



CANOPY

Accelerating innovative solutions to global challenges

Welcome

Introduction from James Cole, Chief Innovation Officer

At CISL, we have been enabling leaders and change-makers to tackle global challenges through innovation, collaboration, and bold ideas for over 35 years.

The world faces immense challenges: providing for billions of people by 2050 within the limits of our planet while ensuring a just and inclusive transition. At CISL, we believe sustainability innovation is the cornerstone of addressing these issues and creating a thriving, resilient future.

Through the Canopy, we aim to unite visionaries—corporates, startups, and investors—in a community dedicated to scaling impactful solutions. We invite you to explore this space, connect with like-minded leaders, and contribute to shaping a sustainable economy.

“Together, we can innovate, collaborate, and accelerate change.”

Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership (CISL)

Innovation provides a powerful tool for companies to stay competitive and to mitigate risk. We have worked with over 500 startup founders to scale their businesses, and partnered for sustainability innovation with organisations like Unilever, British Standards Institution, Boeing, UNICEF and BNP Paribas.

CISL has been in the forefront of sustainability since its inception almost 40 years ago. The institute has been educating senior leaders from over 2,500 companies around the world, published hundreds of papers on business and sustainability, and worked with policymakers in the UK and EU to introduce key sustainability related legislation.



Meet the team



James Cole

James Cole brings over 15 years of expertise at the intersection of business, sustainability, and innovation. As a senior leader at CISL, he oversees business policy and finance initiatives, empowering leaders and institutions to drive systemic sustainability. In 2022, he founded The Canopy, CISL's Cambridge-based incubator for impact-driven startups and innovators.

Previously, James worked at Friends of the Earth, launched a digital media startup, developed Vodafone UK partnerships, and implemented sustainable agriculture projects in Peru. He also serves as a trustee for The Partnering Initiative and PECT, with academic credentials in Rural Estate Management and Leadership for Sustainable Development.



Jie Zhou

Jie Zhou is a circular economy expert with over 15 years of experience driving sustainability through a systems-thinking approach. At the Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership (CISL), she co-founded The Canopy, an incubator and innovation hub, and leads initiatives like SME decarbonization toolkits and global accelerator programs.

Jie also heads the Sino-UK Centre for Sustainability Innovation, fostering collaboration between the UK and China. A DE&I advocate and recipient of the University of Cambridge Vice-Chancellor's Social Impact Award, she advises institutions globally and champions sustainable innovation across cultures and industries.



Viola Jardon

Viola Jardon is the Director of Innovation Programmes at the University of Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership (CISL), where she leads partnerships with corporates to drive industry sustainability transformation through innovative startup solutions. She designs and delivers tailored programmes that empower sustainability innovators and C-suite executives to scale their impact.

With over 15 cohort-based innovation programmes under her leadership, Viola has supported more than 400 early-stage sustainability startups, bridging critical gaps between corporates, investors, and innovators. Leveraging CISL's global network of 45,000 professionals, she cultivates a thriving ecosystem for tech founders and CEOs.



Sam Laakkonen

Senior Programme Director of the Canopy & Accelerator Team at CISL, Sam started his career as a management consultant in the City of London. He was headhunted to his first startup, FirstMark Communications Europe, which raised one of the largest Series A rounds in European history, over \$1 billion. He has since been an early employee at Spotify, privately invested in 25+ startups, had 3 further exits from his own companies, helped 250+ startups accelerate growth, and works as an expert for the European Commission to distribute EIC equity and grant funding.

Sam has been active in the Techstars ecosystem for a number of years, having been an Entrepreneur-In-Residence for Techstars Amsterdam, and a Lead Mentor on a number of programmes.



Ben Kellard

Ben advises leading businesses on how to align their purpose and strategy with the transition to a sustainable economy. He develops best-practice for how to develop and integrate a sustainable purpose into an organisation.

As well as shaping CISL's research into what a sustainable, purpose-driven business looks like, he collaborates with several international initiatives that share the same goal. He was on the steering committee of PAS 808, the first ever BSI standard for a sustainable purpose-led organisation. He draws on over twenty years of experience as an organisational development consultant, eleven of which were with the international not-for-profit Forum for the Future.



Zoë Loughlin

Zoë manages the Canopy, CISL's Cambridge workspace and global community for impact-driven startups, small businesses and entrepreneurs. Zoë has over a decade of experience in sustainability across the public, third sectors, and innovation ecosystems, specializing in waste reduction, recycling, and sustainable food systems. She has worked with organizations such as Sustain, WasteWatch, Glopolis, and Green Alliance, and co-founded a social enterprise focused on food waste reduction.

Zoë has also held voluntary leadership roles with Cambridge FoodCycle and Cambridge Sustainable Food.

CANOPY

What we can do for you

CORPORATES

Accelerate sustainability transitions

We help corporates achieve their sustainability goals by integrating cutting-edge startup innovations into their strategies and operations.

Shape future revenue streams

Our expertise enables corporates to define new revenue generation opportunities and explore innovative business models powered by startup collaborations.

Forge strategic connections

We connect corporates with key stakeholders, including the innovation community, policymakers, investors (including banking and CVCs), and industrial partners, fostering a robust network for growth and impact.

Identify high-impact investments

We support corporate venture capital (CVC) teams in identifying and securing promising startup investments that align with their future business objectives.



Our sustainability expertise, thought leadership, unique sustainability IP and frameworks

- Cambridge brand provides us with ability to source and attract the best global innovators onto programmes
- Our central location in Cambridge, one of the leading innovation ecosystems globally
- Our sustainability innovation community, consisting of our 130+ workspace members and 500+ global startup alumni
- As a department of the School of Technology at the University of Cambridge, we have unique access to leading scientists, researchers and labs to validate and enhance solutions
- CISL global network has grown to 45,000+ senior professionals; an engaged pool of mentors, investors and collaborators
- Our policy work provides us with privileged access and insights into the future of technology
- We have a deep systems level sustainability understanding allowing us to involve a diverse set of stakeholders

STARTUPS

Access to industry leaders

We bring first-class speakers and connections from industry, sustainability, and entrepreneurship, providing startups with valuable insights and inspiration.

Corporate and investor connections

Startups gain direct access to potential corporate partners and investors, opening doors to funding, collaborations, and scaling opportunities.

Supportive ecosystem and peer learning

We provide startups with a thriving community and ecosystem that fosters peer learning, shared experiences, and mutual support for growth and success.

At Canopy, our mission is to bridge the gap between corporates and startups, driving innovation and sustainability while delivering meaningful outcomes for both.

A community and workspace for sustainability startups

CISL's Canopy is a membership community that brings together and supports startups, scaleups and entrepreneurs who are pioneering new solutions to sustainability problems. Whether co-locating in our award-winning workspace, or remotely tapping into the Canopy events programme and industry networks, our flexible membership options aim to open up CISL's knowledge and network to scale sustainability innovation.

WORKSPACE

The Canopy is housed within CISL's HQ, the Entopia building. An award winning, ultra-sustainable retrofit, we have transformed the former Cambridge telephone exchange into an exemplar of sustainable building design. The Entopia building is located in the heart of Cambridge city centre among Cambridge University colleges, and a short walk or cycle from the main city station.

Members have access to:

- A full events programme and support
- Dedicated desk or hot desks
- Breakout space and collaboration areas
- Bookable meeting rooms
- Top floor boardroom for those meetings when you need to impress
- A roof terrace with 360 views across the city
- A building that matches your values when it comes to sustainable performance and design
- Great coffee, secure WiFi, event space and much more.

NETWORK

The strength of your network can make or break a startup. At Canopy, we help build meaningful connections. Whether they happen via network events, mentoring, industry introductions or coffee machine encounters.

Joining Canopy, you can tap into a peer-to-peer community of founders as well as CISL's 200+ staff and mentors working on sustainability leadership initiatives with international leaders in business, government and finance. You'll also become part of CISL's established network of 45,000 sustainability leaders representing every industry on every continent.



EVENTS

Canopy members have access to a dynamic programme of events designed to support business development, personal growth and wellbeing.

Networking and socials:

We host a monthly breakfast club and regular socials to keep you connected, as well as opportunities to connect to CISL's wider network of business leaders.

Business development and skills:

From honing your marketing strategy to legal 101 and scaling your team. We run regular workshops and clinics hours to enable you to build your business skills.

Knowledge build:

With a regular lineup of lunch and learn events, seminars, and conferences, stay ahead of the game with access to cutting-edge sustainability knowledge and research.

Pitch days and demo days:

You'll learn to build your pitching skills and will get the chance to put your ideas directly in front of CISL's network of corporate and finance partners.

Accelerator programmes and events

350+ Alumni startups

500+ Startups supported

45,000 Professionals in the CISL Network

Accelerator programmes

Empowering Innovators to Accelerate Change
CISL's Accelerator Programmes are designed to empower startups, entrepreneurs, and small businesses to scale sustainable solutions and drive systemic change. Delivered through a combination of online and in-person events, workshops, and mentorship, our programmes provide the tools, networks, and knowledge needed to maximize impact.

What we offer

Targeted programmes:

Tailored to address specific sustainability challenges, from net zero innovation to circular economy solutions.

Expert-led workshops:

Focused on critical areas like financing, storytelling, and personal resilience to enhance both business and individual growth.

Global connections:

Direct access to corporate partners, investors, and mentors from CISL's extensive network of 45,000 sustainability professionals worldwide.



How it works

Each Accelerator programme supports a select cohort of visionary startups, guiding them through a structured journey of business and personal development:

- Develop and refine your business proposition.
- Test and validate solutions with industry leaders.
- Build the capacity to scale and deliver meaningful impact.

Success stories

Over the years, CISL has supported more than 500 startups globally, many of which have gone on to secure significant investments, scale internationally, and shape their industries. Our alumni network of over 350 startups continues to drive innovation in sectors ranging from clean energy to sustainable food systems.

Partner with us

Corporates can collaborate with CISL to design bespoke accelerator programmes that align with their sustainability goals. By partnering with leading startups, corporates gain early access to game-changing innovations and the opportunity to co-create impactful solutions.

CASE STUDY



Trust in Sustainability Accelerators in Partnership with BSI



"The team has done a great job in the design and delivery of our programme to achieve our shared goal of accelerating the progress of innovative solutions for sustainability. We have benefited from their networks in the sustainability innovation ecosystem."

Wendy Niu
BSI
Innovation
Labs Manager



OBJECTIVES

To develop and showcase the latest sustainability innovations by offering opportunities to test and pilot emerging products that deliver trust and best practices for the world's biggest sustainability challenges, with each cohort focusing on BSI's latest research interest and where we are seeking innovations.

OUTCOMES & IMPACT

Delivering two 6-9 month accelerator programmes developing and supporting startups with businesses that can deliver trust in sustainability, mentor schemes and demo days were hosted as part of the programmes. 16 startups have been supported so far and counting...

Working in partnership to unlock innovation



Global innovation

Empowering innovation, scaling impact

Canopy's international work drives global transformation by connecting innovators, investors, and systems-change experts to tackle critical sustainability challenges.

What we offer

- **Immersion Programmes & International Accelerators:** Supporting entrepreneurs and startups to scale innovations globally through targeted workshops, mentorship, and regional partnerships.
- **Open Innovation Platforms:** Enabling systems-level change through collaborative solutions, engaging academia, policymakers, and industry leaders.
- **Knowledge for Impact:** From sustainability megatrends reports to bespoke innovation frameworks, we provide the tools and insights organizations need to achieve lasting change.

250+ Partners & leadership

Largest multi-stakeholder platform for sustainability leadership in the world

Global reach and impact

Canopy's reach is worldwide, participating in high-profile events such as COP28 and COP29, and fostering sustainability collaborations in regions like the UK, Cape Town, and Brussels. Notable examples include:

- **Aviation Impact Accelerator (AIA):** Focused on transforming the aviation sector into a sustainable, climate-positive industry by developing tools, frameworks, and strategies for systemic change.
- **UNICEF Innovation 30:** Supported 28 UNICEF staff from 20 developing economies to foster innovation in critical sectors and supply chains to address pressing climate challenges in the global south.
- **Desafía Immersion Programme:** Facilitated collaboration between cleantech startups in the UK and Spain, driving innovation in clean energy, water management, and business efficiency.
- **Sedrah Immersion Programme:** supported ten sustainability-focused startups from the Middle East by equipping startups with knowledge on regional sustainability challenges and provided frameworks for building industry networks.



Leveraging the Cambridge ecosystem

As part of Cambridge's world-class innovation hub, Canopy connects global change-makers with over 72,000 professionals and 5,300 high-tech companies, accelerating commercialization of sustainability solutions and fostering systemic transformation.

Join us

Be part of a global community shaping the future of sustainability. Connect with Canopy International to explore opportunities to collaborate, innovate, and scale impactful solutions.

Global reach & selected international activities



In 2024 alone Canopy's team delivered **25+ keynotes**, panels and speaking engagements delivered to over **500,000+** attendees (approx.).



Awards, nominations and testimonials

Supporting and celebrating sustainability innovation

At Canopy, we recognize the power of awards to amplify impact, build credibility, and accelerate the growth of innovative solutions.

Our services include:

Awards Programme Design and Management:

Partnering with organizations to create and deliver impactful award schemes that celebrate sustainability innovators and their achievements.

Expert Evaluation and Scouting: Leveraging our global network to identify and assess high-potential startups and initiatives for awards.

Nominations for Prestigious Prizes: As official nominators for the Earthshot Prize and other global accolades previously (UNICEF Innovate30 Initiative and Young Entrepreneur Awards with Unilever), we spotlight transformative innovations that address the world's most pressing challenges.

The impact of our work

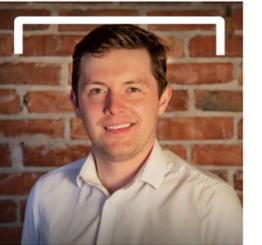
Through our work, Canopy has achieved significant recognition, supporting over 500 startups. In 2024, we were recognized as one of Europe's leading startup hubs, with five alumni included in Forbes' 30 Under 30.

Our partnerships with global leaders like UNICEF and BSI Innovation Labs have directly contributed to scaling high-impact startups that are changing industries and driving global progress.



"CISL Canopy has been instrumental in propelling SkenarioLabs forward on our journey. The connections we've made within the CISL Canopy community have been invaluable, opening doors to new opportunities and collaborations that we wouldn't have accessed otherwise."

Tom Somers, UK&I Director of SkenarioLabs and Trust in Sustainability Accelerate and Pilot Programme member



"Our partnership with CISL's Canopy supports ventures with transformative climate innovations and helps unlock their potential for global impact."

Thomas Davin, Director, UNICEF Office of Innovation



"The Cambridge CISL program has been incredible. The speakers are top-tier, and the program managers really go out of their way to understand each startup's unique needs, pairing us with mentors who deliver quick, actionable results."

Isaure Courcenet, Founder, Initiativ



"CISL's programmes were a game-changer. They provided the knowledge, network, and community to build a startup that's not just innovative, but truly sustainable."

Sushma Shankar, Founder, Deep Planet



"The collaboration with BSI and the Canopy has opened doors to a diverse and inclusive network, which will undoubtedly benefit KlimateNet in the long term."

Anne-France Kennedy, Co-founder & CEO, KlimateNet



CANOPY

"Platforming startups is crucial for advancing sustainability innovation and delivering profitable, impactful solutions to industries seeking transformation. At Canopy, we connect forward-thinking corporates with the brightest startups, providing knowledge, strategic guidance, and access to a powerful innovation ecosystem. By bridging the gap between startups and market opportunities, we help corporates stay ahead of the curve, foster collaborations, and secure game-changing solutions that drive growth, sustainability, and long-term success in an ever-evolving marketplace."

Viola Jardon Programme Director - Canopy

Find out more : www.cisl.cam.ac.uk/innovation



Connect with us:



Canopy has been named by the Financial Times as one of Europe's leading startup hubs following a survey run by Statista.

