Pre-Conversation Preparation (Academic)

Founder Alignment Conversation User Guide

Deciding to commercialize university research is rarely a purely technical decision. It involves questions of motivation, risk, timing, commitment, professional identity, and personal goals. These considerations are often difficult to evaluate in real time during meetings with mentors, technology transfer offices, or potential partners.

Your upcoming Transition Pathway Conversation is designed to help you think through whether and how your research might move beyond the university. The facilitator's is not evaluating your technology or pushing you toward any particular outcome. The conversation exists to help you make a well-reasoned decision that fits your goals, your circumstances, and your career.

This guide is designed as a personal reflection and self-assessment tool for researchers considering the possibility of technology transition or venture formation. The questions are intended to help individuals think deliberately about the broader context surrounding commercialization decisions.

The five questions below cover the same ground the conversation will explore. Experience consistently shows that people who spend time reflecting on complex issues before discussing them are better prepared to ask questions, evaluate options, communicate priorities, and solve problems collaboratively. Even informal reflection such as writing down thoughts, concerns, assumptions, or goals can significantly improve the quality of later conversations and decisions.

The purpose of this exercise is not to determine whether someone is “ready” to become a founder. Instead, it is meant to help develop greater clarity about:

• why you are interested in commercialization,

• what tradeoffs you may encounter,

• what forms of support you may need,

• and how a venture pathway may or may not align with personal and professional goals.

You do not need to prepare a formal response or bring any materials. Just read through the questions, jot down whatever comes to mind, and bring this with you to the meeting.

1. Your Career & Identity

How does pursuing this commercially fit with where you see your career going over the next five years?

Think about how entrepreneurship would sit alongside your academic role, your research agenda, and your longer-term professional goals. There is no assumption that any of these paths are better or worse for your career. The question is about fit for you, specifically, right now.

Your thoughts:

2. Risk, Control & Sacrifice

What would you be most reluctant to give up in order to pursue this and what does that tell you about your priorities right now?

Starting a company typically involves tradeoffs: time, research focus, control over decisions, financial certainty. This question is on which ones feel most significant to you. Your answer says something useful about what matters most at this point in your career.

Your thoughts:

3. Your Motivation

What specifically does starting a company allow you to accomplish that licensing or a research partnership wouldn't?

This is worth sitting with. If the honest answer is "not much" or "I'm not sure," that is genuinely useful information. If there is something a company uniquely enables for you, for example, control over how the technology is developed, the ability to build something, a specific vision for impact, try to name it as concretely as you can.

Your thoughts:

4. Your Capacity & Commitment

Realistically, how much time could you dedicate to this over the next 12 to 18 months and would anything have to change in your current commitments to make that possible?

Be honest with yourself here rather than aspirational. Think about teaching load, grant obligations, lab responsibilities, and personal circumstances. If the number is smaller than you'd like, that can help shape what kind of role makes sense for you.

Your thoughts:

5. Your Technology & Its Requirements

What kind of organization does your technology need to reach its potential and what does that mean for the role you see for yourself?

Some technologies need a dedicated startup to reach the market; others can get there faster through an established company or licensing agreement. Try to think about what the technology requires, separate from what you might prefer. If you are not sure, that is a fine place to start the conversation.

Your thoughts:

A note on outcomes

The conversation concludes with one of three working decisions: pursuing a spinout, exploring licensing or a partnership, or pausing to revisit when circumstances change. All three are treated as equally valid outcomes. The goal is a decision that reflects your genuine situation. Whatever you decide, the conversation is a starting point, not a commitment.