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Gala dinner celebrates 'innovation diplomacy' at MIT

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MIT hosts Regional Entrepreneurship Acceleration Program (REAP) participants and marks MIT's global role in innovation



Associate Dean for Innovation Fiona Murray gives the opening remarks at the MIT REAP dinner

Three years after a team of MIT Sloan faculty conceived of the MIT Regional Entrepreneurship Acceleration Program (REAP), a global executive education initiative designed to help regions spur economic growth and job creation through innovation-driven entrepreneurship, a gala dinner celebrating its 16 international teams was organized last month. The dinner, held at the MIT Media Lab and attended by several MIT deans and Chancellor for Academic Advancement [Eric Grimson](#), was jointly hosted by MIT REAP, the MIT Sloan Executive Education program, and MIT's new [Innovation Initiative](#).

During the week of the dinner, more than 120 people, representing 16 MIT REAP teams from 14 countries, gathered on the MIT campus to learn more about innovation and entrepreneurship. The first cohort of seven MIT REAP teams (including teams from Scotland, New Zealand, and Hangzhou, China) was coming to the end of the two-year program, while the second cohort of nine teams (including those from London, Moscow, and Singapore) was preparing to start. In addition to learning from faculty in the classrooms at MIT Sloan, the teams spent time exploring the MIT campus, hearing from key members of Boston's innovation community and visiting key partners in the greater Boston ecosystem. The dinner brought all these groups together and recognized the power of the MIT REAP program, celebrating what the first cohort had learned, and welcoming the new teams to the MIT community.

MIT Sloan's Associate Dean for Innovation and Alvin J. Siteman Professor of Entrepreneurship [Fiona Murray](#) opened the gala by emphasizing MIT REAP's critical importance in supporting "the prosperity agenda" that had brought the world to MIT and calling the program an act of "innovation diplomacy." She also highlighted the connection between the MIT REAP program and MIT's motto of *mens et manus*, or mind and hand. The new Innovation Initiative shares a similar mission, Murray said.

"Our mission is to spur the development and growth of innovation-driven enterprises which become a key engine in prosperity. In classic MIT style, working with external partners also makes us better teachers and researchers," Murray said.

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MIT Sloan Dean David Schmittlein



MIT Director of Digital Learning Sanjay Sarma

Murray, also a co-director, along with MIT School of Engineering **Associate Dean for Innovation** Vladimir Bulovic, of the MIT Innovation Initiative, introduced fellow dinner speakers MIT Sloan Dean **David Schmittlein** and Chancellor Grimson.

Schmittlein cited MIT REAP as an example of cross-Institute collaboration. "REAP has had faculty engagement not just from MIT Sloan, but also from Engineering, Architecture, the School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences, and Science. It shows us how innovation is a theme that can really unite our community." He thanked Murray for her leadership in reaching out, on MIT Sloan's behalf, to the broader MIT community and to the wider world.



Chancellor Eric Grimson (center) and MIT Sloan Dean David Schmittlein talk with Philip Budden, MIT REAP's

Following Schmittlein's remarks, Grimson said that the gala dinner had underlined MIT's role as a "destination for innovation." Commending MIT Sloan's initiative, he said, "Here we have some of the leading scholars of innovation, as well as faculty generating many innovations that change the world."

Grimson also emphasized that, in order to have significant impact, "We must put our students and faculty into problem-rich and solution-rich contexts around the world—not simply remain on campus. Through the Initiative, we have a chance to refine our global innovation engagements and build new ones in exciting places with like-minded partners."



Desh Deshpande (center) confers with Martin Trust Center for MIT Entrepreneurship Managing Director Bill Aulet, Professor Sanjay Sarma, and Associate Dean Vladimir Bulovic (right).

Dinner was followed by remarks from MIT Director of Digital Learning **Sanjay Sarma** who described the growing role of digital learning in the classroom and its connection to innovation. Also in attendance at the dinner were MIT Vice President for International Partnerships **Claude Canizares**; MIT Dean of the School of Engineering **Ian Waitz**; MIT Sloan Professor **Edward Roberts**; MIT Professor **Charles L. Cooney**; Professor (and MIT REAP co-founder) **Scott Stern**; Martin Trust Center for MIT Entrepreneurship Managing Director (and MIT REAP co-founder) **Bill Aulet**; MIT Sloan Senior Lecturer (and MIT REAP diplomatic adviser) **Philip Budden**; Karen Mills, former administrator of the Small Business Administration; Desh Deshpande, founder of the **Deshpande Center for Technological Innovation** at MIT; Executive Director of MIT Sloan Executive Education **Peter Hirst**; MIT REAP Executive Director **Georgina Campbell**; and consuls from several of the regions participating in the MIT REAP program.

Further details about the MIT REAP program can be found at <http://reap.mit.edu>