



Accelerating Innovation Discovery and Commercialization Translation

A National Dialogue with the Innovation Community

NATIONAL INNOVATION CONVENING (NIC)

Widener University School of Engineering

A National Science Foundation Funded Project

September 23–24, 2026

Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center | National Harbor, Maryland

Partner/Collaborator: TechConnect

Principal Investigator: Dr. Pamela R. McCauley

Co-Principal Investigator: Dr. Kimberlee A. Zamora

Key Personnel: Dr. Annette Hemphill and Ms. Toni Woolridge

Convening Purpose

The National Innovation Convening will bring together leaders from across the U.S. innovation ecosystem to engage in a structured national dialogue focused on strengthening the pathway from federally funded discovery to commercialization, economic impact, and societal benefit.

The **1.5-day National Innovation Convening** is intentionally structured to move participants efficiently from national-level framing and NSF perspectives to cross-sector dialogue, identification of critical innovation gaps, and development of the priorities and recommendations that will form the foundation of the **National Innovation Roadmap Report**.

The central framing question for the Convening is:

What changes, resources, partnerships, programs, and investments are needed to accelerate the movement of American research discoveries from the laboratory to the marketplace and society?

DAY 1 — BUILDING THE ROADMAP

Wednesday, September 23, 2026 | 1:15–5:15 p.m.

Day 1 Objective

Launch the National Innovation Convening by establishing the national context for innovation translation, hearing directly from NSF leadership about priorities and opportunities, and engaging participants in identifying the most consequential issues that should shape the National Innovation Roadmap.

1:15 – 1:30 p.m. | Call the Convening to Order & Introduction of Dr. Mark Nicosia, Provost Widener University

Dr. Pamela R. McCauley

Principal Investigator, National Innovation Convening
Dean, School of Engineering, Widener University

- **Dr. Mark Nicosia Welcome Remarks**

1:30–1:50 p.m. | Welcome to the National Innovation Convening

Dr. Pamela R. McCauley

Principal Investigator, National Innovation Convening
Dean, School of Engineering, Widener University

Opening Remarks

NSF LEADERSHIP PERSPECTIVES

1:50–2:20 p.m. | NSF and the Future of American Innovation

Featured Speaker: Dr. Erwin Gianchandani

Assistant Director

NSF Directorate for Technology, Innovation and Partnerships (TIP)

“Technology, Innovation and Partnerships: Accelerating America's Innovation Future”

2:20–2:50 p.m. | Expanding Pathways for America's Innovators and Small Businesses

Featured Speaker: Dr. Lesia Crumpton-Young

Section Head, SBIR/STTR Program — America's Seed Fund

NSF Directorate for Technology, Innovation and Partnerships

“Expanding America's Innovation Pipeline: Emerging Opportunities for Researchers, Entrepreneurs and Small Businesses”

2:50–3:00 p.m. | Networking Break

3:00–3:45 p.m. | NSF Program Officers Panel

Innovation Across NSF: Emerging Needs, Opportunities and Lessons from the Field

A cross-NSF panel of Program Officers will provide perspectives on how innovation and translation are evolving within their respective programs.

Moderator: Dr. Lesia Crumpton-Young

Panelists:

- Rajesh Mehta, Ph.D., SBIR/STTR Program Director
- Henry Ahn, M.S., SBIR/STTR Program Director
- Elizabeth (Ela) Mirowski, Ph.D. SBIR/STTR Program Director

3:45–4:15 p.m. | National Roadmap Dialogue

Where Are the Most Consequential Gaps in America's Discovery-to-Commercialization Pipeline?

Facilitated Cross-Sector Discussion

Participants will begin the Roadmap-building process by responding to the central question:

Where are the most consequential gaps in America's discovery-to-commercialization pipeline today?

Discussion will draw upon the NSF leadership presentations as well as the experience represented across the Convening.

4:15–4:45 p.m. | AI and Innovation Keynote Address: Dr. Fay Cobb Payton

In this keynote address, **Dr. Fay Cobb Payton** will explore the transformative role of AI in the future of research, commercialization, entrepreneurship, economic competitiveness, and societal impact. She will consider how AI is changing the innovation process itself, including its potential to accelerate discovery, strengthen research translation, expand pathways to commercialization, and create new opportunities for innovators across sectors.

4:45–5:15 p.m. | Day 1 Synthesis & Roadmap Priorities

Dr. Pamela R. McCauley and NIC Facilitation Team

The facilitation team will summarize the major themes emerging from the afternoon and identify the priority questions that will carry forward into Day 2.

Day 1 Closing Question:

What must change if the United States is going to significantly accelerate innovation translation over the next five years?

6:00–7:30 p.m. | NATIONAL INNOVATION CONVENING WELCOME SOCIAL & NETWORKING RECEPTION

An informal networking opportunity for participants, NSF representatives, speakers, innovation leaders, and invited guests.

DAY 2 — DEVELOPING THE NATIONAL INNOVATION ROADMAP

Thursday, September 24, 2026 | 9:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.

Day 2 Objective

Build upon the national context and priorities established on Day 1 through focused discussions addressing commercialization, capitalization, partnerships, and innovation infrastructure, and translate those discussions into clearly articulated priorities and recommendations for the **National Innovation Roadmap Report**.

9:00–9:15 a.m. | Welcome Back & Day 1 Synthesis

Dr. Pamela R. McCauley

Dr. McCauley will:

- Welcome participants back.
- Summarize the major themes emerging from Day 1.
- Highlight areas of consensus and unresolved questions.
- Present the priority issues that will guide Day 2.
- Reinforce the goal of producing meaningful recommendations for the National Innovation Roadmap.

THREE HIGH-ENERGY NATIONAL INNOVATION SESSIONS

9:15–10:00 a.m. | SESSION 1

Commercialization: What Does the Innovation Community Need to Move Discoveries to Market?

10:00–10:15 a.m. | Networking Break

10:15–11:00 a.m. | SESSION 2

Capitalization: Building a Stronger Funding Continuum for Innovation

11:00–11:45 a.m. | SESSION 3

Scaling Small Businesses Through Partnerships, Networks and Collaboration

11:45 a.m.–12:00 p.m. | Networking Break

12:00 –1:15 p.m. | NATIONAL INNOVATION Luncheon & Keynote Address / Q & A

Keynote Address: Engineering the Future: Innovation, Technology, and the Courage to Transform

Keynote speaker: Ms. Christal LaVecchia, Vice President and Chief Engineer for Training and Logistics Solutions

Through examples and lessons from her stellar career in leadership and engineering experience at Lockheed Martin, **Christal LaVecchia, Vice President and Chief Engineer for Training and Logistics Solutions**, will provide an inspiring industry perspective on the culture, leadership, technologies, and partnerships that enable innovation within one of the world's leading aerospace

1:15–1:30 p.m. | Roadmap Development Orientation

Facilitators will introduce the afternoon Roadmap discussions, explain the thematic tracks, and describe how participant input will be documented for the National Innovation and technology companies. The NSF-NIC Project team will take notes for each Track.

AFTERNOON — ROADMAP DEVELOPMENT

Roadmap Report Development Plan.

Participants will be assigned to one of 4 groups as described in the Track A – D below. Each group will be led by a facilitator in a discussion that focuses on the following 7 points:

1. The most significant national innovation challenges.
2. Root causes.
3. Existing successful approaches and models.
4. Gaps in current programs, resources, infrastructure, or partnerships.
5. Priority recommendations.
6. Stakeholders whose participation is critical.
7. Potential measures of progress and success.

1:30–2:45 p.m. | ROADMAP BREAKOUT DISCUSSIONS — ROUND I

Identifying National Priorities: Each group identifies its highest-priority findings and proposed Roadmap recommendations.

Track A — Barriers to Translation

Identify and prioritize systemic obstacles to commercialization, including institutional, geographic, financial, cultural, and structural barriers.

Track B — Ecosystem Best Practices

Identify successful programs, institutional strategies, partnerships, and models that have demonstrated measurable success in moving discoveries toward commercialization.

Track C — Expanding Innovation Infrastructure

Examine how innovation infrastructure and support systems can more effectively serve EPSCoR institutions, smaller institutions, under-resourced research efforts and communities, and early-career innovators.

Track D — Funding and Investment Pipeline

Examine the continuum from federal research funding through SBIR/STTR and other translational funding to angel investment, venture capital, corporate investment, and scale-up capital.

2:45–3:00 p.m. | Networking Break

3:00–4:00 p.m. | ROADMAP BREAKOUT DISCUSSIONS — ROUND II

Refining the National Innovation Roadmap

Participants will refine the priorities emerging from Round I by considering:

- Which recommendations could have the greatest national impact?
- Which gaps require new approaches?
- Which existing successful models could be expanded or replicated?
- Where is stronger coordination needed among federal agencies, universities, industry, investors, and entrepreneurs?
- What resources or infrastructure are missing?
- What should NSF and the broader innovation community understand about these needs?
- What recommendations should receive priority in the National Innovation Roadmap?

Desired Output: Each track will identify:

- **Top Findings + Priority Roadmap Recommendations**

The NIC report-writing team will capture the rationale and supporting discussion associated with each recommendation.

4:00–4:40 p.m. | National Innovation Roadmap Report-Out

Each Track Chair will provide a concise presentation of the group's:

- Highest-priority findings.
- Priority recommendations.
- Areas of consensus.
- Important issues where perspectives differ.
- Successful models or approaches that should be highlighted.
- Issues warranting additional research or national dialogue.

The NIC team will identify cross-cutting themes appearing across the four tracks.

4:40–5:00 p.m. | Convening Synthesis & Next Steps for the National Innovation Roadmap

Dr. Pamela R. McCauley, Principal Investigator & Dr. Kim Zamora, Co-Principal Investigator

Final Charge

Discovery → Innovation → Commercialization → Economic & Societal Impact

The National Innovation Convening concludes with a shared commitment to strengthening America's capacity to move discoveries from the laboratory into innovations that create economic opportunity, strengthen U.S. competitiveness, and improve society.