

THE

ECOSYSTEM

# PLAY BOOK



Reflection cards

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RAMBOLL

Danish Design Center



# Introduction

This document compiles the seven themes we work with throughout the playbook.

For each theme, we list three to four *pathways* that we recommend you choose between and work with throughout the three phases of the playbook.

The three phases are:

- ① Current state
- ② Desired state
- ③ Bridging the gap

You will find new questions for each phase under each *pathway*. Remember, these are guiding questions framed to help you in the right direction. You are always welcome to rephrase both the pathways and the questions.

The playbook will walk you through all the steps.

# Reflection card themes



## **Skills & Talent**

A well-functioning innovation ecosystem depends on having the right skills in the right places. This theme focuses on how innovation ecosystems develop, attract, and coordinate skills and talent to meet current and future innovation needs.

It includes identifying the unique competencies that characterize the innovation ecosystem, addressing talent shortages in key industries, and improving the region's attractiveness to skilled individuals. It also looks at whether there is effective coordination between actors to match talent supply with demand across the ecosystem.



## **Competitive Advantage & Collaboration**

Every innovation ecosystem has unique strengths rooted in industry, research, geography, or talent. This specialisation forms the foundation for competitive advantage. It helps shape identity, guide strategic focus, and attract partners and investments.

But specialisation alone is not enough. Innovation ecosystems thrive when strengths are shared across institutions, sectors, and regions. Through collaboration and joint value creation, regions can move beyond isolated excellence and become part of broader innovation networks.

This theme focuses on how innovation ecosystems can identify and leverage their distinctive strengths, build partnerships that unlock shared capabilities, and understand when to encourage healthy market competition and when to stimulate collaboration across the ecosystem.



### **Ecosystem Performance**

A high-performing innovation ecosystem not only enables innovation but also learns from it. This theme focuses on how innovation activity, support processes, and outcomes are understood, measured, and improved over time.

Strong ecosystems track how ventures move through different stages of development, how support is coordinated, and whether innovation efforts, both in startups and established firms — lead to meaningful results. By measuring progress and outcomes, regions can shorten innovation cycles, adapt more quickly, and guide continuous improvement across the ecosystem.



### **Market & Customer Access**

For innovation ecosystems to thrive, companies must be able to understand, reach, and grow within key markets. Access to customers — locally, nationally, and internationally — is essential for scaling innovation and attracting strategic partnerships.

Ecosystems can support this by offering tailored programs, networks, and market expertise, particularly in emerging or complex sectors. Strategic support that helps businesses navigate new markets, validate customer needs, and build relationships plays a vital role in unlocking growth opportunities.



### **Capital & Funding**

Capital and funding are critical enablers of innovation, but their impact depends on how well they are aligned with entrepreneurs' needs and the ecosystem's strategic direction. Different ecosystems will have different funding landscapes and models, but in all cases, it's essential that capital flows support long-term ecosystem development, not just individual projects.

A well-functioning innovation ecosystem is attractive to both innovators and investors. It offers clear pathways to funding, from early-stage support to scale-up financing, and fosters partnerships built on trust, shared goals, and mutual value.



## Innovation Infrastructure

Innovation infrastructure includes access to resources, environments, and services that support companies, especially startups and SMEs, in developing, testing, and scaling new ideas. These resources are often too costly or risky for individual firms to invest in on their own, particularly in early innovation stages. There are two layers of innovation infrastructure:

1. Physical and technical infrastructure includes R&D labs, production facilities, testbeds, high-performance computing, or data platforms.
2. Support infrastructure — including incubators, accelerators, science parks, and cluster organisations that offer guidance, networks, and access to expertise.

These infrastructures are not tied to a single innovation journey. Instead, relevant resources are designed to be shared and reused across multiple actors and initiatives, making them vital building blocks for a resilient and efficient innovation ecosystem.



## Corporate Fabric

The corporate fabric of a region refers to the established companies that shape its business landscape. These firms can act as anchors for innovation and bridges to global markets, or remain disconnected from the region's broader innovation efforts. The theme includes two key layers:

1. Industrial Structure – Who They Are and How They're Connected  
This refers to the industries, capabilities, and relationships of established firms. It considers how they collaborate and compete within the region and beyond. A strong industrial structure supports a well-connected, dynamic ecosystem where knowledge and opportunities flow.
2. Cultural Structure – How They Behave and Lead  
This covers how firms think and act — their values, leadership styles, openness to innovation, and how they engage with startups, talent, and the community. It includes how they support entrepreneurship, intrapreneurship, and skills development.



# 1

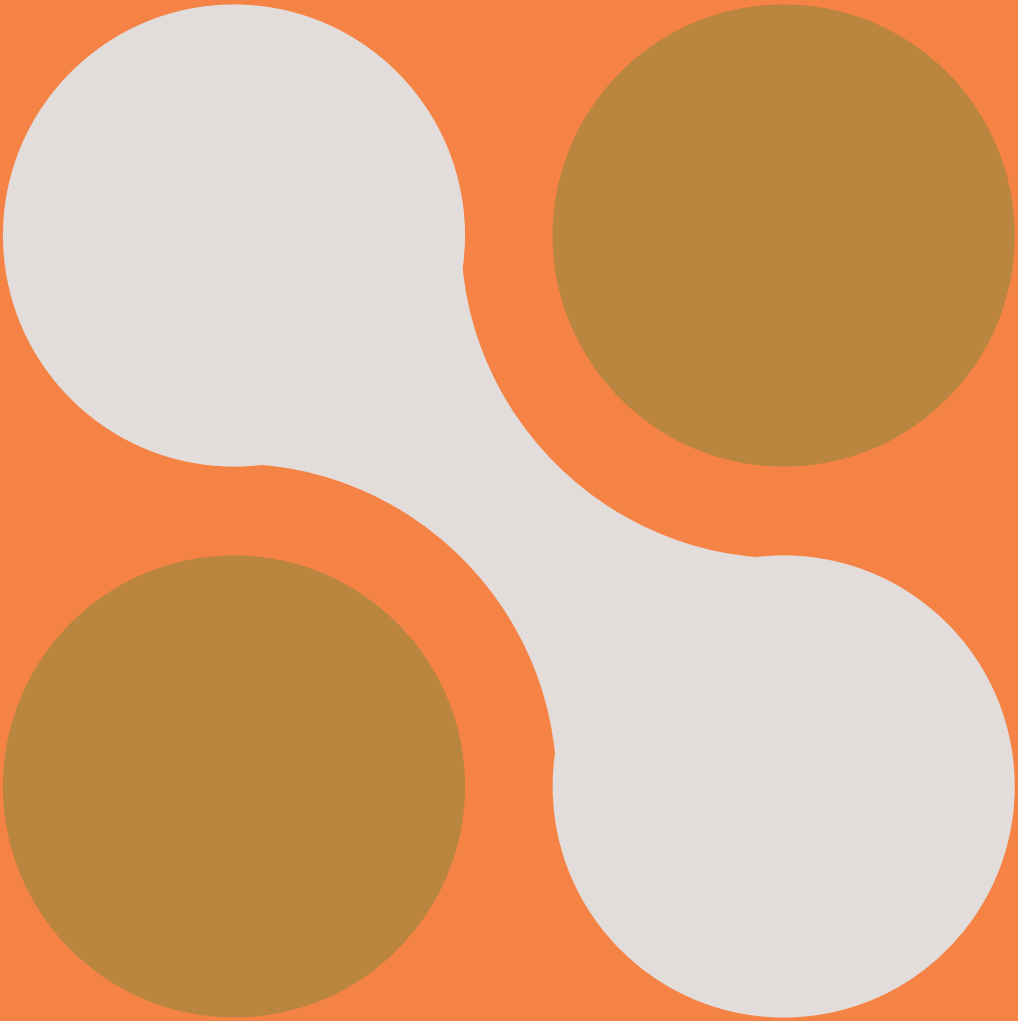
## Self assessment





CURRENT

STATE



SKILLS

& TALENT



### Unique skills

What unique skills and competencies characterize our ecosystem today? Do actors have the necessary skills to utilize the innovation ecosystem?

### Building talent

Which industries or sectors face the greatest talent shortages, and how are these challenges being addressed?

### Attracting talent

What factors influence the ecosystem's attractiveness for talent today (e.g., job opportunities, quality of life, culture, housing situation)?

### Skills coordination

How effective is the collaboration between businesses, educational institutions, and the public sector in developing skills and attracting talent?

CURRENT

STATE



COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

& COLLABORATION



### Strategic focus areas

Which specific industries, technologies, or sustainability challenges in the region are currently the focus of the innovation ecosystem's strategy?

### Industrial strengths

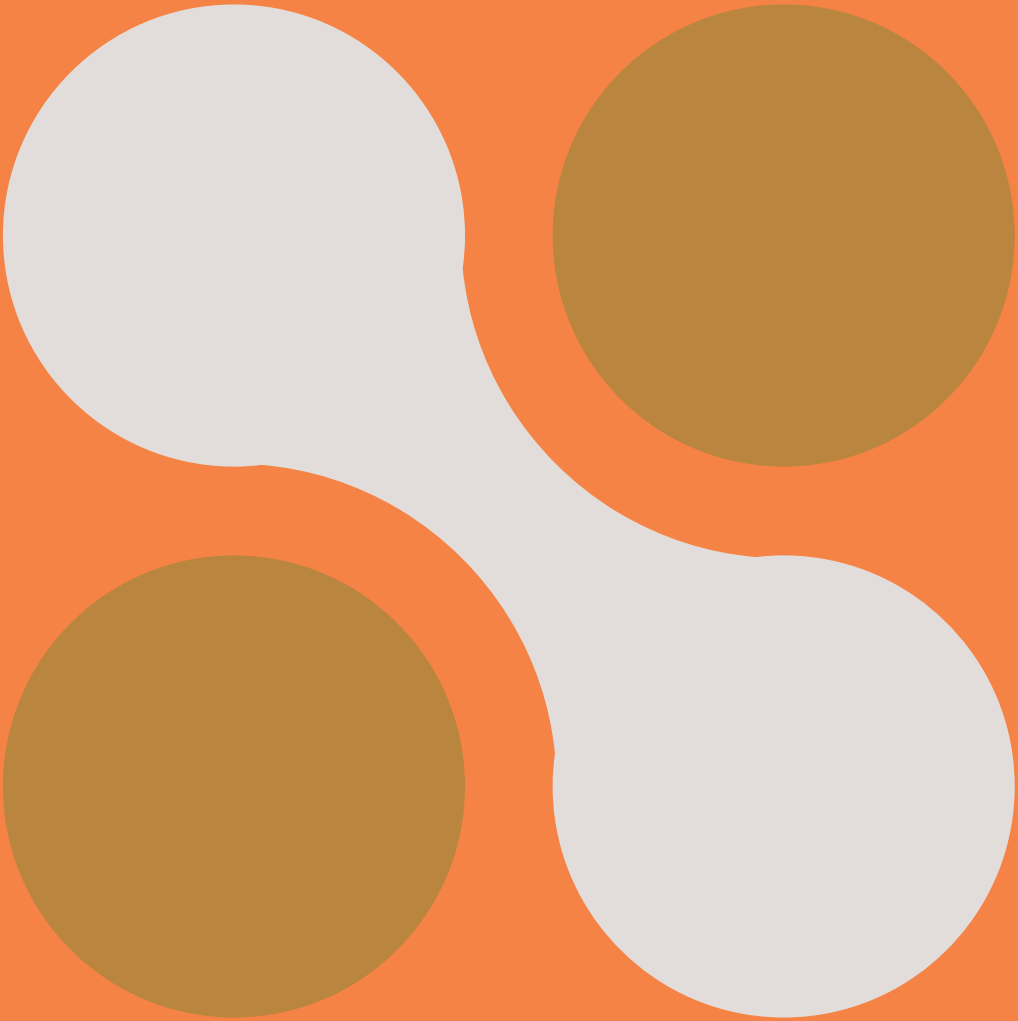
What are the main business sector strengths that innovation efforts in the ecosystem currently build upon?

### Connectedness

To what extent and in what way does the ecosystem currently exchange knowledge, talent, and resources with national and international networks?

CURRENT

STATE



MARKET

& CUSTOMER ACCESS



### International markets

How successful are businesses in scaling from local to international markets in our ecosystem?

### Support systems for market research

What support systems (business development services, export programs, networks) are currently available to help companies expand their market reach?

### Targeted industries

Are there specific industries in the ecosystem who are struggling to find their market?

### Brand & position

How is the innovation ecosystem perceived in terms of attractiveness for national and international investments and partnerships?

CURRENT

STATE



CAPTIAL

& FUNDING



### Access to funding

What funding opportunities are available for startups, scaleups, and established companies in our ecosystem?

### Funding support system

How well does the ecosystem's funding landscape match the actual needs of businesses at different growth stages?

### Innovative funding models

What innovative funding models (e.g., crowdfunding, impact investment, public-private partnerships) currently exist in the region?

### Attraction of capital

How attractive is the innovation ecosystem to investors, and what is the current level of available venture capital?



CURRENT

STATE



INNOVATION

INFRASTRUCTURE



### Infrastructure efficiency

What types of innovation infrastructure (labs, testbeds, accelerators, etc.) currently exist, and who is using them?

### Access to infrastructure

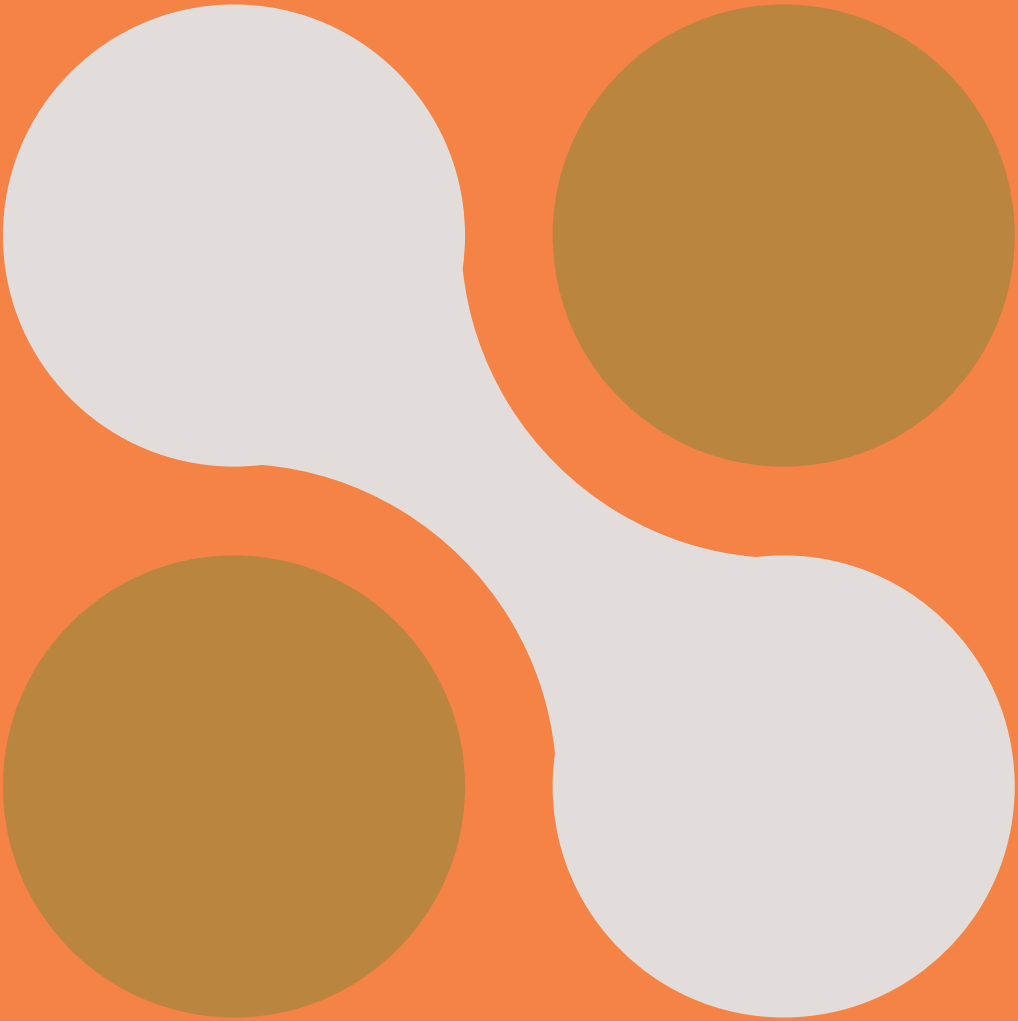
How are infrastructure resources currently managed, shared, and financed across the ecosystem?

### The innovation journey

Which parts of the innovation journey are well-supported by existing infrastructure actors, and which are not? What type of support services are missing or ineffectively supported?

CURRENT

STATE



CORPORATE

FABRIC



### Key ecosystem actors

Which actors are currently engaged in supporting the ecosystem's innovation focus?

### Value networks

What characterizes the nature of the networks between business actors in the ecosystem? Do they encourage innovation and collaboration or lock firms into fixed roles, or dependencies that limit their ability (or willingness) to contribute to the ecosystem?

### Cultural attitudes

What are the dominant leadership styles, risk attitudes, and openness to collaboration among established firms?

CURRENT

STATE



ECOSYSTEM

PERFORMANCE



## Improving innovation journeys

How do the ecosystem's resource and support providers coordinate knowledge and support across ventures' different development stages?

## Ecosystem progress

Which progress and performance measurements currently monitor the innovation journey?  
And how do these measurements continuously improve the ecosystem's ability to shorten the time it takes for a venture to pivot, fail, or succeed?

## Innovation

Is the value and the outcome of the ecosystem efforts estimated or measured in some way?  
And how is this used to guide improvements of the ecosystem?



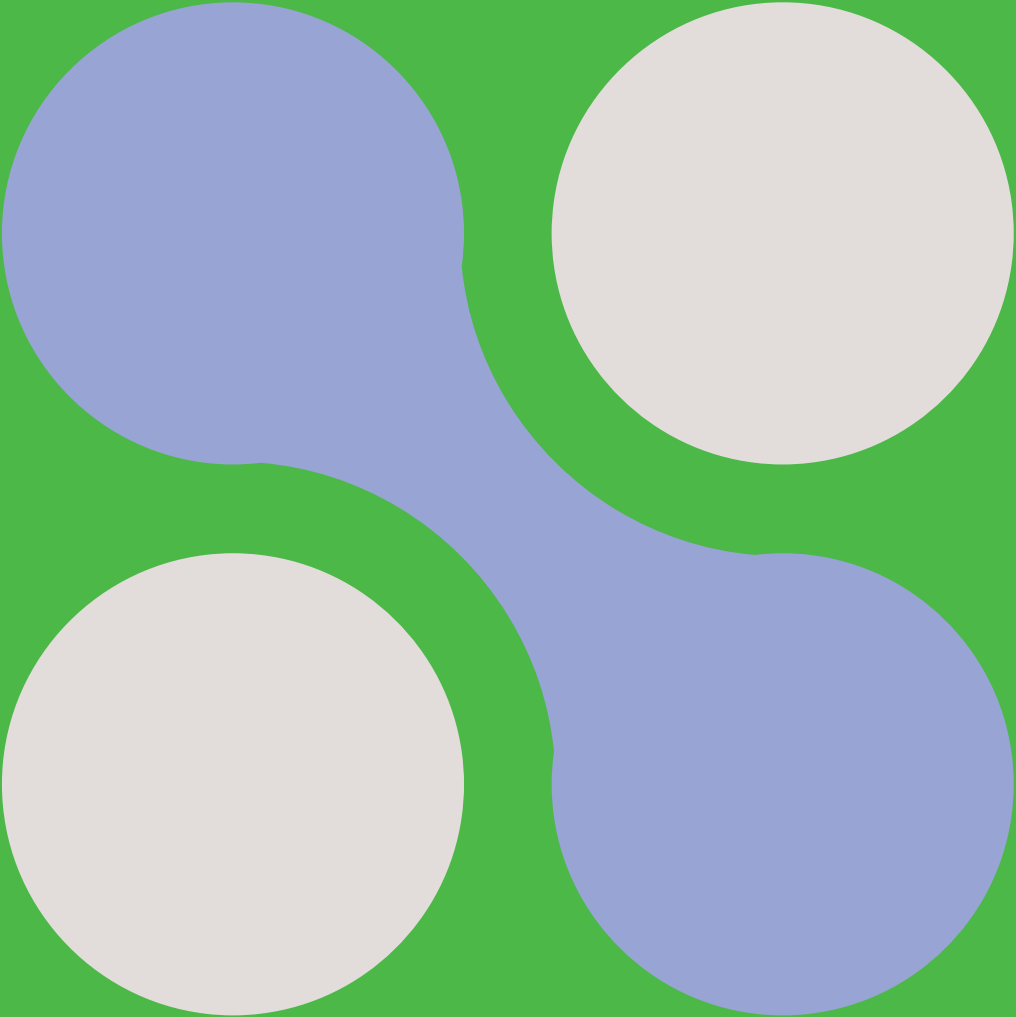
# Directionality





DESIRED

STATE



SKILLS

& TALENT



### Unique skills

How can we build stronger skills to improve business innovation conditions in the ecosystem?

### Building talent

What would an ideal talent pipeline look like for key industries?

### Attracting talent

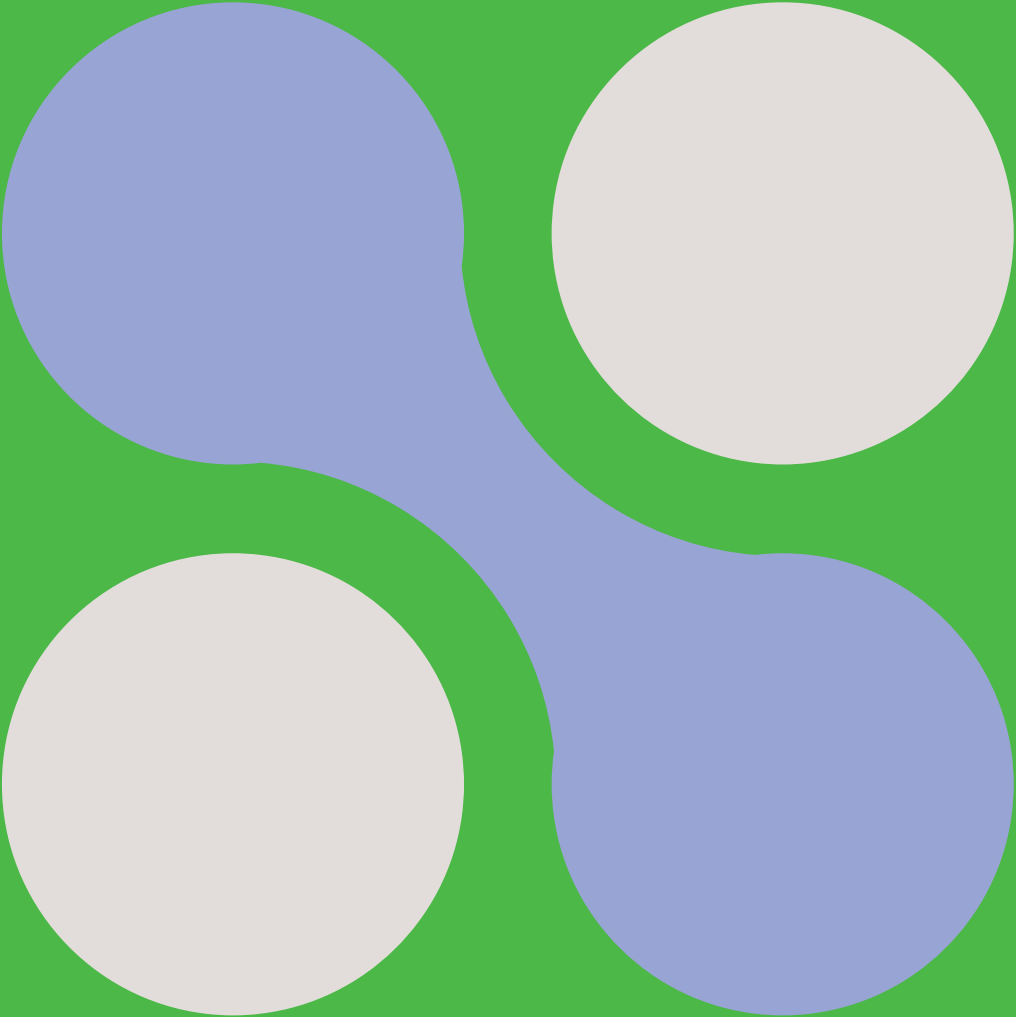
What factors influence the ecosystem's attractiveness for talent today (e.g., job opportunities, quality of life, culture, housing situation)?

### Skills coordination

What should an optimal collaboration model for talent and skills between businesses, educational institutions, and the public sector look like?

DESIRED

STATE



COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

& COLLABORATION



### Strategic focus

What should be the innovation ecosystem's strategic focus to maximize competitive advantage?

### Industrial strengths

What policy framework would best support ecosystem innovation?

### Key ecosystem actors in the region

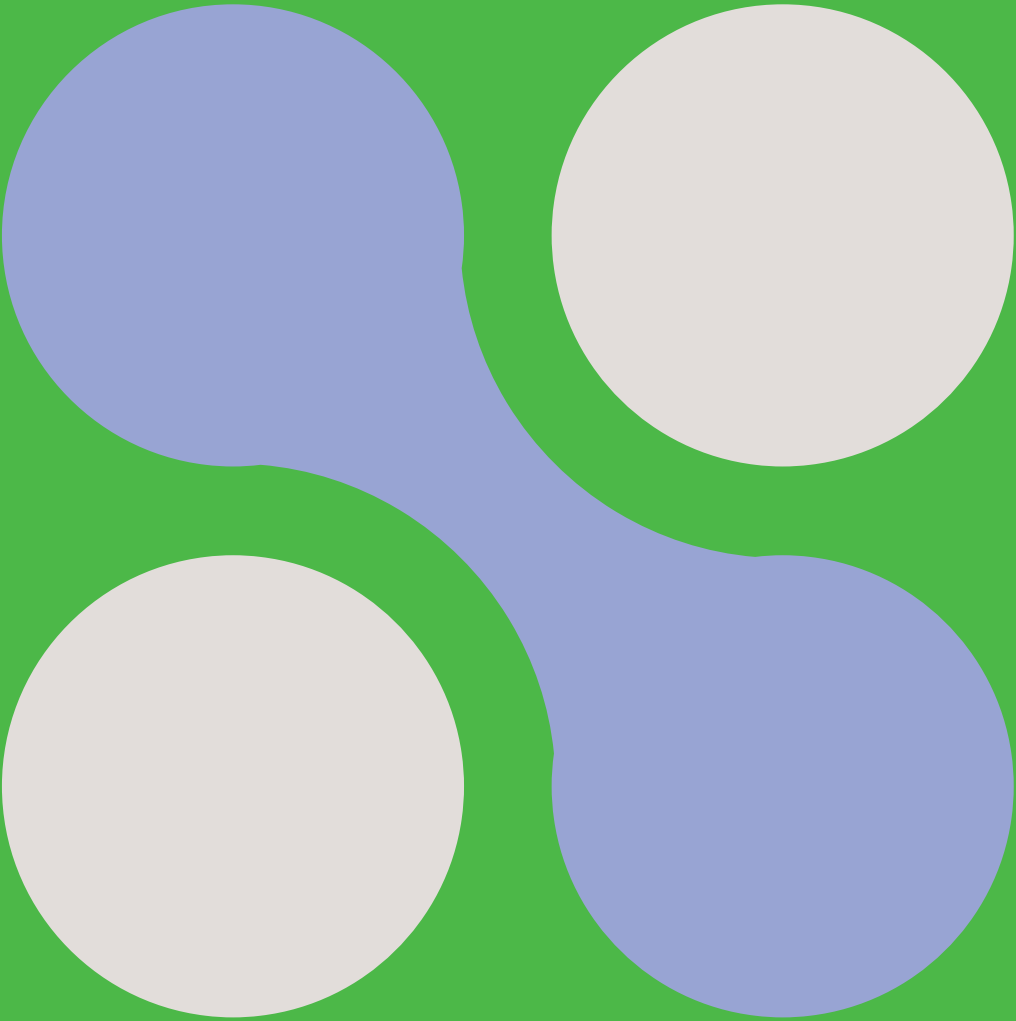
Which industrial strengths should play a more strategic role in shaping the ecosystem's innovation profile and future direction?

### Connectedness

What kind of connectedness and coordination — and in which areas — would strengthen the ecosystem's innovation capacity and competitiveness?

DESIRED

STATE



MARKET

& CUSTOMER ACCESS



### International markets

What would an ideal pathway to internationalization look like for regional businesses?

### Support systems for market research

How should the innovation ecosystem's support systems be improved or expanded?

### Targeted industries

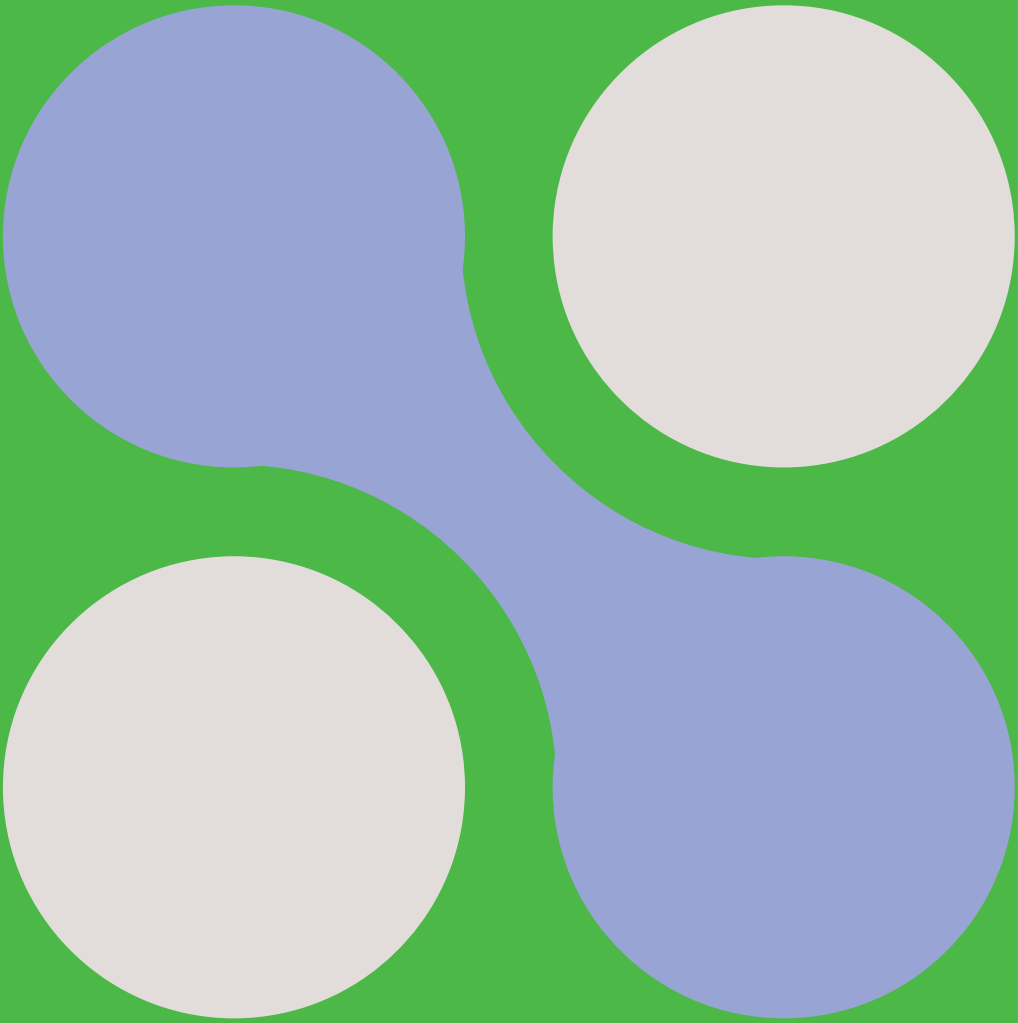
What would new successful market-entry strategies look like for industries in the ecosystem that face challenges today?

### Brand & position

What should the innovation ecosystem brand and positioning ideally be like in the future?

DESIRED

STATE



CAPITAL

& FUNDING



### Access to funding

How do we ideally envision startups, scaleups, and established companies utilizing funding for innovation and business renewal?

### Funding support system

What would a more supportive long-term funding system in the ecosystem look like?

### Innovative funding models

Which alternative funding models should be prioritized?

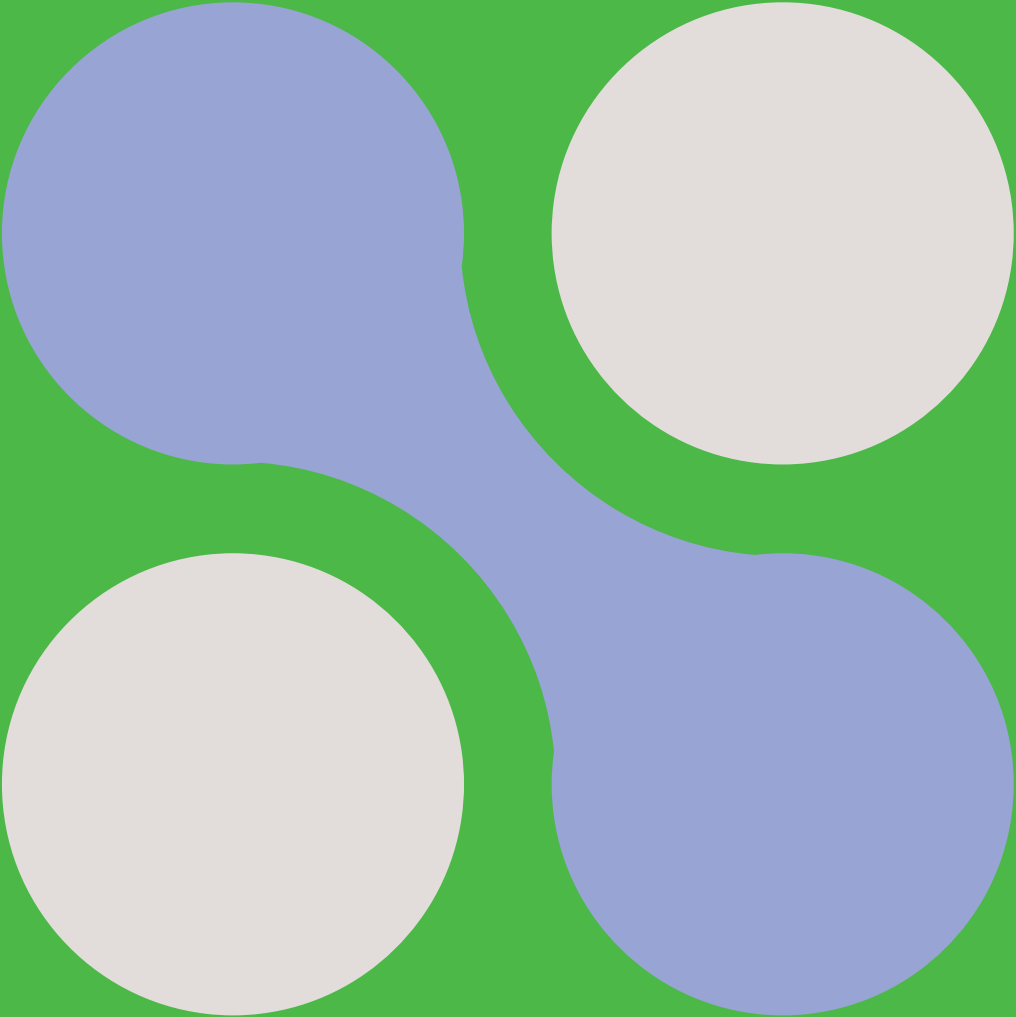
### Attraction of capital

What investment climate would make the region more attractive?



DESIRED

STATE



INNOVATION

INFRASTRUCTURE



### Infrastructure efficiency

What would an ideal, coordinated, and accessible infrastructure landscape look like in our innovation ecosystem?

### Access infrastructure

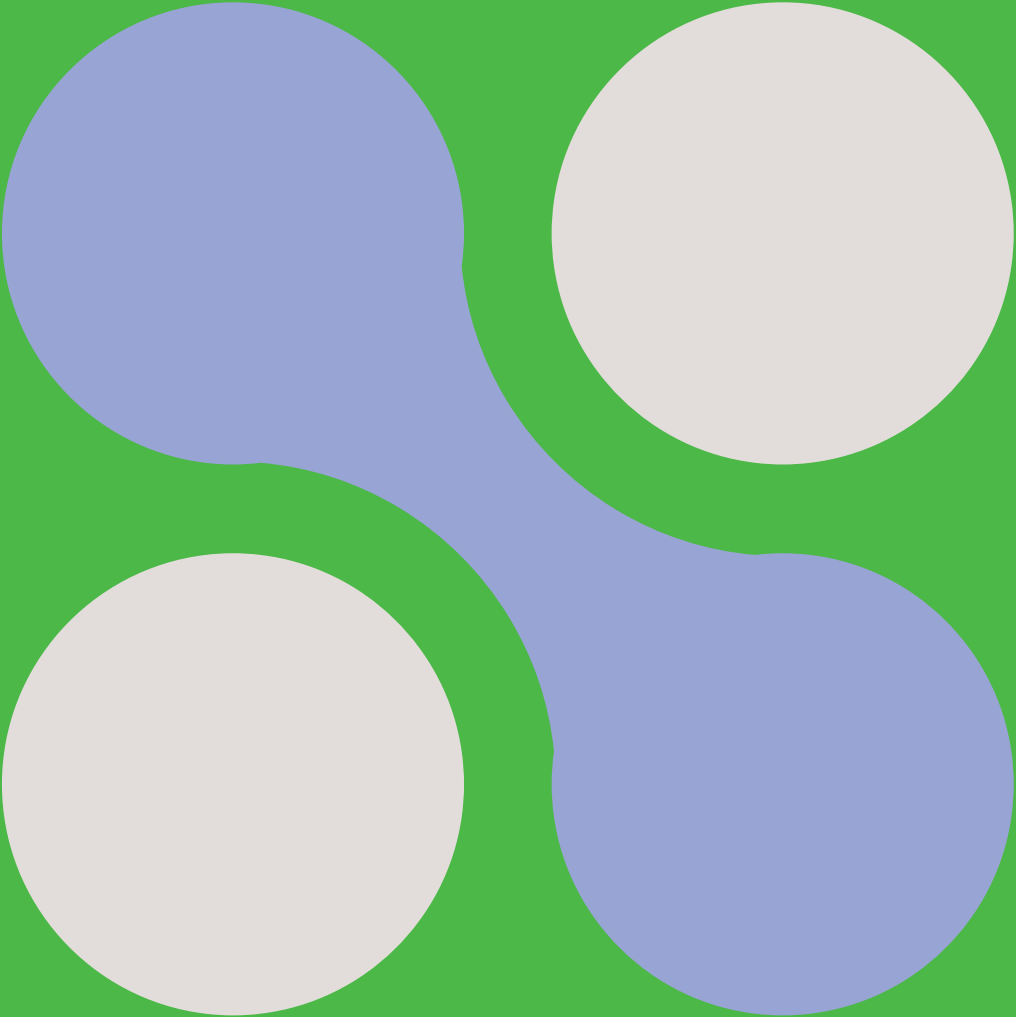
What governance and funding models would support long-term, cross-actor use of shared infrastructure?

### The innovation journey

What should a balanced and phase-responsive infrastructure system look like?

DESIRED

STATE



CORPORATE

FABRIC



### Key ecosystem actors

What role should the different stakeholders ideally play to improve ecosystem innovation?

### Value network

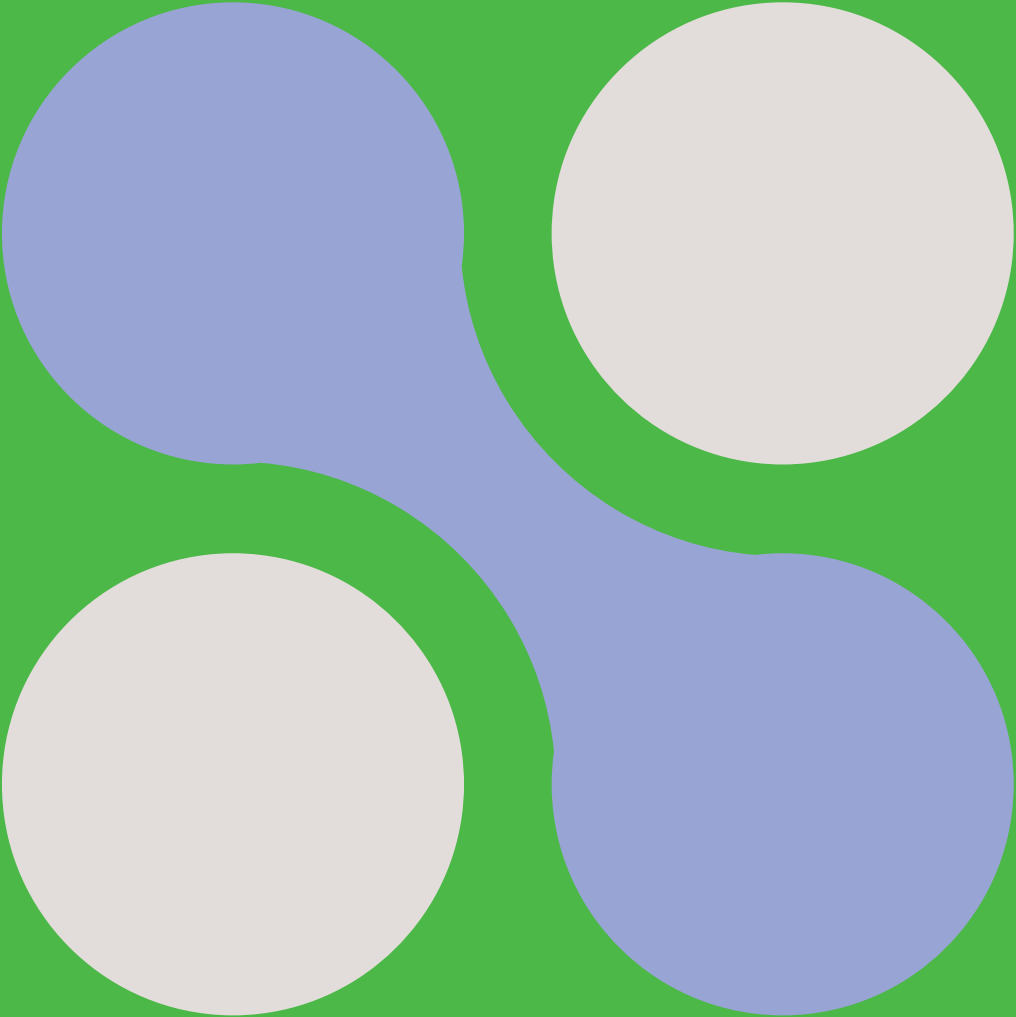
How would you ideally envision the relationships between established firms in order to support innovation in the ecosystem?

### Cultural attitudes

What values and cultural behaviors would foster greater innovation, entrepreneurship, and co-creation?

DESIRED

STATE



ECOSYSTEM

PERFORMANCE



### Improving innovation journeys

What would an ideal, coordinated support system across the stages of a venture's development look like?

### Ecosystem progress

What should a functional and adaptive system for measuring innovation progress look like, and how can it best support ecosystem learning?

### Innovation returns

What ecosystem impacts or returns should be measured to guide future development?



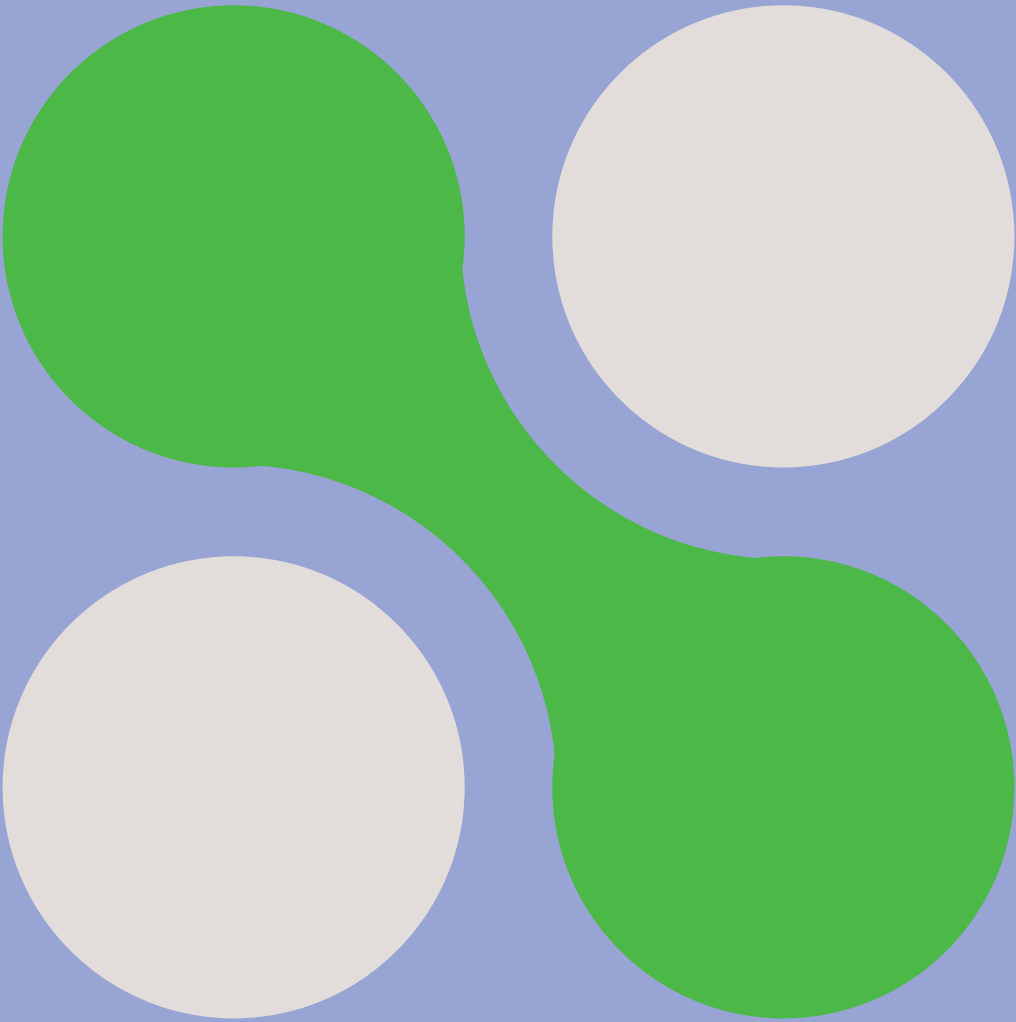
# Bridging the gap





BRIDGING

STATE



SKILLS

& TALENT



### Unique skills

What capacity-building strategies can support targeted upskilling in the ecosystem?

### Building talent

What strategies, policies or partnerships can help mitigate talent shortages?

### Attracting talent

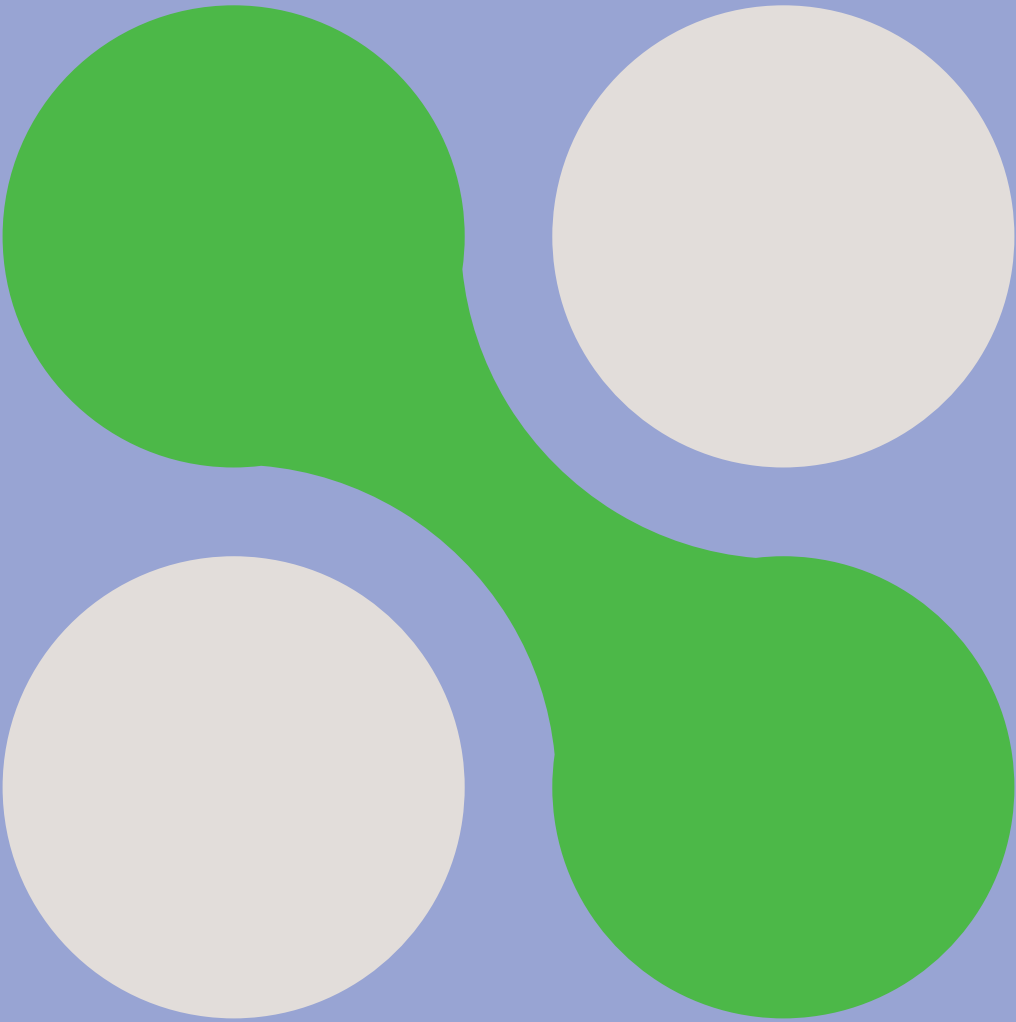
What specific initiatives can improve talent attraction and retention?

### Skills coordination

What improvements can be made to strengthen these partnerships and enhance talent development?

BRIDGING

STATE



COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

& COLLABORATION



### Strategic focus areas

Which concrete initiatives could be implemented to align the ecosystem around strategic focus areas?

### Industrial strengths

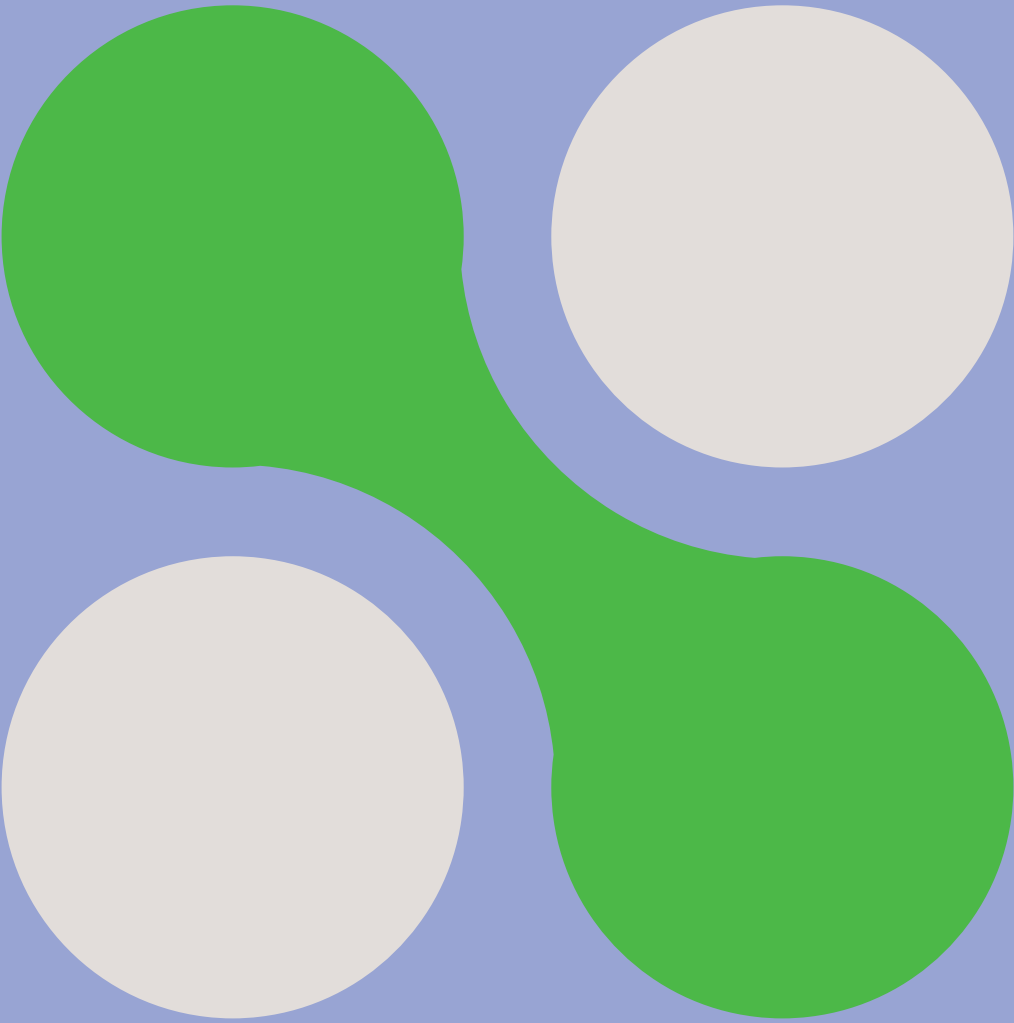
What actions can help strengthen, diversify, or better leverage the industrial strengths of the innovation ecosystem?

### Connectedness

What concrete steps could improve collaboration and mutual learning within and beyond the ecosystem?

BRIDGING

STATE



MARKET

& CUSTOMER ACCESS



International markets

What support systems or initiatives  
could facilitate better scaling?

Support systems for market research

What new or improved initiatives could better  
assist businesses in reaching new markets?

Targeted industries

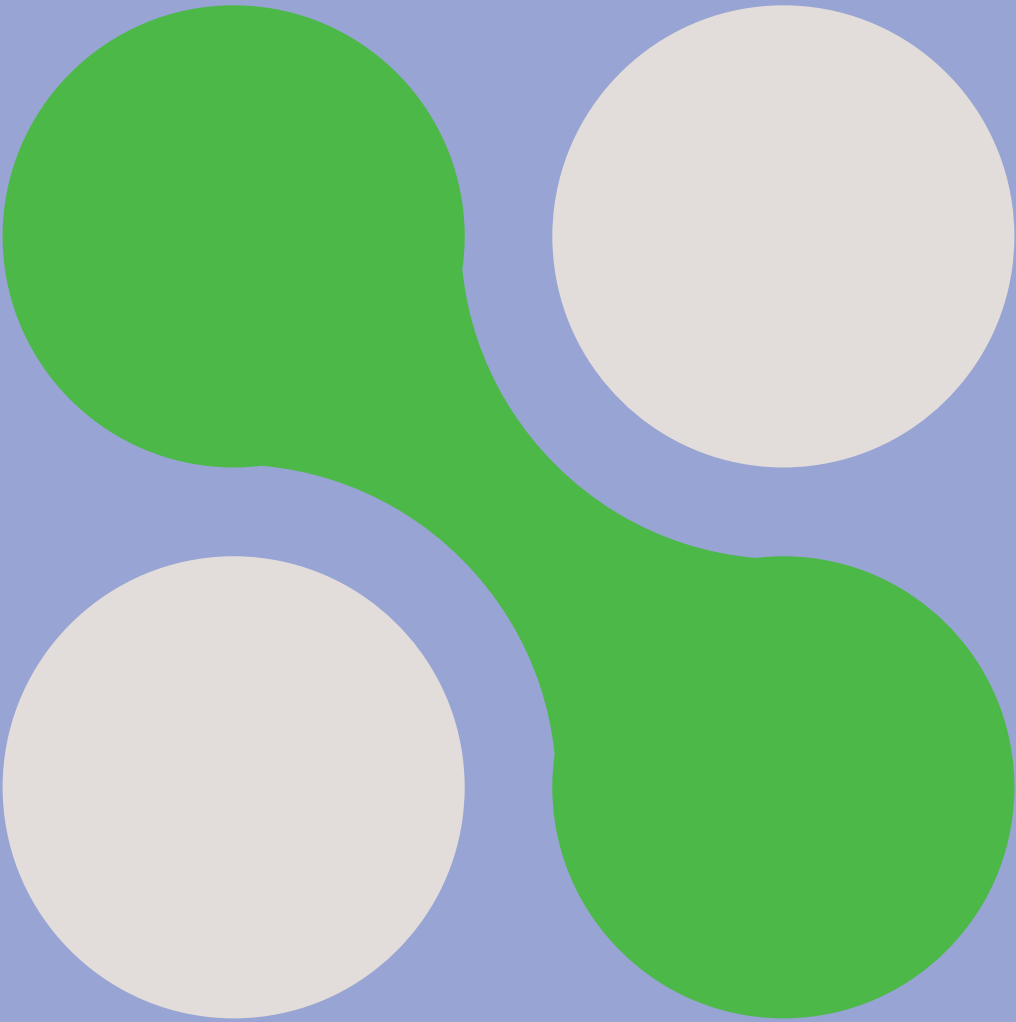
What targeted actions today can help improve  
market access for struggling sectors?

Brand & position

What marketing, policy, or networking  
efforts can enhance the attractiveness of  
the innovation ecosystem?

BRIDGING

STATE



CAPITAL

& FUNDING



Access to funding

What steps can be taken to build better  
a ccess to strategic funding?

Funding support system

What mechanisms can improve  
alignment between funding opportunities  
and business needs?

Innovative funding models

What policy or structural changes could  
help implement innovative funding models?

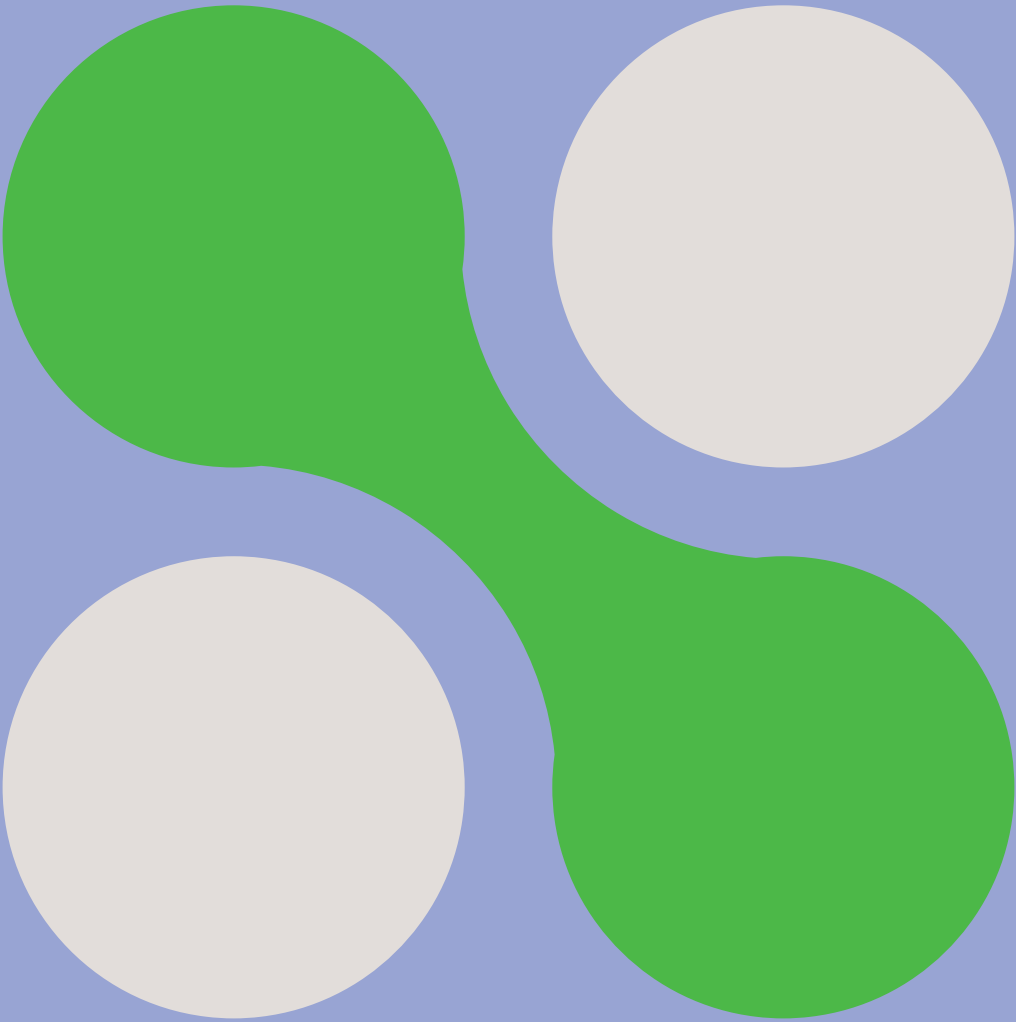
Attraction of capital

What targeted actions can  
increase investor engagement and the  
availability of venture capital?



BRIDGING

STATE



INNOVATION

INFRASTRUCTURE



### Infrastructure efficiency

What actions can improve the quality and coordination of existing infrastructure?

### Access to infrastructure

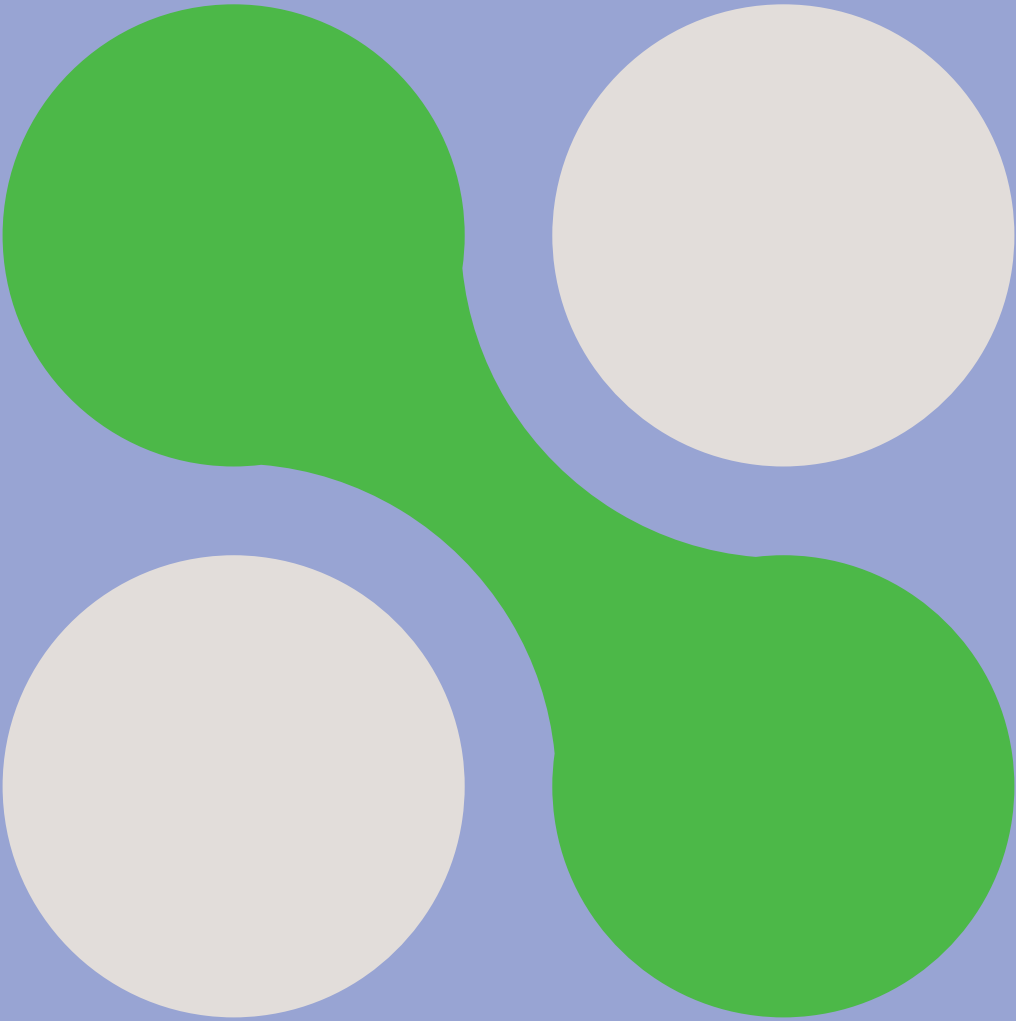
What adjustments are needed to improve coordination and ensure sustainable operation of key infrastructure?

### The innovation journey

What targeted investments or redesigns are needed to fill infrastructure gaps across the innovation lifecycle?

BRIDGING

STATE



CORPORATE

FABRIC



Key ecosystem actors

What collaboration models or incentives can encourage greater stakeholder engagement for targeted actors?

Value networks

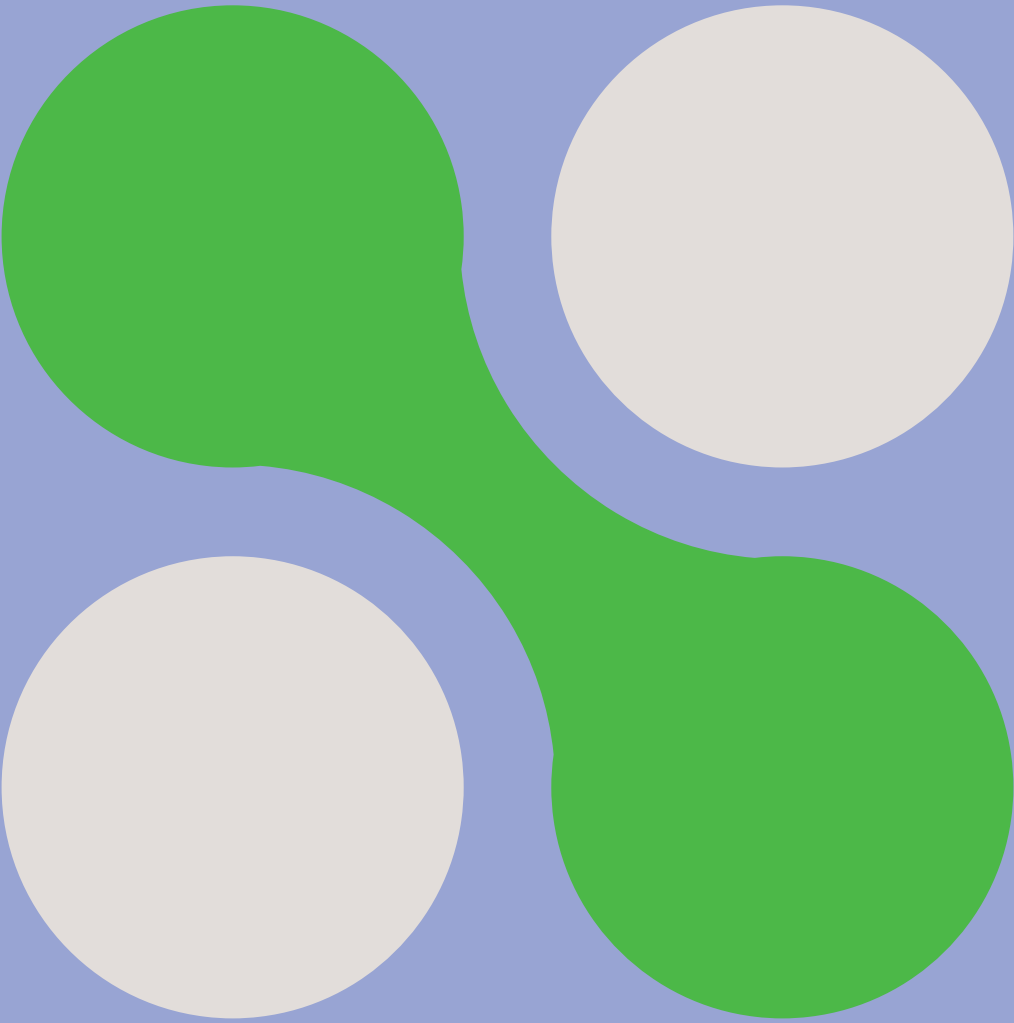
What strategies could better integrate established firms in ecosystem development (e.g., partnerships, open innovation, co-investment)?

Cultural attitudes

What actions (e.g., leadership development, peer learning, intrapreneurship programs) can help shift business culture toward more open and collaborative models?

BRIDGING

STATE



ECOSYSTEM

PERFORMANCE



Improving innovation journeys

What actions are needed to strengthen alignment and knowledge sharing among support providers?

Ecosystem progress

What improvements in metrics or feedback loops would help the ecosystem learn and adapt more effectively?

Innovation returns

What tools or approaches could help better track and communicate the value created by the ecosystem?



