

SOCIAL IMPACT ACCELERATOR

SUPPORTING ASPIRATIONAL SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS ACROSS THE NORTH OF ESSEX

Accelerators are normally associated with the world of for-profit technology-based businesses seeking large amounts of investment in the form of equity. They are often calibrated in terms of deal success (amount raised) and the time it takes to achieve this; they are rarely spoken of as a deep learning experience full of intensive education and supportive of socially impactful businesses. Generally, they are defined as “a fixed-term, cohort-based program for startups, including mentorship and/or educational components, that culminates in a graduation event” (Bergmann and Utikal, 2021).

The one-dimensional perspective, therefore, limits participation beyond this target group. The accelerator model needs to be more appropriate and attainable for businesses operating in the social and ecological impact arenas, despite an eagerness to achieve substantial and scalable outcomes.

A misconception which needs correcting. Redesigning an accelerator programme to educate entrepreneurs in developing sustainable business models (SBM) that are accountable to a triple bottom line of planet, people and profit will lead to the attainment of the UN SDG and the 2030 objectives. Social impacts businesses that engage with a social impact accelerator (SIA), one designed to provide deep learning opportunities supported by mentoring services and access to the necessary capital, including human, social, and financial as well as ecological, will benefit. Participation in such a programme increases the chance of achieving sustainable growth that benefits the region; it also adds a degree of security for the funders in seeing an impact that directly targets their measures of success.

The probability is that those businesses participating will already have some clarity about the social and ecological impact they seek to make. Ideally, some will not, and then the aim is to educate and convert these into a new way of thinking. Social entrepreneurs often demonstrate asymmetric priorities, focusing primarily on the good they do. This myopic approach leads to tunnel vision, and not engaging with the economics of the situation leads to financial instability. The social and ecological implications outweigh economics which is the current driver of a scalable solution.

Their existing business models will likely be highly transactional, full of grant-based funding support for the discrete delivery of specific projects, and not designed to deliver an ecosystem of revenues. The value chain will be unexplored for opportunities, and the inability to translate the entire value offered into the asking price will increase customers' resistance to pay. Our SIA addresses the need to overcome any resistance to buying, explores the value chain to maximise opportunities and develops a mindset to welcome collaborative opportunities, delivering more value and a greater impact.

It is how we overcome the cost-of-living crisis, the uncertainty that plagues any business, and the pricing pressures we will all face.

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Accelerators are normally short-term programmes funded through equity or fees paid upfront upon successful funding. Our model looks to support the delivery through sponsorship and membership, and when it is appropriate, we will seek a small equity stake. The benefit of taking a small stake is that it fosters accountability, educates a newly formed board on how investors impact a business and do so in a non-aggressive and collaborative way.

The design of the SIA is based on years of experience in the world of innovation across multiple industries. It has been informed through our delivery to the university students and facilitating workshops for the enterprise agencies whilst supporting the regional micro-business community. Our thinking is constantly updated through direct feedback from previous cohorts and empirical research, attracting much attention as a new business support area.

The SIA is our primary means of supporting micro-businesses on the growth journey; it is cohort-based, shared learning and practical, leading to a new set of resources.

The programme is designed to run over two months and culminates in a pitch or showcase event.

They are designed for businesses exploring ways to include the triple bottom line into their business models. Normally, a qualifying business would have existed between 12 and 24 months, but starters seeking to develop a competitive advantage or companies facing stagnation that want to explore new growth drivers whilst adhering to the sustainability agenda.

There are three ways a business can create an approach to the shared value model espoused by Porter and Kramer (2011); that is, a business model marries together social and economic returns in a potent union rather than individual, independent components, where one outcome dominates another. According to the research, the three ways are:

1. The reconceiving products and services and the role they play in their market
 2. The redefinition of productivity by considering the entire value chain
 3. Focusing on the enablement and development of local clusters
- (Kramer and Porter, 2011)

The design of our SIA programme builds capacity and competence in each way resulting in the development of an actionable, Sustainable Business Model. The programme will deliver a series of workshops that address the following areas of entrepreneurial activity, framed in the following ways.

- a. **Opportunity Exploration** – what products/services can we deliver to create the greatest impact for society and the business? Is it desirable in terms of customer benefits, socially aligned to the values of the customer and dedicated to the regeneration of global resources?
- b. **Opportunity Design** – how can I take what has been discovered and invent new ways of engaging with a value chain in pursuit of the SBM? Is what we imagine feasible

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- regarding available resources and viable so that the benefits outweigh the costs and the value created can be articulated potently?
- c. **Opportunity Delivery** – How can we best deliver the SBM, test it and bring the social innovation to life? Does the execution of the plan still measure up in terms of the feasibility and viability for the planet, people, and profit?
 - d. **The Expression of the Opportunity** – what can we monitor to measure progress? Who and what technologies are available to help us to create efficiencies, become more effective and communicate more clearly? How can we construct a pitch deck that captures the plan and roadmap and makes a compelling argument to gain investment or buy-in?

Attendees will be asked to complete a questionnaire at the start. It will be designed to judge the status of their entrepreneurial self-efficacy (ESE) and test their confidence and belief in socially entrepreneurial behaviours. Each cohort will be hosted on a Slack channel to facilitate engagement and provide links to resources and chances to discuss aspects of the learning. A routine of homework and preparation will enhance participation in online education. The start of each event will involve a short pitch with feedback that will allow the development of a unique vocabulary for the business to evolve and for the business owners to grow in confidence and communicate with purpose and passion. Social impact business development, case studies and examples of the companies achieving success will be shared during the months as webinars and content will be disseminated. This will act as motivation and aspiration for their endeavours. Each event will be recorded, and the edited content will be made available for each cohort via the platform. The sessions are three hours and occur bi-weekly, allowing for soak time and work to be done by the team.

Curriculum Design

Session #1 Monday 30th of January, 09:30 to 12:30

Overview of the programme and a chance for all attendees to familiarise themselves with each other and make an initial pitch. We will then focus on the business as a system and how we can use the Business Model Canvas, Design Thinking and value chain mapping to engage with the organisation systemically. We will use a case study of an active and successful social impact business to cement some of these ideas.

Homework will be set.

Webinar #1 Thursday 9th of February, 18:00 to 19:00 – a discussion on vision and road mapping the strategy

Session #2 Monday 13th of February, 09:30 to 12:30

The importance of purpose in driving the system and the role of leadership in The session will look at a strategy to increase value through the value chain utilising and growing partnerships. We will also look at what a 21st-century brand looks like, the importance of the four pillars and how we can start and continue to work on each element. This will culminate in building a brand story with work on storyboarding the narrative.

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Homework – produce a BMC for the business and share this on Slack. Work through one area of the canvas and use the SIW to demonstrate how you can modify the current situation to be a more socially impactful SBM.

Webinar #2 Thursday, 23rd of February, 18:00 to 19:00 – Forecasting and projecting from the past

Session #3 – Monday 27th of February, 09:30 to 12:30

The next development area is social impact reporting, innovation accounting and the business's ecological footprint. We will discuss a model of shared value and use a case study to explore how others are doing it. We will also look at different social impact business models as templates and think through the potential revenue structures with which the business could engage. This session will focus on some of the financial aspects of the model and how they tie in with the social and ecological nature of what we do.

Homework – choose a persona of someone you already service, map their customer journey, and produce a VPC for them. Now select an entirely new persona and repeat the exercise – share on Slack.

Webinar #3 – Thursday, 9th of March, 18:00 to 19:00 – Social Funding – some options to attract funding from multiple sources

Session #4 – Monday 13th of March, 09:30 to 12:30

Bringing the pitch together – we will review the pitch deck and ensure we have covered the primary areas of interest. This will include the presentation of the financials, forecasts, arguments and road maps.

Homework – design a one-page strategy document (Napkin Pitch) describing what needs and what benefits your community will have. Identify a community you belong to; how could you improve your community? Create a VPC for the community and complete a BMC to show what it would take to engage with it.

Webinar #4 – Thursday, 23rd of April, 18:00 to 19:00 – Pitch Perfect – some tips and advice on how to present your idea in the best light

Final Event – Week 14

This will be an evening event and a networking opportunity. Ideally, we would deliver this as a physical event where businesses pitch directly to a panel of investors. If funding allows, this would be the preferred choice; if not, we can create a showcase event using the available technology.

Each pitch would be supported by a pitch deck and last seven minutes. There would then be a Q&A session for eight minutes, where the panellists could ask the business for more explanation and greater depth if required.

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The event would be attended by businesses and be an open event to garner maximum exposure for ACT, the sponsors, the companies, and The Weave. Press would be invited, and the primary stakeholders of the North Essex ecosystem, including academics and students.