



# ENGINES OF GROWTH: HIGHER EDUCATION IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

University Economic Development Association  
Membership Impact and Engagement Report

OCTOBER 2025



# PUTTING KNOWLEDGE INTO ACTION

The University Economic Development Association (UEDA) is proud to share the results of its 2025 Membership Survey, a sector-wide snapshot of the activities and priorities of member colleges and universities.

As these results indicate, UEDA institutions are energetic and intentional leaders and conveners. Their efforts create new companies, drive job creation, and transform academic research into economic opportunity. The result: increased resilience and ongoing returns for their surrounding communities and regions.

Providing insight into UEDA member activities, goals, and challenges, this report presents survey data in five areas of focus:

1. Economic Growth
2. Talent Development
3. Innovation and Commercialization
4. Place-Based Infrastructure
5. Member Engagement and Network Value



## ABOUT THE DATA

This report is based on responses from UEDA's 2025 Membership Survey. Responses were anonymous and aggregated. Percentages reflect the number of respondents per question.

# SURVEY PERIOD



## JULY 7 - AUGUST 18, 2025

RESPONDENTS

# 50



## INSTITUTIONS

INSTITUTION TYPE

# 98%

## PUBLIC

GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION OF RESPONDENTS

# 98%

## U.S.

# 2%

## CANADA



RESEARCH PROFILE

# 45%

## R1 INSTITUTIONS

ANNUAL R&D EXPENDITURES

# 43% REPORTED

# UNDER \$50M\*

MEMBERSHIP LENGTH

# 47%

## HAVE BEEN UEDA MEMBERS FOR MORE THAN FIVE YEARS

1

# ECONOMIC GROWTH

## UEDA Institutions Anchor Regional Prosperity

UEDA members are grounded in a public-purpose mission. They serve as regional conveners, employers, research hubs, and talent developers.

For UEDA institutions, economic development is not an added responsibility but a defining institutional focus. Among respondents:

82%

**ENGAGE IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**  
to support the regional economy



# 74%

**DELIVER IMPACT THROUGH  
RESEARCH AND INNOVATION**

# 68%

**FOCUS ON INDUSTRY  
PARTNERSHIPS AND WORKFORCE  
DEVELOPMENT**

UEDA members measure performance through real-world outcomes. Among respondents:



# 80%

**USE JOB CREATION  
AND EMPLOYMENT  
IMPACT DATA**



# 71%

**MEASURE RESEARCH  
FUNDING SECURED**



# 64%

**TRACK START-  
UPS SUPPORTED  
AND COMMUNITY  
ENGAGEMENT**

## **LEADERSHIP STRUCTURES REFLECT THE COMPLEXITY OF THIS WORK.**

While 38% of respondents reported that an office of research or innovation leads economic development, 30% said responsibilities are distributed across departments or managed through external affiliates such as nonprofit foundations.

# TALENT DEVELOPMENT

## UEDA Members Build Workforce Pathways

Talent development is a top priority for UEDA members. Institutions are creating clear pathways from

learning to work and embedding career development into academic programs. Among respondents:

**40%**  
**RANKED**  
**TALENT**

**AS THE UEDA PILLAR THAT WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT AT THEIR INSTITUTION**

(the three pillars being talent, innovation, and place)



**89%** OFFER  
**INTERNSHIPS**



**44%** **PLAN TO ENHANCE INTERNSHIPS IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS**

**44%** **WILL EXPAND WORKFORCE TRAINING AND CREDENTIALING**

**47%**  
**NAMED WORKFORCE ALIGNMENT**

a  
**TOP GOAL**  
for the  
next 12  
months



# Institutions are focused on supporting employment and nurturing innovation readiness.

As students gain experience through internships and research, they are also gaining access to entrepreneurship opportunities and support.

With skills in entrepreneurship and commercialization, graduates are prepared to find jobs—and to create them.

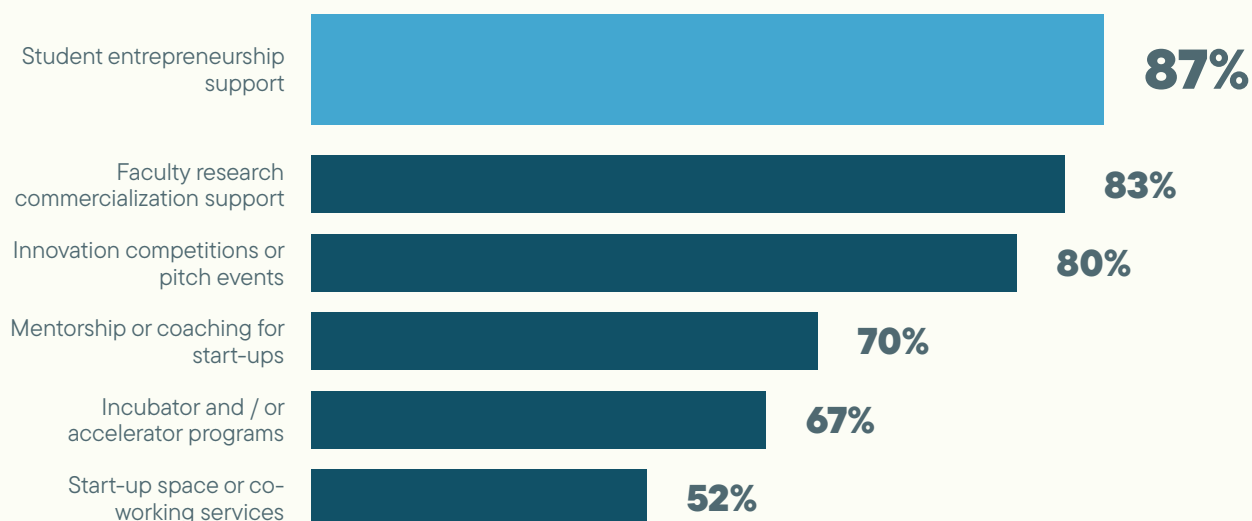
# INNOVATION AND COMMERCIALIZATION

## UEDA Institutions Turn Ideas Into Real-World Impact

UEDA members build capacity for turning discoveries into solutions and helping start-ups

scale. Their programs support researchers, students, and entrepreneurs in moving ideas to market.

Innovation and entrepreneurship offerings by percentage of respondent institutions



Institutions are designed to serve a wide range of stakeholders. Among respondents:

**87%** SERVE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

**85%** PROVIDE SERVICES TO FACULTY

**78%** SUPPORT GRADUATE STUDENTS

**80%** SUPPORT EXTERNAL ENTREPRENEURS



# GROWTH IS A CLEAR PRIORITY,

AND MANY INSTITUTIONS ARE PLANNING TO DEEPEN THEIR COMMERCIALIZATION OFFERINGS. AMONG RESPONDENTS:



44%

**WILL EXPAND  
FACULTY  
COMMERCIALIZATION  
SUPPORTS**



41%

**PLAN TO GROW  
INCUBATOR AND  
ACCELERATOR  
CAPACITY**



58%

**CITED  
INNOVATION AND  
COMMERCIALIZATION  
CAPACITY AS A TOP  
12-MONTH GOAL**

## **HOWEVER, RESPONDENTS NOTED CHALLENGES IN TRACKING COMMERCIALIZATION.**

Close to half (42%) of institutions were unsure what percentage of their R&D was industry-sponsored, and 21% estimated this figure was only 1-5%. These data gaps point to the need for better institutional metrics and benchmarking support.

# PLACE-BASED INFRASTRUCTURE

## UEDA Institutions Invest in Spaces That Enable Impact

UEDA institutions are thinking beyond traditional campus environments. They are creating collaborative spaces that attract partners, support

innovation, and connect with communities.

Respondents reported the following about their infrastructure and investments:

**89%**

**OFFER  
COMMUNITY  
ENGAGEMENT  
PROGRAMS**

**71%**

**PROVIDE  
PUBLIC  
CONVENING  
SPACE**

**69%**

**OPERATE TECH  
TRANSFER  
OFFICES**



## PLANNED INVESTMENTS



**39%**

**WILL DEVELOP  
RESEARCH OR  
INNOVATION  
DISTRICTS**



**37%**

**WILL EXPAND  
PROTOTYPING OR  
TESTING LABS**



**35%**

**PLAN TO GROW  
CORE RESEARCH  
FACILITIES**

**While many institutions continue to invest in lab spaces, amenities are not a primary focus.**

Thirty percent of respondents said amenities upgrades were not applicable, suggesting that these updates are less of a priority than investments in purpose-built R&D spaces.

# MEMBER ENGAGEMENT AND NETWORK VALUE

## UEDA Members Learn Together, Lead Together

One of UEDA's core values is peer learning. Members join and stay because they trust the insights of their

colleagues and want to share what works. Among respondents:

**52%**

**ENGAGED TO LEARN  
WHAT OTHERS ARE  
DOING**

**62%**

**CITED LEARNING  
FROM OTHER  
INSTITUTIONS AS THE  
TOP BENEFIT**

**61%**

**FIRST HEARD ABOUT  
UEDA THROUGH A  
COLLEAGUE OR PEER**

Membership engagement is consistent and sustained. Among respondents:

**55%** **PARTICIPATE A FEW  
TIMES PER YEAR**

**56%** **CITED COLLABORATION  
AND NETWORKING AS  
CORE OFFERINGS**

**86%** **IDENTIFIED THE  
ANNUAL SUMMIT AS  
THE MOST VALUABLE  
OFFERING**

**47%** **HAVE BEEN UEDA  
MEMBERS FOR MORE  
THAN FIVE YEARS**

Thought leadership and strategic alignment were also leading motivators for joining. Members consider UEDA a source of ideas and a platform for relationships. The network is both pragmatic and trusted.

# MEMBER NEEDS AND PRIORITIES

## Where UEDA Can Add the Most Value

Members seek tools that enable them to scale their impact. They want better access to funding, stronger

metrics, and more year-round programming. Top requests among respondents included the following:



61%

**WANT FUNDING AND  
GRANT NAVIGATION  
RESOURCES**



51%

**WANT ENHANCED  
VIRTUAL LEARNING  
OPPORTUNITIES**



49%

**WANT MORE LOCAL  
AND REGIONAL  
NETWORKING**

### **ACCESS TO LOCAL FUNDING REMAINS A GAP FOR MANY UEDA INSTITUTIONS.**

Forty percent of respondents said they do not work with local funding organizations, while 36% said they did.

Members also want help with data. Many expressed interest in case studies, KPI benchmarks, and best practice templates to support internal planning.

Finally, members want UEDA to lead nationally. Open-ended responses emphasized the need for federal advocacy to reinforce the role of higher education in economic development. Institutions want to be heard. They also want to speak with one voice.

# LOOKING AHEAD

## CHAMPIONING THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Higher education institutions are responding to the demands of today while building the economy of tomorrow. UEDA members are preparing talent,

building infrastructure, and launching innovation with lasting community value.

### UEDA SUPPORTS THIS WORK BY:

**SHARING PRACTICAL  
TOOLS AND PEER-  
SOURCED STRATEGIES**



**CURATING FUNDING  
ACCESS AND GRANT  
NAVIGATION SUPPORTS**



**PROVIDING BENCHMARKING  
AND PERFORMANCE  
FRAMEWORKS**



**AMPLIFYING SUCCESS  
THROUGH THE UEDA AWARDS  
OF EXCELLENCE PROGRAM**



The work of one institution can become the model for many. UEDA is committed to facilitating knowledge-

sharing that helps universities and colleges learn from one another and expand their impacts.



## Message From the Board

The University Economic Development Association (UEDA) is pleased to share the findings of its 2025 Membership Survey. As the responses indicate, our members are engaged in a broad range of activities to support economic development and are eager to learn from one another.

UEDA's pillars of talent, innovation, and place are a throughline in the survey responses, reflecting the shared goals of members that unite our efforts across diverse institutions and communities. Respondents have a clear commitment to supporting career development, driving entrepreneurship, building industry connections, and bolstering commercialization efforts. These activities are essential groundwork for future economic success that reaches beyond campus boundaries.

The survey responses also point to shared challenges, particularly with respect to navigating funding pathways and data management and reporting. UEDA is listening, and we look forward to using the survey results to guide our next steps in planning and resource development for our membership.

Above all, the survey findings are an opportunity to celebrate the work of our members, including higher education institutions, government agencies, nonprofit partners, and regional economic development stakeholders. Their work, individually and collectively, is essential to leveraging higher education institutions as economic engines that power local and regional communities for long-term benefit. UEDA is proud to support this energetic and impactful group to share knowledge, build connections, and expand impact.

**Teresa Merriweather Orok, PhD**  
*President*

## About UEDA

The University Economic Development Association connects higher education institutions, government agencies, nonprofit partners, and regional economic development stakeholders. Founded in 1976, UEDA represents over 160 member institutions working at the leading edge of modern economic development strategy. Through peer learning, policy engagement, and curated resources, UEDA accelerates impact across communities and institutions.

Learn more at [universityeda.org](https://universityeda.org)

## About Stiletto

Stiletto Consulting Ltd. is a national leader in economic development, innovation ecosystems, and strategic planning. With deep expertise in higher education, innovation districts, economic development, and place-based strategy, Stiletto supports organizations working at the intersection of education and economic growth. As a long-standing UEDA partner, Stiletto designed and analyzed the 2025 Membership Survey and supports UEDA's broader efforts to translate institutional insight into collective impact.

Learn more at [thinkstiletto.com](https://thinkstiletto.com)



[universityeda.org](https://universityeda.org)