

DEVELOPING AN ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM

HOW CSU PROGRAMS BRING STUDENTS' BUSINESS IDEAS FROM CONCEPTION TO MARKET.

CONNECTING CALIFORNIANS



STUDENTS FROM THE CSU-7 COMMUNITY GRANT BUILDER (CBG) PILOT PROGRAM TAKE PART IN MARKETING TRAINING.

A systemwide pitch competition is only the first step to connecting all 23 universities in an entrepreneurial ecosystem. Faculty at [Cal State Long Beach's Institute for Innovation & Entrepreneurship](#) are developing a systemwide network of support programs, thanks to a CSU-7 Community Grant Builder (CBG) from the Sunstone Community Fund. Seven CSU campuses, including CSULB, are participating in the pilot program: Dominguez Hills, Fullerton, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Northridge, Pomona and San José.

The goals of the CBG are to grow the entrepreneurial ecosystem on each campus by building awareness and engagement for programs and activities around entrepreneurship and map for each campus that will include information on each of the programs, resources for entrepreneurs, opportunities to collaborate and much more.

Ingrid Martin, a professor of marketing at CSULB says they hope to eventually create a roadmap to extend the collaboration model to all 23 universities. Faculty are currently seeking funding for a platform that will be the hub for information, resources and collaboration.

“The idea is that one day, all this information will be available in one place so that a CSU entrepreneur—or even members of the public—can immediately see what startup programs and activities are available, not just at their own campus but across the state,” Martin says. “This will also increase collaboration so that if a student at one campus has a business idea but doesn’t possess the technological skills they need to bring it to fruition, we can connect them to a student at program at another campus who does.” The funding also enabled CBG partner campuses to hire and train student assistants to develop messaging, track performance and help promote the programs at the participating campuses.

As a trial, five of the seven CSUs helped raise awareness of and promote the February 2023 California Celebrates Entrepreneurship (SCCE) event to their campus communities. Martin says the coordinated efforts were successful in increasing student participation and will be used as a model for future events.

“This collaboration laid the groundwork for the CBG to leverage the size of the CSU to provide its entrepreneurs with unparalleled access to resources and opportunities at a scale unheard of anywhere else in the country,” says David Ochi, executive director for the CSU Dominguez Hills Innovation Incubator. “As we expand our efforts, the message to students and the community will become undeniably clear: CSU is the best place to become an entrepreneur.”

START YOUR ENGINES



MEMBERS OF ONE OF THE FIRST-PRIZE WINNING TEAMS, SOLUBRIN, POSE WITH SUNSTONE CSU STARTUP LAUNCH COMPETITION COORDINATORS.

For the first time in its history, the CSU invited students from across the state to compete in a systemwide business pitch competition in spring 2023, gathering nearly 100 of its top student innovators and entrepreneurs and connecting them with funds to launch or grow their fledgling companies.

Thirty-six student teams from 18 universities competed in the inaugural Sunstone CSU Startup Launch Competition, hosted by [San José State](#), to pitch ideas that address some of today's major issues, like food scarcity, fentanyl misuse and hiring challenges.

Many of the business ideas were born out of various startup incubator programs on CSU

campuses which provide valuable mentoring, networking and professional development opportunities to help students prepare for pitches and presentations to investors. The Startup Launch Competition was funded in large part by Sunstone Management, a diversified private capital firm with a long history of supporting entrepreneurial activity at the CSU.

“The founders of Sunstone Management believe the CSU system, with its 23 great universities and nearly 460,000 creative and talented students, will be responsible for creating several new technology startups that will shape the future of California’s economy,” says Sunstone CEO John Keisler.

Fifteen student teams took home a total of \$200,000 in prize money provided by Sunstone, who announced at the awards ceremony a five-year, \$1 million commitment to the university to support the competition and continue promoting the pursuit of business innovation.

“Being able to tap into and support the brain power and energy of students and professors in the CSU system is both our honor and duty,” Keisler says.

Ganesh Raman, associate vice chancellor of research at the CSU Chancellor’s Office, says the annual competition also brings students and campuses together to share ideas, adding that this collaboration is crucial to strengthening the university’s entrepreneurship network and promoting cross pollination.

See what three first-place winners of the Sunstone CSU Startup Launch Competition say about the support they received from the university.

STORY: ALISIA RUBLE

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