



CAL POLY
Center for Innovation
& Entrepreneurship

ANNUAL REPORT



JULY 2020-JUNE 2021

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Cover image: Tessa Luzuriaga (center) working on her startup ODIN XR with teammates (left to right) Christian Bloemhof, Michaela Whitcomb-Weston and Ali Mohammad. Photo by Joe Johnson.

A NOTE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE



JOHN TOWNSEND

*Executive Director,
Cal Poly CIE*

We are pleased to share our annual report reflecting on the year completed at the end of June 2021. It has been one heck of a year.

We accomplished a lot and continued building our program during a difficult period of time. If you're going to navigate your way through a pandemic, having an entrepreneurial mindset and an incredible team of dedicated people are two of the most important things to pack for the journey!

As you will read in this year's report, we have made a number of strategic "investments" that we believe will move us closer to our mission to "be the top interdisciplinary undergraduate entrepreneurship program in the nation and a strategic economic development engine throughout the San Luis Obispo Region."

This year we continued to increase our engagement with both our Cal Poly students and faculty, as well as members of our Central Coast regional business community. We also expanded our reach throughout our alumni base. I am constantly amazed at the impact our alumni have had since leaving Cal Poly. So many of them have chosen an entrepreneurial career and have built companies that have made real and positive differences in our world. Many of these impressive alumni are encouraged by Cal Poly's commitment to entrepreneurship and have generously given their time and financial support, both of which are critical to expanding our reach and engaging students across campus.

At the beginning of the year, we established our Poly Ventures. Our inaugural investment was in a company founded by a Cal Poly alum who started his first startup in the CIE's very first Accelerator program. This fund was established as a means for the CIE to take an equity stake in the companies we help launch, and to provide a source of financial support that enables our programs, educate our students and support the companies they launch. The fund was supported with very generous philanthropic gifts from many of our supporters. Investments from the fund are directed by our Investment Committee, which is made up of an impressive group of seasoned venture capitalists and veterans. More about this later in the report.

We also established our Patiño Scholars Program, which awards scholarships to amazing high-achieving graduates of the Fresno-based entrepreneurial magnet school. Patiño does an amazing job of supporting underrepresented student populations and preparing them for productive and meaningful careers that help foster economic growth in their communities. The first five students began their college journeys at Cal Poly and two are doing so with the support of full scholarships funded by a group of incredibly generous supporters. More on this later in the report.

DIRECTOR

our many accomplishments from the fiscal and academic year we
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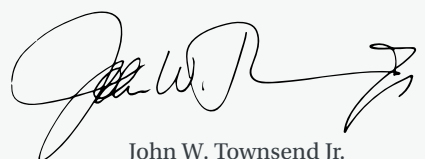
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We expanded upon our Faculty Fellow Release Time program, which provides course release for a selected faculty member to dedicate time towards extending our entrepreneurial impact on campus. This Fall, David Askay will be working with a student team to organize and conduct Camp PolyHacks, which brings students from across campus together for an intensive, high-energy weekend of hacking towards a solution to a self-selected problem or opportunity. This year, the organizing team has selected a handful of very relevant problem areas: climate change, This release time is made possible by the generous gift from Chris and Gwen Cruttenden. We will be expanding this program this year to provide release time for more and more faculty members across campus.

On the community front, we established our industry sector programs in MedTech, AgTech, CleanTech and Aerospace and Aeronautics. This university and community program provides inspiration and resources for students, faculty and community entrepreneurs solving problems and pursuing commercial opportunities in these future leading sectors. We have seeded these programs with both organically launched and externally attracted companies that are working on amazing solutions to some of our society's biggest challenges. We expect to share some impressive success stories with you as the programs mature.

As our nine recently graduated Accelerator teams move forward on their journey in the Incubator and Hatchery programs, we are busy reloading the pipeline with a record number of teams in the Hatchery, our on-campus incubator. Indeed, entrepreneurship is stronger than ever and we are incredibly fortunate to help our young entrepreneurs find their path to market and make a real difference in the world.

Enjoy this year's Annual Report. I look forward to seeing you all at some point throughout the year.



John W. Townsend Jr.

OUR MISSION

Enriching talent.
Enabling dreams.

To be the top interdisciplinary undergraduate entrepreneurship program in the nation and strategic economic development engine throughout San Luis Obispo County.

OUR YEAR IN REVIEW

SEPT. 2020

Demo Day hosted virtually at SLO Brew Rock, in San Luis Obispo, with 1000+ online attendees. [WATCH HERE](#)

NOV. 2020

11th annual Elevator Pitch Competition, with student competitors from Cal Poly, Cuesta and Allan Hancock Colleges. [WATCH HERE](#)

JAN. 2021

Launched **Cal Poly Ventures**

FEB. 2021

Camp PolyHacks hosts their annual event at the CIE HotHouse. The event is a student-run, two-day, multidisciplinary hackathon.

APRIL 2021

Innovation Quest (iQ) event is open for public attendance for the first time, with past competitors introducing this year's contestants. Over \$35k was awarded in prize money to 4 winning teams.

[WATCH HERE](#)

JUNE 2021

SBDC's AngelCon is hosted virtually for the second year at SLO Brew Rock, with Tallyfor winning the top prize of \$135k in equity-backed funding. [WATCH HERE](#)

OCT. 2020

Three startups (De Oro Devices, Neo Charge and Roopairs) graduate from the CIE Incubator, with more than a dozen employees and nearly \$1.7 million in capital raised.

DEC. 2020

Five new members join the CIE Faculty Fellows. Three from the College of Liberal Arts and one from the College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Science. [READ MORE](#)

APRIL 2021

Graduated CIE startup company Alydia Health, formally InPress Technologies Inc., is acquired by Organon & Co. for \$240 Million.

Read more on page xx

MAY 2021

May Forum, with Cal Poly & CIE alumnus Ben Doherty as the guest speaker. He built his business through CIE programs and eventually sold his startup for \$170 million. [WATCH HERE](#)

JUNE 2021

The 13-week Summer Accelerator begins at the CIE HotHouse with 8 teams participating in-person and 1 team participating virtually.

ALYDIA HEALTH: BUILDING A MULTIMILLION DOLLAR COMPANY WITH THE CIE

WRITTEN BY ALYSON SMITH

Postpartum hemorrhage, or excessive bleeding after giving birth, is the leading cause of maternal death in the world, according to the World Health Organization. Graduated Incubator company Alydia Health, formerly InPress Technologies Inc., is working to prevent postpartum hemorrhage with their innovative medical device, the Jada System.

Postpartum hemorrhage is commonly treated with a balloon tamponade, which uses positive pressure to compress bleeding vessels. The Jada System uses a vacuum, or negative pressure, to initiate contractions and stop the bleeding. The device was Food and Drug Administration (FDA) cleared in August of 2020 and is being used in hospitals throughout the US.

The original Jada was designed in 2011 by then-Cal Poly biomedical engineering seniors Davis Carlin and Alex Norred. The pair entered the device into Innovation Quest, an annual business plan and innovation competition founded at Cal Poly by Carson Chen, Laura Pickering, and Rich Boberg, and now hosted by the Cal Poly Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (CIE). Their team came in second.

Carlin and Norred then took their idea to the Summer Accelerator, a program designed to help student innovators turn their ideas into a real, scalable business. Jessie Becker Alexander, a Cal Poly business student who was working for the CIE as a student entrepreneur, was helping to run the program.

Becker Alexander had crossed paths with Carlin and Norred at Innovation Quest, but began to work more closely with the pair throughout the course of the Summer Accelerator.

“I had my little cubicle as a CIE employee, so I was working at the CIE and then I’d go check on what was going on in the [Alydia Health] office,” Becker Alexander recounted. “I was doing both at the same time.”

Becker Alexander ultimately co-founded Alydia Health along with San Luis Obispo-based medical device engineer Nathan Bair, who she met through the Cal Poly Small Business Development Center (SBDC).

“The company was really lucky that we were in this space right when the Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship was starting,” Becker Alexander said. “The support from the CIE community as a whole was incredibly important, both the peer support as well as all of [the CIE’s] structured programs... Starting something is hard, and being a part of a community like that was really important.”

The CIE not only offered a supportive community, but provided Alydia Health with resources that were integral to the startup’s eventual success.

The CIE connects their startup teams with mentors who can provide insights into the startup process within different industries. Alydia Health was paired with Jan Haynes, a business development executive in the medical device industry.

Haynes began working with the team, and it even felt like a companion. She helped the team to enter the device market, connect with investors, and showed interest in the product through the approval process.

“She was the first one who pulled back the curtain and understood what we needed if we really wanted to bring this to life,” Becker Alexander said.

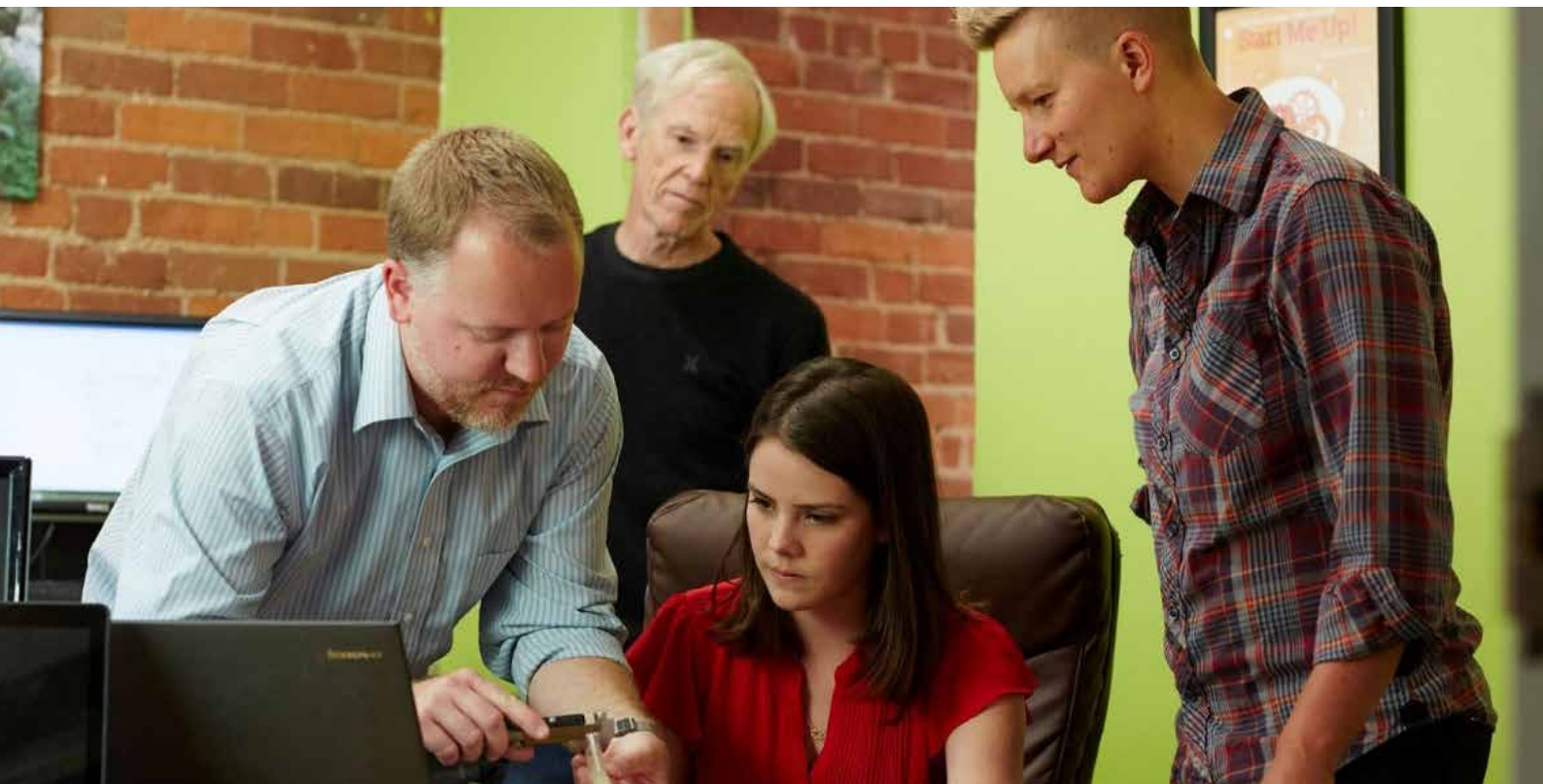
Early investors were attracted to the team, providing the Alydia Health team with not only funding, but mentorship.

“When you bring on the right kind of background and expertise, they can propel you forward faster,” Becker Alexander said.

Many of Alydia Health’s early investors provided the startup with guidance to avoid common mistakes and increase the chances of success. The Alydia Health team with networked connections allowed them to connect with industry experts.

One of Alydia Health’s most recent investors is the Global Health Investment Fund, designed to finance the

The original InPress Technologies Inc. alumni. Courtesy of Alydia Health.



SanPress team is pictured during their CIE HotHouse days. From left: Nathan Bair, Jim Verhulst, Jessie Becker and Amelia Degelkolb. The latter two are Cal Poly students. Courtesy of Alydia Health

with Alydia Health “before we had any,” said Becker Alexander. “I wanted to understand the medical process and walked them through the process for medical devices.”

“Who helped us pull back the curtain and show us what we would need to do to bring this device to market,”

“Another valuable resource, the CIE Health team with access to not only their expertise but also their mentorship.”

“Having the right investors with the experience, knowledge and connections to help propel your progress even further,” said Becker Alexander.

“Early investors provided the resources and expertise that helped them to understand and maximize their potential. We also presented the Alydia Health vision and working opportunities that we had and learned from other investors.”

“One of the most notable investors was the Global Health Investment Fund (GHIF), a fund that focuses on the development of drugs,

vaccines and other medical innovations that fight against diseases disproportionately affecting low- and middle-income countries.

“When we were able to raise money from the Global Health Investment Fund, that was a really big deal for us,” Becker Alexander said. “It was really gratifying to be able to work with an investment group that believed in our mission and the impact that it could have.”

The funding provided by GHIF helped Alydia Health to expand their reach and branch into low-income markets, which according to Becker Alexander, “has always been core to the company’s mission and culture.”

Alydia Health was recently acquired by Organon & Co., a spinoff of multinational pharmaceutical company Merck & Co. Inc., for \$240 million. This development will allow Alydia Health to expand even further, saving thousands of mothers’ lives in the process.

“I’m incredibly excited about the acquisition and the partnership with Organon,” Becker Alexander said. “From the very beginning, everything we wanted for the company was to partner with an organization that has the resources to help propel access to technology even more quickly than we could do on our own.”

The Jada System will be introduced into Europe and other developed countries, as well as underdeveloped countries lacking affordable access to women’s healthcare, said Organon CEO Kevin Ali in a Business Wire press release.

Organon has experience in creating affordable access for underdeveloped markets. Their acquisition of Alydia Health will rapidly increase access to the Jada System.

“Right now, with everything that’s happening with the acquisition, I just feel an immense sense of gratitude that there are so many people out there who believe in the same mission,” Becker Alexander said. “When you have a mission like we have, to save women’s lives around the world, being true to that mission in everything we do — that’s what created success for us.”

Becker Alexander is grateful not only for the support that she received from investors, but also the support she received from the CIE and the San Luis Obispo community at large.

“We would not have been able to survive those early days without the CIE,” she said. “I have immense gratitude for Cal Poly and the CIE. So many people have helped us along the way, and every single one of those people was instrumental in our success.”

PROGRAM BREAKDOWN



INNOVATION SANDBOX

Dedicated to the development of student projects and ideation. Offering free 3-D printing to all Cal Poly students as well as CNC routers, laser and vinyl cutters, hand tools and VR headsets.

CAL POLY ENTREPRENEURS

A student-run club unifies entrepreneurs on campus. CPE hosts dozens of entrepreneurial events, activities and special guests every year.

SUMMER ACCELERATOR

A three-month summer program that provides select students and recent graduates with seed funding, guidance and office space to launch a successful business.

CIE INCUBATOR

Open to SLO County entrepreneurs. It's a two-year program that includes everything needed for early-stage companies to develop into financially stable, high-growth enterprises.

THE HATCHERY

An on-campus incubator program that provides guidance and resources for students who want to take their business ideas to the next level.

CIE ANNEX

Serving the SLO community, this space serves as a regional entrepreneurial ecosystem, including a lab, for product development, that allows for prototyping and early-stage manufacturing.

CIE HOTHOUSE COWORKING

Provides affordable coworking space designed to enhance productivity and collaboration among entrepreneurs, startups and innovators.

CAL POLY SBDC

Promotes the development of technology-focused ventures by providing high-quality business assistance to start-ups and established companies, within the SLO County community.



Muscle Ninja teammates, from left to right, Ivet Avalos and Austin Ma Photo by Joe Johnson.

EVENTS & COMPETITIONS

Forums | FALL & SPRING

Open to students and community members. They are social, educational and communal events that foster information exchange and collaboration.

Demo Day | END OF SUMMER

A showcase opportunity for the Summer Accelerator teams. Teams have the opportunity to give their culminating pitch at the end of the summer.

Elevator Pitch Competition | FALL

Gives students 90 seconds to pitch their product ideas, innovative services or startups to a panel of judges for the chance to win \$1,000.

Innovation Quest (iQ) | SPRING

An annual competition that grants up to \$30,000 in funding and coaching to student-run startups.

AngelCon | SPRING

An investment program that teaches potential investors how to invest in startups through an event-driven competition that ends with a live investment in a startup of up to \$100,000.

SBDC

The Cal Poly CIE Small Business Development Center (SBDC) helps small business owners and entrepreneurs thrive in San Luis Obispo County by providing high-quality business assistance at no-cost. It helps entrepreneurs launch companies, create and retain jobs, and attract capital investment.

With a specific focus on high growth and technology business opportunities, the SBDC helps develop businesses by utilizing:

- Experienced consultants offering free and confidential services.
- Practical, cutting-edge workshops that inspire innovation.
- Open office hours for confidential walk-in expert consultation.
- An atmosphere filled with entrepreneurial spirit and support.

To learn more about the Cal Poly CIE SBDC, check out the website **here**.



Working with the SBDC has been a great experience for me. I have had the opportunity to work with great mentors, whom have been exceptional at providing the advice and guidance we needed to continue growing through the pandemic. Thank you!

TOM CAROLAN
CEO of Digital Market Media

Hear how the SBDC helped Whiz Kids during the pandemic, guiding them through the process of building a website.



2020-2021 HIGHLIGHTS



SBDC
CONSULTANTS

32



JOBS
CREATED

113



HOURS OF
COUNSELING

2,572



CLIENTS
SERVED

602

\$24.7M

TOTAL CAPITAL
(LOANS & EQUITY)



TRAINING EVENT
ATTENDEES

2,350

ACADEMICS

Through dozens of unique programs, the CIE helps students across the university acquire the tools, the skills and foster the mindset of an entrepreneur. Entrepreneurial careers transcend specific job titles, career paths and industries. We develop the entrepreneurial spirit with complementing class instruction and project-based activities.

“Having a Cal Poly engineering education paired with this entrepreneurship experience makes me a prime candidate for small, disruptive tech companies. A lot of renewable technologies are in early stages of development currently, and require engineers who can be technical and entrepreneurial.”

RUSSELL CALETENA

Electrical Engineering '21

Enrolled in Entrepreneurship Senior Project 3-quarter sequence

The CIE Faculty Fellows are growing the entrepreneurship culture at Cal Poly. Within each of the university's six colleges, CIE Faculty Fellows incorporate innovation, and entrepreneurship into their coursework, serve as CIE ambassadors within the college they represent and help guide students through various entrepreneurial career paths.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To see our entrepreneurship concentration course catalog, go [here](#).

To see our entrepreneurship minor course catalog, please go [here](#).

To see more information on each faculty fellows member, go [here](#).



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FACULTY FELLOWS

20

ENTREPRENEURSHIP
COURSES OFFERED

102 STUDENTS

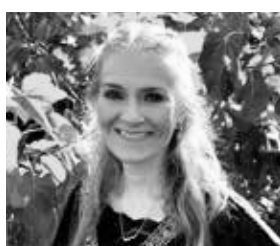
FROM THE COLLEGE OF
BUSINESS, ENROLLED IN THE
*Entrepreneurship
Concentration*

145 STUDENTS

FROM REMAINING
COLLEGES ENROLLED IN THE
Entrepreneurship Minor

ONLY U.S. UNIVERSITY
IN THE eBRIDGE ALLIANCE
PARTNER PROGRAM

(a network of international universities
and university-linked entrepreneurship
located in worldwide startup hotspots.)



ENTREPRENEURSHIP FOR ALL: HOW A FRESNO HIGH SCHOOL AND THE CIE ARE INCREASING EDUCATIONAL ACCESS FOR LOW-INCOME STUDENTS

WRITTEN BY ALYSON SMITH

When Isaac Hernandez started high school, he attended a Fresno public school alongside over 2,500 other students. He had ambition, but no structure, and his school simply did not have the resources to help him develop career goals or build a four-year plan.

“It was thousands of students, and there was a fight every week. I didn’t feel like I was getting anything out of my education,” Hernandez said.

Hernandez then discovered the Phillip J. Patiño School of Entrepreneurship (Patiño), a small magnet high school in the Fresno Unified School District that focuses on business and innovation.

“One day, Patiño was doing recruitment, came to our classroom and started talking about what they do,” he recounted. “It was the holy grail of ‘This is for you.’”

Hernandez eventually transferred from his original high school to Patiño.

Students at Patiño spend their time learning the process of building a business and the fundamentals of entrepreneurship.

“All of our classes are geared toward helping students develop an entrepreneurial mindset,” said principal of Patiño Blair Sagardia.

Freshmen at Patiño take a project management class that introduces them to basic principles of entrepreneurship. In their sophomore years, students move onto classes in online marketing and web

development, where they build websites and create digital advertisements for real companies in Fresno.

Juniors at Patiño begin building their own companies through an incubator class. Students form small groups and work together to develop product, service and startup ideas. They continue working on these ideas into their senior years, when they move onto an accelerator class.

“Their goal is to further develop a business idea, pitch it to investors and to hopefully launch it at some point during their senior year,” Sagardia said.

During his senior year, Hernandez, along with a small group of classmates, launched Gavin’s Notebook, an online directory that connects families with special needs to disability services and resources. The Gavin’s Notebook website is still live, but is no longer being updated. The founding team took a step back from the project to focus on their studies as they entered their first years in college.

“If it were up to me, I would still be working on it,” said Hernandez, who is now a business administration freshman at Cal Poly. “There were many things we just couldn’t do because of our limited time and experience, but I’m very proud of what we created.”



The hands-on learning opportunities afforded to students at Patiño align well with Cal Poly's Learn by Doing philosophy. The high school's incubator and accelerator classes are remarkably similar to the programs offered by the Cal Poly Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (CIE).

Entrepreneur and Cal Poly alum Mark Jackson recognized these similarities. Jackson served on an advisory committee that provided feedback to Patiño during the school's early development in 2015. He recommended that Patiño connect with Cal Poly and the CIE.

"We really focus on a different way of educating students," Sagardia said. "It's about applying your [education] to something real to learn at a deeper level. What we saw with Cal Poly is that students have the opportunity to do the application of learning and the real-world experiences. It was completely aligned with what our kids were learning."

Sagardia acted on Jackson's advice and reached out to the CIE.

CIE executives were excited by the idea of building a relationship with Patiño.

"The idea was there's this incredible school that has an entrepreneurial curriculum, so what can we do to inspire these students to pursue college, pursue an entrepreneurial experience in college and look to Cal Poly for that experience?" said CIE Senior Director of

Development Cory Karpin.

In their initial outreach, the CIE invited a group of Patiño students to attend Demo Day, where they could see firsthand what Cal Poly students are able to accomplish with the help of the CIE.

Demo Day is the culmination of the three-month CIE Summer Accelerator program. During the Summer Accelerator, the CIE provides a select group of Cal Poly students and recent graduates with the resources needed to turn their startup ideas into real business ventures. At Demo Day, Accelerator teams showcase the results of a summer of hard work and pitch their companies.

"We had about 20 students come out with their principal, vice principal and counselor to attend Demo Day, and they just ate it up," said Karpin.

The relationship between the CIE and Patiño is now four years strong, and each year several of Patiño's graduating seniors go on to attend Cal Poly. Nearly 10 of the 30-40 students who graduated from Patiño in the 2020-2021 school year now attend Cal Poly, according to Principal Sagardia.

The CIE ensures that even Patiño students who come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds have the opportunity to attend Cal Poly. They do so with the help of Cal Poly Scholars, a program that supports high-achieving, low-income students at Cal Poly.

CONTINUED ➡

“The ultimate goal is that students graduate Cal Poly, but we want to make sure that along the way, they are getting the support and resources they need,” said Cal Poly Scholars Assistant Director Alexis Melville. “The three goals we have for the program are to assist scholars in building a personal support network for college success, to foster an inclusive community of scholars and to help scholars develop knowledge and skills for lifelong success.”

Incoming students, both freshmen and transfer students, automatically qualify for the program based on their Free Application for Federal Students Aid (FAFSA) or California Dream Act application. The program currently assists around 1,200 students.

Cal Poly Scholars provides students with financial support, including a scholarship, technology credit and waived orientation fees, throughout their time at Cal Poly. The program also connects scholars with academic advisors, fosters an inclusive mentorship network, maintains a residential learning community for first- and second-years living on-campus and sponsors other workshops and programming that promote the central goals of the program.

Funding for the Scholars program comes primarily from the Cal Poly Opportunity Fee, a \$2,100 fee paid by out-of-state students that is used to cover campus-based costs not covered by financial aid for first-generation and low-income California students. Certain scholars, however, receive scholarships paid for by private donors. Select students from Patiño, for example, receive scholarships funded in part by CIE donors.

Many students at Patiño are first-generation students from low-income backgrounds. When the CIE learned that several Patiño students had been accepted into Cal Poly, but turned down the acceptance because they could not afford the cost of attendance, they turned to their donors for help.

“We went to our donors with the goal of raising enough money to provide a full-ride scholarship for one Patiño student to come to Cal Poly that year,” Karpin said. “We very quickly were able to raise enough money for two full rides.”

CIE donors commit \$7,500 per year, for five years, and Cal Poly partially matches that donation with \$2,500, according to Karpin. These funds, along with government-provided financial aid, ensure that Patiño students are able to graduate from Cal Poly debt-free.

Hernandez was one of the two Patiño students in his year who received a scholarship from the Cal Poly Scholars program. Throughout his first quarter at Cal Poly, the program proved to be “very helpful when it comes to being acquainted with college life,” he said.

“Without my Scholars scholarship, I don’t think I would be here,” Hernandez continued. “I’m incredibly grateful to be a part of a program like this.”

Patiño fosters students’ passion for entrepreneurship, and the CIE and Cal Poly Scholars program create opportunities for these students to pursue their passion. These programs not only ensure that they are able to further their education, but provide them with support that helps them thrive as both students and as entrepreneurs.

“It’s not only important to increase access to education, but it’s important to increase inclusion and support of all students on-campus, especially those who have been historically underrepresented and underserved in higher education,” Melville of Cal Poly Scholars said.

For students like Hernandez, increased access to education and educational support are seen as integral to the success of both current and future entrepreneurs.

“Being able to fund these kids who have dreams, but maybe not the finances to pursue them is essential in education,” Hernandez said. “It’s giving kids a chance to pursue their dreams, and I think Patiño is going to be dishing out some kids that have great dreams.”





ACCELERATOR TEAMS 2021

“The Accelerator is our most comprehensive offering at the CIE, providing a true launchpad experience for student entrepreneurial teams through workshops, mentorship, community building, leadership development and access to capital. The overall teamwork, diversity of ideas that span global industries and truly interdisciplinary skill-sets are exemplified by a group of amazing student entrepreneurs and innovators.

JOSE HUITRON

CIE Director of Student Innovation Programs



ARTIFEX

ARTIFEX is creating a drawing tool that will save architects time and money. It was founded by Elijah Williams of Berkeley, California, who earned bachelor's and master's degrees in architecture, and Anna Baytosh, a graduate business student from Gold River, California.

For Mom Care

For Mom Care is building a postpartum recovery platform that provides holistic support to ensure mothers properly heal after birth. It was launched by Christina Grigorian of La Crescenta, California, who earned her master's degree in biomedical engineering, and Camila Monchini of Santa Monica, California, who is a graduate biomedical engineering student.



Intego Technology™ is working to create the most durable and sustainable footwear on the market with a patent-pending manufacturing process. It was founded by business administration junior Alexandra Joelson of Carlsbad, California and environmental management and protection junior Samuel Andrews of Boulder, Colorado.



kit & sis™ is helping children explore hands-on crafting through subscription craft boxes, in-person and virtual summer camps, special events and more. It was founded by twin sisters Madeline and Gabrielle Pollock, both business administration juniors with concentrations in entrepreneurship, and their childhood friend Kate Lally, who is a business administration sophomore at Stonehill College in Massachusetts. They are all from Los Gatos, California.



Odin XR is developing an educational virtual reality sandbox that engineering students can use to conduct experiments. It was founded by electrical engineering senior Tessa Luzuriaga of Temecula, California and computer engineering senior Ali Mohammad of Escondido, California.



PowerMove is developing immersive video games with exercise as the core component to keep children active. It was founded by Sara Glaser, a 2021 business administration graduate from Calabasas, California and business administration senior Madison Lewandowski of Santa Barbara, California.



S2 Monitoring Solutions is empowering residential solar panel owners to accelerate their return on investment. It was founded by Caletena of Glendale, California and recent graduates Paul Romano, mechanical engineering, of Los Olivos, California and Fernando Estevez, computer engineering, of Goleta, California.



TractorCloud is building a hardware-software solution to help farmers and operations managers monitor the maintenance of their vehicles. It was founded by computer science graduate student Morgan Swanson of Pleasanton, California, industrial technology and packaging graduate Harrison Whitaker of Carmel Valley, California and Roxanne Miller of San Ramon, California, who earned a master's in computer science in June.



Zoetic Motion is developing wearable technology to help runners move without injury. It was founded by Ivet Avalos of Moorpark, California, who graduated in June with a bachelor's in mechanical engineering, and computer science graduate student Zeeshan Khan of Los Gatos, California.

ACCELERATOR TEAM SPOTLIGHT: KIT & SIS

WRITTEN BY ALYSON SMITH

Third-year Cal Poly business administration majors Madeline and Gabrielle Pollock and their childhood friend Kate Lally, a second year at Stonehill College, are inspiring creativity with their startup Kit & Sis.

Kit & Sis encourages young girls to explore their creativity through crafting with subscription craft boxes as well as both in-person and virtual summer camps. The summer camps, led by Madeline, Gabrielle and Kate, provide attendees with a three-day immersive experience centered around crafting doll accessories.

“We’re teaching [young girls] to use their hands, get creative and make their own doll accessories while having a creative experience and being resourceful,” Madeline said.

Madeline, Gabrielle and Kate grew up playing with American Girl dolls, but it wasn’t until 2013, when they were packing away their dolls for storage, that they realized they had crafted most of their doll accessories themselves. The realization inspired them to found Kit & Sis and share their crafting expertise with young girls everywhere.

“I’m always blown away by the fact that we were three 13-year-old girls who thought, ‘Let’s make an American Girl doll summer camp’ [and] somehow figured out how to do it,” Madeline said. “It’s just so cool that we’re able to use our hands and our minds and create something to help others.”

Kit & Sis experienced significant growth in 2020 when, with the rise of COVID-19 and the implementation of nationwide shelter-in-place orders, parents turned to their virtual summer camp to keep their daughters entertained during the quarantine. This unanticipated growth inspired the Kit Sis to take their idea to the Cal Poly Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (CIE) Summer Accelerator, an intensive, summer-long program that helps Cal Poly students and recent graduates develop their startup ideas into real, sustainable businesses.

The CIE and the Summer Accelerator program provides the Kit & Sis team with valuable resources that are helping them grow their startup. The expert mentorship from CIE staff and industry professionals have been especially helpful, said Gabrielle.

“We love the entrepreneurial opportunities here,” she said. “There’s so much freedom to go where we want to go with our company and so much fantastic support...The most helpful resources have been all of the amazing speakers that have come in. We’ve learned so much from them.”

The Summer Accelerator has not only helped the Kit & Sis founders develop their business, but has helped them to grow as entrepreneurs, independent from their startup.

“Sometimes I struggle with making decisions and I want someone to tell me what to do,” Kate said. “To be in an environment where people aren’t necessarily telling us what to do, but guiding us, is helping me learn how to [make decisions] myself,” Kate said.

The Summer Accelerator has provided the Kit & Sis team with practical lessons in developing a startup, as well as emphasized the value of entrepreneurship.

“The power of entrepreneurship is your ability to create something out of nothing, and I think that’s really powerful,” Gabrielle said. “It’s going to stick with me the rest of my life, knowing I have the power to change things for myself.”

The Kit & Sis team intends to continue growing their business, even after the Summer Accelerator comes to a close. The lessons learned through the program will help them to expand their impact efficiently and effectively.





"We are dreamers and we have so many ideas of ways to grow our business," Madeline said. "I'm excited about bringing these dreams to life and helping inspire more girls to be creative [and] seeing what the three of us can do together."

Working and growing together, as a team, is important to the Kit & Sis team.

"I think a lot of people talk about how business relationships shouldn't be personal and you [need to] keep your space," Gabrielle said. "It's the opposite for us. If I wasn't so close to [Madeline and Kate], we wouldn't be here."

The Kit & Sis founders rely on each other for support when navigating difficulties in entrepreneurship. Their close relationship, they attested, is integral to their success as a startup.

"One thing that motivates us to keep going when we hit a roadblock or an obstacle is each other," Kate said.

"We discuss problems together and make decisions as a team. Working as a team is really important to our dynamic as a business."

Gabrielle echoed similar sentiments.

"Obviously the Kit & Sis means so much to me as a company, but [Madeline and Kate] mean even more," Gabrielle said. "When we face obstacles in our company, we all have the same values in what this means to us and we're going to help each other no matter what."

To keep up with Kit & Sis, visit [kitandsis.com](https://www.kitandsis.com) or follow them on Instagram [@kitandsis.official](https://www.instagram.com/kitandsis.official).

Photo from left to right: Kit & Sis cofounders Kate Lally, Madeline Pollock and Gabrielle Pollock at Demo Day 2021. Photo by Joe Johnson.

SEARCHING FOR SUCCESS IN A MALE-DOMINATED FIELD: THE CHALLENGES FACED BY THE NEW GENERATION OF FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS

WRITTEN BY ALYSON SMITH

Female representation within the entrepreneurship industry is steadily growing. The number of women-owned businesses is increasing faster than the number of businesses overall, according to Forbes Business. Despite this trend, however, the space is still male-dominated, with only 36% of small businesses owned by women worldwide.

New female entrepreneurs encounter challenges that generally do not exist for their male counterparts. Women — especially young women — don't align with the traditional image of an entrepreneur. This puts them at a disadvantage when meeting with investors and other industry professionals.

Roxanne Miller is one of three co-founders of TractorCloud, a startup developing a hardware-software solution that will help operations managers monitor the predictive maintenance of their vehicles. The startup is still in its early stages, and Miller and her co-founders, both male, are frequently meeting with potential venture capital investors (VCs).

Miller found that her co-founders are able to effortlessly connect with VCs, 81% of which are male according to Forbes Business.

"Because VCs tend to be white males, my co-founders can identify with them," Miller said. "They have a lot of similar interests and experiences. For me, it's more of a balancing game. I have to think about how I'm presenting myself, and it takes a little bit more effort to figure out how to connect with them."

VCs are proven more likely to invest in male-led startups. White males control 93% of venture capital dollars, according to Forbes Business, and only 2% of raised VC backing went to female-founded startups in 2017, according to Entrepreneur Magazine.

For Miller, TractorCloud's male co-founders can act as allies, and are sometimes able to mitigate this issue.

"My male colleagues can support me, give me the floor when it's my turn to talk and show potential investors that I'm trusted with our business," she explained.

But for female-founded businesses, Miller said, "figuring out how to connect with those male VCs on a level that makes them excited about investing in your company can sometimes be a roadblock."

Christina Grigorian and Camila Monchini, founders of women-led startup For Mom Care, struggle to not only connect with potential investors, but convince VCs that their mission is worthwhile.

For Mom Care is building a postpartum recovery platform that provides holistic support to ensure mothers properly heal after birth. Since founding the





Left: Christina Grigorian (left) and Camila Monchini (right) pitch at Demo Day 2021. Photo courtesy of Willa Westneat.

Below: Roxanne Miller (left) working with TractoCloud co-founder and CEO Morgan Swanson (right). Photo courtesy of Joe Johnson.



company in April of 2021, Monchini and Grigorian found that most cis-gendered males are unaware of the physical and mental toll of childbirth.

“Our biggest fear going into this was how we were going to convince a bunch of men that [postpartum care] is really important,” Grigorian said. “It’s an issue that they won’t 100% understand. They’re not women, and because there’s a stigma around not being okay after giving birth, their wives likely haven’t spoken about it.”

Grigorian and Monchini must prove to potential investors that problems exist within the postpartum space before they can showcase their startup as a viable solution. The For Mom Care startup pitch is very problem-centric compared to other early-stage startup pitches.

“If you compare our pitch to other startup teams’ pitches, they talk about their problems for one or two slides,” Grigorian said. “We have six or seven slides on our problem.”

Another challenge when pitching to investors, said Grigorian, is establishing credibility.

Grigorian and Monchini are both biomedical engineers, but because they are not mothers, VCs and other industry professionals often question why they are interested in postpartum care. Grigorian, who has both a bachelor’s and master’s degree in biomedical engineering, believes her credibility is brought into question because of the deep-rooted gender bias in both the entrepreneurship and healthcare industries.

“Women in the healthcare space are not taken seriously,” Grigorian said. “I 100% believe that if there was a man standing behind us on stage, no one would question what makes us credible.”

And Grigorian’s belief is not unfounded. A recent study conducted by the Harvard Business Review found that investors prefer startup pitches presented by male entrepreneurs over those presented by female entrepreneurs — even when the content of those pitches is exactly the same.

When pitching their startup, Grigorian and Monchini go out of their way to establish their credibility and stress that they have both the passion and the skills to bring For Mom Care to fruition.

CONTINUED ➡

“At the beginning of our pitch, we say we’re the two biomedical engineers so [investors] know we’re not just two random girls standing up there,” Grigorian said. “Saying ‘engineer’ gives you a certain amount of credibility.”

Tessa Luzuriaga, co-founder and CEO of OdinXR, faces similar challenges. OdinXR is a startup developing a virtual reality where engineering students and professors can conduct hands-on experiments during online learning. Luzuriaga, an electrical engineering student, founded the company after watching her professors struggle to adapt lab classes to an online format during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It was her passion for engineering that inspired Luzuriaga to found OdinXR, but people often assume that her interest is rooted in the educational aspects, not the technological components, of the company.

“People assume I don’t know anything about computers, when in reality, I’m doing this because I’m an engineer and I know VR hardware to an obsessive amount,” Luzuriaga said. “I’m constantly validating myself. I have to work that much harder to prove that people should be listening to me.”

Luzuriaga feels that because she is a woman in a male-dominated industry, people expect less of her and hold her to lower standards than they do her male counterparts.

“Sometimes it feels like there’s more positivity than I deserve, and I’ll very candidly say, ‘No, you should not be applauding this right now,’” she admitted.

When meeting with industry professionals alongside her male co-founder and all-male team of engineers, Luzuriaga works to “not make gender a thing,” and instead “walks into the room with the same confidence that any one of [her] male peers would.”

She hopes that, as female representation in entrepreneurship increases, gender will no longer be an influential factor in the success of an entrepreneur.

“My biggest hope is that when a woman walks into the room, the initial thought isn’t ‘Oh cool, another woman entrepreneur,’” she said. “It’s ‘Oh sweet, there’s another entrepreneur.’”

Camila Monchini of For Mom Care echoed similar sentiments.

“It would be amazing if in the future, when we think of an entrepreneur, there isn’t necessarily a gender assigned to it,” she said.

More women entering the entrepreneurship space today leads to a more diverse industry tomorrow, and diverse representation makes the space feel more accessible to people of all backgrounds. Monchini hopes that these changes will inspire younger generations and encourage more young women to embark on their own startup endeavours.

“It’s absolutely incredible to see so many women getting into the [entrepreneurship] space,” she said. “For younger girls, it’s really cool for them to have role models and know they can one day get into the space and pursue their passions.”

For Mom Care, along with OdinXR and TractorCloud, were one of nine participating teams in the 2021 Cal Poly Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (CIE) Summer Accelerator, an intensive, summer-long program where Cal Poly students and recent graduates are given the resources needed to turn their startup ideas into real, scalable businesses.

Demographics within the Summer Accelerator reflect the worldwide trend of increased female representation in entrepreneurship. Over half of the co-founders (59%) in the 2021 cohort were women, compared to the previous year, when women made up less than one third (27%) of the entire cohort.

“It’s really inspiring being constantly surrounded by strong, amazing women who are dealing with the exact same work relation problems as me,” said Luzuriaga. “It’s so nice to have another woman’s shoulder to lean on, especially when I have nothing but guys on my team.”

CIE staff are hopeful that this trend will continue, and more women will get involved with the Summer Accelerator as well as other CIE programming.

Many CIE programs, including the Summer Accelerator, match students with mentors who can help them to navigate the startup process. These mentors are often CIE alumni and often male. Increased female representation across CIE programs, however, will eventually lead to more female mentors, with current students hoping to become mentors for the next generation of entrepreneurs.

“It’s so exciting to see the flywheel in motion,” said CIE Senior Director of Development Cory Karpin, who often works with CIE mentors and alumni. “In the early days of the CIE, the percentage of female entrepreneurs was



far lower than it is today, but each year, the number grows. Those trailblazers in the early days of the CIE inspired other female founders and so on and so forth. Here we are today with more than half of our Summer Accelerator startups founded by women.”

The growth of female representation in the entrepreneurship space is a slow process, but a valuable one — and one that Grigorian believes is key to successful entrepreneurship.

“There’s no way to solve problems that women have without the involvement of female entrepreneurs — and that includes female entrepreneurs of color and of different backgrounds, ethnicity and religion,” Grigorian said. “People of different orientations have such different world views and can offer such different perspectives on how to solve a problem.”

*Photo: Tessa Luzuriaga on stage at Demo Day 2021.
Courtesy of Joe Johnson.*

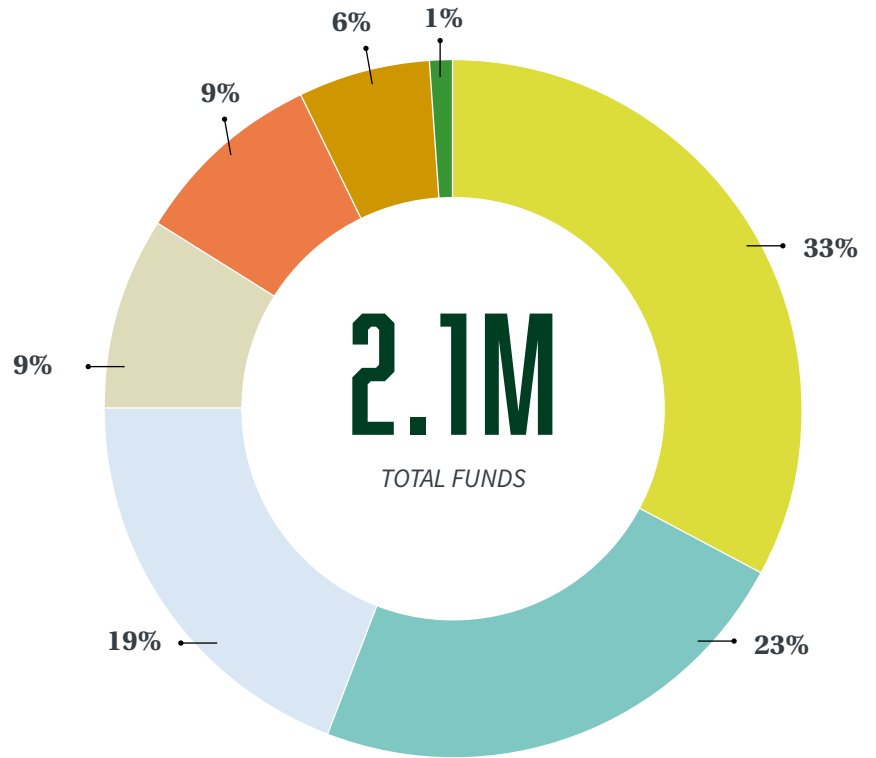
FUNDING

As a longtime donor to the CIE, I am very pleased with the cost-effectiveness of this organization — the large number of programs that support the entrepreneurial ecosystems of both Cal Poly and the larger San Luis Obispo county community. The CIE uses the same 'lean start-up' method that they teach and I know that my money is being used wisely.

JO ANNE MILLER

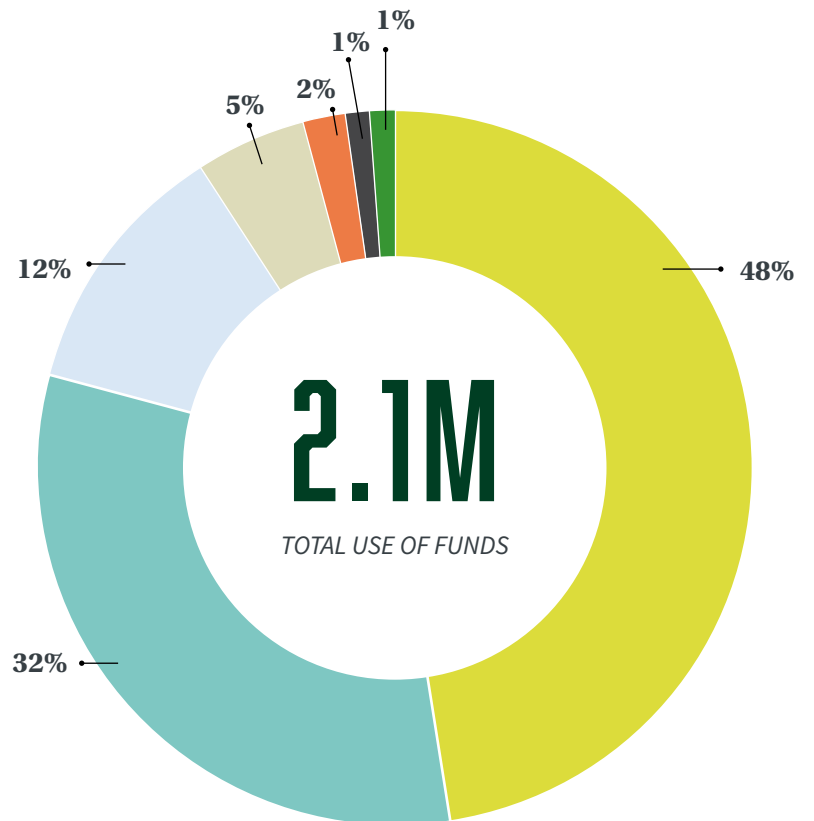
SOURCE OF FUNDS

- **DONORS & SPONSORS** | \$690,000
- **STATE GRANTS** | \$485,000
- **CAL POLY SLO** | \$400,000
- **COUNTY OF SLO** | \$200,000
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- **MARKETING & ADVERTISING** | \$11,000



CAL POLY VENTURES

Founded in January of 2021, Cal Poly Ventures is a donor-supported fund used to invest in high-growth Cal Poly-founded startups. Investment returns are used to grow the fund, as well as support the CIE.

Investment recommendations are made by the Cal Poly Ventures Investment Committee, a small group of professional investors who volunteer their time and combined 50+ years of venture capital experience.

Cal Poly Ventures invested in its first startup, Sunroom Rentals, in March of 2021. Sunroom Rentals is a real estate technology company founded by Cal Poly alum Ben Doherty (CENG '13). Doherty, now a serial entrepreneur, founded his first company, Favor, in the CIE's 2011 Summer Accelerator. That company was acquired in 2018.

There's evolutionary change, and there's revolutionary change. That's what we need in this next decade. The Central Coast needs it. Cal Poly needs it. We need more diverse, more sustainable head-of-household jobs on the Central Coast, and the CIE and this venture fund can be a part of that.

JEFFREY ARMSTRONG

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Learn more about Cal Poly Ventures and hear from some of the founding investment committee members.



To donate to the Cal Poly Venture Fund, please contact Cory Karpin, CIE senior director of development, at **805-660-0985** or **ckarpin@calpoly.edu**.

THANK YOU CORPORATE FOUNDERS CIRCLE

The CIE works closely with students from the Cal Poly's six colleges, as well as the business community, to provide programs and mentorship that cultivate an entrepreneurial mindset.

Corporate Founders Circle members play a critical role in building the businesses of tomorrow. Their sponsorship and expertise help shape the ventures that will change lives locally, nationally and throughout the world.

Carmel & Naccasha is proud to support the CIE. We see it as an imperative investment in our future citizens, colleagues and the drivers of innovation and economic opportunity. We very much value the great work of the team at the CIE.

ZIYAD NACCASHA

Carmel & Naccasha LLP Partner



Membership in the Corporate Founders Circle begins at \$30,000, payable over five years. For more information, please contact Cory Karpin, CIE senior director of development, at 805-660-0985 or ckarpin@calpoly.edu.



THANK YOU FOUNDERS CIRCLE

Through dozens of unique programs, the CIE helps students across the university acquire the tools, the skills and foster the mindset of an entrepreneur.

Founders Circle members are the backbone of the CIE, providing the financial support needed to empower our aspiring entrepreneurial students to change the world.

You know that person who has a great idea and just won't give up? The CIE takes passionate, tenacious students from all majors across campus and gives them the spark and support to start companies and pursue entrepreneurial careers. We support the CIE because it's turning Cal Poly students into ground breakers and innovation leaders.

JAN & RON HAYNES

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Membership in the Founders Circle begins at \$25,000, payable over five years. For more information, please contact Cory Karpin, CIE senior director of development, at **805-660-0985** or **ckarpin@calpoly.edu**.

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We're proud to support and partner with the Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship. It's exciting to see so many homegrown companies scaling in SLO County and all of the jobs they're creating.

WADE HORTON

San Luis Obispo County Administrative Officer



The City of San Luis Obispo has been a supporter of the CIE since its earliest days. Together we've built something that is a hallmark of collaboration, innovation and entrepreneurship to help drive new ideas and opportunities for our city and region. It's a partnership that has helped to launch and grow dozens of new businesses that are firmly rooted in their commitment to our community.

DEREK JOHNSON

City Manager, San Luis Obispo



