INNOVATION TRANSITION ALIGNMENT

A structured reflection guide for researchers considering technology transition and commercialization pathways

Introduction

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.

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.

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 researchers develop greater clarity about:

- why they are interested in commercialization,
- what tradeoffs they may encounter,
- what forms of support they may need,

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

Reflection Prompts

1. YOUR CAREER AND IDENTITY

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

Think about how starting a company or licensing technology would sit alongside your academic role, your research agenda, and your longer-term professional goals. There is no assumption that any path is better or worse for your career, the question is about fit for you.

2. RISK, CONTROL, AND SACRIFICE

What would you be most reluctant to give up pursuing entrepreneurship 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 addresses which ones feel most significant to you. Your answer says something useful about what matters most at this point in your career.

3. YOUR MOTIVATION

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

Is there 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? List that. If the answer is 'not much' or 'I'm not sure,' however, that is also useful information to consider.

4. YOUR CAPACITY AND COMMITMENT

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

This should be an assessment that considers teaching load, grant obligations, lab responsibilities, and personal circumstances. There is no set amount of time needed, but your response is information that informs what role makes sense for you.

5. YOUR TECHNOLOGY AND ITS REQUIREMENTS

What does your technology actually need to reach its potential and what role do you see for yourself in getting there?

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. It is OK if you are not sure, that highlights a need to explore more.