

8 practical steps to boost serendipitous discovery at your institution

“Bring together groups of promising scientists without a direct research assignment. Let them tackle a topic like biodiversity. The wildest ideas would then be allowed, along with the greatest failures... this is always a valuable exercise; perhaps not necessarily at that particular point, but at a later stage.”

—Louise Fresco
Wageningen University & Research, the Netherlands

“Picasso came up with his image of a bull when he saw two things overlap. You need to create that space and mess for things to happen, whether that’s photos on the wall to help you build connections, or locations where people can think together.”

—Wendy Ross
co-Chair of The Serendipity Society



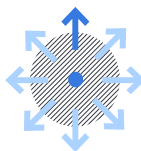
- 1 Develop a ‘psychologically safe’ environment where researchers aren’t afraid to fail — failure and serendipity are two sides of the same coin.



- 2 Nurture a culture of experimentation and consider ways to reward striving, not just success.



- 3 Train researchers to approach situations with a ‘prepared mind’ that can recognize serendipitous opportunities.



- 4 Ensure researchers aren’t overwhelmed by workload or responsibilities — creativity requires time and space.



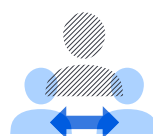
- 5 Break down silos by pursuing multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research projects, or schedule time for researchers to attend events outside their subject areas.



- 6 Foster discussion around research projects to spark new ideas or avenues of exploration, but also to generate doubt and expose potential flaws.



- 7 Create opportunities for ‘casual collisions’ by creatively using physical space and employing platforms or services that host or support virtual and in-person encounters.



- 8 Consider introducing virtual or physical idea walls, where researchers can post images, thoughts and concepts and uncover unexpected connections.

For an in-depth exploration of this topic, see our Perspective **Tales of the unexpected: Designing for serendipity in research**
<http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4048549>

