Connections are everything. Whether these connections are to colleagues and classmates or to family and faculty, networks of support are vital to the foundation of an individual, a business, or an organization—just as they are to a thriving institution.

For MIT Sloan, unrestricted annual giving is a mainstay of support for a myriad of diverse campus initiatives, all of which connect the School’s community in local and global ways. In fulfilling its mission to develop principled, visionary leaders who advance the practice of management, MIT Sloan continues to focus on its community at large, strengthening ties among students and alumni; attracting and retaining top faculty and supporting their research; and creating a collaborative environment within the School and across MIT.

Contributions from alumni to the MIT Sloan Annual Fund also help to support events and activities that promote a connected alumni community, which was clearly demonstrated over the three-day Building the Future celebration in May. MIT Sloan’s newest campus addition, E62, featuring the Joan and William A. Porter 1967 Center for Management Education, served as both backdrop and center stage for a weekend of activities that brought more than 1,100 alumni and their guests to Cambridge as part of the School’s Building the Future events, Alumni Weekend, and the Institute’s 150th anniversary observance.

As part of the weekend’s festivities, Exchange 62: Now and Next, a colloquium led by MIT Sloan faculty and other thought leaders, served as an exploration of the key challenges that organizations face today and will continue to face in the future. The MIT Sloan Annual Fund was critical to making Exchange 62 possible, providing support for events that engaged students, faculty, alumni, thought leaders, and friends of the School.

“The colloquium was designed to showcase some of the great ideas that have been discussed in the corridors of MIT Sloan buildings by faculty, as well as students and staff, issues such as sustainability, how we can promote learning from action-oriented projects, and our international engagements designed to build management capacity,” said Deputy Dean SP Kothari, the Gordon Y Billard Professor of Management. “The colloquium was designed to showcase these ideas and to have a discussion take place among all those who attended—our students, faculty, staff, and, most important, our alumni and our international partners—so the community is being built around the communication of ideas that bind us all together.”

Creating opportunities for faculty collaboration
For junior faculty, like Alberto Cavallo, Matt Marx, and Tavneet Suri, unrestricted annual support through the MIT Sloan Annual Fund provides the means for creative collaboration on campus and abroad, paving the way for groundbreaking research projects and dynamic teaching.

“MIT Sloan has been extremely supportive of me, first as a student and now as a faculty member,” said Cavallo, Assistant Professor of Applied Economics, who earned an MBA from MIT Sloan in 2005 and a PhD from Harvard in 2010. In addition, his work as co-founder of the Billion Prices Project at MIT Sloan—which collects daily data from more than 400 retailers around the world to predict real-time inflation—was recognized by The New York Times Magazine as one of the best ideas of 2010 and was made possible by unrestricted funds to the Annual Fund.

Cavallo’s experience of encouragement and assistance, according to Deputy Dean Robert Freund, is shared in great measure by junior faculty across all areas of discipline. The MIT Sloan Annual Fund gives the School’s deans the flexibility to provide this vital support to faculty.
“The portfolio of work of our highly talented junior faculty members would not be possible without the support and generosity of our alumni through the MIT Sloan Annual Fund,” said Freund. “The unrestricted nature of these gifts allows me to recognize and reward the work of junior faculty members, as well as provide the resources that catalyze their creative talents. For that, the School and I are deeply grateful. The research highlighted in this article is a representative sample of the exciting research conducted here at MIT Sloan.”

With his specialized focus as the Alvin J. Siteman (1948) Career Development Professor of Entrepreneurship, Assistant Professor Matt Marx says the collaborative environment at MIT Sloan has been further enhanced by the departmental grouping of offices in E62.

“There are two things I love about MIT Sloan,” said Marx, an assistant professor of Technological Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Strategic Management. “First, the research community is really fabulous. There are seminars during the summer, we go all year-round, and people work at the office, so we can talk about things. Recently, I asked a senior colleague to read one of my papers, and he gave it back to me the next morning with comments. In addition, the MBA students are awesome, and half of the students in my class are starting companies when they graduate. They are terrific.”

Marx also appreciates the connectedness of MIT Sloan to the rest of campus, with the new Entrepreneurship Center right in between. “The E-Center, in particular, does a good job at reaching out to graduates in other parts of the Institute,” said Marx. “This building never sleeps.”

Nor does Assistant Professor of Applied Economics Tavneet Suri, it seems, as she is frequently flying from Cambridge to the African continent for her ongoing research in the evolution of markets and various market failures in sub-Saharan economies. In particular, her main areas of focus are agriculture and formal and informal financial access.

For Suri, who works with a range of permanent staff in Kenya, Sierra Leone, and Rwanda, Annual Fund support is vital to enable field research to continue when grant-funded work doesn’t cover the “what-ifs” of projects on the ground.

“For example, if you are overbudget because the exchange rate changes and you need a certain amount more, MIT Sloan is there to support the ongoing work,” said Suri, who has been at the School for five years. “I’m on leave this year, but this is another way in which MIT Sloan invests in their faculty—by allowing time to focus on their research. All of my projects require a lot of management and oversight. I have 20 permanent staff in all these countries, and up to 100 at times, and that requires a decent amount of management and time away from campus.”

Investing in cutting-edge technology
The MIT Sloan Annual Fund also played a significant role in funding MIT Sloan Technology Ventures, a new competition launched last fall for students to pitch promising IT initiatives. As explained by Armand Doucette, executive director of Sloan Technology Services, this pilot initiative is “a way to continue to improve the IT infrastructure at MIT Sloan, to provide a voice to students who consistently identify opportunities to improve the IT environment, and to reinforce innovation as a hallmark of MIT Sloan.”

“The idea was to create the opportunity to engage students in a more formal manner around technology-related initiatives and to fund those initiatives that we could,” said Doucette. “Technology Ventures provides a voice to the students who regularly come to us with ideas to improve the IT environment and allows us to invest in their education. Our feeling was, let’s engage them early in the process and get them to the table to talk about how technology can improve their experience.”

Among the competition’s inaugural five winners was Pedro Sanudo, SF ’11, whose idea focused on the creation of an online platform to “help tap the power of the MIT network” and to ease the formation of cross-campus contacts. Initially conceived as MITnet, Sanudo’s idea is now called Peerpol and is currently in the developmental stages with funding provided by MIT Sloan, utilizing gifts to the Annual Fund.

“I strongly believe this positions MIT one step ahead of other schools that are already replicating many of the initiatives MIT launched in the past,” said Sanudo, who entered five ideas into the competition. “Who knows what this program could look like in the future—it could be life changing for many students and a strong pillar to support MIT’s entrepreneurship and innovation leadership.”

As Sanudo well knows, entrepreneurship and innovation are part of the fabric of MIT and MIT Sloan, one that serves to connect students, alumni, and faculty through a multitude of endeavors made possible every day through the support of unrestricted giving.

To support the MIT Sloan Annual Fund, please use the attached envelope or visit http://mitsloan.mit.edu/giving.