GDC STEM TO STARTUP

Annual Symposium Special

Our Logo: Symbolism and Significance

STEM TO STARTUP is an integral part of GDC's ethos and captures the quintessence of GDC's mission. GDC's objective is to enable the transformation of science into startups that impact society at scale. The Lab to Market journey that GDC undertakes with STEM universities and laboratories is aptly embodied by the phrase **STEM TO STARTUP.**

GDC
STEM TO STARTUP

6TH ANNUAL GDC SYMPOSIUM

CONNECT   COLLABORATE   CREATE

17TH JANUARY 2026
08:30 AM - 05:00 PM | TERRACE HALL,
IIT MADRAS

## Theme:
Democratising Innovation
and Entrepreneurship in India

The 6th Annual GDC Symposium focuses on "The Entrepreneur" in advancing India's deep-tech startup ecosystem and highlights the crucial roles of government, corporations, academia, investors, and countless mentors. The theme of this symposium is to shed light on an often-overlooked aspect of developing entrepreneurs. The symposium offers a platform for speakers to share their expertise, help shape the ecosystem, and connect with other key stakeholders dedicated to advancing India's innovation pipeline.

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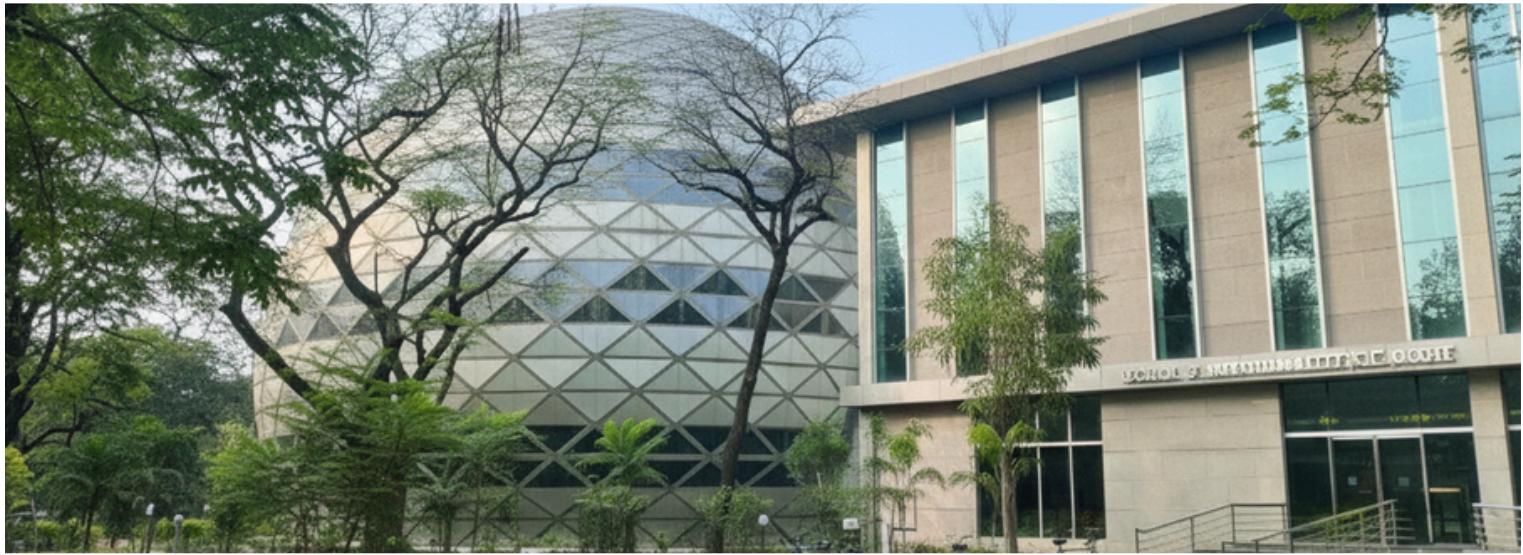
Journey of GDC

Established in 2017 the Gopalakrishnan-Deshpande Centre for Innovation & Entrepreneurship (GDC) provides the required thought leadership and networking drive to aid in building systems and processes that facilitate innovation and entrepreneurship at all levels. GDC aims to foster innovation in a way that it permeates a wide segment of activities in the Institute, ranging from teaching to research to product development and policy making. By giving concrete form to groundbreaking solutions that surface from the Institute's labs, faculty, research scholars, as well as young minds to create economic and social impact on a substantial scale.

The Centre endeavours to strengthen the ecosystem for Innovation & Entrepreneurship by bridging the various gaps between the Institute and the marketplace. GDC strives to become a world leader in innovation research and simultaneously make innovation part and parcel of everyday life.

The Centre has partnered with over 150 universities, research labs, and incubators across India to enhance the entrepreneurial capabilities of the academic and scientific communities. Through its programs, GDC has trained more than 1,700 researchers and entrepreneurs and supported over 550 deep-tech startups, fostering both the mindset and business skills needed to translate STEM research into impactful, market-ready ventures. Recognized across academia, industry, and policy circles, these efforts integrate entrepreneurial thinking into research practices, promoting the human skills essential for sustainable innovation.

Milestone Update: DST-GDC I-NCUBATE Program

As of December 2025, GDC has successfully completed six cohorts of the DST-GDC I-NCUBATE Program. Launched in September 2024 following GDC's strategic agreement with the Department of Science & Technology (DST), this pilot initiative aims to deliver 20 cohorts of deep-tech transformation.

The Impact So Far:
· Reach: 57 Startups and 205 Faculty and Researchers.
· Footprint: Representing 35 STEM Universities across 17 States.
· The Transformation: Over 8 intense weeks, startup founders moved from "Technology-First" to "Customer-Centric" thinking, with each team conducting about 100 stakeholder interviews.

End note:
The momentum continues! The 7th Cohort is set to launch in the third week of January with ten startups.

Citibank CSR initiative- Capacity Building in Innovation & Entrepreneurship across other Institutions- IIT BHU

GDC conducted the I-NITIATE cohort at IIT- BHU, Varanasi, from 8th to 22nd December 2025. The I-NITIATE Program is targeted at academics (Faculty and Researchers) who are working on a research project which they think can be commercialized. They may or may not have a startup yet. The cohort at IIT-BHU comprised nine interdisciplinary teams working on innovations across domains, including medical devices, life sciences, construction, and sustainability. This was the first full cohort of GDC held on the IIT-BHU campus and has ignited the entrepreneurial instincts of researchers and students across BHU.

Outreach Initiatives at GDC

GDC's Engagement with Key Stakeholders in the Startup Ecosystem

100+ Colleges

STEM Universities / Colleges

100+ Corporates

Corporates

GDC

Incubators

400+ Incubators

Government

DBT, DST, MeitY, NITI Aayog,
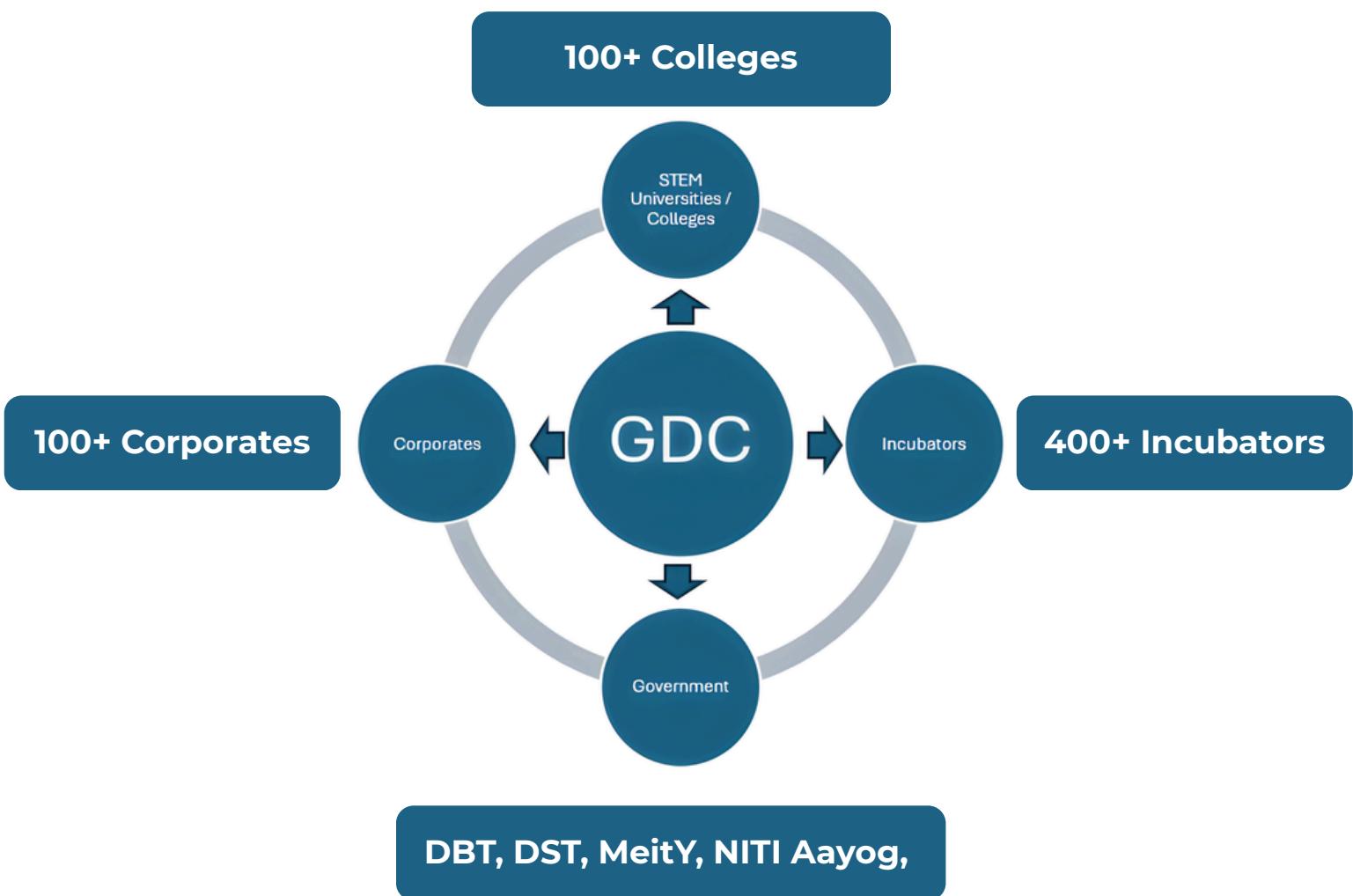
Partnering with STEM Universities

GDC collaborates with STEM institutions to unlock the commercial potential of their research labs through deep-tech creation and IP licensing. We help bridge the "Lab-to-Market" gap by guiding faculty and researchers to transition their focus from technical feasibility to business viability. Beyond individual skills, this transformation requires a fundamental mindset shift across the entire ecosystem—from top leadership to the student community. To facilitate this, GDC offers a tiered suite of programs designed to cultivate entrepreneurial thinking and business acumen:

I-NDUCT: A 3-day sensitisation engagement for the university leadership team to define the roadmap for becoming a truly "Entrepreneurial University

I-NITIATE: A 15-day "personal discovery" journey that helps faculty and researchers assess their readiness and aptitude for the entrepreneurial path before committing to a venture.

I-NCUBATE: An intensive 8-week Customer Discovery program that helps founders validate their problem-solution fit and builds the foundational blocks of business acumen

These programs feature flexible delivery models, ranging from dedicated institution-specific workshops to diverse, multi-university cohorts that foster the cross-pollination of ideas.

Partnering with Incubators

Incubators serve as vital launchpads for early-stage startups. However, a common challenge in most incubators is that startups often mistake a few early sales for true market validation. GDC complements the incubator's support system by addressing this specific "scaling gap." Through our I-NSPIRE program, we guide incubated startups to look beyond their initial wins, helping them rigorously test their assumptions and discover the repeatable, scalable business models necessary for long-term growth.

Partnering with Government

Given the vast scope and diversity of India's scientific research, there is immense potential for high-impact startups to emerge from university labs to address the nation's most complex challenges. This "Lab-to-Market" progression is a proven economic engine in advanced ecosystems like the USA, Israel, and South Korea, where science-based ventures generate substantial social and economic value. GDC aims to bridge this gap in India by institutionalising similar global best practices. Drawing inspiration from the US National Science Foundation's (NSF) I-Corps program—which empowers hundreds of universities to commercialise research—GDC seeks to collaborate with the Government to scale this model nationwide. Our eight years of operational experience highlight the critical need for supportive policy interventions, targeted financial incentives, and mechanisms that encourage deeper collaboration between deep-tech startups, corporates, and investors.
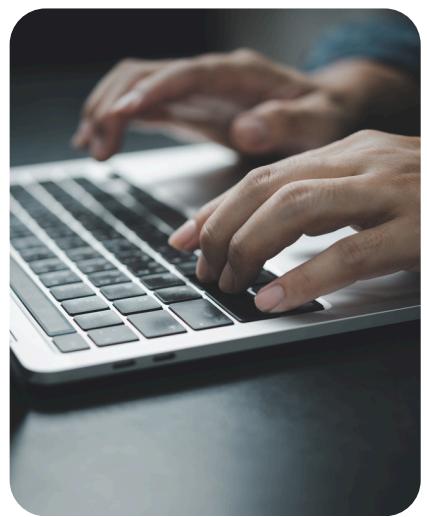
Partnering with the Corporate Sector in Multiple Ways

GDC enables the corporate sector to harness the untapped potential of Indian academia through two high-impact engagement models.

Open Innovation (The I-GNITE Program): Through our I-GNITE platform, GDC facilitates "Open Innovation" partnerships where corporates can co-create deep-tech solutions for their specific business challenges. Over a structured 4-6-month cohort, I-GNITE enables industry partners to scout, nurture, and collaborate with the most promising research-led startups from labs across India. GDC has successfully delivered three such cohorts with global corporate leaders, creating a direct pipeline for industry-academia technology transfer and co-creation.

Strategic CSR: For corporates focused on social impact, GDC offers a pathway to democratise innovation. Through targeted CSR initiatives, we deploy our capacity-building programs in Tier-2 and Tier-3 STEM institutions. This ensures that high-quality entrepreneurship training reaches the hinterlands, aligning corporate social goals with the national agenda of inclusive growth and creating a win-win for all stakeholders.

GDC I-NSPIRE Cohort 17 for Carbon Zero Challenge (CZC)- TNSustains

GDC is the Knowledge Partner for the fifth edition of the Carbon Zero Challenge (CZC)—an All-India Eco Innovation and Entrepreneurship Competition hosted at IIT Madras. This initiative accelerates the lab-to-market journey of eco innovations by funding solutions from proof-of-concept to working prototypes. GDC partnered with CZC to conduct a focused I-NSPIRE Cohort, a 4-week program from 13 October to 17 November 2025, nurturing 10 early- stage technology startups in the Sustainability domain.

Kerala Startup event

Kerala, popularly known as "God's Own Country," hosted the sixth edition of HUDDLE, now reimagined as HUDDLE Global—one of India's most prestigious events in the technology startup ecosystem. HUDDLE serves as a central platform for technology startups and key stakeholders, bringing together government representatives, investors, mentors, industry leaders, and ecosystem enablers.

Envisioned as a global convergence point, HUDDLE Global provides startups with an opportunity to showcase their innovations and engage directly with leading technology experts and industry veterans. The conference features curated stage programs and a range of side events, including networking sessions, roundtable discussions, and facilitated workshops, all aimed at enabling startups to connect with the right investors, corporate partners, and growth opportunities.

Our CMO Mr Subramanian and our CIO Mr KV Anand took a session in the master class under the title Stop Assuming, Start Validating: The Science of Customer Discovery & Early-Stage Insight.

Deloitte's FWD Chennai

Deloitte FWD is an event on technology and innovation initiative by Deloitte that highlights its latest advancements in AI and cloud platforms, solutions, and emerging business models that are reshaping the future of professional services. The initiative focuses on addressing complex, industry-specific challenges by moving beyond generic technology applications to deliver tangible, measurable impact across sectors such as healthcare, finance, and the public sector.

On 19 November 2025, our CEO, Dr. Raghuttama Rao, participated in the event as the Chief Guest at Deloitte's Chennai office and delivered the keynote address titled "Understanding Innovation through the Lens of Deep-Tech Startups." His address offered valuable insights into how deep-technology ventures are driving meaningful innovation and contributing to scalable, real-world solutions across industries
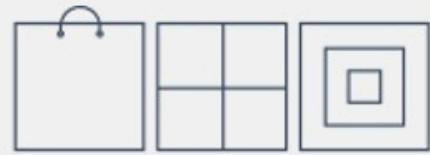
WHERE TO PLAY
AMBASSADOR
— 2025 —

Recognition

KV Anand (KV) is the Chief Innovation Officer at the Gopalakrishnan-Deshpande Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship at IIT Madras (GDC). Recently, KV was honoured and appointed as the India Ambassador of "Where to Play", representing a globally recognised framework that helps businesses systematically identify, evaluate and prioritise market opportunities.

Inspiring Stories of GDC Alumni Teams

Modulus Housing

This interview offers a comprehensive exploration of the entrepreneurial journey of Modulus Housing, led by co-founders Shreeram and Gobinath, in conversation with Mr. K. V. Anand, Chief Innovation Officer, GDC. Tracing their journey from conceiving modular housing solutions during the 2015 Chennai floods at IIT Madras to building a scalable, venture-backed enterprise. They discuss key inflection points such as the role of the GDC IIT Madras ecosystem and the I-NCUBATE program in transforming a student prototype into a viable business, the rationale behind raising ₹70 crore in Series A funding. The discussion also highlights leadership learnings around role clarity, operational bottlenecks, and disciplined execution, concluding with reflections on how GDC's frameworks, mentorship, and entrepreneurial environment shaped their mindset and advice for current cohorts to leverage the ecosystem for purposeful venture building.

KVA: You started Modulus Housing as undergraduates at IIT Madras, shaped by your experiences during the 2015 Chennai floods. From those early prototypes to now, what have been some of the defining moments in your journey?

Shreeram and Gobinath: There have been several defining moments that shaped Modulus Housing into what it is today, and we remain deeply grateful for each of them. The first, of course, was the 2015 Chennai floods. Experiencing that crisis first hand made us question how resilient our infrastructure truly was and pushed us to explore modular, rapidly deployable housing solutions. That moment gave birth to the idea and the motivation to act. The next major turning point was our time at GDC, IIT Madras, especially through the I-NCUBATE Program. This was where our project started to evolve from a technical prototype into a real business model. The program introduced us to critical frameworks like Lean Startup and Customer Discovery, which helped us test our assumptions systematically and understand our users better. Those structured conversations and the mentorship at GDC gave us the confidence and clarity to launch Modulus right after graduation. From there, a series of "firsts" followed — our first customer, our first large-scale order, the first international deployment, and ultimately, our first funding round. Each milestone reaffirmed that we were addressing a real need. Looking back, it feels less like a sequence of events and more like a continuous learning curve where each success—and even the setbacks—built the conviction to go further.

Link to read the full interview

Upcoming Cohorts

GDC WILL CONDUCT I-NITIATE PROGRAM AT BANASTHALI VIDYAPITH, ONE OF FIVE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTES IN INDIA DEDICATED EXCLUSIVELY TO WOMEN'S EDUCATION.

Over the past two years, we've run three exciting programs including I-NITIATE, all aimed at sparking the entrepreneurial spirit among Banasthali Vidyapith students. This ongoing partnership reflects our commitment to enhancing the innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem at Banasthali Vidyapith. We're not just helping students become entrepreneurs; we're building a vibrant community ready to make an impact

DST- GDC I-NCUBATE Cohort 07

Startups often struggle to bridge the gap between technical brilliance and market readiness, leading to failure. The DST- GDC I-NCUBATE Cohort 7 Program, a joint project of Department of Science and Technology (DST) and GDC, addresses this gap by empowering researchers, faculty, and students to transform lab-based ideas into scalable startups. Focused on mindset transformation, the program helps participants shift from technology-first thinking to a customer-centric approach. GDC will be organizing Cohort 07 of the DST-GDC I-NCUBATE program from the 4th week of January 2026. It will run for eight weeks with ten deep-tech startup teams from all over India.

Shell-GDC I-GNITE Program

The launch of Phase 1 of the Shell–GDC I-GNITE Program marks an important step in strengthening the commercial readiness, market focus, and industry integration of a new cohort of high-potential startups. The teams were shortlisted based on the strength of their ideas and the level of innovation aligned with the core objectives of the program.
The Phase 2 was launched in Jan with 7 high potential teams. The program brings together Shell's global innovation expertise and the GDC–IIT Madras startup ecosystem to accelerate deep-tech solutions with real-world impact.

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Contact Us

If you have any queries, reach out to us at equiries@gdciitm.org

To stay updated about GDC's program and events,
visit: www.gdciitm.org

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