New CEO Announcement FAQ

What is happening at Activate?
We are announcing the appointment of our new CEO, Cyrus Wadia, who succeeds our founder and CEO, Ilan Gur (now heading ARIA, the UK's multibillion-dollar innovation agency).

Who is Cyrus Wadia?
Cyrus Wadia brings a unique combination of science, business, and government credentials and networks well-aligned with Activate's mission.

- He holds a master's degree and Ph.D. in energy and resources from UC Berkeley and bachelor's and master's degrees in chemical engineering from MIT.
- Most recently, Cyrus was the director of worldwide product sustainability at Amazon, where he launched the company's first sustainable shopping program, and previously vice president of sustainable business & innovation at Nike.
- Cyrus served in the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy under President Barack Obama as assistant director of clean energy and materials R&D, responsible for a $1B initiative defining the cutting edge in materials science and innovation.
- He has also served as co-director and faculty member of the Haas School of Business Cleantech to Market program, senior advisor on energy and manufacturing for McKinsey & Company, and project manager at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory.

Why is he the right leader for Activate?
Cyrus has the experience, expertise, passion, and ingenuity to accelerate the trajectory of Activate and deliver impact at scale. He is a proven leader whose inclusive leadership style and people-first mentality align closely with Activate's values. He has the unique ability to operate at the 30,000-foot level while also being detail-oriented. As one of his team reported, "he can toggle between laying track to operationalizing and visioning."

What is his vision for Activate?
Cyrus comes into our organization as we are well on our way to expanding the team and entrepreneurial fellowship program, both geographically and demographically. We have a proven, powerful leadership team, extraordinary staff, a rich company culture, and an inspiring community of fellows. Cyrus is committed to protecting and enhancing who we are and what we have achieved.

In eight years, the Activate team has grown from four to nearly 50 people, established five communities across the country, built a sturdy infrastructure, created a thriving national science innovation network, supported over 188 fellows, catalyzed 145 science-based startups that have raised nearly $1.4B collectively, and created over 1,900 jobs. Most importantly, Activate Fellows have emerged as global leaders, accelerating the invention and deployment of solutions to the world's most pressing problems.

That said, Cyrus is a visionary. After getting to know the organization, its culture, and its people, he will have bold ideas about how Activate can achieve maximum impact.

How was he selected?
We conducted an exhaustive global search, resulting in a diverse pool of 430 candidates. The rigorous selection process lasted over a year and was led by an executive search committee composed of Activate board members, external advisors of Activate, and an Activate Fellow alum. Final candidates also met with the entire Activate board and executive team.

When does he start?
Cyrus will officially begin on October 16, 2023, but has graciously and enthusiastically agreed to participate in several stakeholder events before this date. We will make a public announcement on September 18. Todd Johnson, Activate's interim CEO, will officially step down and return to his role on Activate's board of directors on October 15.

What will he do in the first 90 days?
Cyrus plans to listen and learn in the early months of his appointment, keen to fully understand our unique culture and excellence.