
Work Patterns Exploration
Understanding how you work
How do you spend your time?
Focus
Individual activities including deep focus and routine tasks
Collaborate
Socialize
Creating connections with others
0%
25%
50%



4. Innovation Services and Support

INNOVATE CAROLINA INNOVATION SERVICES RECHARGE CENTER

64 Design Thinking and Innovation Services
65 Market Research and Competitive Intelligence Services
66 Venture and Event Support Services

LEGAL AND GRANT WRITING SERVICES

67 UNC School of Law Institute for Innovation
68 KickStart Grant Writing Support Program

INNOVATION LABS, STUDIOS AND ACCELERATORS

69 1789 Student Innovation Incubator
71 Institute for Convergent Science (ICS) Lab
71 Eshelman Innovation Therapeutics Accelerator and Venture Studio
72 KickStart Venture Services and Accelerator
73 Launch Chapel Hill
74 Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship (SIE) Lab

ENTREPRENEURIAL MENTORS, ADVISORS AND SUPPORT GROUPS

75 1789 Student Innovation Mentors Program
76 Junction Mentor Office Hours
77 KickStart Advisory Group
77 Institute for Convergent Science Advisory Board
78 Entrepreneurs-in-Residence
78 Gillings Faculty Innovator Group

EXPANDING INVESTOR AND INDUSTRY NETWORKS

79 National and International Conferences
79 Regional Venture Showcases
80 Targeted Industry Engagement

INNOVATION RESOURCE TOOLS

81 UNC Innovation EcoMap
82 Human-Centered Design Outcomes Collaborative (HCDOC)

Innovate Carolina and other teams across campus offer innovation services and support programs that help inventors, innovators and entrepreneurs at UNC-Chapel Hill and in the community turn research and ideas into real-world impact. Support includes professional services, physical workspaces for incubating and accelerating projects and ventures, and entrepreneurial mentors and advisors.

Other support involves engaging investors and industry partners as well as wayfinding tools that help people locate innovation-related resources. While this section of the report highlights numerous examples of innovation services and support programs at UNC-Chapel Hill, it is not an exhaustive list. Many programs across campus play valuable roles in advancing innovation and entrepreneurship.

IMPACT AT A GLANCE

870+

PROJECTS SUPPORTED BY INNOVATE CAROLINA INNOVATION SERVICES CENTER

In FY25, Innovate Carolina provided market research/competitive intelligence, design thinking, and event support services to 59 entrepreneurial projects, adding to 872 projects supported all-time.*

$1.9 BILLION

RAISED BY UNC-AFFILIATED VENTURES SUPPORTED BY INNOVATE CAROLINA SERVICES CENTER

Ventures receiving Innovate Carolina design thinking, market research or venture services/event support have raised over $1.9 billion in capital — approximately 570 times more than the $3.3 million in services provided.**

$358 MILLION

RAISED, 5,900+ PEOPLE EMPLOYED BY CAROLINA ACCELERATOR PORTFOLIO COMPANIES

476 startups have graduated from UNC-Chapel Hill innovation labs, incubators and accelerators, raising $358 million. In FY25, 234 active portfolio companies of these programs earned $163 million in annual revenue and created 5,942 jobs.**

6X

SUCCESS RATE ON SBIR/STTR GRANTS

Grant writing support provided by Innovate Carolina's KickStart Venture Services resulted in a 65% success SBIR/STTR success rate (compared to 11% without the service). Startups using the service have raised $26.2 million in SBIR/STTR grants — 140 times more than the $187,000 in grant writing service support provided.

135+

ENTREPRENEURIAL MENTORS AND ADVISORS

More than 135 expert founders, investors and industry professionals provide advice to Carolina innovators and local entrepreneurs and small business leaders.

560+

MEETINGS AND TOUCHPOINTS WITH INVESTORS AND INDUSTRY PARTNERS

During FY25, Innovate Carolina team members facilitated 563 formal meetings and discussions with investors and industry partners on behalf of UNC-affiliated technologies and startups.

---

* *Venture teams supported by the Innovate Carolina Innovation Services Recharge Center include those which received the following services from Innovate Carolina: Market Research and Competitive Intelligence Service, Design Thinking and Innovation Service. Value of professional innovation services provided based on average time per project and competitive in-state private market rate as of FY25 (to account for Market Research Services prior to establishment of formal service center) and UNC recharge center data (Venture Services and Design Thinking and Innovation Service). The Center also includes the Innovate Carolina Junction.*

** *Venture teams include those working on translational projects or startups in the Institute for Convergent Science Lab, 1789 Student Innovation Incubator, KickStart Accelerator, Launch Chapel Hill Accelerator, Eshelman Innovation Therapeutics Accelerator and Venture Studio, or the Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship (SIE) Lab.*

INNOVATE CAROLINA INNOVATION SERVICES RECHARGE CENTER

The Innovate Carolina Innovation Services Recharge Center provides professional services designed to help startup ventures, inventors, and entrepreneurs advance their inventions, products, and services. Services include design thinking, market research and competitive intelligence, and venture services for executing successful events and programs. These services lay the foundation for successful commercialization and market implementation, benefiting University entrepreneurs and organizations across North Carolina. The Center has provided professional services estimated at $3.3 million in all-time value and supported more than 870 projects since 2012, including 160 startups. These ventures have raised over $1.91 billion in capital — approximately 570 times more than the $3.3 million in services.

DESIGN THINKING AND INNOVATION SERVICES

- **34 design thinking and innovation projects completed (nine in FY25).**
- **92% of clients embrace design thinking strategies and mindsets.**
- **94% overall client satisfaction rate with project outcomes.**

Design thinking and innovation services offered by Innovate Carolina's Design and Innovation for the Public Good (DIPG) team provide campuswide access to expert design-thinking support — essentially functioning as a shared "confocal microscope" of innovation. This service helps teams start with end-users in mind and apply human-centered design methods to improve the viability, feasibility and desirability of solutions. Staffed by trained Innovate Carolina staff and graduate students, the service supports internal University and external business, nonprofit and government projects that prioritize public impact.

Activity and Impact: Since launching the service in 2022, the team has completed 34 projects totaling $348,683 in service value, including nine projects worth $152,475 in FY25.* Project teams report positive results: 92% of clients embrace

design thinking strategies and mindsets, resulting in a 94% overall client satisfaction rate with project outcomes. Through a mix of workshops, advising, coaching, and guided consultation and execution sessions, the DIPG team has worked with a variety of project teams in North Carolina.

For example, DIPG led a project supporting the Atlantic Coast Center for Infectious Disease Dynamics and Analytics to understand how epidemiologists and policymakers engage with data and which visualizations they need to make timely localized decisions. The project aimed to make complex disease outbreak data more useful for state and local public health officials. DIPG also worked with the Carolina Center for Public Service to reimagine how UNC tracks and supports community-university partnerships statewide, producing key recommendations that enabled the Center to beta test a new community partnership engagement platform.

* *Value of services based on Innovate Carolina recharge center data for design thinking service projects, FY21-25.*

MARKET RESEARCH AND COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE SERVICES

- **785 market research and competitive intelligence projects completed (30 in FY25).**
- **$2.9 million in services provided to inventors, founders and startups.**
- **$1.9 billion in total funding raised by UNC-affiliated startups using the service.**

Innovate Carolina's Market Research and Competitive Intelligence Service helps innovators understand their markets, define audiences and evaluate the competitive landscape. This team supports faculty, students and external ventures by producing custom analytical reports that guide smarter decisions throughout the innovation process. Three core offerings anchor the service. Market and industry research helps innovators determine whether a viable market exists and how it's structured, guiding efforts to identify high-potential segments and emerging trends while navigating saturated domains. Grant and funding opportunity research supports ventures that are too early for private investment, helping identify aligned opportunities from federal agencies and foundations. Customer and competition trend analysis informs strategies for differentiation, customer targeting and building compelling investor narratives. The team also provides targeted economic impact modeling capabilities that support local communities interested in assessing strategies and impact potential for local entrepreneurial networks and hubs.

The service has helped inventors and startups pivot toward more viable markets, uncover niche applications and scale effectively. It significantly increases the likelihood of successful commercialization and the optimal use of University and startup resources.

Since it began offering the service over a decade ago, Innovate Carolina has helped inventors, founders and startups with 785 total market research and competitive intelligence projects totaling an estimated $2.9 million in service value. This includes 30 projects in FY25 worth $112,500.* The service lays a foundation for startup momentum. UNC-affiliated startups using the service have raised $1.91 billion in total funding. Those active during FY25 earned $147 million in annual revenue and created 1,194 jobs.

* *Value of services estimate based on avg. time per project and competitive in-state private market rate as of FY25. Market value rate applied to cumulative paid and in-kind projects spanning Market Research Service offering, FY13-25.*

VENTURE AND EVENT SUPPORT SERVICES

- **52 event projects supported (13 in FY25).**
- **2,020 people attending entrepreneurial events supported by venture services.**

Innovate Carolina's Innovation Hubs and Engagement team helps ventures and entrepreneurial organizations develop programs and events. The team offers strategic direction, recruits expert speakers and structures event content for clients. This includes support for event preparation, check-in, cleanup, and marketing, as well as planning and promoting events to ensure successful execution.

Activity and Impact: Since it began offering the service in 2022, Innovate Carolina has completed 52 cumulative event projects totaling an estimated $97,500 in value, including 13 projects worth $24,375 in FY25.* Approximately 2,020 people have attended entrepreneurial events supported by this service. One project example is Innovate Carolina's partnership with the 79°West innovation hub and coworking space in Pittsboro, NC.

* *Value of services based on Innovate Carolina recharge center data for venture/event support services projects, FY23-25.*



A group of entrepreneurs, small business owners and community members gather the 79°West innovation hub and coworking space in Pittsboro, NC. Innovate Carolina partners with 79°West to provide event and entrepreneurial programming services for the community.

LEGAL AND GRANT WRITING SERVICES

Beyond services offered through the Innovate Carolina Services Center, other units at Carolina provide professional support to startups and entrepreneurs. Two examples include grant writing assistance via Innovate Carolina's KickStart Grant Writing Service and legal services from the School of Law Institute for Innovation.

UNC SCHOOL OF LAW INSTITUTE FOR INNOVATION

- **44 law students receiving hands-on legal training (FY25).**
- **71 clients receiving legal counsel on over 100 legal matters (FY25).**
- **581 unique individuals served across North Carolina (FY25).**

The UNC School of Law's Institute for Innovation offers early-stage legal counsel to for-profit and nonprofit ventures, advancing North Carolina's innovation economy in a range of communities across the state, including under-resourced and rural areas. Supported by the North Carolina General Assembly and Kenan Charitable Trust, the Institute trains law students through three clinics: Startup NC Law Clinic, Community Development Law Clinic and Intellectual Property Law Clinic. Students receive hands-on legal experience and take the lead in providing legal counsel to early-stage businesses and entrepreneurs. Annually, up to 48 students help real clients with entity formation, contracts, intellectual property protection, nonprofit development, and a wide range of other legal matters, all while gaining critical lawyering skills. The Institute has an office at the Innovate Carolina Junction in downtown Chapel Hill, providing proximity to entrepreneurs and technology transfer professionals working in the hub as well as immediate access to the community outside the University.

Activity and Impact: During the 2024-25 year, 44 law students participated in the Institute, furnishing free legal counsel to 71 clients across North Carolina on over 100 legal matters — serving 581 unique individuals in North Carolina. This adds to the cumulative total of approximately 259 students who have provided legal services to 325 clients on 477 legal matters since the Institute opened in 2020.

KICKSTART GRANT WRITING SUPPORT PROGRAM

- **66 startups receiving KickStart grant-writing support (10 in FY25).**
- **65% SBIR/STTR success rate — nearly 6 times higher than startups applying for grants without support.**
- **$26.2 million in SBIR/STTR grant funding raised by startups using the service (cumulative).**
- **140x ROI over funding provided by KickStart (cumulative).**

The KickStart Grant Writing Support Program connects UNC-affiliated startups with expert support to develop and submit competitive SBIR and STTR grant proposals — critical early-stage funding avenues for research-driven companies. Through partnerships with top grant writing firms such as Grant Engine, Eva Garland Consulting, and InteliSpark, KickStart provides up to $4,000 for Phase I applications and $8,000 for Phase II or Fast-Track proposals. Support includes assistance with registration, proposal development, expert reviews and submission strategies.

Activity and Impact: In total, 66 companies have received support, including 10 companies in FY25 — double the number of companies (five) in FY24. In total, KickStart has awarded $186,813 in grant writing support to UNC-affiliated ventures since the program began in 2017, including $37,500 in FY25. The service delivers proven results. Startups that use KickStart's grant writing support achieve a greater than 65% success rate securing SBIR/STTR grants. This represents a nearly six times higher success rate compared to companies not using the service (11% success rate).

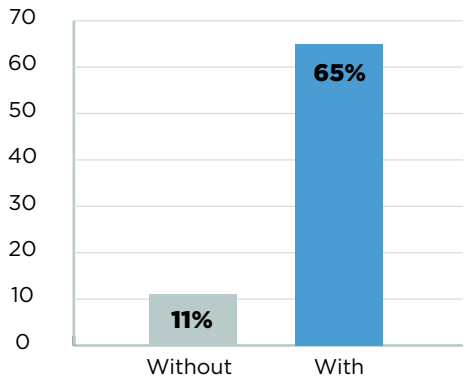
The return on this investment is substantial. Startups supported through the program have collectively secured more than $26.2 million in SBIR/STTR grant funding — a 140-fold return on investment over the $186,813 of support funding by KickStart for company grant applications. Many companies build on this support, learning from professional grant writers to become self-sufficient in preparing future applications. The service boosts access to non-dilutive funding while strengthening startups' long-term ability to secure investment.

FIGURE 11

KickStart Grant Writing Support Program

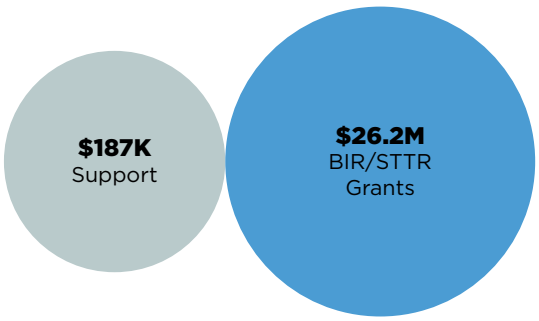
6X

Higher SBIR/STTR success rate for startups using KickStart grant writing support



140X

ROI on KickStart grant writing support



INNOVATION LABS, STUDIOS AND ACCELERATORS

Innovation labs and accelerators at UNC-Chapel Hill are where translational scientists, startup founders and emerging entrepreneurs convene and work. Carolina innovators can access desk and bench spaces, offices, specialized equipment, collaborative meeting areas, embedded experts, programs and advisers to help move their technologies and business ideas forward, faster.

1789 STUDENT INNOVATION INCUBATOR

- **244 startups launched by students and alumni supported by the 1789 Student Innovation Incubator (cumulative).**
- **$47.2 million in total funding raised by supported startups (cumulative).**
- **100 active companies: $37.4 million annual revenue and 5,346 jobs (FY25).**

The 1789 Student Innovation Incubator, operated by Innovate Carolina, is UNC-Chapel Hill's campuswide hub and community for student innovation and entrepreneurship. As part of its mission to guide and support students through various phases of their entrepreneurial paths, the incubator offers a mix of resources — mentorship, co-curricular learning, community networking, funding and more — that are critical to helping students explore, launch and build early startups.

Activity and Impact: Current and former members of the 1789 incubator have founded 244 total startups, raising $47.2 million in total funding. Of those startups, 100 remain active and earned $37.4 million in revenue, while creating 5,346 jobs in FY25.

FIGURE 12

UNC-Chapel Hill Startup Accelerators Impact

$368 Million **Total Raised** (Cumulative)	**$163 Million** **Annual Revenue** (FY25)
476 **Portfolio Companies** 234 active (FY25)	**5,942** **Jobs** (FY25)

Innovate Carolina

1789 Student Innovation Incubator
Student

Pharmacy

Eshelman Innovation Therapeutics Accelerator + Venture Studio
Faculty

Innovate Carolina

KickStart Accelerator
Faculty

Social Work

Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship Lab
Student, Faculty, Alumni

Innovate Carolina + Town of Chapel Hill

Launch Chapel Hill
Student, Faculty, Alumni, Community

Note: Some startups are served by multiple UNC incubators and accelerators. Therefore, the combined impact totals shown for number of companies, funding raised, annual revenue and jobs are less than sum of individual accelerator figures.

INSTITUTE FOR CONVERGENT SCIENCE (ICS) LAB

- **Six translational projects hosted in the ICS lab (cumulative).**
- **Startup launched: Sorbenta technology removes hazardous PFAS chemicals from drinking water.**

The Institute for Convergent Science (ICS) Lab, managed by Innovate Carolina's ICS team, is a 7,500-square-foot innovation facility located on the second floor of the Genome Sciences Building. Purpose-built for AGILE projects — "Advance Great Inventions or Leave Early" — this space empowers interdisciplinary teams to advance high-potential ideas, build prototypes and make informed go/no-go decisions at early stages of the pre-commercialization process.

The lab includes wet lab areas, common lab equipment, private labs, offices, and collaborative workspaces that support translational research and pre-commercial development. At the end of FY25, the space is rapidly filling due to a combination of increasing translational research activity in the space and a creative partnership: beginning in FY26, ICS is sharing lab space with the biomedical engineering (BME) department's teaching lab during a period of renovations in the BME department.

Activity and Impact: The ICS lab has hosted six translational projects since 2022. A notable milestone includes Sorbenta, a UNC-affiliated startup that began as an ICS AGILE project, successfully advanced to commercialization and moved into the KickStart Accelerator in FY25. The company develops innovative sorbents — materials that absorb liquids or gases — to remove harmful PFAS 'forever chemicals' from drinking water. As projects hosted in the lab continue to achieve commercial milestones, the ICS team anticipates additional projects to follow in Sorbenta's footsteps.

ESHELMAN INNOVATION THERAPEUTICS ACCELERATOR AND VENTURE STUDIO

- **Approximately $35 million in support to 191 projects and companies ($2.1 million to six in FY25).**
- **$251 million in total follow-on funding, generating a 1:7 return ratio on Dr. Fred Eshelman's donation.**
- **AI-native venture studio for digital health startups.**
- **FY25 startup launched: Goldie Health with $1.85 million new capital raised.**

Eshelman Innovation is driving the future of health care through two primary pillars: the Therapeutics Accelerator and the Venture Studio.

The Eshelman Innovation Therapeutics Accelerator scouts, supports, and advances high-potential drug discovery efforts targeting critical needs in oncology, neuroscience, and infectious diseases. By offering comprehensive translational assistance — from early-stage project advising and experimental design to proof-of-concept milestones — the accelerator helps reduce risk for novel therapeutics in development.

The Eshelman Innovation Venture Studio is a forward-looking public-private partnership designed to transform cutting-edge research into scalable digital health ventures. It is distinct from traditional accelerators by originating startup ideas in-house, de-risking them through structured validation, and then forming, funding, and launching startups with dedicated support. This model bridges the gap between academic discovery and commercial impact, especially in health care and digital innovation.

A central component is Kairos, UNC-Chapel Hill's AI-native venture studio. Kairos blends faculty expertise, student creativity, and generative AI tools to create faster, leaner, and more accessible startup pathways. Through a structured six-month sprint process, teams of faculty, student builders and entrepreneurs-in-residence develop validated, investor-ready ventures. This model accelerates the journey from lab innovation to real-world impact.

Activity and Impact: Goldie Health, an overdose case-management tool for community paramedics and others, is one recent example of a venture studio company that is rapidly expanding and securing new capital. In FY25, this startup implemented eight customers in two states, and raised over $1.85 million in additional capital.

KICKSTART VENTURE SERVICES AND ACCELERATOR

- **188 startups supported by KickStart Venture Services, with $6.4 billion in funding raised (cumulative).**
- **126 active companies: $232 million in annual revenue and 1,622 jobs (FY25).**
- **KickStart Accelerator: 23 portfolio companies served (13 in FY25), with $79.8 million raised (cumulative).**

KickStart Venture Services supports research-based startup formation and growth by providing education, early-stage funding, and on-campus accelerator space. Founded in 2008, KickStart has made a significant impact on startups. Since the program began, KickStart has provided guidance and $3.35 million in grant awards and other support to 188 companies, which have raised $6.36 billion in total funding — nearly 1,900 times more than the dollars provided by KickStart. During FY25, KickStart portfolio companies earned $232 million in annual revenue and employed 1,622 people.

Located within UNC-Chapel Hill's Genome Sciences Building, the KickStart Accelerator provides 7,500 square feet of affordable, state-of-the-art wet lab and office space for UNC-affiliated, IP-based startups. Managed by Innovate Carolina's KickStart Venture Services, the facility has served as a critical launchpad for early-stage ventures since opening in early 2020. The accelerator supports startups with fully equipped wet labs, advanced shared instrumentation, flexible hot-desk seating and collaborative meeting spaces — all designed to foster innovation, productivity and community. Companies in the KickStart Accelerator have access to shared lab equipment valued at approximately $1 million, allowing them to tap into cost efficiencies of equipment that young ventures can rarely afford on their own.

With immediate proximity to Carolina's core research facilities on campus, such as mass spectrometry and imaging labs, tenants benefit from unique convenience and cost-saving advantages. For instance, startups with SBIR/STTR grants are eligible for off-campus researcher pricing, as opposed to commercial pricing, at these core facilities.

Activity and Impact: At the end of FY25, the KickStart Accelerator was home to 13 companies, part of group of 23 total companies that have worked in the space since the accelerator opened. The accelerator's 23 portfolio companies have raised $79.8 million in total funding. As of FY25, 10 startups have graduated from the space.



Michael Halpert (left), Founder of Ver Coaching, offers a demonstration of the startup's Ver Vision Trainer, a virtual reality vision training app for athletes, which is available on the Oculus headset. The app is designed to help athletes see the ball better, track movement more accurately, and improve their focus and reaction time. Ver Coaching participated in the Launch Powered by KPMG Accelerator in spring 2025.

LAUNCH CHAPEL HILL

- **245 total startups supported by Launch Chapel Hill (cumulative).**
- **$134.5 million in total funding raised by portfolio companies (cumulative).**
- **119 active companies: $95.2 million in annual revenue and 5,546 jobs (FY25).**

Established in 2013, Launch Chapel Hill is a startup accelerator formed through a strategic partnership between UNC-Chapel Hill and the Town of Chapel Hill. It is located at the Innovate Carolina Junction in downtown Chapel Hill. With programmatic support and funding from these anchor institutions, Launch Chapel Hill provides a supportive, high-impact environment for startups at multiple stages of development.

In 2025, the accelerator expanded its reach through a corporate partnership with KPMG, which helped establish the new Launch Powered by KPMG Accelerator program. The inaugural cohort of this new five-week accelerator included 10 companies — five focused on AI and five focused on developing physical products, such as robotics and biotech innovations.

The KPMG-powered program stands out for helping startups secure their first customers, activate pilot deployments and pursue market entry through KPMG's global network, a rare feature among accelerators. The program also emphasizes investor readiness, go-to-market strategy, and federal funding (e.g., SBIR/STTR). The first cohort culminated with companies delivering pitches during a June 2025 showcase at the GrepBeat conference in Durham.

Startups affiliated with UNC-Chapel Hill and NC State University — as well as companies from beyond the Research Triangle region (Wilmington, NC) and outside the state (Florida and Illinois) — participated, highlighting Launch's growing regional and national appeal. Four startups in the cohort previously completed the NSF I-Corps program through Innovate Carolina's KickStart Venture Services team. Launch Chapel Hill works with such companies to help them advance from the early customer discovery stage to become pilot-ready ventures.

Activity and Impact: During spring and summer 2025, Launch Chapel Hill supported 37 total startups, including 10 companies in its inaugural KPMG-powered accelerator and 27 student ventures in the summer accelerator programs. Approximately 10 of the student ventures participated prior to the end of FY25, while the remaining ventures began the summer accelerators in early FY26. In total, Launch Chapel Hill's portfolio of 245 total startups raised $134.5 million in funding since 2013. In FY25 alone, 119 active portfolio companies created 5,546 jobs and generated $95.2 million in annual revenue.

In summer 2025, Launch Chapel Hill introduced a new dual-format for its student summer accelerator, designed to provide flexible, high-impact experiences for aspiring student entrepreneurs.

- **Introduction to Ideation Accelerator.** The one-week format offered evening sessions across two separate weeks, geared toward students new to entrepreneurship or exploring early-stage ideas.
- **Rams-to-Riches Accelerator.** This accelerator had six sessions spread over two weeks. It offered a deeper focus on startup development and culminated in a final demo showcase day.

The 2025 summer program supported 27 total student venture participants: 11 student ventures in the ideation track and 16 in the Rams-to-Riches accelerator, drawing primarily from UNC-Chapel Hill, with additional participants from NC State University.

SOCIAL INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP (SIE) LAB

◆ **Social enterprises and innovation initiatives focused on poverty, food insecurity, and access to education, health care, and employment.**

Founded in 2017, the Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship (SIE) Lab at the School of Social Work supports social work students and alumni in developing mission-driven startups, provides consultation and technical assistance to nonprofit organizations, and fosters interdisciplinary collaboration with experts across business, public health, law, and government. In 2024, SIE Lab became part of the School's newly launched Office of Community Engagement and Outreach.

Activity and Impact: Students and alumni working with the SIE Lab have launched a variety of nonprofit ventures that support workforce development and initiatives that address complex social problems. Beyond creating social enterprises, a signature initiative of the lab includes the Community Aspirations Hub, which explores innovative pathways to individual, family, and community well-being through collaboration with communities, organizations, subject matter experts, and people with lived experiences. From 2018-2024, the lab engaged corporate, local government and nonprofit partners to explore and adapt an international, evidence-based poverty elimination tool that benefits North Carolina communities. The Lab also cultivates student learning through partnerships with Innovate Carolina and the Graduate Certificate in Innovation for the Public Good. By nurturing human-centered solutions, SIE Lab contributes to Carolina's mission of making innovation a pillar of education and a driver of community well-being.

ENTREPRENEURIAL MENTORS, ADVISORS AND SUPPORT GROUPS

Entrepreneurial mentors and advisors at Carolina help inventors, entrepreneurs and founders navigate the early, challenging stages of technology and startup development. Innovate Carolina and other campus teams offer a variety of programs and resources — pooling the expertise of more than 135 entrepreneurial advisors and mentors — to provide expertise and knowledge, strategic guidance and planning, professional networking, and leadership development. This expertise supports UNC-affiliated innovators as well as non-UNC entrepreneurs and small business leaders locally and across the state.

1789 STUDENT INNOVATION MENTORS PROGRAM

- **18 entrepreneurial mentors available to advise students (FY25).**
- **20 areas of expertise across industries and technologies (FY25).**

The 1789 Mentor Program provides UNC-Chapel Hill students with free, personalized guidance from a network of entrepreneurial mentors, including faculty, alumni, and local entrepreneurs. Available virtually and in-person, the program helps students explore entrepreneurship, refine startup ideas and navigate innovation careers.

Activity and Impact: The 1789 program connects students to 18 entrepreneurial mentors who are available to talk, meet and provide advice. These mentors have expertise in market research, startup strategy, funding preparation, design thinking, e-commerce, user experience, and emerging technologies like virtual and augmented reality.

JUNCTION MENTOR OFFICE HOURS

- **11 mentors available to students, Junction coworking members and local entrepreneurs (FY25).**
- **418 hours of mentor support ($64,790 value) offered in FY25.**

The Innovate Carolina Junction Mentor Office Hours Program offers free, in-person one-to-one consultations to innovators, entrepreneurs and startups — open to University affiliates and the broader community. Launched in FY25 at the Junction, Innovate Carolina's innovation and coworking hub in downtown Chapel Hill, the program connects participants with a network of entrepreneurial mentors who are professional service providers, founders, and entrepreneurs-in-residence.

Activity and Impact: These 11 mentors offer advice on emerging technologies, startup and small business strategy, creativity and design, tech and social ventures, sales and marketing, and legal and intellectual property issues. Widely used by students, Junction coworking members, and local entrepreneurs, the program offered 836 total half-hour sessions (418 hours) of mentor support valued at $64,790 in FY25.*

* *Office "hour" sessions represent half-hour blocks. Value of volunteered Junction mentor time estimate based on 2025 UNC recharge center data: Innovate Carolina's market rate of $155 per hour valuation of tech consulting service.*



Six of the 11 mentors who volunteered in 2025 through the Innovate Carolina Junction Mentor Office Hours Program gather with leaders from Launch Chapel Hill and Innovate Carolina. Organizations represented include Dreamspace AI Solutions, 1893 Brand Studio, Small Business Technology Development Center, 4E Innovation Consulting and the Olive Law Group.

KICKSTART ADVISORY GROUP

- **More than 90 advisors guide research-based startups (FY25).**
- **Advisor mix: entrepreneurs, investors and industry professionals.**

The KickStart Advisory Group is a monthly forum that brings together highly experienced advisors, including industry professionals, entrepreneurs, investors and mentors. These advisors support UNC-affiliated startups that work with Innovate Carolina's KickStart Venture Services team. Designed as a non-investment pitch opportunity, each advisory board session features one early-stage venture that presents targeted strategic needs, such as regulatory strategy, product development and strategic partnerships. Ventures then receive real-time feedback and advice. The board convenes nine months annually, supporting eight startups each year.

Activity and Impact: More than 90 advisors work with KickStart companies as part of the advisory group. The program emphasizes mentorship and relationship-building, with tangible outcomes including talent recruitment and new collaborations. For example, in FY25, a startup founder successfully hired a team member they first met at an advisory meeting.

INSTITUTE FOR CONVERGENT SCIENCE ADVISORY BOARD

- **Seven advisory board members aligning activities and goals of ICS and the University (FY25).**
- **Conduit for connecting expert researchers to NC Collaboratory translational projects.**

The Institute for Convergent Science (ICS) Advisory Board ensures that the activities and goals of the Institute align with the broader goals of Innovate Carolina and UNC-Chapel Hill. ICS has a pan-campus mandate to support translational science. The advisory board draws from the leadership ranks of research-intensive units across campus and also includes a representative from the North Carolina Collaboratory who brings a statewide perspective.

Activity and Impact: The advisory board consists of seven members. Beyond providing critical operational guidance to ICS, a relatively young organization launched in 2022, the board facilitates strategic actions that amplify the impact of ICS. For instance, the board worked with ICS to expand the use of ICS Innovation Faculty Fellowships as mechanisms to attract and retain talented faculty entrepreneurs. Advisory board meetings provide conduits for connecting expert researchers at Carolina with translational priorities identified by the Collaboratory. Examples of joint efforts include: a translational science project called GENESIS, which involves developing a novel material science technology for use in kidney dialysis; and a market landscape and technology report that helps guide academics, industry leaders and policy makers on energy storage opportunities in North Carolina.

ENTREPRENEURS-IN-RESIDENCE

- **Six innovators-in-residence supporting Shuford Program entrepreneurship students (FY25).**
- **Four KickStart entrepreneurs-in-residence (EIRs) available for research-to-startup guidance (FY25).**
- **Gillings School EIR for public health and new faculty Innovation Strategy Adviser role (FY25).**

Entrepreneurs-in-residence (EIRs) at UNC-Chapel Hill play a vital role in mentoring students, faculty and startup founders. Drawing from real-world entrepreneurial experience and often embedded within academic schools, departments and programs, EIRs provide strategic guidance on business models, fundraising, market validation and venture growth.

For instance, the Shuford Innovators-in-Residence Program brings six to seven alumni to campus each year. These experts lecture in classes, sit on panels, host conversations and workshops, and provide individual mentoring guidance for students enrolled in the Shuford Program in Entrepreneurship. The program's 2024-25 cohort included entrepreneurial experts in the fields of education, tech and talent, mental health, fashion, law and women's health.

Innovate Carolina's KickStart Venture Services team also includes four EIRs who offer one-on-one consulting for innovators exploring the path from research to startup and beyond. These experts offer insight on how to evaluate commercial potential, build strong business cases, navigate intellectual property, and prepare for venture creation, pitching, and financing.

Another example of EIR support occurs at the Gillings School of Global Public Health. Donald Holzworth serves as the School's EIR, applying decades of entrepreneurial experience, especially in global health startups, to mentor faculty, staff and students, advise on venture creation, and help translate public health innovations toward real-world impact. In FY25, the Gillings School created a new advisory role — the Innovation Strategy Adviser — demonstrating the School's commitment to building a robust culture of innovation, entrepreneurship and translation that directly impacts public health. William Vizuete, PhD, Professor of Environmental Sciences and Engineering, assumed the inaugural role in October 2024.

GILLINGS FACULTY INNOVATOR GROUP

- **Multiple programs, meetings and resources for supporting faculty translation and innovation.**
- **Four micro-grants awarded to fund translational prototyping activities (FY25).**

The newly formed Gillings Faculty Innovator Group (FIG) held its inaugural meeting in December 2024. The FIG community within the Gillings School of Global Public Health is dedicated to fostering innovation among its faculty, students and staff. Led by the School's first Innovation Strategy Advisor, William Vizuete, the FIG provides resources like strategic sessions and grant programs that equip Gillings School innovators to turn their ideas into tangible outcomes.

Activity and Impact: The group aims to support research-based startups, develop digital health products, and accelerate the development of beneficial public health solutions globally and within North Carolina. For example, during FY25 the group awarded four micro-grants to fund translational prototyping activities that traditional federal dollars cannot.

EXPANDING INVESTOR AND INDUSTRY NETWORKS

- **More than 563 meetings and touchpoints with industry partners and investors (FY25).**
- **320 participants in venture showcases: investors, partners and serial entrepreneurs (FY25).**

Support for Carolina innovators and founders extends beyond campus. During FY25, Innovate Carolina teams participated in regional and national events and facilitated one-on-one meetings to make connections between UNC-Chapel Hill inventors, startups, investors and corporate partners.

Activity and Impact: In total, Innovate Carolina facilitated engagements with more than 563 investors and corporate leaders on behalf of Carolina inventors, companies and translational research teams.

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES

Attending events such as BIO International Convention in Boston, members of Innovate Carolina's Office of Technology Commercialization team met with more than 68 companies and investor groups. These engagements strengthened connections, advanced partnerships, and opened new doors for investments in UNC-based technologies and startups.

REGIONAL VENTURE SHOWCASES

Innovate Carolina's KickStart Venture Services team partnered with other universities to organize several venture showcase events designed to give university spinouts from Carolina and other schools opportunities to pitch to investors and connect with potential partners. Such convenings included: Triangle Venture Showcase (hosted with NC State University, Duke University and the

North Carolina Biotechnology Center); the Southeast Venture Showcase (inaugural consortium of 21 institutions across 12 states held at Vanderbilt University); Venturium (co-hosted with Northeastern University, Rutgers University and others). In total, these showcase events gave Carolina startups access to approximately 320 venture capital firms, investors, strategic partners, serial entrepreneurs and tech experts.

TARGETED INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT

In FY25, Innovate Carolina's Institute for Convergent Science (ICS) team participated in 175 meetings and direct engagements with individuals across academic, defense, commercial, nonprofit and government sectors. These substantial engagements involved targeted conversations taking place via symposia, Zoom calls, workshops, and in-depth meetings, which focused on collaborations for advancing translational research projects with commercial potential. The ICS team has facilitated 375 such engagements since fall 2023.



Dr. Erin Carey, Tenured Associate Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the School of Medicine, delivers a presentation at Triangle Venture Day about her translational efforts to address chronic pain in women. The event is organized by Innovate Carolina's KickStart Venture Services team and colleagues from Duke University, NC State University, and the North Carolina Biotechnology Center. The session attracts investors and strategic partnership groups from across the country.

INNOVATION RESOURCE TOOLS

UNC INNOVATION ECOMAP

- **More than 250 innovation resources mapped for digital access by innovation community.**
- **Online tool for four user types: students, faculty, community changemakers and citizens.**

Innovation support resources are only useful if innovators can find them. In FY25, Innovate Carolina's DIPG team launched the Carolina Innovation EcoMap, an interactive digital tool designed to help students, faculty, alumni and community members navigate innovation and entrepreneurship resources across UNC-Chapel Hill.

Activity and Impact: Built in partnership with EcoMap Technologies, the Carolina Innovation EcoMap platform is customized through UNC-led human-centered research, including campus and community-wide persona-based interviews that identified four user types: student innovators, faculty founders, community changemakers and curious citizens. The EcoMap includes 250 innovation and entrepreneurship resources that are available for online access and navigation.

Unlike traditional technology tool implementations at many universities, the DIPG team reversed the standard model, driving platform features based on end-user feedback rather than default templates. Innovate Carolina launched the tool in 2025, using AI-based search tools and real-time UX data to continuously enhance navigation and resource access. By providing a centralized and personalized discovery platform, the Innovation EcoMap helps people from across campus and beyond find the right tools, spaces, funding and support systems to advance their ideas across various stages of innovation.

HUMAN-CENTERED DESIGN OUTCOMES COLLABORATIVE (HCDOC)

- **International collaborative to establish and communicate the impact of human-centered design.**
- **40 interdisciplinary members from five countries (FY25).**
- **Four open-source prototypes developed for researchers, entrepreneurs and the community (FY25).**

The Human-Centered Design Outcomes Collaborative (HCDOC) is an international initiative led by Innovate Carolina's Design and Innovation for the Public Good team. It brings together more than 40 interdisciplinary members from five countries — including researchers, educators, public health professionals and community-based practitioners — to establish and communicate the impact and return on investment of human-centered design (HCD) in research and practice.

Activity and Impact: In March of FY25, 26 members actively contributed to quarterly working groups and a national retreat held in Chapel Hill, which included 18 participants from across the United States. The collaborative developed four open-source prototype tools, including a mechanism to assess whether a project is suited for HCD methods. The group is refining these tools through ongoing prototyping and feedback and will make these resources available to researchers, entrepreneurs and community leaders worldwide. Team members also presented HCDOC's work at the national Design Forge conference and are planning further written and digital outreach to communicate findings and encourage broader adoption of HCD strategies.



Kyle McQuillan, PhD (center, standing), Design Thinking Innovation Manager at Innovate Carolina, leads a design thinking workshop with clients.



Bill Romani, PhD (right foreground), Director of Design and Innovation for the Public Good at Innovate Carolina, leads a discussion during the 2025 Tar Heel Bus Tour stop in Morgantown (Burke County, NC). Romani's team provides design thinking and innovation support for a faculty-led project that engages the community and stakeholders to co-design more effective street medicine practices for people experiencing homelessness in the county. The project is led by W. Oscar Fleming, DrPH at the Gillings School of Global Public Health. Photo courtesy of Jon Gardiner, University Communications.



Frank Leibfarth, PhD, Royce Murray Distinguished Term Professor of Chemistry and Institute for Convergent Science Faculty Fellow, is a co-founder of the startup Sorbenta. The company, which now works in the KickStart Accelerator on the UNC-Chapel Hill campus, stemmed from work that began as an Institute for Convergent Science AGILE project focused on developing sorbents that remove harmful PFAS 'forever chemicals' from drinking water. Photo courtesy of Donn Young.