

**“Enriching the Ecosystem: A Four-Point Plan for Linking Innovation,  
Enterprises, and Jobs” by Rosabeth Moss Kanter  
Executive Summary**

Kanter argues that innovative institutions “such as universities, venture creators, supply chains, labor markets, and job-training programs” are “more likely to contribute to shared prosperity when they’re networked,” adding that “links and collaboration among these institutions can enrich the business ecosystem and help more ideas blossom.” She continues, “Links in four areas are essential: generating ideas and deploying them in market-ready enterprises; connecting small and new enterprises to large companies; aligning education with industry needs; and uniting leaders across sectors to develop ecosystem strategies.” Kanter proceeds to identify four goals and suggests corresponding “links.”

For the first goal, “Link knowledge creation and venture creation to speed the conversion of ideas into market-ready enterprises,” Kanter proposes six things: first, “knowledge-creation centers,” wherein university R&D becomes more productive through “strong industry ties and networks connecting faculty, entrepreneurs, and funders.” Second, “Regional centers of excellence,” which “connect basic science to innovation and venture creation.” The third suggestion is “start-ups.” Kanter tells us that “the lab is not enough” – start-ups can create major shifts in an industry. Next are “incubators,” particularly incubators “associated with universities,” which “generate the most positive results.” Kanter’s fifth suggestion is to establish “test sites” where

“companies [...] lay the groundwork for a positive market reception.” The sixth item is the creation of “innovation zones,” allowing for “mixed-use residential/work spaces” and giving more people the opportunity to create businesses.

The second of Kanter’s four goals is to “[l]ink small and large enterprises to promote the growth and success of small and midsize companies and revitalize large corporations through partnerships with innovative SMEs.” Here she emphasizes the importance of becoming a “corporate supplier.” The benefits of such an account are manifold, including reputation – “one corporate contract leads to others.” Although this link can be helpful, it is difficult to create: “the consolidation of global procurement has cut out qualified local vendors,” Kanter writes. She names “getting information – about which people to pitch at a large company and what they need” as “the biggest obstacle” for SMEs. She recommends a simplification of the bidding process as well as a “national campaign” to encourage large companies to “help [SMEs] break into global export markets,” among other things.

Kanter’s third goal is to “[i]mprove the match between education and employment opportunities. Develop a job-ready workforce through apprenticeships and other education-industry links, including new structures for schooling.” She addresses the insufficient number of “workers trained to do middle-skill jobs” and looks to community colleges as a solution. She notes that “[w]hen they’re disconnected from the enterprises that create employment, community colleges and related training centers remain weak links.” Collaboration can strengthen these institutions: “college

partnerships with business enhance motivation to complete a program because of preferred access to hiring, while companies provide community colleges with valuable curriculum input.” She provides examples of several innovative education-business links.

Kanter’s fourth goal is to “[l]ink leaders across sectors to develop regional strategies and produce scalable models that build on local assets and attract new investment.” She stresses the notion that “[e]cosystems are inherently local” and asserts that “[t]oday’s businesses leaders must play a more strategic and systemic role” in regional economies. “Regional strategies work best when they focus on underlying capabilities and the foundational institutions that produce them,” she writes. She concludes with a three-point “agenda” for leaders who aim to increase collaboration: “Invest in foundational institutions,” “Support integrated solutions that direct resources to regional coalitions and public-private partnerships,” and “Identify and reward excellence, invest in the best ideas, and spread institutional innovations.”