

COMMITTEE ON ACCELERATING TRANSLATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Accelerating Translation and Entrepreneurship at MIT

Findings and Recommendations of the Committee on Accelerating Translation and Entrepreneurship – August 2026

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Charged by President Sally Kornbluth and Provost Anantha Chandrakasan

Executive Summary

MIT has long been one of the world's great engines of discovery. For more than 160 years, the Institute has insisted on the link between knowing and doing — *mens et manus* — a conviction inscribed in Lobby 7: “*Established for Advancement and Development of Science, its Application to Industry, the Arts, Agriculture and Commerce.*”

Acting on that conviction, generations of MIT students, faculty, and alumni have turned ideas from the lab and the dorm into companies, non-profits, and other ventures that have reshaped industries and improved lives. But the systems through which the Institute supports that work have not kept pace with the demand and potential of our community, nor with the urgency of the moment. There is both an opportunity and a clear imperative to improve those systems now.

The Committee on Accelerating Translation and Entrepreneurship (CATE) was charged in January 2026 to recommend bold, actionable steps that strengthen the pathways through which MIT's ideas become impact. After six months of work, a clear finding has emerged.

MIT does not lack talent, ideas, ambition, alumni, or programs. It has a remarkable grassroots entrepreneurial ecosystem. But it lacks institutional coherence and standardized solutions to support translation and entrepreneurship.

Translation is the movement of MIT's discoveries and research into practical products and solutions for society and the public good — the broad set of activities by which ideas move from MIT into the world: commercialization, social ventures, non-profits, public-interest innovation, engagement with industry and government, and many other forms of impact. We define entrepreneurship as a skill set and mindset that students, faculty, and staff can develop independent of whether they ever found a company. The goal of our report is to build out the ecosystem for translation and entrepreneurship across the entire continuum of the MIT community — from the curious to the deeply committed.

The work proposed here builds on the existing ecosystem rather than replacing it, and it does not seek to turn MIT into an incubator or a venture fund. MIT's distinctive contribution is to educate, convene, connect, de-risk early translation, set fair institutional rules, and build environments in which people with the drive to act can move important ideas into use.

The committee identified four primary impediments:

- (1) Lack of clear information about - and easy access to - the rich set of offerings available to students, faculty, and staff. Many valuable resources are not readily visible at the time they would be most helpful, and utilizing them often relies on *ad hoc* exceptions.
- (2) Insufficient dedicated resources to provide customized and integrated education, programming, mentoring, and translational support for students, faculty, and research scientists, so that their journeys are effective, efficient, and as accelerated as possible.

- (3) In general, resolving obstacles takes too long: institutional flexibility is limited around faculty leaves, conflict-of-interest policy restrictions on faculty-startup collaborations, protracted licensing processes, and access to laboratory facilities by startups.
- (4) Uneven connectivity with the MIT alumni network. Strong programs and communities already engage alumni deeply, but visibility, connection, and access across the Institute remain inconsistent and often depend on personal networks. Alumni connectivity could unlock significant resources and benefits for the entire community.

The result is uneven access to resources and support, slower speed, and frustration in navigating the ecosystem. The committee proposes five recommendations, summarized in the table below. Together they would make translation and entrepreneurship a visible, accountable, mission-aligned part of MIT's operating model and position the Institute to lead in defining what translation looks like at a research university in the twenty-first century. The five recommendations are interdependent. Recommendation 5, on institutional frictions, is the foundation on which Recommendations 2, 3, and 4 depend; without those reforms, those supports and pathways will not deliver.

Recommendation	Core Move	Specific Sub-Recommendations
1. Establish Institute-level leadership for translation and entrepreneurship	Create a senior leadership function that coordinates and supports translation and entrepreneurship across schools, programs, and external partnerships.	1.1 Designate an interim senior sponsor and launch the structure-and-search process. 1.2 Resource the function to match its mandate (operating budget, coordination and assessment staff, pilot funding, and the authority to convene cross-school working groups). 1.3 Convene an internal advisory board and an external advisory board of practicing entrepreneurs. 1.4 Publish an annual translation and entrepreneurship dashboard, segmented across speed, reach, education, equity, faculty engagement, alumni activation, and venture outcomes.
2. Accelerate lab-to-market	Strengthen and connect dedicated mentoring, funding, and education for faculty, postdocs, and graduate students moving research-based ideas to the market.	2.1 Develop a translational venture-building community for final-year PhDs, postdocs, research scientists, technical associates, and experienced venture builders, anchored by MIT Sloan and the Deshpande Center. 2.2 Expand translational funding and improve systematic connections among

Recommendation	Core Move	Specific Sub-Recommendations
		grant programs, translational fellowships, alumni mentors, and technical catalysts. 2.3 Revamp and amplify translational courses across MIT for rigorous action-learning around real MIT technologies (e.g., i-Teams, Medical Device Design, R2E, Catapult); pilot vertical-specific programs (life sciences, fusion, climate and energy, defense, hard tech) building on a HEALS pilot. Offer faculty entrepreneurship bootcamps. 2.4 Learn from the success of the Faculty Founder Initiative and explore scaling to other areas.
3. Accelerate dorm-to-market	Provide a rigorous, practical, customizable, visible, accessible, and integrated pathway for students to build entrepreneurial skills.	3.1 More focused offerings: meet students where they are by creating new, more specialized programs for entrepreneurs at different stages, ranging from those who are active founders to those who are curious about the discipline — e.g., revised leave policies; next-generation Delta v programs; solution design and discovery programs (DesignX); exploratory programs (e.g., Startup Career Fair, Sandbox); impact-driven programming (PKG IDEAS, MIT Arts, Kuo Sharper Center) — that together form an integrated continuum. 3.2 Harmonization of the existing system: identify best practices in the current system and improve connections to produce value beyond the sum of the parts. This would be done through data, reduced duplication, and integrated offerings across the dorm-to-market ecosystem, including intentional and explicit connections to lab-to-market. 3.3 Undergraduate access: create early (first- and second-year) visibility and accessibility to entrepreneurship for

Recommendation	Core Move	Specific Sub-Recommendations
		undergraduates, in the classroom and through extracurriculars and internships. Include a physical presence on West Campus and an AI system that can provide customized, targeted student guidance, connections, and assistance. 3.4 An Institute-wide nervous system: build a lightweight network of trained student and staff volunteers who serve as ecosystem connectors at key transition points across departments and living communities. 3.5 Residential option: pilot entrepreneurial living or community spaces (e.g., a dedicated floor at New House or a cohort-based environment) to foster peer learning and collaboration.
4. Enhance alumni engagement and connections	Build on existing alumni engagement to activate alumni more broadly as force multipliers for capital, capabilities, customers, jobs, design partnerships, regulatory knowledge, and founder-to-founder trust. Frame this work as low-cost activation of latent capacity, not new program-building.	4.1 Explore formalizing partnerships between the MIT Alumni Association and related founder communities (modest staffing, data support, communications, preserving the founder-first character). 4.2 Launch and appropriately resource a Founder Bridge program for graduating students, a one-to-two-year period during which recent graduates retain access to MIT email, library services, founder circles, selected programming, the Venture Mentoring Service, and the alumni founder network. The Founder Bridge addresses the critical period after graduation when MIT loses contact with its most entrepreneurial young alumni. 4.3 Explore creating Founder Return roles (entrepreneurs-in-residence, founder fellows, venture builders, design partners, guest instructors) and an AI-assisted alumni discovery layer

Recommendation	Core Move	Specific Sub-Recommendations
		paired with human routers, in coordination with other programs. 4.4 Curate “intellectual hubs” that activate MIT’s alumni network in key innovation centers (e.g., Silicon Valley, Hong Kong, Singapore) — featuring alumni networking events, student trips hosted by alumni, MIT pitch competitions, and VC and startup internships — staffed by the Alumni Association or the new translation and entrepreneurship function, rather than costly physical offices.
5. Reduce institutional frictions	Replace <i>ad hoc</i> exception-making with published leave pathways; modernize conflict-of-interest policies; accelerate licensing; structure facilities access; pursue pre-negotiated IP frameworks; expand sponsored-research mechanisms; and protect students and faculty from predatory external actors.	5.1 Create a formal, named entrepreneurial faculty leave track for senior (tenured) faculty engaged in active venture-building, with a standard duration of two to four years and flexible 20% to 80% effort, allowing multi-year predictability without annual renegotiation. 5.2 Reframe conflict of interest as “complement of interest,” recognizing entrepreneurship as an important complementary activity that advances MIT’s mission and impact. 5.3 Establish and publish TLO service standards (48-hour confidential disclosure agreement, 30-day options, 90-day routine licenses) and standard-template licenses; establish a clear mandate for TLO and provide faculty with resources aligned with that mandate. 5.4 Pursue pre-negotiated IP frameworks with key partners (e.g., Broad-style agreements with Mass General Brigham and others). 5.5 Establish a streamlined process supporting access to MIT equipment and facilities in faculty labs, for a fee. Third parties, including faculty startups,

Recommendation	Core Move	Specific Sub-Recommendations
		would benefit. MIT preserves assets that would otherwise be underutilized. 5.6 Expand the current sponsored-research exemption process to include non-federal funding from faculty-affiliated companies. 5.7 Permit faculty to hold operational and leadership positions in faculty-affiliated companies, including C-suite roles. 5.8 Permit and facilitate graduate students to engage with PI-affiliated startups earlier in their PhD training, with appropriate oversight, by creating an equitable, transparent, and efficient participation process. Grant leave when appropriate. 5.9 Create targeted educational opportunities for postdocs on the process and responsibilities of outside professional activities, so that they can structure such engagements effectively.

What success looks like

Success means that MIT provides its community with resources and efficient pathways for translating great ideas from campus into the world — whether the route is dorm-to-market or lab-to-market. Two dimensions matter most.

First, MIT should equip its community — and especially its students — with basic entrepreneurial skills and the mindset to act on them, whether their interest lies in for-profit ventures, social ventures, non-profits, or other forms of impact. Success on this dimension means that members of the MIT community can find the level of support that matches their stage and commitment, from the entrepreneurship-curious to the highly proficient.

Second, MIT should allow ideas and intellectual property created at the Institute to reach the world in the most effective way available. Success on this dimension means that the people who carry those ideas forward experience MIT's translation services — the TLO, conflict-of-interest management, faculty leaves, the gestation of new ideas — as working well to support ideas that are ready to leave the lab or dorm, and as candidly helping people understand when an idea is not yet ready, so that everyone's time is used well.

I. Why MIT Should Act Now

MIT's motto, *mens et manus*, has always implied more than discovery for its own sake. Translation is one of the ways MIT turns knowledge into action. Entrepreneurship, broadly construed, is its central mechanism. The recommendations of this report are designed to support translation in all its forms — commercial ventures, social ventures, non-profits, public-interest innovation, and engagement with industry and government — alongside the inventors, operators, product leaders, and policymakers who carry entrepreneurial impact into existing institutions.

Translation has become central to how MIT delivers on its mission. It is part of education: students need practice moving from technical possibility to customer reality, operational reality, regulatory reality, and societal reality. It is an increasingly important channel for our faculty and students, as the mechanisms to move technologies out of the lab are rapidly evolving. It increasingly sustains research: federal funding is less predictable, and agencies including DARPA and ARPA-H expect pathways to deployment. And it is part of MIT's public role: the Institute's most important ideas should not fail to reach the world because of internal friction. MIT's commitment to translation deserves to be communicated publicly, so that students, faculty, alumni, partners, and peer institutions can understand it and respond.

MIT begins from a position of strength. Alumni have founded more than 30,000 active companies generating roughly \$1.9 trillion in annual revenue, with an 80 percent five-year survival rate (compared to a national average of roughly 50 percent)¹. The Technology Licensing Office (TLO) reported 684 invention disclosures, 137 licenses and options, and 38 startup formations in FY2025. Members of the MIT community, including students and alumni, start many more companies each year, most outside the TLO pathway. The question is not whether MIT can create entrepreneurial activity, but whether MIT can organize itself to improve, broaden, and accelerate it.

This report rests on six months of evidence gathering. The committee's work drew on more than 250 interviews and discussions; listening sessions with the Provost's Council, the Faculty Policy Committee, the Provost's Faculty Advisory Committee, the Science Council, the Engineering Council, and the SHASS Council; written input from stakeholders inside and outside MIT; meetings with members of the MIT Corporation; and structured comparisons with peer institutions. The committee's work builds on and coordinates with the work of other Institute committees on adjacent topics, including the Committee on Intellectual Property (COIP), the Global Engagement Committee, and others; we have sought to complement rather than duplicate their findings.

¹ Roberts, Edward B., Fiona Murray, and J. Daniel Kim. *Entrepreneurship and Innovation at MIT: Continuing Global Growth and Impact*. MIT Sloan School of Management, December 2015.

II. Findings

The committee's evidence base points to six recurring frictions and one cross-cutting cautionary signal. Each represents an opportunity for improvement. Together they reveal a system design problem.

1. The ecosystem is rich but hard to navigate.

MIT has deep resources when it comes to entrepreneurship — for example, the Martin Trust Center, Deshpande Center for Technological Innovation, Sandbox, Delta v, DesignX, the Venture Mentoring Service, I-Corps, PKG IDEAS, Kuo Sharper Center, MIT Solve, the Faculty Founder Initiative, START.nano, student clubs, alumni communities, and many others. Together they host hundreds of entrepreneurship events each year; yet, despite this activity, many MIT stakeholders tell us there is room for improvement in visibility and accessibility. The issue is not the absence of resources. It is transparency, sequencing, and connection. Students and faculty often know one or two programs well but not how the system fits together. Alumni already connected through established programs engage deeply; those outside those channels may struggle to identify where to plug back in. External stakeholders who could be valuable partners are often mystified about how to connect.

“MIT has 11-plus entrepreneurship entities with no clear API for outsiders.”

— Venture capitalist and MIT alumnus

“Resources feel designed for existing founders, not curious beginners.”

— Graduate student town hall participant

2. Licensing, contracting, and conflict-of-interest practices create avoidable friction.

Faculty, investors, and administrators repeatedly describe a gap between MIT's stated openness to translation and their own experience with licensing, conflict-of-interest (COI) review, sponsored research, and agreements. The problem is partly policy, partly interpretation, partly an outdated model of translation, and partly culture.

Across every stakeholder category — from junior and senior faculty to external investors and Corporation members — we heard licensing cited as an area of discouraging institutional frictions. Confidential disclosure agreements (CDAs/NDAs) that should take 48 hours can take weeks. While faculty may hold equity in privately held companies, those companies cannot directly sponsor research in the faculty member's own lab unless the work is funded through a federal award (with MIT as prime recipient or via subaward arrangements between MIT and the company), or following an exception process.

Three threads run through this feedback. First, there is the question of whether the application of the Technology Licensing Office's mission is too narrow, to the extent that it focuses inordinately on financial interests rather than broader metrics to achieve a beneficial societal

impact. In some cases this can negatively affect how counterparties experience a negotiation with MIT, which can in turn impose a relational cost that outweighs marginal gains the Institute might accrue from more favorable license terms.

Second, the TLO does not systematically track or publish its turnaround times; stakeholders indicated that upgrading the TLO's systems to facilitate learning and improvement of service should be a high priority.

Third, MIT does not publicly disclose certain standard terms (e.g., equity stakes it will consider, clearly stated boundaries), which makes us less transparent than some of our peers. This also increases the planning uncertainty for stakeholders and counterparties. These are problems of design, clarity, and incentives.

The committee was pleased that TLO leadership has shown an openness to changes in these areas.

3. Lab-based companies face a facilities cliff.

The facilities issue is especially acute in climate and energy, materials, advanced manufacturing, life sciences, medical devices, and other equipment-intensive domains. These ventures often need specialized instrumentation precisely when they have the least cash and face the greatest technical uncertainty. Once a startup is formed and the researchers leave MIT, access to locally based (i.e., in faculty labs or departments) instruments, space, and shared infrastructure typically ends. A separate but related need is scale-up infrastructure for hard-tech ventures that have moved past zero-to-one but cannot easily access the larger facilities required for next-stage prototyping and pilot manufacturing.

“As soon as a startup is formed and the researchers leave MIT, the door slams shut and they are forced to replicate facilities on the outside.” — Faculty founder

4. Student pathways are uneven, and access is not neutral.

The student pathway is not one pathway. Students at every degree level face different challenges. Undergraduates contend with status competition and the pull of safer career paths. Graduate students must navigate the complex intersection of dissertation, advisor, and funding obligations. Postdocs are systematically underutilized as entrepreneurial multipliers. International students at all levels face visa constraints that can make founding a company effectively impossible. Across all populations, the system disproportionately advantages students who arrive with prior networks, family safety nets, or cultural familiarity with startups. Thirty percent of MIT undergraduates are first-generation or low-income, and women and underrepresented groups sometimes experience undergraduate entrepreneurship culture as narrow or exclusive.

MIT has several effective programs to help students interested in entrepreneurship expand their skills, and our interviews with students and alumni indicate that these programs would benefit

from broader access, greater scale, and more targeted offerings for students at different stages of experience. Encouraged by this committee's charge, several recent initiatives already show how readily this can be addressed. In February 2026, a Startup Career Fair organized by the Martin Trust Center Student Advisory Board — in collaboration with the Career Advising and Professional Development (CAPD) office and the First Generation and/or Low-Income (FLI) program — drew almost 1,700 registered students in roughly 30 days, with 64 startups attending. Delta v's 2026 redesign raised equity-free funding and recruited an expanded mentor network of unicorn founders, contributing to a 400 percent increase in early student interest and more than \$6 million raised in support before launch. And the Trust Center and MIT HEALS (Health and Life Sciences Collaborative) together launched the Researcher 2 Entrepreneur (R2E) grant, which provides up to \$20,000 of non-dilutive funding and structured mentorship to PhD students and postdocs.

"FLI students are their family's primary hope for economic mobility. They are trapped between security and entrepreneurship." — MIT administrator

"Undergraduate entrepreneurship feels very tech bro-y." — Recent alumna, Course 2

5. Alumni are a substantial asset, engaged too casually.

Alumni can provide capital, capabilities, customers, hiring pathways, design partners, regulatory knowledge, and founder-to-founder trust. Greater involvement of MIT alumni with entrepreneurial experience on campus can also be a valuable resource for current faculty and students — a learning opportunity that flows both ways. The MIT Alumni Association (MITAA), volunteer-led alumni founder communities, and entrepreneurship programs on campus already demonstrates the latent power of this network: a community of MIT founders built largely through volunteer effort. The latent capacity exists; the institutional infrastructure for it does not yet.

"If you get a call from another MIT founder, you answer the call."
— MIT alumni founder-community leader

6. Entrepreneurial education is fragmented and its target audiences are not clearly defined.

Entrepreneurial mindset and skills are increasingly central to how MIT graduates operate in the world, regardless of whether they found companies or social ventures, or choose to have impact in different ways. While entrepreneurial classes and programs exist, and many are excellent, exposure depends largely on student initiative. Faculty receive limited structured support to develop their own translation capabilities. Graduate students, postdocs, and research scientists have no consistent on-ramp. The result is that MIT's exceptional educational machinery produces strong entrepreneurial outcomes for those who self-select into existing programs, and weaker outcomes for everyone else.

Discussions with several groups reinforced that entrepreneurial relevance is broad at MIT and that interest in entrepreneurial opportunities exists for students across campus. For example, existing SHASS courses address entrepreneurship from historical, regulatory, and humanistic angles, and the arts and humanities are not peripheral to MIT's translation and entrepreneurship story — they are part of it. Similarly, Sloan and the School of Engineering have deep sets of classes teaching the skills relevant to creating new ventures. These offerings should become more visible and accessible to students earlier in their time at MIT.

“Entrepreneurship is not just a venture-backed startup.”

— Alumni founder, non-profit digital health

7. The committee heard real caution.

Some faculty worry that entrepreneurship will become a benefit for the already advantaged, that teaching and service burdens will shift to colleagues, that venture capitalists will roam the halls, or that MIT will drift toward short-term market incentives. Others are simply uninterested in entrepreneurial activity and concerned that an Institute push will impose expectations on them. These are not objections to dismiss. They are design constraints. The right response is disciplined design rather than timidity: transparent rules instead of exceptions, pilots instead of permanent overreach, visible student protections, department backfill for faculty leaves, optional rather than mandatory engagement, and assessment that asks whether MIT is becoming clearer, more inclusive, and more effective at providing our community with entrepreneurial skills and moving important ideas into the world.

A concern raised consistently across stakeholder groups is the risk of predatory external investor behavior toward MIT students and faculty. When MIT makes it easier for our community to engage the entrepreneurial ecosystem outside campus, the reverse is also true: external actors gain easier access to MIT, and less experienced or more vulnerable members of our community can be targeted with non-standard or disadvantageous arrangements. External investors and operators do offer real value in teaching and mentoring; the goal is not to exclude them, but to ensure that those with access to the MIT community operate by fair and transparent standards. Specifically, the classroom should remain a safe space, with no solicitation of funding during classes; investors who teach, mentor, or judge competitions should be subject to an honest-broker policy with no preferential access to deals or IP; and a community-curated mechanism should allow MIT students, faculty, and alumni to rate their experience with investors on campus, with regular access conditioned on participation in that transparency. MIT should also equip its community — through education, advising, and founder-friendly templates — to engage external capital from a position of preparation. This is framed as protection of the MIT community, not as a heavy regulatory regime.

III. Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Establish Institute-level leadership for translation and entrepreneurship

Translation and entrepreneurship are an important pillar of MIT's mission, and leadership architecture should reflect that. The committee recommends that the President and Provost establish a senior, Institute-level leadership function for translation and entrepreneurship, reporting to the Provost, with the authority to support and coordinate the ecosystem, assess the programs within it, drive policy reform where needed, steward alumni engagement, represent MIT externally, and be accountable for outcomes. Below, we present the case for the function itself. The choice of organizational form should rest with the President and Provost, based on institutional considerations the committee has surfaced but does not pre-judge.

The case for Institute-level leadership

First, leadership architecture should reflect mission claims. If MIT is to treat translation and entrepreneurship as a major pillar alongside teaching and research, the Institute should not solve the problem with a structure that signals it as a second-tier priority. The position of the Vice President for Research exists because research is a core mission requiring senior leadership with budget authority, strategic vision, and cross-school coordination. Comparable considerations apply to translation and entrepreneurship.

Second, cross-school coordination requires standing authority with the deans. The frictions documented in this report span every school and the College. A director-level role or informal coordinating committee lacks the institutional standing to negotiate policy with deans and the offices of the Provost, Vice President for Research, and General Counsel on equal terms.

Third, external representation requires senior-level visibility. The role will represent MIT to industry, government agencies, health systems, alumni founders, and international partners. These constituencies expect a senior, named institutional counterpart. UC Berkeley's Chief Innovation and Entrepreneurship Officer position was created at the senior level for this reason.

Fourth, sustained execution requires resourcing and accountability. The recommendations in this report require a regular operating budget, dedicated staff, and someone clearly accountable for whether the Institute is becoming faster, clearer, more inclusive, and more effective. Coordinating models can produce coordination but typically not accountability without a designated leader.

This role coordinates and supports rather than controls

It should not absorb every program, run every accelerator, or impose a single model across MIT. Different schools, industry sectors, and populations require different approaches, and that variation is precisely why a coordinating function is needed. The job is to make the system work: reduce duplication, surface gaps, establish service standards, coordinate policy reform, steward alumni engagement, build measurement infrastructure, and represent MIT externally. The role

must also have meaningful authority — budget allocation power and the ability to assess the quality of programs across the ecosystem — so that it can support strong programs, redirect resources away from weak ones, and influence how the centers and offices on campus operate. Without this authority, the role becomes advisory rather than coordinating.

Sub-recommendations

1.1 Designate an interim senior sponsor and launch the structure-and-search process. A senior faculty member or current administrator should be named within the next two months to begin coordination work and to oversee the structure-and-search process, so that momentum is not lost while the question of the form the permanent role should take is resolved.

1.2 Resource the function to match its mandate. The President and Provost should provide initial operating budget, dedicated coordination and assessment staff, project funding for the first-year pilots described in Recommendations 2 through 5, and clear authority to convene cross-school working groups. Specific staffing and budget levels are deferred to the President and Provost; under-resourcing the function relative to its portfolio will prevent it from delivering on its mandate, regardless of form.

1.3 Convene both an internal advisory board and an external advisory board. The internal advisory board should meet regularly to ground the function in current campus realities. A separate external advisory board, meeting two to three times per year and drawn from practicing entrepreneurs and entrepreneurially experienced faculty, keeps the role connected to the realities of the people it serves.

1.4 Establish an annual translation and entrepreneurship dashboard. Public, segmented metrics covering speed, reach, education, equity, faculty engagement, alumni activation, and venture outcomes. The dashboard should be designed to inform decisions rather than primarily to communicate success.

Recommendation 2: Accelerate lab-to-market

Lab-to-market ventures — those that emerge from MIT research, built on Institute facilities, sponsored research, and faculty-developed intellectual property — require a distinctive set of supports beyond what general entrepreneurial programs provide. They need translational funding, IP and licensing clarity, conflict-of-interest management, structured facilities access, technical and regulatory expertise, and sector-specific routes to commercialization. MIT should strengthen and connect existing supports into a coherent lab-to-market pathway organized around these needs and connected to the broader entrepreneurial ecosystem.

MIT already has several pockets of expertise relevant to this work. The Deshpande Center is purpose-built for the transition from promising research to translational opportunity and occupies a distinctive position between the laboratory, the market, and the mentor network. The Sloan School of Management has a world-leading faculty in entrepreneurship and innovation and a host of classes that can be scaled and made more broadly accessible to the community. The committee's recommendation is that MIT invest in strengthening coordination among these offerings and integrating these and other offerings across the ecosystem — the Technology Licensing Office, the Martin Trust Center, venture builders, the MIT-Royalty Pharma Faculty Founder Initiative, the Venture Mentoring Service, I-Corps, the Engine, and relevant sector-specific resources across MIT — without designating a single owner or duplicating effective existing capacity of the lab-to-market function. Scale-up infrastructure for hard-tech ventures is a related issue the committee discussed but defers for further institutional review, given the legal and mission-scope considerations it raises.

Sub-recommendations

2.1 Develop a translational venture-building community for final-year PhDs, postdocs, research scientists, technical associates, and experienced venture builders, anchored by MIT Sloan and the Deshpande Center. The community should include structured mentoring, exposure to sector-specific commercialization pathways, and access to experienced operators who understand the difference between a promising research result and a scalable venture. Experienced venture builders should be a cross-Institute resource — drawn from MIT alumni, industry partners, and faculty entrepreneurs — rather than staffed within a single center, to ensure availability to ventures across schools and disciplines. The community is open to a broader population than traditional faculty-led ventures: technical associates, research scientists, and senior PhD students with translational ambitions should be eligible participants alongside postdocs and faculty.

2.2 Expand translational funding and improve systematic connections. MIT should expand support for translational funding and venture-building for faculty, postdocs, graduate students, and research staff working on promising research-based opportunities. Equally important is systematic connection among existing supports: Deshpande grants, translational fellowships, venture-building support, alumni mentors, and technical catalysts. The goal is to build human capital around research-based ventures, not simply to provide small grants. The new

Researcher 2 Entrepreneur (R2E) grant from the Martin Trust Center and MIT Health and Life Sciences Collaborative (HEALS) is a promising recent addition to this pipeline, and the committee believes models of this kind deserve continued investment and tighter integration with Deshpande.

2.3 Revamp and amplify translational courses across MIT as rigorous action-learning experiences organized around real MIT technologies — for example, i-Teams, Medical Device Design, and the Researcher 2 Entrepreneur (R2E) grant cohort. MIT should also develop vertical-specific programs modeled on the spirit of the HEALS experiment, designed around the specific requirements of different domains — life sciences (regulatory strategy, clinical translation), fusion and climate/energy (demonstration and scale-up), defense-relevant technologies (procurement and security), and hard tech (manufacturing and facilities constraints). These programs can be developed in partnership with Sloan and the relevant schools, centers, and external partners, and should reflect the deep technical specificity each domain requires. Among the classes that have proven effective in many places are short, focused faculty entrepreneurship bootcamps, especially during the January Independent Activities Period or at other times outside semesters.

2.4 Learn from the success of the Faculty Founder Initiative and expand it where appropriate. The Faculty Founder Initiative, which has produced 16 companies in four years involving 33 faculty, combines research-area-focused educational programming with dedicated resources raised from outside donors. The committee suggests analyzing the drivers of the program's success and codifying the lessons that could be scaled and disseminated beyond its original focus on biotech and healthcare.

Recommendation 3: Accelerate dorm-to-market

Dorm-to-market ventures — those originating primarily but not exclusively from students' own ideas, interests, projects, or lived experience — are central to MIT's entrepreneurial identity. They are typically not based on MIT-funded research or Institute IP but are shaped by MIT's educational environment, peer networks, mentoring culture, competitions, and entrepreneurial programs. The dorm-to-market subcommittee's research makes the central point clearly: there is no single profile of the MIT entrepreneur. Some students arrive committed to founding a new venture; others are curious, not yet ready to commit, or even intimidated; many will join startups or lead products in existing organizations rather than found companies, especially early in their careers; and many, especially first-generation and low-income students, need access to networks their families or communities cannot provide. MIT should build the dorm-to-market pathway around access, sequencing, and continuity rather than a single founder archetype. MIT is home to many high-functioning programs, competitions, and student communities — among them Delta v, Sandbox, DesignX, the \$100K Competition, Venture Mentoring Service, PKG IDEAS, and the Arts Startup Incubator — that drive much of its grassroots entrepreneurial energy. As these efforts have grown in number, scale, and impact, there is an opportunity to strengthen collaboration, coordination, and alignment across the ecosystem in ways that amplify the value of each program — through stronger incentives and support structures that encourage programs to align strategically where appropriate and build on one another's strengths, while preserving the creativity, independence, and experimentation that make MIT's entrepreneurial culture distinctive. Graduate students whose entrepreneurial work flows through advisor relationships and laboratory IP are often best understood as lab-to-market actors and are addressed in Recommendations 2 and 5.

Sub-recommendations

3.1 More focused offerings. MIT should segment student-facing programming by stage and intent, meeting students where they are rather than pushing everyone toward a single path. Two recent MIT pilots point the way: students committed to founding in the near term now have a focused offering in the new and enhanced Delta v, which has been well received by students; and aspiring or curious students will find a redesigned Startup Career Fair that more directly meets their needs. Students exploring can work with Sandbox, students working on solution design and discovery can engage DesignX, and impact-driven entrepreneurs working on social, civic, or creative ventures can engage PKG IDEAS, MIT Arts, and the Kuo Sharper Center. Across these tiers, the programs should form an integrated continuum, with the possibility of a central coordinating role, so a student who starts out simply curious can advance to committed-to-founding without needing to re-discover the system at each stage.

3.2 Harmonization of the existing system. MIT's entrepreneurial programs were built from the bottom up over decades and are individually strong but unevenly connected. The committee recommends a structured exercise — owned by the senior translation and entrepreneurship function in Recommendation 1 — to identify best practices through data, reduce duplication,

and integrate complementary offerings without flattening their distinct missions. One concrete example of a successful model already in this vein is R2E, a program focused on PhD students, researchers, and postdocs. This cross-Institute effort integrates lessons and resources from MIT classes as well as the Deshpande Center, Delta v, DesignX, fuse, the Faculty Founder Initiative, I-Corps, Blueprint by The Engine, Venture Mentoring Service, and others, and aligns them with an MIT strategic initiative — in the case of the pilot, that initiative is HEALS. It connects directly to the lab-to-market journey (Recommendation 2): many ventures move between dorm-to-market and lab-to-market over time, and the system should support that movement rather than treat the two pathways as separate silos.

3.3 Undergraduate access. Visibility and accessibility of entrepreneurship to first- and second-year undergraduates remain uneven, and disproportionately so for first-generation and low-income students. MIT should create early exposure to entrepreneurship in the first two years — through coursework, extracurriculars, and internship pathways — and establish a physical presence on West Campus to close a real geographic gap for students who do not naturally orbit Sloan or the Trust Center. A guidance system that helps students navigate MIT's entrepreneurial offerings with information customized to their stage would meaningfully reduce search costs.

3.4 An Institute-wide nervous system. MIT should build a lightweight network of trained student and staff volunteers — organized by the senior translation and entrepreneurship function — who serve as ecosystem connectors at key transition points across departments and living communities. This puts knowledgeable connectors close to where students live and work, reducing the search costs that make the current system difficult to navigate, without requiring dedicated staffing or programmatic overhead.

3.5 Residential option. The committee recommends piloting an entrepreneurial residential community — for example, a dedicated floor at New House or a cohort-based environment elsewhere — to foster peer learning and collaboration among students with common entrepreneurial interests. As with all such pilots, this should be evaluated as an experiment rather than a permanent commitment, with explicit attention to whether the residential format broadens or narrows access.

Recommendation 4: Enhance alumni engagement and connections

MIT's alumni network is not just a mentoring pool or a fundraising audience. It is a force multiplier. As one Corporation member observed, young companies need three things: capital, capabilities, and customers. MIT's roughly 150,000 alumni, with about 30 percent of them in Massachusetts and California combined, provide all three. The opportunity is to extend and connect strong existing models of structured, high-trust engagement across the Institute, making them easier to find and access ultimately defining what active alumni-network infrastructure looks like at a research university. This work is best understood as low-cost activation of latent capacity rather than new program building. The point is to unlock what already exists, with modest institutional support, rather than to compete with or duplicate the internal supports in Recommendations 2 and 3.

Sub-recommendations

4.1 Explore formalizing connections between the MIT Alumni Association, MIT alumni startups, and related founder communities. MITAA has built a global community of MIT founders largely through volunteer effort: founder circles, peer groups, jobs and customer matchmaking, toolkits, and the cultural norm that MIT founders respond to each other. The Institute should provide modest staffing, data support, communications, and formal connection to student and faculty pathways, while preserving the founder-first character that makes the community work. The intent is to support a working community, not to absorb or rebrand it.

4.2 Launch and appropriately resource a Founder Bridge program for graduating students. A one-to-two-year period during which recent graduates retain access to MIT email, library services, founder circles, selected programming, while receiving a deliberate handoff to ongoing resources for which they are eligible, including the Venture Mentoring Service, founder circles, and alumni founder networks. The Founder Bridge addresses the critical period after graduation when MIT loses contact with its most entrepreneurial young alumni — a period in which informal support is often the difference between continued progress and a venture going dormant. The committee believes this is the single highest-leverage alumni-side investment MIT can make in the near term.

4.3 Explore creating Founder Return roles and an alumni discovery layer. Establish entrepreneurs-in-residence, founder fellows, venture builders, design partners, and guest instructor roles to bring experienced alumni back to campus in structured ways that draw on their operating expertise, in coordination with other programs. Build an opt-in, AI-assisted alumni discovery layer paired with human “smart routers” for matchmaking. A directory alone will not create trust; investment in human curation is essential. The committee recommends piloting human-curated matching first and then layering AI on a working manual model rather than the reverse.

4.4 Develop curated intellectual hubs that connect the MIT community to alumni networks beyond Cambridge. Corporation members and alumni cautioned the committee against a

physical hub: peer institutions' experiments with dedicated Silicon Valley offices proved expensive and saw limited use, and founders do not lack places to meet. Building and maintaining laboratory space in these locations would be prohibitively costly. The higher-leverage move is to create curated "intellectual" hubs that activate MIT's network in key innovation centers such as Silicon Valley, Hong Kong, and Singapore. This also aligns with a larger global engagement strategy at MIT. Dedicated staff — based in the Alumni Association or the new translation and entrepreneurship function (Recommendation 1) — should organize alumni networking events in these cities, student trips hosted by prominent alumni, MIT pitch competitions, and structured internships for undergraduate and graduate students with alumni-led venture firms and startups. Lighter-touch gatherings — dinners or social mixers hosted by a well-known MIT founder or investor, and selectively opened to others in the local ecosystem to broaden reach — can sustain these communities at low cost. As elsewhere in this recommendation, this is activation of latent capacity rather than new program building, and it should be piloted and scaled where it works.

Recommendation 5: Reduce institutional frictions

The reforms in this recommendation are foundational to the others. Faculty leaves, conflict-of-interest management, licensing, facilities access, IP arrangements, and sponsored-research mechanisms together form the institutional infrastructure on which Recommendations 2, 3, and 4 depend. Stakeholders across the committee's evidence base — faculty entrepreneurs, external investors, alumni founders, the Corporation, students, and administrative leadership — identified institutional friction as the most consequential set of issues this committee could address. Implemented separately, each reform helps; implemented together, they replace negotiation-by-exception with a transparent runway from research to responsible venture formation.

A recurring theme — voiced by stakeholders ranging from senior Institute leaders to individual faculty — is institutional clock speed: how long it takes MIT to decide, approve, and adapt. The aim of the proposed reforms is to remove unnecessary friction and replace negotiation-by-exception with fast, predictable, and transparent pathways. We also hope that MIT will experiment with several of the new ideas proposed in this report and scale the ones that work.

Sub-recommendations

5.1 Create a formal, named entrepreneurial faculty leave track. The committee recommends that MIT establish a distinct leave category designated for entrepreneurial activity, with a standard duration of two to four years (with the possibility of a shorter term), for senior (tenured) faculty engaged in active venture-building. Faculty should have access to a transparent menu of effort and salary options across roughly 20 to 80 percent of full-time effort at MIT (with 25 percent MIT / 75 percent startup a common example). Multi-year approval with lightweight annual check-ins should replace year-by-year renegotiation, providing the predictability that both faculty and companies need. The committee's view is that this leave should be available to tenured faculty only; pre-tenure faculty should not have access to extended entrepreneurial leave, to avoid skewing tenure dynamics. Salary savings during leave should flow to the relevant department, with offsets for teaching and service responsibilities, to support replacement coverage.

5.2 Reframe conflict of interest as “complement of interest.” Conflict-of-interest rules exist to protect the integrity of MIT's teaching and research, ensure objective professional judgment, and maintain public trust. In current practice, however, their application can drive talent away from MIT, and penalize those who engage in good faith while rewarding those who work around the rules. The committee uses conflict of interest as the standard term, in line with MIT's official language, but recommends that MIT's working posture shift from *de facto* avoidance to managed engagement. Specifically, MIT should recognize entrepreneurship as an important complementary activity that advances MIT's mission and impact. A complement-of-interest plan describes how MIT's mission and a company's work advance together, what boundaries apply, how students and postdocs are protected, and who provides independent oversight. The

complement-of-interest framework should be the default working posture across faculty-affiliated ventures, with appropriate safeguards.

5.3 Establish and publish TLO service standards and standard licensing templates. Service standards: 48-hour confidential disclosure agreement turnaround, 30-day option proposals, 90-day routine startup license execution. Standardize template agreements with two to three equity and royalty bands differentiated by sector. Create an express option/license path for routine cases.

MIT should publish its standard terms, express licenses, and the officers responsible for them, and should track and report the TLO's own turnaround times and outcomes against the service standards above, noting that turnaround times are ultimately a function of both the TLO and its counterparties. The committee further recommends that MIT consider a "concierge" model — in which a TLO staff member not involved in licensing negotiations would be assigned to each case to keep the founders informed of progress and help them navigate interactions among the TLO, the COI office, and other internal offices. The committee notes the active effort by Eric Paley, Massachusetts Secretary of Economic Development, to standardize licensing terms across institutions; MIT should engage with this work and lead where appropriate.

Most fundamentally, the Institute should reinforce that the TLO's core purpose is to advance innovation, entrepreneurship, and impact by actively supporting faculty and student inventors. Particularly in cases where inventors are themselves commercializing the research, MIT should have a broad view of its own interests, including financial benefit to the Institute, impact on society, and support for faculty and innovators. This broad view is consistent with acting according to standard terms and safeguards while moving quickly and acting with transparency.

5.4 Pursue pre-negotiated IP frameworks with key partners. The Broad Institute's multi-institutional operating agreement with MIT and Harvard pre-defines IP ownership, licensing frameworks, and collaboration terms, eliminating repeated negotiation. MIT should explore similar joint-invention frameworks with Mass General Brigham and other key clinical and research partners. The committee notes that institutional alignment of this kind is ambitious and will take time; the recommendation is for MIT to begin the conversations and treat this as a multi-year objective rather than an immediate deliverable.

5.5 Establish a streamlined process for access to MIT equipment and facilities. MIT laboratories contain specialized equipment and facilities that are underutilized at the margin and would dramatically accelerate early-stage spinouts, including faculty startups, if access were available under transparent terms. The committee recommends that MIT establish a streamlined process for such access, on a fee basis, that helps startups "go from crawling to walking" while preserving the priority of MIT research and educational uses. Access arrangements should rely on transparent pricing, fair-market-value analysis, written complement-of-interest plans, explicit IP rules, compliance with federal regulations, and phase-out triggers. For zero-to-one ventures, an equity-for-equipment-use mechanism (a published rate of equity per dollar of equipment use, available to companies up to their first seed round) eases cash constraints without bespoke

valuation. The committee's April 2026 conversation with the Office of the General Counsel suggested a viable legal pathway if MIT documents process, pricing, eligibility, review, and exceptions carefully.

5.6 Expand the federal sponsored-research exemption to non-federal funding from faculty-affiliated companies. MIT currently allows subawards to and from a faculty-affiliated company and the faculty member's laboratory for federally sponsored research, with COI committee review. Extending this to non-federal funding (with the same management-plan oversight) opens an important translation pathway and unlocks meaningful research funding for MIT labs. While exceptions have been made to enable this, the committee recommends investigating what a standard process might look like.

5.7 Permit faculty to hold operational and leadership roles, including C-suite roles. Current Institute practice is ambiguous on whether faculty may hold formal operational or executive positions in their companies outside of sabbaticals. The committee recommends that MIT explicitly permit this: faculty engaged in active venture-building should be able to take operational or leadership roles (including CEO, CTO, and similar) in companies they have founded or co-founded, irrespective of leave status but subject to the complement-of-interest framework in 5.2, and consistent with MIT's conflict-of-interest and conflict-of-commitment policies. Permitting these roles aligns MIT practice with peer institutions and with the realities of building deep-tech and life sciences companies.

5.8 Permit and facilitate earlier graduate student engagement with PI-affiliated startups. Current practice often delays graduate student participation in PI-affiliated startups to the final stages of doctoral work, even when the student's engagement is in their academic and professional interest. The committee recommends that MIT create an equitable, transparent, and efficient process to permit graduate students to engage with PI-affiliated startups earlier in their PhD training, with appropriate safeguards (designated academic advisor outside the founding faculty member; thesis committee oversight; standard agreements; and department head visibility into PI-startup arrangements involving graduate students, with the ability to flag lab-culture concerns). The process is designed to be initiated by either the student or the faculty member, and it applies whether or not the startup is affiliated with the student's own PI. Leave should be granted when appropriate, with the candid acknowledgment that lab funding may not be available on return.

5.9 Create targeted educational opportunities for postdocs on outside professional activities. Postdocs at MIT are already permitted to engage in consulting and entrepreneurial activity under existing COI, conflict-of-commitment, and outside professional activities policies and processes. What is missing is targeted education on the process and responsibilities involved, so that postdocs can structure such engagements effectively, productively, and in compliance with policy. The committee recommends that MIT develop dedicated programming on outside professional activities for postdocs — what is permitted, what disclosures are required, and how to handle the practical and ethical questions that arise.

IV. Implementation

The five recommendations reinforce each other, and implementation can be sequenced to deliver visible early wins while the structural changes take shape. Internal supports for students and faculty should come first, with alumni activation as a parallel low-cost track rather than the leading program; alumni-side investments do not require new infrastructure on the scale of Recommendations 2 and 3, but rather primarily require formalizing partnerships with networks that already exist. The report's primary commitments are to the people inside the MIT community, with alumni engagement as an extension of that work.

Sequencing

By Fall 2026:

- Designate an interim senior sponsor for translation and entrepreneurship and launch the structure-and-search process.
- Publish TLO service targets (48-hour CDAs, 30-day options, 90-day routine licenses) and process maps; develop and socialize broader metrics for assessing TLO performance.
- Issue and update written guidance on the formal entrepreneurial faculty leave track, the complement-of-interest framework, faculty operational and C-suite roles, and graduate-student engagement with PI-affiliated startups.
- Formally expand the existing federal sponsored-research exemption to non-federal funding from faculty-affiliated companies.
- Brief MIT Admissions, CAPD, the FLI program, and the International Scholars Office (iSchO) on entrepreneurship to improve connectivity at student transition points; align iSchO graduation deferral with the federal 60-day grace period.
- Explore collaboration with alumni subgroups within MITAA and pilot the Founder Bridge for the graduating cohort, as a parallel low-cost track.

Academic year 2026–27:

- Install senior translation and entrepreneurship leadership and stand up a small operating office (per Recommendation 1).
- Design the streamlined equipment and facilities access process, including the equity-for-equipment-use mechanism, and identify the first five to ten participating startups and facilities.
- Launch the streamlined equipment access process with the first cohort of spinouts.
- Implement the segmented dorm-to-market offerings (Recommendation 3.1) and begin the harmonization work in 3.2; pilot the Institute-wide nervous-system connectors (3.4).
- Begin first- and second-year undergraduate access initiatives (3.3), including the West Campus presence and the student guidance system pilot.

- Roll out Founder Bridge and Founder Return programs at modest scale, with human-curated matching.
- Pilot faculty entrepreneurship bootcamps and expand Faculty Founder Initiative programming.
- Revamp and amplify translational courses (i-Teams, Medical Device Design, R2E); design the first vertical-specific programs.
- Roll out targeted postdoc education programming on outside professional activities (Recommendation 5.9).
- Publish MIT's first annual translation and entrepreneurship dashboard with baseline metrics.

Two to three years:

- Scale what works, sunset what does not, using the dashboard.
- Continue conversations with key partners on Broad-style joint-invention frameworks.
- Institutionalize leave, COI, staged access, and sponsored research pathways.
- Build a recurring philanthropic case for translation infrastructure, bridge funding, and equity-focused access programs.
- Develop tailored stakeholder fact sheets (for students, faculty, alumni, external partners) summarizing the relevant parts of this report for each audience.

Continuous learning

The committee recommends lightweight, continuous assessment infrastructure across all five recommendations, with metrics segmented by population, covering founder-track participation, broader capability development, FLI access, distance traveled, faculty leave uptake, licensing and COI cycle times, alumni activation, facilities access and utilization. A detailed framework should distinguish outputs (venture creation), outcomes (capability development), and system performance (the ecosystem itself), along with a governance structure for ongoing oversight. The goal is to learn quickly and refine policy; the report does not recommend over-indexing on startup count alone.

V. Conclusion

MIT is already one of the most entrepreneurial institutions in the world. The question is not whether entrepreneurship has a home here. The question is whether MIT will build an institutional environment worthy of the talent, ambition, and public mission it already possesses, and help define what that environment looks like for the rest of higher education, while maintaining the integrity of its research and education.

The committee's recommendation is that MIT should act, and act now. The case is straightforward: translation and entrepreneurship are among the ways *mens et manus* becomes real. Insight moves into action, students learn how impact happens, research finds new pathways, and the Institute's ideas have the best chance of driving impact. Done well, this work reinforces MIT's research and educational mission rather than competing with it — and it builds on and strengthens the grassroots ecosystem MIT already has rather than replacing it with something more centralized.

If MIT acts now, it can do more than remove friction. It can set the standard for modern research universities: one that treats translation as mission-aligned, protects academic integrity, broadens access, and moves at the speed the moment requires. MIT has the talent, the assets, the alumni network, and the institutional history to lead — and the time is now.