

Making Entrepreneurial Ecosystems Mainstream



VICTOR HWANG ON THE PRACTICES OF ECOSYSTEM BUILDING

Author: **Jeff Bennett**

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

Victor Hwang is a serial entrepreneur, investor, co-author of the ecosystem building book, [The Rainforest: The Secret to Building the Next Silicon Valley](#), and former vice president of Entrepreneurship at the Kauffman Foundation. At the 2018 ESHIP Summit, Hwang shared his perspective and insights on the maturity of the practice of ecosystem building, in order to set a direction for the collective work that needs to be done to co-create and advance the professional field.

In the opening talk of the 2018 ESHIP Summit, Hwang reflected on the information collected, as well as his work and experience. Hwang also provided a 'State of the Professional Field of Ecosystem Building,' gathering information from years of community work done by the Foundation — more than 1,000 sticky notes from group discussions and 350 responses to surveys regarding the most pressing issues in the field.

We're In a Unique Point and Time

Hwang kicks off his talk by encouraging the audience to consider what it means to be at the Summit and to look for ways to contribute to the work being done. He reiterated a previous point, saying that the people in the room have the potential to change the arc of human history — now, even more than the year before.



[View the full Firestarter](#)

Making Entrepreneurial Ecosystems Mainstream

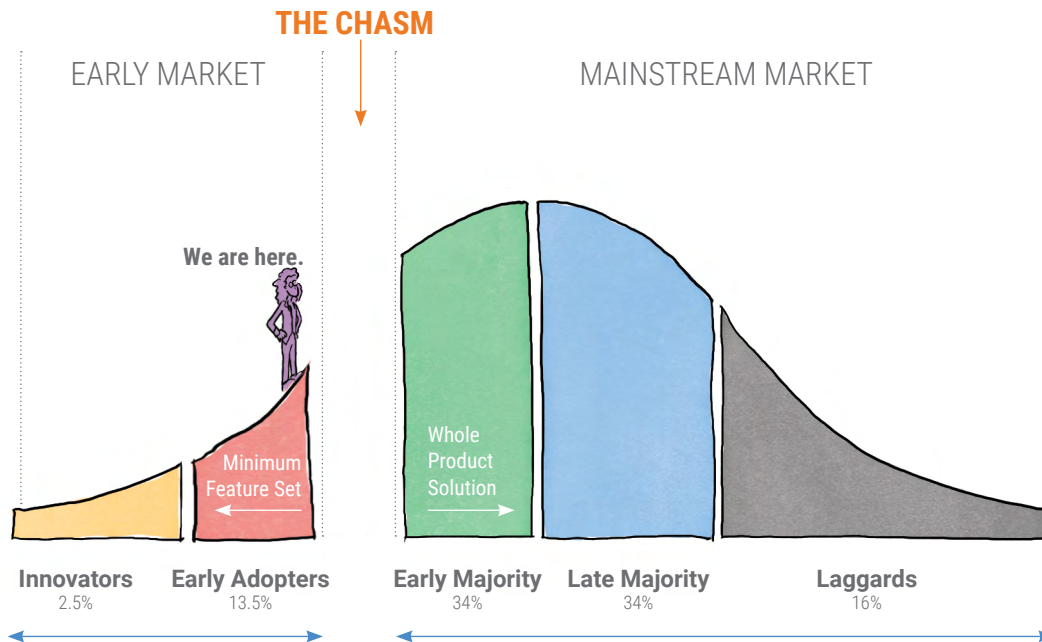
VICTORY HWANG ON THE PRACTICE OF ECOSYSTEM BUILDING

"... You are the people that are building that new economic model, the new way we're going to lead our economy of society forward to health, sustainability, equal opportunity, and access for people that have ideas that want to turn them into something of value."

Though the community has collectively been able to co-create a significant body of work, there is still a gap between what has been accomplished and what needs to be done.

Crossing The Chasm Together and Going Mainstream

To illustrate the gap between what has been accomplished and what needs to be done, Hwang compares the status of the field of ecosystem building to the product development metaphor where new ideas or products need to leap the chasm that stands between the early adopters and the early majority to go mainstream.



"What we have is a minimum feature set. We have some really interesting ideas on how we build ecosystems and we've been experimenting with these different pieces, but we haven't pulled it all together yet into a full thing. We're facing the chasm, which is that leap that you have to take in order for something to become mainstream."

In the development and adoption of new products, there are early adopters, people who start using a product or technology as soon as it becomes available. Audience members in the room at the ESHIP Summit are some of the early adopters of ecosystem building.

"We are the people that believe, and we have passion. We are now at the point where we have to take it to the next step. We have to build the field of practice into a sustainable professional field. So that means we've got to cross that chasm into the mainstream."

For Hwang, in order to go mainstream, ecosystem building needed to be a definable discipline that includes: methods and metrics, a common language, common ways of doing things, the ability to learn from each other, and the ability to share.



[View the full Firestarter](#)

The ESHIP Summit Model: Discover, Design, Deliver

The model of the ESHIP Summit includes three phases: Discover, Design, Deliver. In 2017 and 2018, ecosystem builders took time to investigate the field – working, learning, and having conversations with community members to better understand what was missing. That process of discovery led to the Design phase in the 2018 ESHIP Summit.

"Now we're ready for design – which is, let's start to build the solutions to the issues that we're dealing with together."

Building the Field as a Body of Practice

The task of building the field of entrepreneurial ecosystem development into a whole body of practice is a daunting one. But there are frameworks that can help to guide the approach.

Hwang explains that the collective community had developed a set of seven ESHIP Goals, using a framework patterned after the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#).

"If we have these seven things, if we answer these seven questions, we will have a field called ecosystem building."

Hwang invited the audience to enroll in the process and partner with the Kauffman Foundation to co-create, build, and shape the future of entrepreneurial ecosystem system development.

"Each of these different goals, we're gonna need your help because each of them is a different piece. These are like empty vessels. These are buckets that we need to fill with your knowledge, with your insights, with your experiences, with your networks, with the practice of the work that you've been doing out in the field."

Introducing the Seven ESHIP Goals

As he displays the description of each of the seven ESHIP goals on the screen behind him, Hwang adds his perspectives on each.

Goal #1: Inclusive Field: Ensure ecosystem builders from diverse perspectives lead our field

"We need you involved in making sure that all the voices that we bring into this process are inclusive – that we bring lots of people into this conversation – like we have here at this conference."

Goal #2: Collaborative Culture: Strengthen the culture within our field

"This speaks to how we do the work, how do we break down the silos across the field... We need to strengthen the collaborative culture across the field so we are in a position to share things more effectively and build off of one another."

Goal #3: Shared Vision: Establish shared outcomes and a common lexicon for our work

"We can't even agree on what's the definition of an entrepreneur, what's the definition of an ecosystem, what's the definition of capital, what's the definition of a start-up. We need to figure this out. We need to, as a practice say, 'here's some common lexicon, here's some common vocabularies of how we describe the work,' and let's align around getting there together as one, as one unit, as one field of practice."

Goal #4: Connected Networks: Build field-wide communication channels to connect ecosystem builders across networks

"How do we sync up, how do we lock networks across this field, so we can share information effectively together? ... We can start to share more effectively so then we can learn and we can build what we have from a siloed community, a fragmented community, into one where people are able to access the ideas and the resources quickly to be able to do the work more effectively."



View the full Firestarter

Making Entrepreneurial Ecosystems Mainstream

VICTORY HWANG ON THE PRACTICE OF ECOSYSTEM BUILDING

Goal #5: Quantified Methods: Define the methods and metrics of evidence-based ecosystem building

"We need to be able to know how it's working, so how do we do what we do? ... We need to create that kind of scientific precision and we need to build that knowledge base of how do we do this work well and then how do we measure and track what's happening?"

Goal #6: Universal Support: Expand external stakeholder engagement in ecosystem building

"How do we get everybody on the bus? How do we make sure that it's not just the people building ecosystems and the entrepreneurs and the people supporting entrepreneurs, but we have large corporations, we have large financial institutions, we have policymakers at all different levels of society, we have essentially all the people that are involved in the entrepreneurial process."

Goal #7: Sustainable Work: Develop professional recognition and resources for ecosystem builders

"How do we turn this into a real profession? How do we turn this into something that you can say, 'that's my job, that's what I do, and I know how to make a living out of it.'"

As he concludes his talk, Hwang reminds us that the ESHIP Summit is a hands-on conference where the challenges and problems will be solved by leveraging the diverse talents and skills in the room and together having conversations to fix the problems and advance the agenda forward.

Personal Reflections

That day, the key takeaway for me was the invitation to get involved, to "look at what you can contribute ... and enroll in the process and partner with the Kauffman Foundation to co-create, build, and shape the future of entrepreneurial development." It's something that I took to heart, and it has influenced my trajectory since. I encourage all ecosystem builders to engage and help to co-create and advance the professional field of ecosystem building. [Learn about ways to get involved.](#)



Bio: Jeff Bennett is an ecosystem builder at both the local level and the field level. At the local level, he is the co-founder and President of [StartupSac](#), a small, scrappy non-profit in Sacramento, California, that informs, educates, and connects founders and innovators. He is also a meta-ecosystem builder, working to connect and inform ecosystem builders and advance the field. He is the co-founder of [Ecosystem Builder Hub](#), an online resource for ecosystem building news and stories and writes extensively on the topic on Ecosystem Builder Hub and his Medium channel. He also leads ESHIP Goals and initiatives as an ESHIP Champion for ESHIP Goal 4 and Storytelling initiatives.



[View the full Firestarter](#)

