



Making the Leap from Entrepreneur to Ecosystem Builder



Author: **Tyler LeCompte**

The Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation asked over a dozen ecosystem builders to watch, recap, and share their thinking on the Firestarter talks from the past three ESHIP Summits. This article is part of a series that supports the Kauffman Foundation's ongoing efforts to grow entrepreneurship and explore new models of economic development by elevating the work of ecosystem builders.

These talks were intended to inspire conversation and drive engagement in key themes in the field of entrepreneurial ecosystem building.

Summary

Cecilia Wessinger is an entrepreneurial ecosystem builder and supports the Kauffman Foundation as an ESHIP Community Activator. At the 2019 ESHIP Summit, she shared her experience transitioning from an entrepreneur to an ecosystem builder to community activator, and supporting and cultivating a sense of belonging in the ESHIP community.

Entrepreneur to Community Activator

Like many entrepreneurs, Cecilia Wessinger's journey to the 2019 ESHIP Summit stage started with a cup of coffee and an idea. As a consultant on community activation for the Kauffman Foundation, Wessinger shared how she was introduced to 1 Million Cups in Tulsa, Oklahoma, only a few short years ago. What she saw there was the same thing she saw in front of her today: "A beautiful room full of people like you who gave before they got, listened before they answered, and really want to be part of something bigger than themselves," she said.

Wessinger is one part of the dynamic duo that supports much of the innovative, collaborative work being done between ESHIP Summits. Christine Lai serves in a similar role, working with National Resource partners, focusing on bringing her knowledge of grassroots community frameworks with her passion for diversity and inclusion.



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“When we ecosystem builders foster community for ourselves, we create an environment where we can all thrive,” Wessinger says. “We interconnect and infuse a collaborative culture and mindset of abundance, which in turn, creates robust, prosperous communities.”

Championing the Work

Wessinger & Lai worked to bring the first class of community-nominated “ESHIP Champions” together to review and prioritize the 130+ initiatives that the 2018 ESHIP attendees had identified, and hone in on 30 immediate initiatives under seven major goals. But the ESHIP Champions program was only part of the larger framework that they dreamed of developing. Working under the “*Model what’s needed to create what’s possible*” mantra, they coordinated the collaborative culture we experience at the ESHIP Summit, supported the new community infrastructure we’ve created together, and ensured that everyone experienced a sense of belonging.

Ecosystem Building is a Team Sport

Wessinger shared that more ESHIP Champions are a key component of supporting the work, as more and more initiatives were brought up for action and attention. She shared her commitment to ensure that those future ESHIP Champions represent the community making up the room that day – 51% women and 35% people of color. And while she’s still looking for the “Answer Room” at the Kauffman Foundation, she believes that a part of each answer already exists in the community members gathered in front of her, and encouraged them to “find the answers to the questions they don’t yet know to ask” together.

The entrepreneurial journey can be lonely and challenging. Working to build something new but needed, something special but equal, is often considered impossible. The ESHIP community sought to overcome this, working with Cecilia and Christine and the hundreds of ecosystem builders in the room to engage them in the challenge.

“Entrepreneurship is a community sport, but ecosystem building is a team sport. And thank you for being part of the team,” Wessinger said as the 2019 ESHIP Summit officially kicked off.

Making the leap from entrepreneur to ecosystem builder isn’t an easy decision. It takes a special kind of person to set their focus on the greater good – and those are the people we’d like to have involved in the community building work that we are doing. Reflecting on her talk, I’ve been impressed with Cecilia’s dedication to inclusion, diversity, and equal opportunity for anyone, no matter their geographic or demographic differences. It is honorable and inspiring. The Kauffman Foundation did an amazing job in selecting Wessinger and Lai to be the initial community activators, and their success is evident in looking around the room today, full of ecosystem builders and resource partners of all shapes, sizes, colors, and communities.

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Bio: A self-described ‘recovering’ entrepreneur, Tyler LeCompte is an ecosystem builder from Florida who was part of the inaugural ESHIP Champion class. Tyler has worked with hundreds of entrepreneurs and businesses on their startups. Through his involvement with 1 Million Cups, Tyler was introduced to the ESHIP Summit and has been engaged in the work ever since. He works most closely with Goal 4 – Connected Networks and the Storytelling Initiative. Recently, Tyler joined ESHIP Champions Jeff Bennett and Avary Kent, launching ecosystembuilderhub.com to highlight the people and work of ecosystem builders around the world.



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