

Kasie Whitener (00:01):

Good morning, welcome into Moore Impact. This is our third episode of live radio here on 100.7, the Point. I'm your host, Kasie Whitener. And with me in studio today, Caroline Crowder from the Boyd Innovation Center and GrowCo powered by the Boyd Innovation Center. Or how, what's is it flipped? The Boyd Innovation Center, powered by GrowCo.

Caroline Crowder (00:21):

Yes. So we're flipped around, right? So it's the Boyd Innovation Center, powered by GrowCo.

Kasie Whitener (00:26):

All right. We're gonna unpack all of that and explain exactly what that means here on Moore Impact today. Now we, when we did our podcast season, Caroline was here. She told us her whole background because you are an alum, a double alum of the Moore School of Business, and you're now an instructor at the Moore School of Business, which is super cool too, and have always been, in my opinion, always been the epicenter of the economic, of the entrepreneurial ecosystem here in Columbia. So, always kinda have your fingers on the pulse of what's happening in the entrepreneurial ecosystem. So today, most of our conversation's gonna be about entrepreneurship. Tell our listeners just a little bit about you and what it is you're, you're working on here in Columbia right now.

Caroline Crowder (01:03):

Yeah, so I'll give the, the super quick background and thanks Kasie for having me on. I'm so excited to be back here today again. And obviously like the instructor piece now at USC and the Moore School, that's the big update since the last time that we talked. So brief, like, kind of, you know, rewind the birthdays a little bit here. So two time alum of USC. Got, did my undergrad in management and marketing at South Carolina in the Moore School. Worked for USC for several years, led their tech incubator. A handful of tech startup programs over there. And went back to USC, got my master's in international business, which paved the way for me to move to Singapore and go globally scale an ed tech startup there, an education technology startup there through government. So it was a B-to-G role business to government. If anyone listening has ever done government contracting, you know, that that is a very, very, very slow sales process and slow sales cycle. And if you are an entrepreneurially minded person, you like to go fast, like NASCAR fast and turn left constantly <laugh>. So that was where we kind of got into like a little bit of a roadblock there. I was like, dang, I really want to like close deals. I'm ready to move. And

Kasie Whitener (02:11):

So even the Singapore government moves slow?

Caroline Crowder (02:14):

Well, we weren't working, we were appointed by the Singaporean government to implement their digital re-skilling and up-skilling plan for the entire country. So we essentially had validated it with a 40,000 learner case study with university students in Myanmar to validate that we could even scale the program. So we did that. And then ultimately they, that was when they brought me in after they validated that the, that the plan itself was applicable to other countries. That it wasn't just Singaporean nationals that needed these very specific digital skills. It was the entire world. That was when they brought me in and said, okay, Caroline, go forth and conquer you know, be an American, be kind of

diplomatic and go talk to governments and ministries of educations all over the world. Go scale this thing.

Kasie Whitener ([02:58](#)):

Nice.

Caroline Crowder ([03:00](#)):

Yeah, and to top everything off with the complications with it, right? Not just cultural nuances that come along with any sort of new job and moving abroad and living abroad and doing global business in general. But it was also still on the tail end of Covid, so there was no travel, right? And so when it comes to building relationships with individuals, especially government officials, you've gotta get in the room with people in order to close deals. So we just ran into all sorts of things. And then, so the role ended up pivoting into something completely different which was essentially building up a digital skills coalition, which ended up encompassing something like 48,000 individuals and something like 1600 organizations and industry partners and government orgs all around the world. So it was incredible and amazing learning experience.

Kasie Whitener ([03:46](#)):

All of this facilitated by solid good software product.

Caroline Crowder ([03:48](#)):

Yes. Yeah. Fantastic learning management system on the back end.

Kasie Whitener ([03:52](#)):

Nice. Yeah. Yeah. Okay. So then you come back to Columbia. Yes. Unexpectedly,

Caroline Crowder ([03:57](#)):

<Laugh>, very unexpectedly. Right? When I set abroad to go literally, like live and work abroad, when I got my master's in international business from USC from the Moore School, I had it in my head that when I accepted this initial position abroad in Singapore, I said, okay, this is the door opening. I'm gone for the next decade. I don't wanna live in the us. And lo and behold, 18 months later, my dream job opened up back in Columbia as the executive director of the Boyd Innovation Center. Its inaugural executive director, you know, setting the strategy, setting the vision for what the entrepreneurial ecosystem was really going to look like and evolve into for the next five years for Columbia. And it was just an offer that, or it was really an opportunity that I couldn't pass up on. Yeah. And when the offer came in, you know, internally, I felt completely torn because it wasn't how I imagined life to go. I thought that I was literally gonna be abroad for 10 years. I thought that Dubai or Abu Dhabi was gonna be the next city after Singapore. And it turned out that Columbia was, and it's, I have never looked back after I came back. It's been the most incredible career chapter to be back in Columbia to be working with the tech founders here locally. Again. It's amazing.

Kasie Whitener ([05:04](#)):

After our interview for the podcast you and I were at an event for the South Carolina Department of Commerce, where they brought in a bunch of the folks that are working in this entrepreneurial ecosystem space. And you're one of the speakers to talk about the journey of the Boyd Innovation

Center. And I loved in your presentation, 'cause you showed the, like before and after pictures of like, this is the space as we found it, and this is what we did with it. So tell our listeners like, where is the Boyd Innovation Center and like, what does it look like to take sort of a, I mean, basically an empty shell of a place and turn it into a, a legitimate, warm and welcoming space for entrepreneurs?

Caroline Crowder ([05:40](#)):

My goodness, there's so much there that we could unpack. I mean, we could literally spend hours just talking about this very topic in itself. But I mean, the construction process, again, supply chain has been affected by covid. And even two plus years ago when I first assumed this role and moved back to Columbia, I mean the construction timelines and supply chains, they were still so backed up. And, you know, it's taken, you know, in certain instances it takes 18 months sometimes to get a part in that we need in order to activate as a very specific room or you know, like an AV system or something like that. And so the entire build out of a physical space was not something that, I'm not even sure that I understood that when I assumed the role and accepted the offer, I'm not even sure that I understood that that was what was also going to be included,

Kasie Whitener ([06:22](#)):

That you were gonna become a construction contractor, <laugh>

Caroline Crowder ([06:25](#)):

I mean, not the contractor per se, but, you know just I have learned so much about construction and project management from the construction side of things, right? Like actually building out a physical space and what comes along with that. And just frankly, like how many hiccups can you know, it can just cause speed bumps along the way that ultimately impacts your programs and your events and your entire strategy. But also that you know, Columbia moves slow. So that's actually been beneficial for us for the last couple of years. I always, you know, again, I like to go fast. But you know, I've, I've slowed down the pace of it. We've had to do that to accommodate for Columbia's culture which is what you have to do, right? You have to assimilate to the local culture. And Columbia, for better or for worse, we move a little slow around here.

Kasie Whitener ([07:07](#)):

Where is the Boyd Foundation's Center? The Boyd Innovation Center? Where is this located?

Caroline Crowder ([07:13](#)):

We're in Five Points. So we actually have a temporary popup coffee shop in our front space right now. We are in this hidey hole in the back of a building. So we literally have no storefront. So a lot of people don't even know that we exist, but,

Kasie Whitener ([07:28](#)):

But there's a big sign out front that says the Boyd Innovation Center.

Caroline Crowder ([07:31](#)):

Yeah, but it kind of blends in the colors blend in with the blue, the storefront. So I just feel like people walk by it and miss it all the time.

Kasie Whitener ([07:37](#)):

Well, it's on Saluda Ave. And if you don't know what it is and you're not actually looking for it, you might in fact pass it by and not be aware of it. But I mean, I think the signage was a nice add. I mean, I think it was like the, when I went there and the signage there, I was like, oh, look at that. You're like, legit. Now you have a sign, <laugh>.

Caroline Crowder ([07:52](#)):

Yeah. Right. And there were so many little things, right? Like going back to your comment about the presentation that we did to Commerce a handful of months ago. I mean, kind of on our, to kind of celebrate our two year anniversary or two year birthday, whatever we wanna call it. I mean, part of the learning curve over the last couple of years was that, I mean, frankly, we never even knew that this model would work, right? When the Boyd Foundation two plus years ago, infused \$1 million into GrowCo as an organization in order to create the Boyd Innovation Center. I mean, we didn't know that the model would work. We had a really strong conviction that it would, we had a lot of reasons to believe that it would, but we ultimately didn't know. And over the last two plus years, we've proven the model. We know what programs and events work, and we're excited to continue building those out this year.

Kasie Whitener ([08:35](#)):

We're gonna learn everything the Boyd Innovation Center does, what's upcoming and how you can get involved. It's more on, more impact on the other side of the break. Don't go away.

Kasie Whitener ([09:07](#)):

Welcome back to Moore Impact. Kasie Whitener, your host here and with me in studio Caroline Crowder from the Boyd Innovation Center, powered by GrowCo. And we are talking about the entrepreneurial ecosystem here in Columbia and sort of the Boyd Innovation's vision for the Boyd Innovation Center's vision for what that should look like. And you said something you, before we went to break, you said the business model, we didn't know if it would work. So share with our listeners what the business model is of the Boyd Innovation Center and what the vision is for how to impact the ecosystem here. Yeah,

Caroline Crowder ([09:38](#)):

I'll, I'll share this for any entrepreneurs who are out there listening, right? Any entrepreneur or anyone who's ever started something new, right? Kasie, even when you started this podcast, you probably had some strong inclinations of, and like a strong vision of, okay, this is what it could look like. This is what it could feel like, but I really don't know if it's gonna work. How am I gonna coordinate speakers every single week? That's a lot to do. Right? And to that same point you know, we had a lot of reasons to believe that we could build a culture of entrepreneurship in the, in the Columbia metro region. We knew that we needed a home for high growth, high tech startups. If you're not sure what those are, essentially just scalable business models, right? So we're not gonna support cosmetologists or small business consultants or business, business ideas like that.

Caroline Crowder ([10:20](#)):

But like what our folks tend to lean in towards is like software as a service, or quantum computers or robots, right? We want people that are really gonna be building those tech or tech enabled ideas and ultimately have recurring revenue either on a monthly or annual basis, right? But we're not looking for anything that requires your time to be attached to your business model altogether. But for our business

model, right, as an innovation center we're a nonprofit at our core. A lot of folks don't realize that. So when they look at our rates, like our membership rates online, they see some subsidized rates in there. Well, I can tell you that's very much thanks to the Boyd Foundation who makes all that possible, right? They've made it possible for us to kind of take the leap into our vision and see if we could create this community.

Caroline Crowder ([11:05](#)):

And over the last two plus years, I can tell you it's working. It's very cool. There were so many times along the journey where I thought, oh no, we've hit another speed bump almost daily, right? Pretty much daily, multiple times a day on certain days, right? Especially on the early construction days. And I thought, oh my goodness, are we ever gonna make it through this really awful like, muddy part of the journey? Are we really gonna make it through? And, you know, last year we really hit our stride when we finally finished building out a portion of the Boyd Innovation Center. And things started clicking for people when they walked in and they started to see this vision, literally a physical place where they could come and work, where they could co-work, where they could have a private office where they could host events for their tech meetups and things like that. So it's been incredible to see it. And along that, you know, like my role this year is kind of pivoting into something different as well.

Kasie Whitener ([11:56](#)):

Yeah. So before we get into that, 'cause I wanna unpack this specifically for our listeners. At its heart, the Boyd Innovation Center powered by GrowCo is a community. And so community from a revenue perspective, you've got memberships, you've got use of space. So if they are going to rent a desk or rent a cubicle or rent a private office, or if they're gonna use the space to host events and things like that, that's where that revenue is coming from, is from the community paying for the use of the space in whatever capacity that is. But you also have to get, you have to give enough back. You have to create value for that community to get those people to pay, right? Like to, you have to provide them with something that they feel like is worth investing. Because a lot of the people who are in this community are startups themselves. And so their business may not have the level of revenue that they would need to support a full-time office somewhere or to support, you know, a, a big event space or something like that. And so they're here kind of saying, well, I'm willing to be one of 30 that you have that are all sharing this same cohabitation experience.

Caroline Crowder ([12:59](#)):

Yes, exactly that. And I'll also add too, right, like going back to our revenue streams as a, as our business model, none of what we would do, our membership rates really don't pay for our operations whatsoever. They don't even pay for our programs. If we did not have the Boyd Foundation support and a handful of local governments supporting us, there would be no way that we could even make this an opportunity for the community. This was not just some, this was something that frankly, over two years ago, the Boyd Foundation led the vision as the lead investor from the startup lens, but it was also local government who came to the table and supported us as well, a handful of individuals that really started this journey and made it financially possible for us to even take the leap and start.

Kasie Whitener ([13:39](#)):

And all of that investment is what has built out this space. <Laugh> making. I'm like suddenly picturing you with a hard hat on <laugh>, like

Kasie Whitener ([13:46](#)):

In this construction experience. And if you haven't been down to the Boyd Innovation Center, you can walk in and just kind of look around and see what it's like in there. And all the, the transformation from empty warehouse hidey hole in the back of the building to like, you've got these really cool lighting in there now you've got a a lot of dynamic movable elements in the room so that you can reorganize the room to meet whatever needs y'all have. And the last time I was there, you had a speaker. So you have a, a a, a stage at the end of the room. And I'm kind of laughing too, because that was the one that was like up on cinder blocks originally, right? And like now we have like a more permanent install stage, but at one point it was just on cinder, I think it was the mayor, Mayor Rickenmann, who stepped up on the cinder blocks to get up on there and, you know, for the ribbon cutting or whatever it was

Caroline Crowder ([14:31](#)):

<Laugh> it was, it was Mayor Rickenmann. And also representatives from the Boyd Foundation's board. Again, two in multiple individuals, two organizations who have really made what we do possible. And yeah, I mean, they have never been, as, you know, entrepreneurially minded individuals themselves or entrepreneurs themselves. They have never been afraid to get on literally a stage that was assembled by plywood in someone's garage and using a cinder block as a step. That was our little minimum viable product that our, our MVP of a stage in the early days of doing our programs. 'cause We knew that we needed to elevate our program participants, right? So people could see them, but we didn't want to invest several thousand dollars into that permanent stage unless we knew that it was going to be a good use of funds. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. So I'm really super grateful that we have individuals like that leading Columbia, right? People like Mayor Rickenmann people like the individuals that lead the Boyd Foundation because, you know, they are not above getting on a plywood stage and stepping on a cinder block as a step. And

Kasie Whitener ([15:29](#)):

Well, they know you gotta start somewhere. Yeah. I mean, that's, that's the, the critical piece and it's sort of the entrepreneurial mindset to go, we gotta start somewhere. I love that you said minimum viable product. I mean, everybody in that entrepreneurial mindset is gonna say, we're gonna give this a try and it's not gonna be perfect the first time around, but we're gonna take feedback and we're gonna iterate and we're gonna make it better. And the better it gets, the more likely we are to get to commercialization,

Caroline Crowder ([15:49](#)):

Right? And now we have our beautiful black stage that is permanent, it's a permanent fixture. But also it breaks down. So, you know, to your point, Kasie <inaudible> talking about, about there's tons of flexible furniture at the BIC and any time at any point that you walk in, whether it be for multiple events or if you become a member our members tease me all the time because I rearrange the furniture all the time, it will not stay the same. We rotate local artwork in and out of the space. We rotate the furniture around, we move things around, right? Because we want you thinking in different ways. We don't want you just, when you get comfortable sitting in your favorite chair, I'm sorry, I'm probably gonna rearrange it, <laugh>, because I want you to think differently. And I don't want you, the whole premise of what we do right, is centered around a growth mindset.

Caroline Crowder ([16:34](#)):

And we want you growing and scaling. We want you sitting on the peripheral of discomfort at all times while you're growing your business. And the way that our team is hardwired, even at the BIC and all of our members are hardwired, is that we're all gonna push you and coach you in different ways. And you know, Kasie, what do you, you alluded to earlier, we're always giving back to one another. We're always giving first in our community. We firmly believe that everyone has something to give. Everyone also has something to receive from other people. And that's what makes our community super, super, super special.

Kasie Whitener ([17:02](#)):

One of the programs that you have that I had the privilege of participating in was Ask Me Anything, which is where you bring these different folks in that have, you know, knowledge in different areas and they just sit at the table and anybody in the community can come and sit down with them and just kind of pick their brain on this or that, which I love. Like I always hate that phrase pick their brain because there's a lot of times early in your entrepreneurial journey where you're looking for help and you're looking for advice. And so you'll go everywhere and you'll ask everybody. We, that's the premise of 1 Million Cups is you'll have a million cups of coffee in order to get your startup up off the ground at some point. You just have to do the work. Like at some point you can't keep just talking to people, like at some point you just have to go and do the thing.

Kasie Whitener ([17:38](#)):

But the ask me anything sort of subs for that, individuals coming in, eating up too much time for people who are actually out there doing some work. Instead, it says, Hey, people come in here and have a seat. Give us an hour of your time and we'll bring all of our community here. Anybody that has questions about this, and I got to go and spend time talking about podcasting. And how do you get into, you know, radio and what kind of audio equipment do people need to have to be able to do it on their own? Can they do it on their own? What's the post-production look like? All these kinds of things, which I'm like not an expert in. I'm just somebody that like figured it out over the last five years. Right, <laugh>.

Caroline Crowder ([18:07](#)):

Exactly. But you know, so many people in our community, we, we never say that you have to be the expert in order to give back to somebody else. All you have to do is Kasie, literally exactly what you just said, right? Recognize where you can contribute, recognize where you also cannot contribute, right? And just contribute in those ways that you can, like you've figured something out over the last five or so years, and you've built something incredible. You have something to give back. And you have an incredible story to share on that. And I'm so grateful that you did come in for our Ask Me Anything session to share.

Kasie Whitener ([18:33](#)):

Well, I appreciate that. It was a good conversation too, because we're talking about the power of developing content as a purpose of marketing, right? So like here, the, everybody, you know, content marketing, content marketing, and it's sort of this like nebulous thing out there. And when you're an entrepreneur, you're like, I just don't have time for that. I just don't have time to creating content all the time and trying to put it out into the world.

Caroline Crowder ([18:51](#)):

Well, the sad truth though, actually, is I'm glad you that you're, you're bringing in kind of like the content slash like creator economy that's really strongly emerging at the moment. Because it is the future of marketing, whether we want to be content creators or not. This is the e like this is literally the reality that we're living in today. The facts are that consumers now trust personal brands more than they trust their business brands. And you know, the big update, right on the personal side since I, we last talked over the radio was that I'm now an an instructor in the Moore School, and this is literally what my class is living through right now. We're doing a full experimentation of a brand new course at USC completely revamping what was existing. And all of these entrepreneur majors are now seniors graduating in May, and they're building businesses and they're being content creators, and they're leaning into their personal brands and figuring out what they're the expert in and being forced to start that before graduation.

Kasie Whitener ([19:49](#)):

I love everything about that, especially because when we think about, even if you don't plan to go out and be an influencer, right? Even if you're not expecting to start up some kind of, you know, TikTok driven influencer business, the personal brand and the content that you put out into the world is representing your expertise. And so if you're applying for a job with somebody else, it's on your LinkedIn profile. If you are out there trying to, you know, push your agenda forward with your customers, it's out there on your LinkedIn profile. It's the way to earn other people's trust and their respect and get their attention is to create content and show them what, you know, show what you know all day long. Right? And then don't be silly about putting something out that clearly isn't very smart. Like the lady that put out the video about how the Washington commanders are actually in Washington state, <laugh> and I'll, and I, I was like, wait, what? <Laugh>

Kasie Whitener ([20:36](#)):

Like hmm. Okay. but anyway, all that to say, we and I wanna, 'cause we're gonna run to break here at the bottom of the hour, but I wanna make sure that we unpack the challenge for you personally getting into the classroom and what did you, how did you feel when you were approached by the Moore School? Like, hey, come back and teach these, these young people. And then repackaging a new class and trying to figure out like what do they really need to learn and what do they really need to know? What was that journey like for you as well? And then I wanna do some of the programming that you guys have going on at the BIC because there's some things available for our community that they can apply for, or at the very least, they can attend and see what it looks like for the, to be part of this startup scenario here in the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Caroline Crowder ([21:18](#)):

And at no cost to them either. That's

Kasie Whitener ([21:20](#)):

Exactly right. Alright. Caroline Crowder here for the Boyd Innovation Center. It's Moore Impact. We're gonna run to break, we'll be right back.

Kasie Whitener ([21:47](#)):

Welcome back to Moore Impact, Kasie Whitener here with Caroline Crowder. We're talking about the Boyd Innovation Center, and as you've noted before we went to break, you have moved into a new role at the Moore School instructing one of the classes in the entrepreneurial sequence. So welcome on



board in our management department and what you've worked with these students to do is to revamp the, the class. It's, I think the 474 class. Yeah. to really help them understand how to become content creators and how to then generate interest slash revenue in this new economy, which is a, a content driven economy. And it's interesting because we're here on talk radio, which is sort of the oldest form of this kind of content creation stuff. And I don't know that we necessarily think of talk radio as being content creators, but of course that's what we are in talk radio. And then, you know, the digital version of that is the podcast and all that kind of thing where the barriers to entry are so low to go out there and create content on your own. If you've got, you know, some basic technology, you can create the kind of content that you need to express your expertise. So talk about rewriting this class and, and what that took.

Caroline Crowder ([22:52](#)):

Yeah. So another guy, right? Jeff Savage called me towards the end of last semester and said, Hey, we've got an open position. We need somebody to come in and teach management 474. It's about executing and building a new venture strategy essentially. And we want fresh thoughts, we wanna do something new, we wanna push the boundaries. And, you know, for better or for worse, people in Columbia know to call me for things like that. And, you know, towards the end of our conversations I think, you know, teaching at the Moore School has always been something on my bucket list. Personally, it's always been something I've wanted to venture back into the classroom. And this one, you know, honestly just felt like a very natural evolution to, to go back into the classroom for. So what we're doing right now is actually talking through the difference between influencers as we traditionally think about them on Instagram or TikTok or wherever you reach your influencers on versus the power of influence, right?

Caroline Crowder ([23:47](#)):

So something that we're not doing as part of the class is turning out 70 plus influencers, quote unquote influencers for Columbia out of the Moore School. We're not doing that. We're creating scalable businesses as part of this model, right? Because we understand several things about the talent pool at USC one being we've gotta talk about the elephant in the room, right? Talent retention in Columbia is not something that we're really strong at right now. We're trying to do a better job of that on the Boyd Innovation Center side. We have some very natural on-ramps for students to continue on with building their ventures with us. But however, on the Moore School side, we know that most of our students are going to leave after graduation and really, frankly, don't have an interest in staying in Columbia because there's not a lot of ex, well, from their perspective, there's not a lot of exciting things happening. I'm also working to change that because I think Columbia is awesome <laugh>, and I think there's so many reasons that you should stay here after you graduate.

Kasie Whitener ([24:40](#)):

There's so much opportunity in the city. Yes, especially if you're a young person. I mean, I'm always, I, I'm blown away by it because when we graduated in 1999 and 98, 99, we ended up in Charlotte. And Charlotte was like at the early stages of starting to become a big deal in that early two thousands timeframe. And here you are, like 25 years later, all these people are like, Charlotte's the thing. I'm like, but it wasn't the thing. It was this like wimpy little town in 2003, 2004 when we were living there. And there were a ton of young people there who were trying to make a living and you could afford to be there. And that's the biggest piece. You're young, you need a place where you can actually afford to thrive. And here in Columbia, we're in that place right now where, where young people can really do very well here if they'll give it a chance.

Caroline Crowder ([25:22](#)):

Yes, it's amazing. And honestly, it was the best decision that I ever made when I graduated from USCI. I spent through my undergrad years and graduated a year early. And, you know, when I graduated, I kind of looked up about two weeks after, you know, I was heads down focused on getting through school. And about two weeks before I graduated, I looked up, like literally looked up from the books and was like, wait a second, I don't have a job after I graduate, what am I gonna do? And so talked to a few professors, asked them if they knew of any last minute opportunities in Columbia. One of them connected me internally to USC with a couple of folks. And you know, again, power of warm intros. They're amazing, incredible things. And you know, putting forth a ton of effort through schoolwork.

Caroline Crowder ([26:03](#)):

They knew that I was, you know, type A gonna go <laugh>, you know, gonna do great work, <laugh>. And yeah, got a couple warm intros and had a couple conversations and interviews. And lo and behold, USC ended up hiring me. And that's where, but like Columbia was where I started my career. And now everything has again, just come full circle to be back in Columbia, which has been incredible. There is so much opportunity here for young students, or not even young students, right? They're the old ones or quote unquote old ones when they graduate <laugh>. But I mean, it is where they, they need to give Columbia a true opportunity because there is potential here. And we have so many tech startups down at the Boyd Innovation Center. They're always hiring. They're looking for young energy and they want people who can think in a different way who may or may not be working for equity, but just wanna learn a ton. And that's really where the dots can kind of connect on both ends of this too.

Kasie Whitener ([26:52](#)):

That's just a lot of opportunity. So the Boyd Innovation Center's hosting various programming and I said that the last time I was there was for ask me anything, but that's not true. The last time I was there, it was for a pitch night where you all had been putting folks through the paces and teaching them how to do the thing. And then each of these creators are gonna get up. Each of these founders were gonna get up and pitch their business idea. And so all of us were kind of hanging around listening to see what they had to say. And so talk a little bit about what your upcoming programming is and the various types of programming that you're doing to try to encourage people to build new stuff here in Columbia.

Caroline Crowder ([27:26](#)):

Build new stuff. I love it. Simplified version is of that is even like ideas start here. We love to say that. Because even if you call us and you think that you wanna be a small business consultant after one 20 minute conversation with me, we're gonna have a scalable business model, almost guaranteed <laugh>. Just because, you know, a lot of folks in Columbia too, right? Like again, meeting this community where it is, a lot of people just, we don't know what we don't know as individuals, and that's okay. Fortunately for me, I mean, I've got so much borrowed mentorship out of Columbia and abroad through Singapore, Australia, all these different touch points all around the world. And the ability to bring that knowledge and infuse it back into Columbia, it's incredible, right? So I I love contributing that that coaching lens kind of back to everything.

Caroline Crowder ([28:09](#)):

But you know, Kasie, back to what you said, right? Pitch nights, a lot of folks in the community come out for pitch nights. It's a super welcoming event that we do for the culmination of our six week pre-accelerator program called COLA Starts, which we shameless plug, we have one last info session today,

actually at noon for our last or sorry, for our first cohort of 2025 that we're gonna be running. So if you are interested, if you have an idea, you know, you wanna be an entrepreneur, then the Cola Starts program is a really great place for you to start. So we're taking you through six weeks of teaching you the very basic foundational skills that you need in order to, like, what you really need to be thinking about in the earliest stages, what's actually important versus what's not, right? For example, achieving products market fit, that's important. Pitching every single week or reforming a business plan that is not important when you're in the earliest stages, right? You've gotta figure out what that idea even is. We've gotta put just a little bit of color, a little bit of structure around it and then let you go out into the real world and start to iterate, iterate, iterate fail a ton, have a little bit of success along the way, take the successful building blocks and just continuously build those. So,

Kasie Whitener ([29:20](#)):

So real quick, 'cause I wanna unpack this exactly to make sure I'm getting it exactly right. So Cola Starts is a cohort that people can join. Today's noon session at the Boyd Innovation Center is an info session. So you can just show up on your lunch break and learn a little bit more about it. And then the cohort is a six week cohort. What times are they meeting? Like when should they expect to be dedicating time to it? Oh,

Caroline Crowder ([29:41](#)):

I'm glad that you brought this up too, right? So our info session today is actually not at the Boyd Innovation Center, it's virtual online. Oh, look at that. Because we know that when people are having their lunch breaks, we know that we're serving this entire region. And from end to end, from west to east and north to south of this region there's, it would be impossible. Even though we are centrally located downtown, it's impossible for you, for some folks who live further out to drive 30 minutes into town, or sorry, into the city I should say, right? You drive into the city, you know, sit through an info session, then drive back out. Most people, a lot of folks only have a 30 minute lunch if they even get a lunch. I am not somebody who usually takes a lunch, 'cause I'm usually working through my lunch, you know, <laugh>.

Caroline Crowder ([30:19](#)):

So I mean, you know, to that point, right? Like, we've got to reach people where they are. And that's something that we always keep at the forefront with everything. So especially for info sessions, they're probably going to be either at noon or something like 6:00 PM and they're gonna be virtual because we either wanna tap you while you're on your lunch break or we wanna tap you in your early evening while like before things at home get crazy with kids and practice and all sorts of like cooking dinner and all of that for the family stuff. So

Kasie Whitener ([30:44](#)):

Give them their website so they can find it and link to it and register and all that.

Caroline Crowder ([30:47](#)):

Yeah, so super simple for us, it we're online [boydinnovationcenter.org](http://boydinnovationcenter.org),

Kasie Whitener ([30:52](#)):

[BOYDinnovationcenter.org](http://BOYDinnovationcenter.org).

Caroline Crowder ([30:55](#)):

That's it. And then we've got a little events tab on there. It's got our full on event calendar on there. So the very top one that you'll see if you log on before noon today will be that info session that you can get registered for. So anyone is welcome to join it, even if you are, you know, that traditional consultant or you're not sure how to scale or how to pivot into something that's more scalable, the info session is a perfect opportunity for you to show up to. Let's do a little brainstorming together. Also, our new program manager, Dana Watkins will be on there. And so she's a really great coach as well that's gonna be taking folks through the Cola Starts program. And

Kasie Whitener ([31:29](#)):

The Cola Starts program will then run six weeks and mostly in the evenings.

Caroline Crowder ([31:33](#)):

Yes. Yeah. Yes. So we do one evening session a week. Usually it's Tuesday evenings. It's I call death by cohort, right? So it is like cohort's choice, right? It's like dealer's choice. And then we also have a virtual session on Fridays because we also know, hey, a lot of people are not in Columbia on Fridays. A lot of people take off Thursday nights, go somewhere for the weekends, especially in this post covid era that we're living in where we have more flexible workspaces and flexible remote options through work. So we do our Friday sessions virtually because we want you not to, like, we want you to continue living your life even though you're part of this program. We don't want it to be a hindrance with your travel schedule which you if you can participate or not.

Kasie Whitener ([32:14](#)):

So a new COLA Starts getting underway and this is one of just one of the programs that the Boyd Innovation Center offers. So what else is going on?

Caroline Crowder ([32:22](#)):

Ton of stuff, right? So even post-program, we've got this new thing kicking off this year. We realized, well, I realized over the last couple of years, right? We've got over 70 teams that we've put through our pre-accelerator cohorts over the last couple of years, and we now understand better where the gaps from an ecosystem perspective in Columbia are. So we're gonna start doing monthly peer groups. These are invite only. So I won't spend too much time over the radio talking about them, but you know, post Cola Starts after you've been through that program, we know that we need to continue supporting you and we know how much just knowledge sharing amongst your peers is important. Even just building relationships, knowing that you can have a friend in your cohort, you could have a mentor in the cohort. You know, ultimately if we're creating a beautiful culture of entrepreneurship for this region, we should ultimately like mentors that are once your mentors, they may or may not evolve over time into being your friends. I've even noticed that as part of this line of work in general there, when you connect with people who are so similarly minded to you and you see the same thing, you see the world the same way, you know, you, you align with this really strong vision of what this community could look like. Those are some really, really powerful people to retain in your circle. Yeah,

Kasie Whitener ([33:34](#)):

Some really great friendships coming outta the Boyd Innovation Center, that's for sure. And certainly out of our ecosystem in general.

Caroline Crowder ([33:39](#)):

Yes. And then we have one other event too, right? So if this is all sounding too much for you, right? If you're like, okay, I'm not sure I wanna be a founder, not sure I really wanna start something, but maybe you've got a tech skill that you can contribute back to a startup and you just kind of wanna dip your toes into the water for 24 hours. We have this super, super fun event that we are doing in just a couple of weeks. It's February 6th in the evening, and then all day February 7th. So it's called Startup Sprint. And what we're gonna do is sprint for 24 hours to build startups. So can sound a little bit overwhelming, but if you've got plans on the works and you're like, dang, I've been sitting on this idea for forever and I know I just need a little bit of motivation to come in and do it. If you're working remotely on Friday, February 7th, you know, you can just come in and set up like the Microsoft Jiggler app <laugh>, okay? I won't tell your boss or your manager about that. It'll be fine. So February 6th and seventh, we do have Startup Sprint coming up as well.

Kasie Whitener ([34:37](#)):

I'm excited about all the programming. We're gonna talk a little bit more with Caroline Crowder. One more segment to go. Don't go away. It's Moore Impact on the point.

Kasie Whitener ([37:06](#)):

Final, final segment of Moore Impact. Welcome back into the show, Kasie Whitener, your host here, and my guest Caroline Crowder from the Boyd Innovation Center. We've been talking about the economic or the entrepreneurial ecosystem here in Columbia and the Boyd Innovation Center's role in that. Certainly at the Moore School where we have an entrepreneurial education, we've got two different parts of it. So we've had people in here before to talk about the McNair Institute. The McNair Institute led by Dirk Brown is the campus-wide entrepreneurship minor where anybody majoring in anything can minor in entrepreneurship at the University of South Carolina. And then the Faber Entrepreneurship Center, which Dr. Geoffrey Graybeal and I have been in here talking about that is the entrepreneurial center in the Moore School itself. So we work with business students specifically. And then all of that is to say that's our on-campus stuff.

Kasie Whitener ([38:00](#)):

And then off campus, we're supported by the Boyd Innovation Center powered by GrowCo here in the Five Points area and the things that you guys are doing, which are primarily focused on tech startups and thinking about scalability inside a business. And we spend a lot of time in our entrepreneur curriculum talking about how do you create a business that can scale beyond you and your individual capacity. So if you are a business owner and the business would not operate if you weren't there, you just don't have the opportunity to get that business to a level of full sustainability without your 24 hour presence. And so how do we instead build systems and processes to create the style of business or the kind of business model that will enable you to step back and let the business grow even at if you're not there 24 hours a day.

Kasie Whitener ([38:44](#)):

And so I think it's interesting to think about, a lot of that times it ends up being software. A lot of times it ends up being this kind of digital infrastructure piece. But sometimes it is just a regular business like this, like the radio show or the podcast or something like that that's like, yeah, but we're gonna automate in this way and create these opportunities for our business owners to, to disengage to a certain extent. The Boyd Innovation Center has programming specifically to help people get up and get going. How many

people would you say are coming in your door? Like what's the, are you getting a better response than you expected? Do you have more interest than you expected? Are you still looking to generate more interest? Where, where are you from a community perspective?

Caroline Crowder ([39:23](#)):

Oh, it's such a fun question to ask and dive into Kasie. We've had tremendous interest in the last couple of years and every single co like pre-accelerator cohort that we've run through Cola Starts every single cohort gets a little bit more finely tuned. We are iterating just like you would on your startup, we're iterating program over program event after event with everything. And you know, even things that we started two plus years ago from the get go, right in our infamous Tech Beans, right? A lot of folks in the community knew about Tech Beans. We met every single Wednesday morning at 8:00 AM for probably about the last two and a half years. But the community's changed, right? Our interests have changed as a community. And so at the end of 2024, we decided to sunset tech beans.

Kasie Whitener ([40:06](#)):

So no more Tech Beans on Wednesday mornings,

Caroline Crowder ([40:08](#)):

No more Tech Beans on Wednesday morning.

Kasie Whitener ([40:09](#)):

Well, I'll stop telling my students to go <laugh>. Yeah.

Caroline Crowder ([40:12](#)):

So we do have a new coffee meetup called Caffeine and Convos, right? So we wanted it to be a bit more inclusive. We wanted it to show that there was a new evolution of a coffee meetup because Tech Beans, there's just so much brand equity built into that of, and program equity, right? Everybody knew exactly what to expect. It was networking focused, but you also knew that you were gonna go away with some tactical things, right? There was always a four minute pitch or three, three to four minute pitch. Somebody always from the audience got to ask two questions and most of the time was spent networking, right? We have iterated on this several times of just Tech Beans in the last couple of years. And you know, frankly, where everything ended up falling was and what I kept hearing from our members, AKA, our customers and our community was that, Hey, Caroline, we just want a really casual coffee meetup. Like that's it.

Kasie Whitener ([40:59](#)):

No programming at all. No,

Caroline Crowder ([41:01](#)):

Right? Because what we really want right, are one-on-one opportunities to connect in a very meaningful and casual way. And what ecosystem builders like myself can be guilty of at certain points is over programming your community

Kasie Whitener ([41:15](#)):

Over structuring

Caroline Crowder ([41:15](#)):

Yeah, over structuring and over programming. But when we think about what entrepreneurship is, and its natural orientation is that it's a very authentic and non hierarchal thing that exists. And so if you're not allowing room, you know, sorry for the the bad word here, right? But if you're not allowing room for innovation and if you're not allowing like the room in there just to stretch and be flexible, you're hindering entrepreneurship and you're hindering the growth of your community even if you don't see it. Yeah. So you have to allow and make room for serendipity. And so caffeine and combos, I feel is extremely casual. You know, we're gonna rotate seats around so you can make sure that you get to talk to everybody particularly selfishly, because I wanna talk to everybody, <laugh> in the community, and I I'm just a social butterfly that wants to meet everybody and every single founder, right? Because I also wanna see how we can grow your business, but I, if we can help scale you. So

Kasie Whitener ([42:06](#)):

I love I love that you use the word serendipity too, because what this casual, sort of, less structured thing does is instead of people coming in and just absorbing the content that you're producing, absorbing the experience that you've curated for them, now it's gonna be on them to curate their own experience and it's gonna be on them to reach out to the people that they wanna have conversations with and to start and ignite something and ignite a relationship with somebody that they're curious about that they wanna get to know. I think that's awesome. I think to, to put it on our, our founders or on our ecosystem to say to them, Hey, you're gonna get outta this what you put into it, right? If you come in and generate a good buzz, a good conversation, and you, and you really can communicate with folks, you're gonna see some rewards here. But if you show up and expect us to do all the work, you know, it's, it's not gonna work for you. Yeah.

Caroline Crowder ([42:57](#)):

And Kasie, going back to what we talked about too earlier, right? Like our info session today for Cola Starts, it's virtual because we wanna meet the community where it is on their lunch break, which is probably maybe sitting behind your desk or maybe it's going for a quick walk outside. Ca another you know, kind of negative thing that we saw to Tech Beans was, while the cadence of every Wednesday morning at 8:00 AM was a great thing for a structure, again, we were over structuring a very, very, what was supposed to be a very simple coffee meetup on a weekly basis. And so now what you'll notice if you go to our event calendar [boydinnovationcenter.org](http://boydinnovationcenter.org) is, you'll notice if you look at the caffeine and combos times, they're scattered throughout the week on different days at different times. Some are in the afternoons. Some are in the mornings.

Caroline Crowder ([43:38](#)):

Because what I heard routinely from parents in the community about Tech Beans was that, hey, 8:00 AM does not work with my schedule. I've gotta take my kids to school. I want to come, but I can't come and there's no other time to go. But I like morning meetups or I like connecting over coffee. So, you know, and frankly, I mean, you know, they would come to me and say, well, what can you do about this? You know, like, can you make this more accessible for the parents? And I was like, let me see what we can do, right? Yeah. And so, you know, while over the holidays finally had some time to kind of slow down from programs and events and everything and just kind of revamp everything and, you know, startup communities, they also thrive on new things. So I'm excited, you know, to kind of put Tech Beans on the shelf to honor what that was for a couple of years. For us. It was an incredible coffee meetup, but caffeine and convos, that's where we're at today.

Kasie Whitener ([44:27](#)):

I love it. I love the idea that we had this product that was working and it was fine, and then we just put it on the shelf and did something else instead. <Laugh>. Yeah.

Caroline Crowder ([44:35](#)):

Well, I mean, you know, like the attendance also at Tech Beans, you know, some weeks it was waning. Yeah. And you know, that's also a very, very natural evolution within startup communities to have happen. For organizations in other cities like Boyd Innovation Centers that exist in other locations. It's something that we're what's known as an entrepreneur support organization or an ESO and what esos are inherently extremely guilty of is trying to beat a program to death. Like, and, and the equivalent of Columbia, it would've been me beating Tech Beans to death and saying, no, this thing's always worked. We're just gonna keep doing it because it's always worked. And frankly, sometimes you have to look at your baby and say, Hey, you know, the baby's not exactly what I wanted it to be right now, this idea isn't exactly where we thought it would be after we started it two years from now.

Caroline Crowder ([45:22](#)):

And we have to take a really hard look at our business. I think I try to do it on a quarterly basis but I do a very, very deep dive every six months into everything that we're doing and really take time to think and reflect and see where the gaps are, really listen in on founders and figure out what we, where we're missing, where the gaps are, and how do we revamp things. And you know, one of the bigger things that we did was putting Tech Beans on the shelf and relaunching it through caffeine and convos.

Kasie Whitener ([45:48](#)):

Well, you've inspired me. I mean, there's a lot of stuff that I'm doing day in and day out that has been the thing I've been doing always. Right? When I think about my classes that I teach and all that, and at the end of every semester I'm like, ah, I'm gonna redo that class. I'm gonna make some changes to this or that. Right? And certainly this semester I've been able to do that. I mean, we've got I think I told you about, we've got the one class or two classes that are dedicated to the film industry this semester, which we've never done before. But instead of building their own startup, all of them are working with film directors to try to package these films as if they were startups. And then they're going to pitch the films to potential investors at the end of the semester.

Kasie Whitener ([46:20](#)):

So it's a new look on entrepreneurship for them, a chance for them to think about how is a, a film like a business is really kind of the, the pivot there. I'm excited about it because it meant I got to bring in a whole bunch of new content. I gotta revamp all their discussion forums. I got to bring in a bunch of new articles for them to read all the things that are about creative entrepreneurship that is definitely up my alley. Versus, you know, in the past where I've been like, oh, let's, let's make an app that'll get me outta the bar quicker. You know what I mean? <Laugh>, or like, that'll allow me to skip the line at the buy in five points or whatever.

Caroline Crowder ([46:54](#)):

Every, every single semester. There's at least three of those.

Kasie Whitener ([46:56](#)):



Yes, exactly. So we were finding, and I actually was talking to a colleague at a different university that was saying that they ended up with just about every semester somebody trying to figure out a way to alert people that they've been roofied. And I was like, wow, that's a preoccupation by your particular student body. 'cause Ours doesn't spend much time talking about that. All that to say. So as we're kind of wrapping up here and getting to the end of our conversation this has of course been Moore Impact. And part of this is the relationship between the Moore School and the Boyd Innovation Center. And now that, that you're on faculty at the Moore School and you've got this Boyd Innovation Center as your primary gig, do you feel like these two things are working in tandem? Is there conflict or tension, or do you feel like the two things are naturally melding in, in the way that you would want them to?

Caroline Crowder ([47:42](#)):

Oh, I mean, they're very, very, very natural together, right? I mean, on the Boyd Innovation Center side, the number one thing that we've always wanted to create as part of our mission is just net new founders, right? Those high growth, high tech founders, right? Prefacing those high growth ones, right? Again, looking for those recurring revenue models and the scalability, which are probably going to be those tech or tech enabled ideas. And, you know, on the Moore School side, I want, look, I was one of those students at the Moore School one time who didn't see a future in Columbia. I didn't know that there were opportunities, much less exciting opportunities like my job today. Like, I think I have the coolest job in the world. And I also for some reason, like nobody ever wants my job either though when I try to pitch it to them. So

Kasie Whitener ([48:21](#)):

Website again, how can people find you?

Caroline Crowder ([48:23](#)):

Boyd Innovation center.org. BOYD, innovation center.org.

Kasie Whitener ([48:27](#)):

Thanks for being here, Caroline. This has been more impact. When you learn more, you know more, when you know more, you do more. Thanks for listening.