem to achieve quality access for all. SmartStart is currently reimagining how to transform this infrastructure into an open national platform that scales beyond the SmartStart organisation.
- 8 Expanding knowledge resources**
SmartStart provides resources for the entire value chain of early childhood learning programme setup and development. This includes pedagogy (a structured set of activities called ‘The Daily Routine’) as well as roles, tools, and processes that support the consistent delivery of quality learning over time.

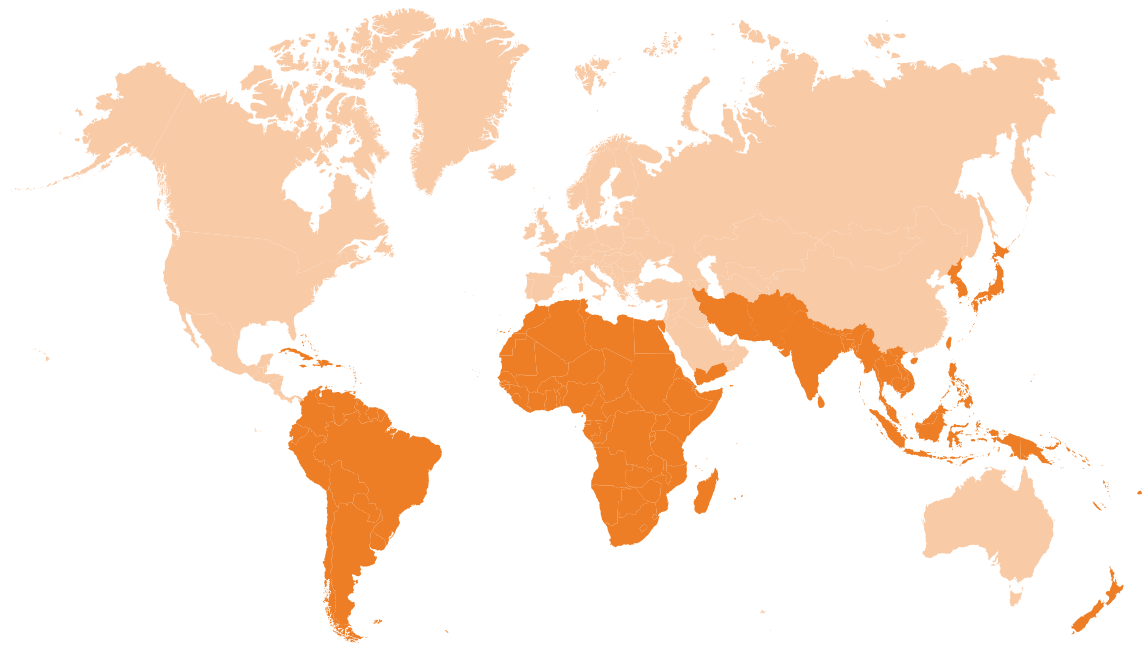
Amplifying and connecting local experts in drone, data, and AI technologies for sustainable development

Overview
WeRobotics is an international social enterprise amplifying and connecting local experts who use drones, data, and AI technologies to implement long-term solutions for sustainable development. Through its Network of Flying Labs in more than 35 countries, it develops local-global partnerships to apply emerging technologies to areas such as disaster and climate resilience, agriculture, health, urban planning, and environmental protection. By co-creating ecosystems, models, and pathways between local and global actors to sustainably integrate technologies into local solutions, WeRobotics is also promoting a replicable model to redefine localisation and power balances between grassroots and global actors through a locally led, globally supported approach.



Geography
35+ countries in Africa, Asia Pacific, and Latin America

Headquarters
Fully remote



Social theme
Sustainable development



Number of full-time employees

11



Legal entity
WeRobotics is a non-profit organisation registered in the USA and Switzerland.



Governance structure
WeRobotics has a global Board of Directors with six members. Since 2024, the Flying Labs Network has had a Council with nine members, providing governance and strategic decision making for the Network.



Population target
WeRobotics does not have a population target but rather aims to enable a global mindset shift within the aid, development and private technology sector to decentralise power to local experts.



Current impact
38 Flying Labs connect **300+ local experts** with hundreds of global and local partners. From 2019–25, the network **implemented 988 locally led initiatives** and **built capacity among 19,453 professionals and young people**.



Journey to ecosystem building



- 2015-2017**
WeRobotics is founded by the merger of two existing initiatives: Drone Adventures and UAViators. WeRobotics tests the development of ‘local drone, data & AI knowledge hubs’ and builds early partnerships with funders and key technology companies.
- 2018-2021**
WeRobotics initiates a social franchising model in 2018 to scale its approach by licensing Flying Labs to local non-profit, academic, and for-profit enterprises. An internal engineering team is still part of the organisation for project-related work.
- 2022**
WeRobotics reorganises its organisation and closes the Swiss-based engineering team to fully embrace the ‘Power of Local’ vision.
- 2023-2025**
Full energy goes into growing the Flying Labs Network, realigning support to local needs and opening new pathways for collaboration. The model is shared for adoption with four other organisations.
- 2026 onwards**
WeRobotics achieves its 10-year TOC and launches the new strategy for wider ecosystem building and model adoptions.



Nasir Khan, Bangladesh Flying Labs, 2025



Nepal Flying Labs.



Dan Muniu, WeRobotics, 2022



Value creation
WeRobotics and the Flying Labs Network are building ‘nested’ ecosystems: (1) a global network of local experts, connecting Flying Labs to each other and to (2) an ecosystem of global technology and organisational partners and (3) local ecosystems in countries with a Flying Lab presence. The value created is local expertise and global support, both for local challenges and global knowledge sharing.



Stakeholders

1 Bridging diverse stakeholders
WeRobotics brings together a diverse network of local experts, technology and organisational partners, NGOs, governments, and international funding partners to share resources and knowledge, and integrate emerging technologies for social impact.



Connections

2 Crafting shared narratives and culture
WeRobotics unites the Flying Labs and international partners around a shared narrative, the ‘power of local’, as well as a culture of collaboration, sharing, and co-creation.

3 Weaving relationships and trusted connections
By connecting international and grassroots experts at the global level, through its Flying Labs Network, WeRobotics enables local development that empowers local experts to lead technology-driven development.



Resources

4 Supporting skills building, talent development, and leadership pathways
Flying Labs provide hands-on training, mentorship, and locally led learning programmes, enabling individuals and communities to build expertise in drones, data, and AI for social impact.

5 Designing supportive policies
Flying Labs engage directly with government authorities, such as national civil aviation authorities, by organising workshops, submitting policy recommendations, and creating operational frameworks that reflect local reality.

6 Designing financial structures and raising capital
WeRobotics enables in-kind donations of software and hardware by technology partners and pro bono services of organisational partners to Flying Labs. Flying Labs are self-sustaining, receiving project fees, training fees, and grants from their clients, who are mainly local.

7 Building infrastructure
WeRobotics and Flying Labs establish governance and funding strategies that allow local organisations to finance and lead technology projects rather than depend on international actors.

8 Expanding knowledge resources
Flying Labs share learnings with each other through regional and sector-focused pathways, as well as publicly through blog posts, use cases, and webinars for wider replication. Technology partners host Lab-exclusive trainings.

04

Conclusion





Shikshagraha, Mantra4Change, 2025

Conclusion

Ecosystem building starts with an important realisation: social innovators and entrepreneurs cannot solve societal challenges alone. Many actors — with different resources, skills, and points of view — have a role to play in social change. Businesses, non-profits, governments, communities, academic institutions, investors, and philanthropists are all critical to creating the systemic shifts that enable population-level improvements.

In this playbook, we have shared learnings from social innovators building ecosystems on the ground, looking at real-life examples of the messy but impactful work of bringing together multiple stakeholders to achieve large-scale social change.

At the heart of this work is *bridging diverse stakeholders*, which is increasingly challenging as our societies become more polarised. Tackling complex social problems calls for innovation not only in the solutions themselves, but also in how diverse stakeholders collaborate to make them work. In recent years, social innovators around the world have begun pursuing new efforts to support, connect, and bring together multiple stakeholders, across thematic areas and geographies.

To bridge diverse stakeholders, ecosystem builders *craft shared narratives and culture and weave trusted networks*. This involves deep listening to different stakeholder groups, ensuring that evidence and insights are shared widely to build understanding and alignment while moving forward together. It also involves making time for repeated interactions, which build trust and solidarity, while also ensuring that all stakeholders have a role and voice in the process.

To support these diverse stakeholders, ecosystem builders develop critical resources that enable collaboration and sustained impact: *shared knowledge and evidence; skills, talent, and leadership pathways; supportive policies; enabling infrastructure; and aligned financial mechanisms*. Together, these resources strengthen collective capacity and allow activities to coalesce into meaningful, long-term systems change.

End notes

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