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Strong ties to CU a 'win-win' for school, startups

By [Lucas High](#) — May 13, 2019



BOULDER — Boulder's startup community and the University of Colorado Boulder share a symbiotic relationship in which stronger ties between the two ecosystems are mutually beneficial.

The equation is pretty simple: Startups need access to talent, and students need jobs. But despite that simplicity, the relationship between the school and startups is one that needs constant tending in order to thrive.

Members of the business and university communities gathered

Monday for a Boulder Startup Week panel on why this relationship is critical to the success of both groups.

Zach Nies, a computer-science instructor at CU's College of Engineering and Applied Science and a managing director at Techstars Boulder, said he got involved working with the school as a way to ensure access to skilled talent.

He noticed that many students were entering the workforce not fully prepared, and thought to himself, "You can complain, or you can get involved."

Startup veterans have a number of opportunities to connect with the school include mentorship programs and guest professorships.

Getting involved often begins with simply "find(ing) some things to show up to on campus," said Brad Bernthal, associate professor of law at the Colorado Law School and director of the Entrepreneurship Initiative for the Silicon Flatirons Center.

Connections with students and professors allows companies to tap into an eager — and often more affordable — workforce.

"I needed access to problem solvers" on many occasions during his career as an entrepreneur, said Andy Goldstein, CEO of Longpath Industries and Entrepreneur in Residence with Venture Partners at CU.

"This is an outstanding research university," he said. "You can find simple answers to very complex problems" from a wide variety of disciplines.

The relationship eventually evolved into a two-way street: Professors and students help companies, and the executives of those companies then teach and mentor students.

"The partnerships are really beneficial for both sides," said Claudia Bouvier, co-founder of Pastificio Boulder. "But the partnerships only work if there are win-win opportunities for both parties involved."

Because of CU's size and bureaucratic nature, it will never be the most innovative organism in the startup ecosystem, Bernthal said. But the university makes up for that by being "most stable part of the startup system."

Startups come and go, succeed and fail; the university is always there. Entrepreneurs are well-served to embrace CU and figure out a way to best leverage its resources, while also giving back, the Boulder Startup Week panel agreed.

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Cutline: Participants in Monday's Boulder Startup Week panel about connecting the University of Colorado to the local startup ecosystem were (from left): Daria Kotys-Schwartz, professor at CU's College of Engineering and Applied Science and co-director of Idea Forge; Claudia Bouvier, co-founder, Pastificio Boulder; Martha Russo, installation artist and CU art instructor; Brad Bernthal, associate professor of law at the Colorado Law School and director of the Entrepreneurship Initiative for the Silicon Flatirons Center; Zach Nies, computer science instructor at the College of Engineering and Applied Science and managing director at Techstars for the Boulder program; Andy Goldstein, CEO of Longpath Industries and CU Entrepreneur in Residence. Lucas High/BizWest