PIE Cookbook Documentation

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PIE

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Contents

CHAPTER 1

PIE Cookbook

An open source guide to starting and managing your own early stage startup accelerator — or any accelerator, for that matter.

Thank you to all of our Kickstarter backers and all of our alums, mentors, contributors, sponsors, patrons, and staff for making this possible.

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Preface

> It's hard for people to realize now how inconsequential YC seemed at the time. I can't blame people who didn't take us seriously, because we ourselves didn't take that first summer program seriously in the very beginning. But as the summer progressed we were increasingly impressed by how well the startups were doing.... When people came to YC to speak at the dinners that first summer, they came in the spirit of someone coming to address a Boy Scout troop. By the time they left the building they were all saying some variant of "Wow, these companies might actually succeed."

- Paul Graham, How Y Combinator Started

This cookbook all began simply enough. As a way of formalizing the mechanics and processes of the PIE program. In case one of us, as the euphemism goes, got hit by a bus. Painfully.

But once we started working on it. And building it out. We realized that we were actually beginning to scratch the surface of something much larger. Something far more compelling.

What we had hit upon — unbeknownst to us at the time — was a framework for anyone, anywhere to start building a startup accelerator.

Or, perhaps even more generically, a way for people to accelerate creative output.

As with framework, we were curious as to whether what we had built would have value for others. Was it repeatable? Where were our blind spots? Could others improve upon our initial learnings? Suffice it to say, we had tons of questions.

So drawing on our Portland open source roots, we began to think of this as something bigger than PIE. And what better way to enable folks from all communities to join us in taking on that challenge than to open source the document? An open invitation for others to provide feedback and insights for the greater good. And a starting point — a baseline — from which we could continue to iterate, test, and revise much as we would with any startup. Or experiment.

Because the best thing about experiments is that whether you succeed or fail you always, always, always learn something.

Welcome to the PIE Cookbook.

Open Source

We are releasing this information as an open source project for a reason. Because we want this to be a conversation.

This isn't a broadcast or soliloquy. It's a collaboration among communities. That's why it is equally important that your provide feedback. What was helpful? What worked? What didn't work? What was complete malarkey? Where was PIE's experience a matter of timing and luck, rather than repeatable? How did you do things differently?

> "So with the PIE Cookbook, getting the chance to actually help lead an open source project…? That's been a long time coming for me. I'm looking forward to learning—and probably making some mistakes. But no matter what, I'm really interested in seeing where the community takes this project."

- Unnecessarily proprietary

Caveats

I have always been a fan of books that start with a caveat or two. Because inevitably, you, gentle reader, have just started down this path. And given that you've already started to get a feel for where this is going, you're inevitably jumping to the question: Is this book for me?

The answer is yes. But with a few caveats.

1) This is not a problem technology can solve.

If technology could solve this problem, we would have built it. Trust us. But it can't. This isn't about algorithms or dynamically connecting dots. This is about getting to know people. And what makes them tick. And what pisses them off. And what scares them. This is about seeing non-obvious connections. It is about using what artists refer to as "negative space." Finding opportunity in what is absent or invisible.

> Negative space, in art, is the space around and between the subject(s) of an image. Negative space may be most evident when the space around a subject, not the subject itself, forms an interesting or artistically relevant shape, and such space occasionally is used to artistic effect as the "real" subject of an image.
>
> The use of negative space is a key element of artistic composition. The Japanese word "ma" is sometimes used for this concept, for example in garden design.

- "Negative space" in Wikipedia

So if you're looking for a way to throw technology at the problem and avoid the messy feels and stuff, it's probably best to stop reading here and starting to search the web for what you think you need.

2) This is not a scalable solution.

This is the very reason we're not seeking to stamp out a ton of cookie cutter versions of PIE. Because our way of doing this doesn't scale. Well, that and "cookie cutter" and "PIE" is a mixed metaphor. We don't believe you can recreate what we created to solve Portland, Oregon's technology startup problem late in the first decade of this century. Nor would we want you to.

It's not that we haven't tried. We have. But each time, it comes out differently. Because the community the each accelerator model supports needs it to be different.

Again, if your hope is to find some easily repeatable way of doing this, the way is shut. It was made by those who are communities. And the communities keep it. The way is shut.

3) This is not an efficient solution.

Given the first two caveats, it is appropriate to assume the third — and potentially most obvious — caveat, that one of how time consuming this is. It doesn't scale. There are no technology shortcuts. It takes time. But none of it is wasted. Even if you're making mistakes. Because it is through that process of trying, iterating, changing, and learning that you will manage to build the best accelerator for your community — no matter what that community happens to be.

4) Be intentional

So much of what occurs in an accelerator environment appears to happen organically and dynamically. But appearances, as they say, can be deceiving. And can belie all of the prior effort that has been invested prior to the accelerator environment.

To be successful, you must be intentional. And work with the intent of making stuff happen. Not just letting stuff happen.

5) This is not about creating a community

With the PIE Cookbook, we have to start with a series of assumptions about you and your community. These assumptions are:

- You are already part of a well defined community.
- You have a relevant role in that community.
- You have identified an opportunity for an Accelerator within that community.

With these assumptions in mind, please understand that we may lightly touch on community management and development from time to time. However, the PIE Cookbook is not designed to educate you on how communities are defined, built, and maintained. This guide is a resource for helping existing communities take build Accelerators to support their members.

PIE as an example

> My hope is that you do not view the use of Boulder here as "Boulder tooting its own horn." I use Boulder as an example of a lasting and vibrant startup community because I know it extremely well (at least one segment). This approach is called synecdoche, where the part stands for the whole. There are many things the Boulder startup community can do better and many more for it to discovers we continue on our journey; my hope is that by exploring it in depth it helps you with your journey in your startup community.

- Brad Feld in Startup Communities

Throughout this book, you'll find us using PIE as an example. I mean, I guess it makes sense. It's the accelerator we know best. But please keep in mind that references to PIE are meant to serve as that and only that. An example.

It's not doctrine. Or specific direction. Or maybe even the right way to do things. In fact, we'll highlight — on any number of occasions — how it was absolutely not the right way to do things.

Please don't think that we're purporting to have the only recipe for an accelerator. Because we don't. And if that's what you're hoping to get out of this book, then you should probably stop reading right now.

Because there are plenty of ways for you to start an accelerator based solely on someone else's model. And there are any number of successful accelerators that have programs to help you do this. There are also any number of curricula available for purchase that will arm you to deliver their prescribed way of learning.

And there's absolutely nothing wrong with taking those paths to an accelerator. For many, that is the only viable way of effectively achieving the goals they are trying to meet.

But that's not what this book is designed to do. Far from it.

What this book is designed to do is quite simple. We're going to teach you to fish.

We simply wanted to provide some contextual evidence for our learnings at PIE, the majority of which will be purely anecdotal. This is a conceit to bring our theoretical guidance into more tactical applications. And to prove to you that we screwed up a lot, made a ton of mistakes, and got lucky in any number of ways.

And it's important to note that we have realized these concepts not only in the context of early stage technology startups. Yes, we've spent the majority of our time and learning applying these techniques to early stage tech startups. But we've also experimented with these techniques on nonprofits, open source projects, and solo founders. We've applied these techniques to more traditional creative pursuits. We've even had opportunities to test these processes on internal employee teams as a means of driving innovation throughout large corporations.

Long story short, there are any number of ways to apply the concepts of trust, pressure, and mentorship to any number of creative pursuits. To accelerate creative output.

But our context for this experimentation has always been PIE. And in order for PIE to make sense as a point of reference, you need to understand a little bit of the history of the organization. And also recognize that, much like you, we started by simply taking what others were doing, using that as a framework for something different, and iterating from there.

While we'll get into specific elements of the program, its composition, and its multiple iterations throughout the book, here is some grounding in where this whole thing started.

No interest in building a startup accelerator like PIE? Good.

Our motivation to share the PIE Cookbook isn't to convince you to recreate PIE. It's to inspire you to create something new—and better.

I was having a conversation with a friend, recently. Given that we're both startup types, the topic of conversation eventually gravitated to the PIE Cookbook project.

His response? An unadulterated "Meh."

I paused.

I mean, he's a serial entrepreneur. He's been mentored. He's been a mentor. He's seen a bunch of startups. He's currently working for a startup—*that went through an accelerator*.

Why wasn't this concept super interesting to him?

The reason—it didn't take me long to realize—is because **the thought of starting some also-ran tech startup accelerator isn't terribly interesting to *most* people these days**.

And then it dawned on me. The idea of convincing others to build some preconceived, generic tech accelerator hosting a hodgepodge of startups, in this day and age, **wasn't even a concept that motivated or interested me**.

Furthermore, it occurred to me as we continued the conversation that we, as PIE, had just assumed—or taken for granted—that our true motivations for creating the *PIE Cookbook* were obvious. And that our hopes for this next phase of the ongoing experiment were clear.

They're not.

So let's be clear. **Inspiring the creation of a bunch of generic startup accelerators is not—at all—how we hope people will use the *PIE Cookbook*.** Trust us.

But at first blush, I realize that's *exactly* what it looks like we were trying to do. And with this new vantage, I recognize how our prevailing assumptions, today's startup rat race, and our lack of clarity may lead to a very flawed first impression of the *PIE Cookbook*.

That's our fault. So I'd like to ask you to **please take a moment to look deeper.**

PIE is actually an experiment in accelerating creativity When Renny reached out to me to start the conversation that would eventually become PIE, he had one very clear hypothesis he was interested in testing:

> Entrepreneurs and technologists are a new creative class, and their problem-solving toolkit will be increasingly important to solve the emerging brand challenges we tackle at Wieden+Kennedy. But words and images don't always seem to play well with code. And folks great at one craft may not recognize another as "creative." But in a world of distributed software and hardware, it's important to find ways to work together. Entrepreneurs and technologists are inspired creatives who've chosen technology as their medium for creative expression. We should be able to find ways to do cool stuff, together.

And that hypothesis has remained a guiding principle for PIE for nearly a decade. First as a coworking space then as a startup accelerator then as a means of effecting more compelling collaborations between corporations and startups. But through and through, we've always been about **creating innovation communities** and **accelerating creative output**.

The PIE Cookbook is no different.

It's your job to improve upon the learnings from PIE With that in mind, **please don't try to recreate PIE**. In fact, we would hate for you to do that. This is your opportunity to build something different. And better.

This is about rolling up your sleeves and getting your hands dirty. Making this model yours. Experimenting, manipulating, iterating, exploring, and improving.

The world needs more variety—not less. And together, we all get better.

Therefore, we'd like to ask: How might the PIE learnings be adapted to meet your community's needs?

Maybe you could…

- Use the PIE learnings to create an environment that focuses on companies engaged in services-based businesses—read "not candidates for equity investment." Maybe you could create ways to better meet their unique business needs? And maybe you could create entirely new ways of investing in and evaluating these companies? You could. Because that's exactly what **Oregon Story Board** is doing with the PIE recipe, as it accelerates companies in the world of digital storytelling. All of which enabled them to be among Carnegie Mellon, Dartmouth, UC Berkeley, and Virginia Tech as an early stage grantee for Microsoft HoloLens.
- Leverage the PIE model to focus on issues that are adversely impacting your community. Like lack of inclusion. And ineffective support for women founders. Maybe you could use it to raise the visibility of a whole ton of awesome founders from communities of color? Maybe this effort could be part of a broader economic plan to make your entire community a better place to live? You could. Because that's how the Portland Development Commission is adapting the PIE recipe to guide and accelerate companies in the **Startup PDX Challenge**.
- Identify the compelling knowledge and resources your community has accumulated. And look for ways to activate that knowledge by using an a PIE-flavored accelerator to focus that energy. That expertise could be geographical. It could be cultural. It could be the business environment, itself. You could. Because that's exactly what the town of Newberg, Oregon—the gateway to the Willamette Valley wine country—is doing with the **Chehalem Valley Innovation Accelerator**, a project that will focus efforts on agricultural technology projects and businesses that directly impact the wine industry.
- Use the PIE insights as means of changing the way employees approach, attack, and resolve problems *within* a corporation. You could bring a cross-functional team of folks from throughout the company to a shared communal workspace that resembles an accelerator. To work for three months on an entrenched problem, free from the typical approval cycles and sacred cows of corporate life. To get them out of the building and get them engaged with real customers. To hear, firsthand, how they can fix things. You could. Because that's exactly what **Daimler** did with their SPIN program, by using the PIE recipe to create an internal accelerator. For employees.
- Or maybe you could **come up with something completely unique**. Maybe you could use the PIE Cookbook to build new curricula at a college. Or to create a nonprofit accelerator. Or to change the dynamic of an R&D shop. Or to rethink craft brewing. Or to create agencies. Or to help Kickstarter projects survive, post funding. Or to change the world of VR. Or to help bloggers build better business models. Or to give artists an environment to

> create. Or to help a diverse slice of indie game developers change the face of gaming. Or to build a maker space. Or to help lifestyle companies succeed more efficiently. Or or or or...

The point is that the PIE Cookbook is designed **to inspire you to do something**. To help you frame up your organization, your community, and yourself. To give you a pattern for what success might look like. And how to budget for chaos, random constructive collisions, and innovation. **To get creative. Not repetitive.**

The PIE Cookbook is designed to help provide a framework and some confidence. To give you courage. To provide suggestions and inspiration. It's designed to help you understand—or to educate your superiors—that it's actually okay to try this stuff. To show them it's not just *acceptable* to participate, but it's exciting and critical to survival as well. **The PIE Cookbook is our way of telling you to step off that cliff and go for it.**

Not interested in building a generic tech startup accelerator? Good. Please don't. **Go do something more interesting than that.**

And, by all means, please keep us in the loop. We're looking forward to learning from—and with—you.

Motivations

It seems a lot of folks want to build an accelerator to somehow create a startup community from scratch. Unfortunately, that's not really how this thing works.

An accelerator can attract a community. An accelerator can codify a community. An accelerator can even import a community. But an accelerator has to have a community.

Building an accelerator is not a means of creating a community from scratch. Building an accelerator is a means of accelerating or capitalizing on the momentum of an existing community, identifying and enabling community leaders, and providing infrastructure for supporters and contributors to engage, thereby enabling all parties, throughout the community, to focus everyone's efforts to the greatest benefit — and highest likelihood of success — for that community.

The best accelerators spring up from communities. Great communities can form around accelerators, but they need a seed community from which to spring.

If you don't have an existing community, keep this in mind when you're deciding on the focus of your accelerator. Because if you don't have a community then your accelerator needs to be attractive enough to recruit a community around it.

Understanding — and working within — the existing culture of the community

Every accelerator needs a community. Every community does not need an accelerator.

Communities exist on a spectrum. Some communities don't even realize that they're communities. Others are a loosely assembled group of individuals who identify with peers and members of their community through a feeling of commonality and affinity, even though they lack definition, infrastructure, and process for formalizing that community. Still other communities are well defined, organized, and managed as communities.

When it comes to accelerators, no one type of community has a particular advantage over any other. They all have their respective pros and cons.

Amorphous and nebulous communities, for example, have the benefit of needing the structure accelerators bring to a community. That's an upside. No pre-existing conditions or competition or toes on which to step. That's awesome. On the downside, these ill defined communities are — well — ill defined. As such, they don't have easily accessible resources into which an accelerator can immediately tap. The onus, therefore, is on the accelerator to create these assets and resources from scratch.

Conversely, a well established community — on the upside — could have a wealth of infrastructure and programmatic elements which can be leveraged by an accelerator. While on the downside, it may have pre-existing and well established players, organizations, and cultural mores that prevent an accelerator from being as effective as it can be — without spending significant political capital to navigate the existing infrastructure.

See? Pros and cons. No community is perfect.

What we're saying is that the community doesn't have to be a certain kind of community to support the concept of an accelerator. It simply has to exist. As a community. Even if the members of said community are still not fully cognizant of the community's existence or their inclusion therein.

If you, as the accelerator perceive something that behaves like community — no matter how ill defined — then there's enough there to begin.

Accelerators function within communities

Accelerators can be a means of bringing an existing — but nebulous and ill defined — community together. Or accelerating the momentum of an organized community.

But make no mistakes. Accelerators are not a means of creating a community from scratch. And this is an assumption that most people make. Many potential accelerator founders are enamored of the concept of creating an accelerator that will somehow result in the creation of an amazing and vibrant community. It's actually the converse that is true.

Community first. Accelerator second.

To be successful, you must work within the context and culture of your existing community. You're not going to be successful trying to build something that flies in the face of the community in which you're trying to build it.

Current state of accelerators

While PIE will speak from its vantage point on its experience as coworking space, a community hub, and an early stage tech startup accelerator, the PIE Cookbook is not meant to be tech specific. Nor is it meant to be a guide that only applies to startups.

We believe that the accelerator model is a powerful and efficient educational construct to can be applied to a variety of markets, businesses, and communities.

We believe that no one has perfected it yet. So you should feel free to adapt and revise it as you see fit.

We believe that the accelerator market is currently like the search engine market pre-Google. There are lots of well meaning people sort of doing things right but no one has really hit upon a repeatable and successful formula for doing this.

Remember pre-Google Web? Well if you don't, suffice it to say that there were a few choices for searching the Web, back in the day. Like hundreds. And no single one had significant traction. Mostly because they were all variations on a theme. Some were directories. Some were aggregators. Some were really, really smart algorithms. Many of them were wildly successful at the time. But none of them had really nailed the way to find the most relevant information on the Web. That's kind of where we are with accelerators, today. And I'm hopeful that getting more smart people thinking about the model will help us find a better way of doing this. For everyone.

Using higher education as an analogy, accelerators have our Harvard and Stanford. We have our Oxford. But where our state schools? Our small private liberal arts colleges? Where are our vocational schools and community colleges? We haven't even begun to scratch the surface for this educational model.

As far as accelerators go, we have our Ivy Leagues and our Stanford, but we have barely begun to scratch the surface for this educational model. Where is the Georgia Tech of accelerators? Where is the RISD? Where is the Reed or Whitman? Better yet, where is the state school or community college or junior college? Where is the vocational school of accelerators? There's still plenty of room to explore this educational model. We have a long way to go before we've even leveraged the existing model, let alone begun to inflate the bubble.

Spoiler alert

This document is full of "spoiler alerts," things that PIE has learned over the course of time. In most every case, it may not be wise — or downright foolhardy — to start where PIE ended. You should start where PIE started. And try to end where you want to end.

There is inherent value in the journey, itself.

Attempting to start an accelerator without an existing community is a recipe, too. It's a recipe for disaster.

Accelerators don't start communities. Communities start accelerators.

Your accelerator should be a reflection of your community — or the community you want to attract.

In other words, don't try to build an accelerator that doesn't have a target community.

For PIE, that target community was the startup community that was beginning to form in Portland. It was the combination of the open source community, a nascent group of early stage companies who were seeking assistance and capital, and a group of experienced startup folks who were looking for a means of giving back to the community. Folks who were willing to share their expertise if only there were a means of doing that.

- It's a means of catalyzing existing community
- Be honest about your community
- You can only work with what you've got
- You have to start with the ingredients your community has, but you don't need to follow the existing community momentum
- You're allowed to bring different ingredients into the community, but the initial activity must start with existing assets
- Some of your community assets may have never combined before (e.g., Portland startup community and W+K), but they're still both assets to be considered

It is incredibly difficult to do virtual communities well. Not loosely affiliated social networks. Clearly folks have managed to do that. But communities. Actual interacting and collaborating communities. Groups of people who share common interests, work toward common goals, and support one another.

In our experience, this kind of activity does not happen out in the ether. It happens somewhere. Physically and personally. Community, we believe, needs a place.

And this has come into sharp relief as we've moved away from PIE being a physical presence. We've learned that not having a physical space has actually weakened our ability to scale and the strength of our connections. The more we rely on virtual, the more it makes it difficult to accomplish the things our community needs.

Long story short, we greatly underestimated the positive impact and community benefits of having an actual physical place. That's why we're working to correct that. To return to PIE being less virtual and more physical. Because our community needs that physical space.

Community, then accelerator

Attempting to start an accelerator without an existing community is a recipe, too. It's a recipe for complete failure. For that reason, we'll cover ways to discover, identify, engage with, and collaborate with your community prior to beginning your accelerator effort.

Just enough

You can go too far.

- In design
- In environment
- In structure
- In goals
- In trying to over architect the experience
- In over planning and under participating

This is meant to be a little messy.

There is no pause button

Once you start, you cannot stop. Ever.

How to use this cookbook

Like many cookbooks, there's no one way to use this book. But we have designed it with two particular use cases in mind:

1. If you are intrigued by the idea of starting an accelerator but have absolutely no idea where to start — or, worse yet, are paralyzed by a fear of failure that's preventing you from taking the leap — this book will guide you step-by-step through the iterations that PIE followed, highlighting mistakes we made along the way and culminating with the process we use to run our accelerator today.
2. If you have already started an accelerator but are feeling like you could be doing better, this book will allow you to jump to sections that apply to specific areas of your program that you're looking to improve.

Like any cookbook, this book provides the instructions that worked for PIE. They may or may not work for your organization. And your special adaptations are what make the recipe work for you.

With that in mind, it is our intention to:

- Arm you with enough knowledge to be dangerous. And to break things.
- Give you enough insight into our process for you to internalize it, change it, and create your own way of doing things.
- Encourage you to communicate back to us what worked and what didn't. So that we can create a more compelling cookbook for everyone that is just as crazy as we are.

Jump around as needed. Choose your own adventure.

This isn't a book you read cover to cover. Some of this will seem obvious to you. If it is? Skip it. Sometimes you'll need to start later in the book and work your way backwards.

Start with what you have. Go from there.

CHAPTER 3

History of PIE

We are providing the PIE history as an example or parable, not a step-by-step, cookie cutter process for you to follow to achieve the same ends.

It is important to note that, like many things in the world of startups, PIE worked at a moment in time, because of the people involved, and the way the world happened to be going in Portland, Oregon, with open source, technology, startups, blogging, and creative agencies.

To put it another way, the way PIE came into being and worked would likely not work if we tried to do the same thing today. Too many things have changed. There is no way to recreate those random collisions of things. Or to recreate that period in time.

That said, your community is likely at a different place. Maybe there are similarities to our experience or moment in time. Maybe there are companies or individuals we'll reference in the PIE Cookbook who remind you of someone in your community.

Whatever the case, we are hopeful that our history with PIE provides reference points that allow you to better identify — and take advantage of — potential opportunities in your community, today.

Beginnings

PIE began as a collaborative experiment between award-winning, global advertising firm Wieden+Kennedy and the Portland high-tech startup community. Now, PIE has evolved into an intensive three-month mentorship program designed to identify, recruit, capitalize, accelerate, and promote early stage high-tech startups which are highly efficient with investment capital, establish corporate headquarters in Oregon, create high paying jobs for Oregonians, and raise the visibility of the state on an international stage.

The PIE model has been tested, refined, and proven over a three-year period. During that time, the program has fostered the growth of companies that have attracted more than $50 million in venture capital and created more than 150 Oregon jobs with wages averaging nearly double the baseline of the average Oregon family wage of $40,486. In addition, PIE has had the opportunity to work with corporations like Intel, Target, Coca-Cola, and Google raising the visibility of both the State of Oregon and its innovative technology community to international acclaim.

Like the startups the program serves, PIE is extremely efficient with capital. All activity to date has been accomplished with minimal capital investment. This is thanks in part to the creative efforts of the PIE team to leverage volunteer resources, actively seek and secure in-kind contributions, and create and manage additional revenue-generating programs beyond its incubation activities.

A melding of hypotheses

> Portland, Oregon, boasts more microbreweries, restaurants, food carts, batch distilleries, mobile startups, and open source user groups per capita than any city in the world. Some call it the most entrepreneurial city, ever. It's determined to be the most green, friendly, sustainable, bike commutable, soccer loving, and livable town you'll ever encounter. And if that's not good enough for you, it's 90 minutes from the ocean and 90 minutes from skiing and snowboarding, year round.
>
> But most importantly, it's the best place in the world for you to build your startup dream into a reality. To make your startup work. To make it.

- PIE, circa 2011

So I guess you're wondering. . . what on earth motivated the largest privately held — and exceptionally successful — creative agency in the world to start mucking around in the world of startups?

Well, this whole crazy experiment started quite simply. With a hypothesis.

It's a hypothesis that **founders** — be they executives, developers, designers, or any combination there of — **are simply another form of creative**. No different than someone who paints or writes or shoots film. A creative who, instead of words and images, has chosen technology as a medium for expression.

And like any creative, they need space to create.

And in having a space — actual physical space — you have the opportunity to put people in that space. To put those disparate groups of creatives within close proximity to one another. And in so doing, you create the opportunity for random collisions. And serendipity. From the collisions come collaborations and friction and conflict and resolution. Resulting in interesting outcomes. And demonstrating significant impact.

But what attracted the startup community to participate in the project? Well, startups are opportunistic. Tentative but opportunistic. Quick to capitalize. But slow to trust.

And the startup community came to the table with a hypothesis of their own. That the community had the opportunity to "Build better founders." To share knowledge and support one another. To provide a framework for mentors to engage with those who needed mentorship. To collaborate and share skill sets.

So we took those complementary hypotheses and started testing them. Carving off a little corner in a building full of disparate creatives driven by a willingness to experiment and collaborate — and potential fail.

Our hope was that by building better founders and enabling creatives to collide, we had the potential to artificially accelerate the startup community in Portland. And to make it easier to build a company in the city that had long been seen as a flyover town between the larger, more active startup scenes in the Bay Area and Seattle.

A timeline

The PIE accelerator, unbeknownst to us, started in 1995, 15 years before PIE officially became an accelerator. It started when members of the startup community started careers and built networks of peers in the dotcom days. Where classmates at our universities explored technology together. Where agencies and creative community grew in strength and numbers. Where companies had been founded and demolished. Where the open source community had created connections and collaborations.

It took all of those things — and a growing sense of community — to start conversations. Conversations about "What if. . . ?" What is the community had a collaborative workspace? What if there were a way for the community to have a more physical and tangible presence? What if we had a community hub that gave more gravity to what we sensed was happening?

But communicating that need to others was challenging. No one built startups in Portland, Oregon. Maybe food carts. But not tech startups.

This wasn't even perceived as a problem. It wasn't pervasive. There weren't a ton of people who agreed with that viewpoint.

It was a non-obvious problem. And equally non-obvious was the potential opportunity.

So funding the effort was going to be a challenge. And with no active early stage investor presence — coupled with the nascent community — it would be incredibly difficult to make the argument. And it was simply too much for us to bootstrap. Even as a community.

Enter Wieden+Kennedy.

Wieden+Kennedy — which we may also refer to as W+K or Wieden, throughout the PIE Cookbook — is the largest privately held creative agency in the world, perhaps best known for creative efforts such as Nike's "Just Do It" and the Old Spice Guy" among others.

The worldwide headquarters of the agency are located not in New York, Chicago, or London, but in Portland's Pearl District, where a former Fuller Brush Company warehouse holds more than 500 of their employees. The remainder of their creative talent lives around the world, gathering in offices in Amsterdam, Delhi, London, New York, Sao Paulo, Shanghai, and Tokyo.

And in 2009 — thanks to economic doldrums and a horrible real estate market — W+K had an empty retail space sitting vacant on the first floor.

The project didn't even have a name at the time. It was just "the startup thing at 1227 NW Davis Street." It would be come to known as the Portland Incubator Experiment or more commonly as "PIE," a collaboration between members of the Portland tech startup community and Wieden+Kennedy.

I can still remember the handful of us, standing in a small circle, on the empty concrete of 3500 cavernous and columned square feet of potential.

source/images/PIE-sketch-2009.jpg

We've talked to any number of people who are overly concerned with the space. Or its appointments. We're firm believers that you work with what you've got.

We had a former retail space that had been gutted. So it was huge columns, a concrete floor, high ceilings, and a cryptic set of light switches we never really figured out how to operate.

source/images/pie-light-switches-xolotl.jpg

It was raw. And unfinished. And difficult.

It was perfect.

Now, we just had to fill it with interesting people.

It was a rag tag crew. But we all had one thing in common: we were doing things. Not talking about things. Actually doing things. Not necessarily things that made money. But making things. Building things. And trying to actually get stuff done. All of us commonly driven by the frustration that Portland had a tendency to be a town where untold hours could be spent talking about what needed to happen or what opportunities existed. And then would talk about it some more. And then more.

Without ever actually doing anything.

And that became the primary selection criteria for the coworking space when people approached us. “What are you building?”

> Why are we doing this? Because we don’t have all the answers. Because we believe that the people who collaborate to innovate will win. And innovation is core to the business at W+K and for our brand partners. The brand and technology mentors that have come together around PIE, the ability to scale an idea across multiple brands with massive reach and off-the-chart awareness scores, interaction with other startups and W+K involvement is something you can’t get anywhere else but here, and that’s the result of a lot of people who believe PIE represents something truly unique, both for the industry and for Portland.
>
> “Filling in some more details on PIE” Silicon Florist (July 28, 2011)

It started, quite simply, as a coworking space for a handful of people from the Portland tech and startup community. Not all were tech startup founders. Some were just solitary outposts for companies like Twitter or Kickstarter. Others were building small consultancies. A handful of folks were building tech companies.

But they were all doing something.

There were bloggers. And early stage founders. There were community builders. There were telecommuters. There were product companies. And service companies.

But they were all doing something. Not just talking. Doing.

We worked with what we had and did very little in the way of tenant improvements. W+K decorated the space with an air of startup edginess. Closet door desks on welded sawhorses. A repurposed Starbucks sign became our coffee table. Highback leather chairs from a local second hand store became our intentionally ironic conference room.

source/images/pie-highback-leather-chairs.jpg

The first winter, the heat didn’t work. So we typed away in fingerless gloves. Watching clouds of our own breath.

We were respectful of one another, but we focused on business first. And getting shit done.

Some folks would sit at their desks and take calls. Others would look for quiet corners. Or walk around the block.

There was no privacy. So when we needed it, we took calls from the stoop. Which was only slightly colder than the interior during the winter.

PIE began as a utilitarian space designed to do not only what the residents wanted, but what the community wanted. The space had an open floor plan. Which allowed the number of people to ebb and flow without needing to retool. It also enabled us to cram a bunch of folks in there when we needed. Or to tear down the space for speakers and events.

We did everything from host speakers to user groups to hackathons to inviting hundreds of folks from DjangoCon to cram into the space as part of a code sprint.

But it wasn’t just businessing. We held happy hours. We served as an art gallery on “First Thursday”s. We hosted Minecraft gatherings. Basically, we tried to make the space accessible by having a policy of allowing people to stop by whenever they wanted or needed — whether they had work to do or not.

We even cleared the space out completely early in PIE's existence to create three soundstages for a 30-hour live streamed telethon put on by members of the community.

We had watched the concept of coworking develop in the Bay Area. And took part as the concept spread to Portland and other areas. We had been participants, residents, and customers of previous spaces. But we still really didn't have any idea what might work and what would not. So we just picked price point and tried it.

At this point, W+K was providing the space gratis as part of the experiment. So any revenue generated could be used by PIE to further its objectives.

Given that we wanted the project to be communal, we decided that any revenue would go back to a general fund for PIE activities, sponsorship, and food and beverage. We would also contribute a percentage of any joint projects — some of the folks in the space could collaborate on consulting gigs — to the PIE general fund.

And we wanted rising water to float all boats. So we introduced a concept that any company started at PIE would grant 1% common stock to PIE. It was our hope that this equity would provide PIE with a means of sustaining the business over time.

From our experience with other coworking spaces, we realized that people generally charged for desks. So we started by charging $200 per desk. That quickly eroded. But that wasn't a bad thing. It was all part of the experiment.

Some startups managed to squeeze multiple people around a desk. That's just smart. And it made that $200 go a lot farther. Some were given "scholarships" to sit in PIE rent free because we believed not only in what they were building, but in the founders, themselves. And all but a few skirted the 1% equity kick in. Not because they didn't want to. But mostly because we didn't enforce it very strongly — or even do a good job of communicating that as an expectation.

That was our fault. Not theirs.

Wary of organizations that talked and talked and never did, PIE was designed to be a place for people who were making things. Rather than talking about them. And in that vein we wanted to accomplish something before we went public with what we were doing.

At least in theory.

What we wanted was something that helped Portland startups — and by that, we meant revenue generating ventures — get going as quickly as possible. Less a coworking space and more an incubator. Something that helped people get going and then booted the project out of the nest to fly on its own. Something Y Combinator like. Something like TechStars. And yet, something uniquely Portland.

Drawing inspiration from other programs There are a benefits to starting something after people have already tested the waters. You're getting the chance to take advantage of learnings from predecessors to inform the organization you're trying to build.

We tried to do the same thing. But when we started thinking about PIE as an accelerator, we weren't quite as lucky. Much like when we started the coworking space, there were few models from which to select — and none of them had proven whether the model would actually pencil out. (Many of them still haven't.)

So we just had to take our best guess from the available options. But unlike you with hundreds of successful accelerator programs from which to choose, we had, well, two. Those two models were still in their early existence but they made the most sense to us. And seemed most in line with what we were trying to accomplish. So we took a risk. And tried to glean as much as we could from what they were doing and apply those concepts to our program.

The two programs we chose to serve as role models were — now obvious thanks to their continued success — Y Combinator and TechStars.

Things weren't as obvious back then as they are today. There was little indication at that time that these two entities would become the juggernauts of startup acceleration that they are today.

We just got lucky.

Note: This is a recurring theme.

Looking back, we also made a decidedly important decision by accident.

You see, we knew we couldn't recreate the perceived effectiveness of either of those programs, wholesale. Because we didn't have all of the necessary components or community at our disposal. Nor were we in a region that would provide all of those elements.

So rather than selecting one program after which to pattern ourselves in a cookie-cutter fashion we chose to instead dissect each program and take only the elements which we felt best resonated with our audience — and that we had a chance of effectively emulating.

That is, it did us no good to strive to set up the program up as the onramp to the Silicon Valley elite and a bevy of investors — because we didn't have the access that would have enabled this. Instead, we took only the parts of each program we had the ingredients to effectively recreate.

It wasn't well received. Which wasn't necessarily a bad thing. But it wasn't necessarily a good thing, either. There was some appropriate cynicism. And a healthy amount of questioning. With a few folks going so far as to categorize it as some carpetbagging or war profiteering move by Wieden+Kennedy. A way of the agency capitalizing on some grassroots activity in the Portland market.

In short, the community immediately assumed that W+K was taking advantage of an opportunistic situation.

I mean, the ire was somewhat understandable. Maybe not the unmitigated hate. But at least the ire. What the hell was this global creative agency doing dabbling in the world of startups? And why the sudden interest in Portland in particular?

It didn't help that, at the time, we were shallow on facts. And didn't really have much detail to provide. Because we didn't exactly know what we were doing.

There simply wasn't much there there.

We were naive in the most rudimentary sense of the term. But we continued the experiment anyway. And we went completely dark from a promotions and public relations standpoint. Until we had something more meaningful to say.

But perhaps most importantly, W+K had not been a significant part of the Portland startup community. And their sudden and intentional engagement — although seemingly ginger from the perspective of PIE participants — still ruffled feathers.

Because W+K didn't engage the community where they were. They brought the community in. Before they were part of that community. Before the hospitality made sense.

It was a mistake. But we worked as quickly and as diligently as we could to correct it.

We invited all kinds of random folks into the space — from interesting technology people to solo founders to early stage startups to individual contributors at companies like Automattic, Kickstarter, and Twitter. Heck, we even worked with a few early stage agencies.

Just as important to the experiment we invited all kinds of people from Wieden+Kennedy to collaborate.

We also invited the community to use the space. For hackathons. For events. For meetups.

After roughly a year of observing the community, interacting with the PIE startups, observing their hardships, understanding their needs, and recognizing their opportunities, we stepped back and reassessed what we had accomplished. Or in our minds, what we had completely failed to accomplish.

And so, with the blessing and backing of W+K, PIE transitioned from coworking space to accelerator, as a means of taking a more active role in the growth and development of these promising companies.

This book documents the learnings of that journey. A journey which, as of this writing, has resulted in a portfolio of more than 40 companies which have created more than 1000 jobs and put hundreds of millions of dollars to work.

At the time, that made PIE one of the more successful startup accelerators in the world.

By sharing the learnings from PIE, we have had the opportunity to work with a number of other accelerators around the world—corporate accelerators, innovation centers, R&D shops, for-profits, nonprofits, private, public, and everything in between—all of which have their own unique ways of managing their programs.

We even took our learnings and cofounded a sister accelerator focused on the world of digital storytelling called Oregon Story Board. Story Board has served as a way for us to test our PIE learnings within a different target market. With a different type of creative. And to explore new ways of accelerating creative output.

Not bad for an experiment.

Now let's get you working on your own. And hopefully doing this whole accelerator thing way better than we have.

CHAPTER 4

Introduction

The PIE methodology has been tested, refined, and proven in Portland over an eight-year period. During that time, the program implementing that methodology has fostered the growth of a number of companies, such as AppFog, AppThwack, Cloudability, Little Bird, Lytics, Outdoor Project, Simple, Supportland/Placemaker, Switchboard, Uncorked Studios, and Urban Airship, to name a few.

Our alumni have collectively attracted hundreds of millions of dollars in venture capital and created more than 1,000 well-paying employment opportunities. Just as important, the program has helped educate a new generation of entrepreneurs — whether the businesses those entrepreneurs were originally pursuing have succeeded or not.

We firmly believe that the techniques and methods PIE has developed are a means of creating communities of trust and accelerating creative output in ways that are applicable to a vast spectrum of entrepreneurial communities.

We sincerely hope that our mistakes, happy accidents, and successes prove valuable to you and your communities as you work to build the support infrastructure that gives your entrepreneurs the best chance of success.

Welcome to the PIE Cookbook.

What this is not

Before we get into what the PIE Cookbook *is* it might be helpful to explain what the PIE Cookbook is not.

This is not about creating or managing community

As we have stated before, we are working under the assumption that you are already part of a well defined community. Furthermore, we are assuming that you, gentle reader, have a relevant role within that community — or are collaborating with folks who hold relevant roles within that community. Finally, we assume that you have identified that there is a very real need and opportunity for an Accelerator to improve and support that community.

Perhaps, you've already experimented with coworking or shared workspaces. Maybe you're already hosting events. Maybe you've been writing about the space. Or helping to make connections and strengthening the bonds within the community. Maybe you've been doing all of this.

Whatever the case, we're assuming you have a community. You may not yet completely understand the community. Or the finer points of its composition. But you know you have one. And you know it has potential.

With those assumptions in mind, it makes sense that we forego providing lengthy guidance on community development and community management in favor of focusing on the Accelerator, itself. Granted, we will lightly touch on community development from time to time. But we will try to avoid describing, in depth, how communities are defined, built, and maintained. That topic is another book — or library of books — in an of itself. And with this book, we would much rather focus on the Accelerator that serves that community.

This is not about recreating PIE

Let's make one thing clear. We're sharing the PIE Cookbook not as a roadmap, but as a starting point. The last thing we want is to inspire the creation of a bunch of generic technology startup accelerators. The world has enough of those. Trust us.

What the world needs more of are the creative applications of the accelerator process. Of individuals activating the latent value of their respective communities. Of subject matter experts sharing their wealth of knowledge — and wealth of mistakes — with new founders. Of more people making more new mistakes.

We called this the PIE Cookbook for a reason. We'll give you the base ingredients. But we expect you to make each recipe your own.

Want to start an accelerator? Don't start an accelerator

You don't get to start in the middle. You have to start at the beginning.

When we started the experiment with Wieden+Kennedy that would become PIE, we didn't set out to build an accelerator. We started with something to support the existing startup community. Something that would fill gaps that were preventing our community from growing and thriving. Something that would enable connections and random collisions and happily serendipitous events to occur.

Honestly, we just kind of stumbled into the whole "accelerator" thing. It wasn't even on our list of objectives when we started. Or part of the conversation. It's just where we wound up for a time. But oddly enough—even though we never set out to build an accelerator—we managed to build a very effective one.

This is a recurring theme that we will touch on time and time again in this book. Throughout PIE's life, we have been part of an ongoing series of happy accidents. But those accidents were expected. We designed the project to work that way. To never take itself too seriously. And to always be open to changing the recipe. Even if staying the course seemed safe and sane. We wanted to always be pushing the envelope, exploring the edges, and not getting comfortable. Because that's where some of the most interesting things happen.

You can do this too. It's not hard. And if you need help, we'll be happy to give you a nudge from time to time.

PIE is an experiment.

It started as experiment between Wieden+Kennedy and the Portland startup community to determine how established corporations and startups could work together to mutual benefit. And the project just sort of continued to cascade from there.

Well, honestly, to be more accurate, it was less an experiment in the traditional sense. It was a more a whole bunch of mistakes, failures, and missteps that happen to be punctuated — here and there — by some very happy accidents. And we have lucked our way into some things—once the timing was right and all signs pointed to an opportunity—that enabled us to solve problems for the Portland startup community. By identifying gaps and then building something to satisfy that gap. Again and again. And we're still trying to do that.

Simple, right? Well, sort of. Simple, but convoluted. So maybe give us the opportunity to be your accidental sherpa. To help you along a similarly incongruous — but beneficial — path.

But to get the best results, you have to be similarly inclined to take risks, to fail, and to misstep. Because that's what it takes. Honestly, if you're looking for a recipe that will empower you to create successful accelerator class after accelerator class using a straightforward and simple recipe, you're probably reading the wrong book. Because like the communities, startups, and entrepreneurially minded folks you're looking to help, this process is a series of best guesses and iterations. And you have to be comfortable with that.

If we had started with an accelerator, we're confident that PIE would have failed. Miserably. And that's why we're recommending that—if you're thinking about starting an accelerator—you do anything but that.

Start at the beginning

So if starting with an accelerator isn't the right place, where should folks begin? Well, if you skipped straight to the recipes, how about you go back and read the timeline of PIE's existence. Maybe it will give you some clues as to what's coming next. And maybe you'll find commonality in your community that gives you a more appropriate starting place.

Or maybe, just maybe, you'll discover that you're one of the rare few who has already done all of the legwork. One who has completed all of the prerequisites. One of those lucky few strong communities that can, in fact, dive straight into the deep end of the pool. Because they've been ramping up all along. And now you're actually ready to take on that accelerator opportunity.

Don't start patting yourself on the back yet. There's still a ton of hard work ahead of you. But you can keep reading from here. You don't have to go back.

But if you're not there yet, please do not skip ahead. Do not pass go. There is no shortcut. It takes time.

Building a startup accelerator in seven easy steps

> **tl;dr You're not starting an accelerator. You're helping to aggregate and strengthen an existing community.**

Caveat: Please do not take this document as a step-by-step roadmap to try to recreate PIE. This is just an allegory. To serve as an example of one potential path.

Step 1: Found your own company. Or at least work at a startup.

Per Brad Feld's advice in **Startup Communities**, if you're going to truly succeed in building a vibrant startup community then "the leaders have to be entrepreneurs." Not politicians. Not corporations. Not agencies. Or economic development bodies. Entrepreneurs.

With that in mind, we realize that PIE's journey started when the founders started working in startups. Sometimes as founders. Sometimes as employees of startups. But in startups.

In the trenches, as it were. Experiencing the insanity that was the dotcom days, firsthand. Being wildly optimistic time and time again about how this time it was going to pay off. How all of the stock options would actually be worth something. How we were going to change the world.

Note: No one said you had to actually be a *successful* entrepreneur. Just an entrepreneur.

On the surface, this is the price you pay for credibility.

But, more importantly, it's also this time — mired in the struggles of startups — that allows you to see the real problems and opportunities from the trenches. That provides the hindsight. That provides the what-if-ed-ness in your brain. That has rethinking every decision you ever made as a cofounder or employee or consultant.

That has you thinking like a founder.

Because it's that direct startup experience that will inform the accelerator you want to build, eventually.

I mean, you don't get to build it right now. You've got a long ways to go before that happens. But eventually. When we get closer to your time to build the accelerator. Then. That's when this experience will really help.

But in the meantime, it will really help you engage and understand your community.

Also, let's not forget the most important aspect of that accelerator you're going to build sometime in the distant future after you get through all of the recipes. After you work your fingers to the bone building value for the community. Let's not forget that it's that time working with other startup types, meeting people, and building a network of intelligent and driven folks that becomes the most critical element of this first step. Because it's those people who will provide the foundation for a broader community. A community that will be critical to your accelerator. Because these are your colleagues, mentors, advisors, investors — and more often than not, your potential applicants.

But this takes more than winning at home. It's not just local community. Because building an accelerator requires variety and diversity. It takes more than just local flavor. It takes expansive and extended networks. And a multitude of viewpoints. And getting outside of your comfort zone.

So you have to do the hard work at home. But you also have to be out and about. Visiting other regions. Figuring out how other communities work. Making interesting connections. And bringing value to your community by connecting it to communities everywhere.

So yeah. A little bit of work. But you can do it.

Step 2: Participate in the community.

The most important part of beginning to build community isn't throwing the best parties or planning the biggest events. It isn't renting a massive space and inviting everyone to join you. It isn't bringing in dignitaries from around the globe and expecting the community to rally around you.

Although you may be tempted to try all of these things.

The most important thing to do when starting to build and accelerate your intended community is to meet the existing community where it is, currently.

Maybe you don't think you have a current community. Maybe the current community isn't shaped like the community you want. Maybe you're unclear as to where this existing community gathers or communicates.

Get to work.

Because we can guarantee — whether you think there is community or not — that there is community. Tons of it. It's just not evenly distributed. It's disconnected. Broken into different factions. It's in hidden pockets, here and there. Soloed. Presenting as something different than your archetypes.

But trust us. It's there. It's already there.

And your challenge is to find it. And meet it. Where it lives.

PIE's founders attended coffee gatherings, happy hours, user groups, tech meet ups, startup discussions, open source gatherings, BarCamps, Ignites, unconferences, tradeshows, and on and on and on.

But we also did things far less organized and structured. Sometimes, we just sat in coffeeshops and struck up conversations with other laptop-wielding denizens. We talked to people both in Portland and outside of Portland. Because we needed that diverse network. And diversity of viewpoints. We tried to figure out what was going on and who was doing what.

Did we always fit in? No. Was it always successful? No. Was it clear we were getting any traction whatsoever? Absolutely not.

But we did it. And we did it on the community's turf. Not ours. We tried to provide value and get invited to their gatherings. We didn't egotistically start our own events.

And in so doing — from that collaborative standpoint — we began to build the a network that would become the most critical component of PIE: a subset of an already vibrant community.

Step 3: Talk about the community.

There's something about a tree falling and no one hearing it. Community is the same way. You have to talk about it. And blog about it. And tweet about it. You have to connect it. And highlight what it's doing.

Why? Because, for the most part, community is not immediately self-aware. As such, people don't just realize that there's "a community." Unless they're specifically looking for it. And this is true, even if they're deeply involved in that community.

You have to tell them. And then tell them again. And again.

You have to cheerlead. You have to create a bully pulpit. And you have to use that megaphone to convince those outside of the community that the community is, in fact, real. And to encourage those who are starting to become self-aware of the community to connect more deeply with that community.

You saw folks like Brad Feld, Mark Suster, and Fred Wilson doing — and continue to do — this with their personal blogs. You saw Silicon Alley and Silicon Prairie and GeekWire do this with more journalistic efforts. And if you were in the same communities we were, you saw Michael Arrington do this with TechCrunch. To ridiculous effect.

For us in Portland, those vehicles were things like Silicon Florist, our personal blogs, larger tech blogs outside of our region like TechCrunch, local publications, and the — then nascent — social media landscape. All served as the means of talking about the Portland startup community. And to spread the belief that it existed and had the potential to be much, much more.

Yes, Virginia, there is a Portland startup community.

Note: This step is ongoing. You don't get to stop talking about the community. Ever. Keep going. Keep talking.

Step 4: Invite the community in.

Now that your community is gaining definition. Now that it is starting to solidify and formalize. Now that you are taking an active role within that community. Only now can you start to host events. Shine a spotlight on talented community members. And invite people who would benefit from hearing those community members. Renny did this by having W+K serve as the inaugural host of Ignite Portland. And hosting events like Portland Lunch 2.0, among others.

Without — and this is critical — expecting anything in return. At all.

Don't think that you have to acquire space before this happens. You can partner with existing spaces. Or pay to rent spaces that you make accessible to others. Or this can occur in a shared space or a known resource.

You don't have to own the space, but you must do what it takes to make space available to the community.

With PIE, we were lucky enough to own space. Which had been generously donated by our patron, W+K, as part of the experiment. So we hosted community gatherings that we didn't manage. We invited people into the space. We had them hold their events in our space. We let people crash out overnight for crazy caffeine fueled coding sessions. Heck, we even hosted the first ever 30 hour nonstop livestreamed Web telethon in the space to help the community raise money for charity during the holiday season.

We made the PIE space a resource by the community, for the community. It became a platform on which other members of the community could build their events and programs. And, eventually, companies.

Step 5: Create a common space.

Events are great. But truly valuable community spaces are leveraged as a utility, all day, every day.

For PIE, forming a coworking space was the way to go. In part because Wieden had given us the space to do it. And in part because we thought it was what our community needed. It ensured that the space was being used throughout the day while making it available for events in the evening. Plus it gave the space ongoing and sustainable energy. Everybody wins.

Maybe your community needs the same thing. Or maybe it simply needs an event space that it uses throughout the day. Or maybe it needs a coffeeshop or a brewpub. Who knows? Maybe it needs a multistory complex that houses everything from startups through established businesses.

We don't know what your community needs. It's your community. There is no right answer. Or, perhaps more appropriately, there is no one answer that is right for every community.

Your task is to find the answer that solves an actual need within your community. And to find the partners and patrons who are going to help you get there. You need to create the space that your community needs to continue to thrive. And to continue the momentum you, as a community, have created.

For us, the space in the Wieden+Kennedy building afforded us opportunities for coworking and hosting events — which in turn provided all kinds of value for the community. In retrospect, there are three things we found to be most important about having a physical space:

1. As different groups in the community took advantage of the space, it created an opportunity for random collisions to occur and serendipity to thrive—from W+K and giant global brands to nascent startups. We found that those collisions created real and sustainable connections.
2. It provided a vantage point for us — the startup community and our patron — to better understand the dynamics of the community, where the momentum was, and where the gaps were. At times, it also provided us with an opportunity to simply observe, as an objective third party.
3. It served as a physical representation of the community, as a whole. So when folks were visiting town or were new to town, they had a place to land. And that space enabled others to discover and engage with the community more readily.

Step 6: Keep doing all of that stuff. But do more of it. Faster.

Now that you've got some momentum, you've got a working space, and you've started to define your role in the community, you have to really get to work. Or maybe you have to build something else. But you get the gist.

There's more to do.

In addition to hosting, you now get to start programming your own events. And using your network to make those events interesting, engaging, and valuable. But bear in mind, that this event programming has to occur in collaboration with—not in competition to—the events we mentioned in Steps 2 and 4.

It's incredibly important that these events fill gaps. Not replicate existing content.

With PIE, we created our own programming and invited folks to attend. We held hackathons that combined the startup community with the creative community and corporate community. We offered our space for coworking sessions for the "friends of PIE." Even if that meant giving space away.

In short, we were on the constant lookout for interesting opportunities to bring our networks together. For talks. For gatherings. And for all sorts of collaboration. Because connecting our disparate communities and adding value to the broader community is what helped us establish our space as valuable, needed, and sustainable.

And then, only then, were Renny and I ready to. . .

Step 7: Start an accelerator.

Now that you've done all of that work, you're ready. I mean, if it's even still needed.

At PIE, we absolutely needed to start an accelerator. The community needed it. W+K needed it. Startups needed it. Individuals needed it. First a bullhorn. Then a coworking space. Then an accelerator. Because we needed it. As a community.

But if you discover that — after all of your hard work — an accelerator is not needed, that's okay too. No one said that having an accelerator was a requirement.

Again, this isn't the right way to do anything. This just happens to be how PIE came into being.

Whatever you choose to do — start a long journey or jump into the deep end of the pool — just remember that, in the long run, you're not building an accelerator. You're building a community.

Coworking and Community Development are not complementary

When we started PIE, we were working under the assumption that "coworking" — the concept of a variety of companies and individual contributors sharing a common workspace — and "community" were synonymous. Get a bunch of people sitting and working in the same space and viola! Community.

Nope. Coworking and Community are not synonymous. In fact, at times, they may even be at odds with one another. So even if you've got a thriving coworking business, don't assume you have a community. If your coworking business is thriving, that actually may be an indicator that you don't have a community. Conversely, if your coworking space is struggling to make ends meet, that may also be an indicator that you're doing okay with community development.

You see, sometimes communities need to embrace people who cannot afford the cost of a desk. And sometimes communities have to turn away individuals who can afford to pay.

It seems counterintuitive but we've learned that giving startups desks for free often creates a tighter bond and stronger commitment than asking them to pay. That is, they perceive more value in the offering than office space to be more valuable than simply cash out of pocket. They feel like a valued part of the community. And since a very important part of our role is strengthening community, we feel this emotional tie has far more value that the rent check.

Long story short, we feel we've gotten exponentially more value out of giving desks away than we ever would have by adding a few more dollars to the revenue stream. And whatever the case, don't assume the health — or lack thereof — of a business pursuit like coworking is a direct or even relevant indicator of the health of your community. We've seen many a healthy community without the financial health to sustain a coworking space.

Culture

Your accelerator should serves as a welcoming hub for the community. It should be a safe place where ideas are exchanged. Where concepts are challenged. And where productive discussions occur.

> **tl;dr Your primary objective is to create a culture of trust.**

This is critical to your ability to create a culture of trust and an environment where founders and mentors can be open and engaged.

Empathize with Founders

Before you do anything, put yourself in the Founders' shoes. Empathize with them. And continue to return to that viewpoint. Founders are your customers. Treat them accordingly.

This is why we encourage you to immerse yourself in the community before you try to do anything else. And why we encourage you to start your own companies. So you know what it's like.

Ideally, you'll sympathize with your Founders. At the very least, you must empathize with them. And treat them with the compassion that empathy fuels.

If you need help getting your head in the right place, read "Why Y Combinator made all the difference."

Encourage bonding among peers

This is an important part of our program and one that we feel is often overlooked by others. We believe that we aren't just graduating individual companies from our program, but collaborative groups who will improve and enhance our existing community.

But this doesn't necessarily happen organically. It takes effort. And intent. That's why we've learned to put time into creating opportunities that enable those peer bonds to form, even on a short timescale.

We've also learned that it's important to use a range of bonding activities. A beer or cocktail is fine every once in a while, but it's important to break out of the startup stereotype. Plan activities that don't just involve drinking. Heck, maybe even plan some activities that are healthy (gasp) or educational.

The basic rule is: Be inclusive. And provide a range of options. Not every option will work for every participant.

Three months

PIE chose to run our program for a three month intensive period.

We ran the first class for four and half months, and it seemed to be too long. So we shortened the program.

This version of the PIE Cookbook assumes that you are considering a similar format, so it is written from that vantage point. That said, many of the topics we'll cover are equally applicable to any number of accelerator models.

Long story short, we're starting with what we know by writing this from the PIE perspective. But we remain hopeful that, as this project goes on and the documentation continues to grow and expand, we're able to cover any number of models, timelines, and formats in the future.

Three months is a very short time

Most corporations, governments, and larger organization often question how we can possibly get anything effective done in three months. "Three months seems so short," they say.

And it is. It's a short intensive period of incredibly stressful work. Piled on top of — or in the middle of — the long period of incredibly stressful and arduous work that is building a startup. (In all honesty, the accelerator period is the least stressful — and most supportive — of any of it.)

And if companies aren't careful, the three months can slip by very quickly. Too quickly. Without much to show for it. A few skipped mentor meetings. A talk or two. And suddenly it's Demo Day. Just like that.

Three months is a very long time

But fact of the matter is, when you're in the thick of it, three months is an incredibly long time. Especially when you're breaking it into minutes.

source/images/pie-countdown-clock.jpg

From the time the first day of PIE starts until we bring the house lights down and Demo Day begins is about 130,000 minutes. And each one is critical.

But no matter how motivated the founder, no matter how real the opportunity, no matter how passionate the team, it's a challenge to keep the momentum going. It's nearly impossible, over that length of time, to keep a sustained sprint going. It's like running toward a goal somewhere off in the distance. Like trying to realize a strategy without any tactics.

Start small

Where you start is where you start. Don't let the current state of things or the amount of effort required prevent you from taking action. Start small. Start today. It might not be where you want to start. But you've got to start somewhere.

Just start.

CHAPTER 5

Establishing the unique context for your accelerator

This is like a cookbook of false starts, isn't it? Bear with us.

It is important to understand that an Accelerator is simply a tool. It is not inherently positive. It is simply a means to an end. At PIE, we always say, "We're an accelerator. That's not always a positive thing. We have the potential to help accelerate your success, but we can just as easily accelerate your company right into the ground."

At PIE, we dove headlong into the effort with a bunch of assumptions. Among those assumptions was the ideas that when one of us used a particular word, we all had a similar concept for what that word meant. We were wrong. And it caused confusion and stress.

So we learned that it was important to diffuse those assumptions by taking some time to establish context and vocabulary for what you're trying to accomplish. Below, you'll find an example of the definitions we used to explain the different elements of the PIE community.

In this day and age — with a bevy of accelerators from which to choose — it's more important than ever that you take the time to figure out what makes your accelerator unique and valuable. Rather than making it a me-too-also-ran.

Definitions

Like many industries, the startup world is rife with terminology that holds special meaning to individuals who are well versed in its own cryptic lexicon. For that reason, we often fall into situations where we assume we're on the same page as one of our similarly immersed counterparts. And—like most assumptions—that can cause problems. We believe that communication and clarity are vital, so we're always looking for ways to get everyone speaking the same language.

We feel that it is extremely important to have a consistent set of language to describe the concepts and participants in this process. Without clear definitions, we run the risk of miscommunication — even when we think that we're speaking the same language.

For that reason, we're going to provide you with some definitions of terms that are regularly used throughout the PIE Cookbook. Please note that, like all things in this document, we are simply providing this as a reference. We would encourage you to create your own set of definitions for your community and for your accelerator's specific needs.

Community

Community can refer to any group of individuals who hold common goals and are motivated to collaborate to achieve those goals. There is no specified size for a community. And communities can be nested within other communities — or overlap. Therefore, it is always important to test the assumptions and continually re-evaluate the ends toward which the "community" is working.

> e.g., The Portland technology community has subsets like the Portland open source community and the Portland tech startup community. There is significant crossover between the participants in the open source community and founders and employees in the tech startup community. But, at the core of those communities, they do not share the same goals.

A community simply has to have a focus. It can revolve around concepts, ideals, goals, brands, or any combination thereof. We see community, at its essence, as a group of people with a shared, collaborative vision.

Accelerator

An accelerator is a semi-protective environment that behaves as a microcosm of the real world, at a highly increased rate of speed. It is designed to help founders better understand how to deal with trends, personalities, and adversity in the real world. It is also designed to support founders in rapidly addressing issues impacting their businesses.

> Accelerators are not designed to protect founders from the elements of the startup world. They are designed to expose founders to those elements, time and time again in rapid succession.

To quote Techstars, accelerators, by their very nature, are designed to help companies "do more, faster." They are designed to make founders uncomfortable. And to push founder to do and achieve more — or fail — more rapidly than they would be capable of on their own.

Accelerators are unsuccessful when they allow unproven founders or products to survive longer than they reasonably should. Failed companies are not a "failure" of an accelerator. In fact, accelerating a company toward failure, sooner rather than later, is one of the most important functions of an accelerator. It saves founders time, money, and emotional stress by helping them recognize that the timing simply isn't right for their pursuit.

Incubator

An incubator is a protected work environment designed to shelter founders and ideas as they work to realize concepts and prototypes in an effort to bring a functional product to market.

In our definition of an incubator, there is no "business" yet. There are simply ideas and potential.

Incubators are designed to help early stage ideas survive longer than they would in the wild, without the shelter, care, and feeding of an incubator. As such, an incubator does not strive to accurately reflect the stressors and turmoil of the real world. Instead, it seeks to shield founders from reality by providing resources that best ensure its likelihood of finding commercial applications of its concept(s). This is by design.

> e.g., University tech transfer programs tend to be a good example of incubators

Incubators are unsuccessful when they fail to provide adequate support for the founders engaged in their programs. Failing concepts are not a "failure" for the incubator. They are simply a recognition of the fallacy of the pursuit.

While the terms "incubator" and "accelerator" are used interchangeably, we see them as very different and distinct pursuits.

Throughout this document, we will only be focusing on the Accelerator model but Incubators may find some of the content helpful for their day-to-day operations, as well.

NOTE: Although PIE has "incubator" in its name, that's a misnomer. We started as an incubator and transitioned into an accelerator. We chose not to rebrand the effort. Or maybe we simply couldn't come up with an acronym that worked. Except PAELLA.

Startup

How, exactly, does one define a startup? Well, honestly, we could write a-whole-nother book on that question alone. So rather than get into the particulars, we're going to simplify our definitions.

At a macro level, we tend to define a "startup" as any company that:

1. Has the potential for exponential growth
2. Lacks the resources — be it product, staff, capital, experience, market knowledge, business acumen, or otherwise — to fuel that exponential growth
3. Has yet to experience a significant liquidity event

For the sake of this book, a "startup" will be any company with whom your Accelerator engages in the activity of acceleration. Simple as that. It is important to note, however, that we will often use "company" and "startup" interchangeably throughout this book. When discussing more established companies such as sponsors and patrons, we will often refer to them as "corporations" or "brands."

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tl;dr Your Accelerator is inhabited by Startups. And it may be assisted by Corporations.

Founder/Cofounder

Founders — often referred to a Cofounders when part of a founding team — create Startups. So Founders are the folks with whom you will be working. They're the person or people who were motivated to solve a problem and start a company. Often, Founders come in teams, but there are solo Founders, as well.

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tl;dr Founders are the individuals on whom you will be focusing your Accelerator efforts.

Sometimes, Startups have already hired Staff. While this does not necessarily preclude them from participating in an Accelerator, we have found that the bulk of the Accelerator's effort is focused on assisting the Founders of the company, rather than the Staff.

> NOTE: At times, an Accelerator must designate activities as "Founder only" — specifically excluding Staff, Mentors, Advisors, and Investors — to ensure that those activities provide a protective environment of trust for Founders in the Accelerator. Managing this exclusivity will be critical to an open and collaborative cohort.

Mentor

Obviously, as an early stage startup accelerator, we spend far more time with mentors than advisors. In our world, we define a Mentor as an individual who volunteers his or her time to provide a startup with opinions, criticism, and feedback on problems, opportunities, or quandaries.

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tl;dr Mentors are volunteers who provide opinions to Founders.

Mentors tend to provide feedback in the form of “If I were in your shoes…”, “Here’s what I’d suggest…”, or “I remember being in a similar situation. Here’s how we handled it.…”

Therefore, mentors should…

- Give first
- Volunteer their feedback free of charge
- Provide feedback on a wide range of issues and opportunities with the startup
- Speak from previous experience tempered with a knowledge of current market conditions
- Openly share mistakes and missteps from their past experience
- Remove their “brand hat” or “title” as needed, i.e., sometimes a mentor is “a CEO” and sometimes that same mentor is simply a “user,” “successful business person,” or “someone who has seen a lot.”
- Float in and out of a startup’s purview, enabling the mentor to provide fresh perspectives on problems as they change
- Be used en masse to simultaneously provide a variety of viewpoints on specific problems or opportunities—the more opinions, the better— even if it winds up causing the classic “mentor whiplash”

Advisors

Conversely, we define an Advisor as an individual who is compensated — either in the form of equity or cash—by a startup in exchange for effort on solving a specific issue with the company or who is charged with assisting the founding team with a variety of issues.

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tl;dr Advisors are compensated to do work for Startups.

Therefore, advisors should…

- Always be compensated for their efforts
- Work to earn that compensation
- Focus on specific areas that are in the advisor’s wheelhouse
- Provide strategic value to the startup that is recognizable to potential investors or other advisors
- Be expected to contribute effort to solving problems
- Be held accountable for contributing time to the helping a startup make progress or resolve issues
- Be used by the startup in a fashion that is equitable to the amount of compensation
- Provide more than advice or guidance
- Continue to provide value to the startup throughout their tenure

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[sidebar]

Pick the right person for the job

> The primary difference between a mentor and an advisor is that the former is chiefly tasked with providing opinions on problems and the latter is tasked with resolving those issues.

To recap, if you're working with a **mentor**, ask them for advice, not effort. They're volunteers. They're not being paid to help you. They're providing their insights with the hopes that others will not have to suffer the same pains the mentor has.

If you're working with an **advisor**, it's fine to ask for advice, but you should also expect them to do work—and hold them accountable to that expectation. And you should recognize that they are a direct reflection on you and your company. Don't take on advisors on a whim. Anymore so than you would take on a cofounder lightly.

Mentors volunteer; advisors are paid. Mentors advise; advisors work.

Investor

Folks have a tendency to lump all investors together. However, when you're dealing with a specific stage of company, it's best to be more granular about the types of investors with whom that company will be interacting, both in the short term and in the future.

At the most basic, an investor is someone who is using either personal capital or someone else's capital to make investments with the long-term objective of creating more money than they started with.

https://twitter.com/turoczy/status/777181970782523393

A common misconception is that it's an investor's job to "give people money" or "cut checks." It is not. An investor's job is to leverage their assets to create an appreciable return on investment. This is important to note because, in many ways, the investor with whom you will be dealing is in a very similar predicament to the startup founders with whom you are dealing. They are often two parties using someone else's money to build a business.

We used the following definitions to describe the investors with whom we had a tendency to interact.

A note about capital: We'll use "capital" in the broad sense, but you should recognize that many investors — especially those at later stages — have at least two distinct capital resources at their disposal. A portion of the fund is dedicated to making the initial investment in a company, establishing the relationship between the investor and the company. Another portion of the fund is often dedicated to follow-on capital. This is the money used to prevent an investor's position in the company from being significantly diluted.

Therefore, Accelerators operating with only initial investment capital must be comfortable with the concept of their position being increasingly diluted in future rounds of funding. To allay this, Accelerators may raise funds to go to follow-on rounds or they may partner with other investors to help protect the Accelerator's interest. Another tactic some Accelerators employ is introducing "anti-dilution" clauses into their agreements that prevent dilution from happening. Or assigning Warrants for future equity purchases. At PIE, we have found this practice — especially for new or little known Accelerators — to make future fundraising more difficult for companies. So it's not something we'd recommend.

Angel

An Angel is an individual who invests his or her own money in an early stage company. This investment could come as early as a "Friends and Family" round (defined below) or as late as a "Lettered" round (defined below), though more often than not, Angel check sizes generally have them participating sooner rather than later, ranging from low five figure checks to six figure checks, depending on the Angel and his/her investment strategy. Some Angels choose to make a series of small bets; others choose to make a significant investment in a single company. Some Angels are comfortable investing on their own; others prefer to invest with other Angels or as part of an Angel Group (defined below).

NOTE: It is important to understand individual Angels and they're preferred investment strategies, because they run the gamut.

Due to the stage at which they are investing, Angels are often required to make judgments based on the founders of a company and the Angel's understanding of the product and market. This is because Angels are usually engaging before the product has been completed or before the product has been taken to the market.

Some Angels are described as "true Angels," where the investor bases the investment decisions on the founders and appeal of the product whether or not that investment has a high likelihood of paying off in a significant way. These are individuals who are supporting both the founder and the community by using their capital. This type of investment is not charity, but it is goodwill in that it often lacks the rigor or due diligence of other investments. It's an "I like you and I think you're going to make something happen" sort of investment.

Angels often invest in industries where they made their money. So it is important to understand the Angel's pedigree before engaging him/her as a potential investor.

> e.g., If an Angel made his/her money in food and beverage, it may be unlikely that they will feel comfortable investing in a technology startup.

Angel Groups

Angel investors will sometimes collaborate with other Angels to pool funds, get access to more deal flow, or share due diligence with one another. We refer to these collectives as "Angel Groups." Angel Groups may be in a position to write larger checks from pooled funds than individual Angels would be willing to commit.

Angel Group check sizes range from individual Angel checks at low five figures

One of the benefits of Angel groups — to both investors and startups — are the inherent efficiencies of these types of organizations. Rather than having to speak to each Angel individually, a startup can pitch the group, en masse. Likewise, instead of an Angel having to chase down a bunch of deals, they can rely on the organization to line those deals up for the Angels.

Another benefit is that it enables Angels to invest "outside of their comfort zone," thanks to the trust in their peers.

In addition, Angel Groups provide a means of educating first-time or inexperienced Angels on deal flow, due diligence, and investing.

Long story short, because these organizations can be structured in a variety of ways, it is important to understand how the Angel Group is organized.

Some important questions to ask:

- How are decisions made?
- Is there a pooled fund or do Angels invest individually?
- Is there shared due diligence or is each Angels doing his/her own?
- Can Angels choose to invest individually, independent of the decisions of the group?

Syndicates

A Syndicate is a venture capital fund often composed of a group of Angels led by a single dealmaker designed to make a single investment. The model is predicated on the idea that the dealmaker is a trustworthy source of deals and that is a good judge of opportunity.

Members of the Syndicate agree to invest capital when the dealmaker invests capital.

Why is this even a thing? Well, it has two benefits. One, like Angel Groups, it simplifies fundraising from the startup perspective. They can focus on pitching Syndicate leads with the hopes of gaining the investment of the entire Syndicate. For the Syndicate lead, helping source deals provides them with a the benefit of participating in the carry, like a traditional fund, which provides an additional upside should the deal prove lucrative.

Accelerator Investment

While it is not a requirement, many accelerators chose to invest capital in the startups participating in their programs. Some of these investments are structured as traditional equity purchases while, these days, more accelerators seem to offer convertible notes as the structure for investment. Y Combinator uses a vehicle called SAFE (Standard Agreement for Future Equity).

Some programs choose to provide all of the capital at once. Some programs provide a small amount of capital at the outset of the program, followed by a more significant investment once the company completes the program.

Micro Venture Capital

Micro Venture Capital tends to be funds of under $100 million that invest in early stage companies often before typical institutional investors would participate in a deal. Check sizes vary for these types of organizations. It is important to note that these funds often reserve follow-on capital to protect their positions.

Traditional/Institutional Venture Capital

Most accelerators will only work with traditional venture capital in the role of mentors for their programs, given that large funds do not generally invest in early stage companies. That said, having later stage investors involved in the program can be extremely beneficial as a means of preventing problems before they start or helping guide startups on conversations that will occur in the future.

What's more, it's always best to start these conversations sooner rather than later. And it's always nice to have conversations about money and expectations when neither party is currently in a position to engage with one another — rather than at the awkward point where the startup is in dire need of capital.

Corporate Venture aka Strategics

Corporations with venture arms most often choose to make strategic investments in companies at later rounds as a means of strengthening partnerships or market position. You often hear these investments referred to as "strategic investments." As such, Corporate Venture groups are sometimes referred to as "strategics."

Most accelerators will only work with corporate venture folks in the role of mentors for Accelerator programs, given that corporate funds do not generally invest in early stage companies. Like traditional VC, it's better to establish these relationships before a capital need arises for the startup.

Private Equity

Private Equity firms provide a means of creating a liquidity event without an initial public offering or acquisition by another company.

Most accelerators will only work with private equity folks in the role of mentors for their programs, given that private equity does not tend to invest in early stage companies. Again, it's always best to start these conversations sooner rather than later.

> **tl;dr Traditional VC, Corporate Venture, and Private Equity can be good sources of Mentors for Accelerators because there is likely no immediate transactional opportunity for the participating startups.**

Investment rounds

While it's a bit of a shifting target, it is important to distinguish each type of investment round and the stages at which companies should be pursuing these kinds of investments. The following are a broad definitions using the common lexicon of the stages of rounds of equity investment.

> NOTE: We are providing the definitions PIE used. Your results may vary.

Friends and Family aka FFF (Friends, Family, and Fools)

The "Friends and Family" round is generally the first round of funding many startups pursue. Whether it be a nest egg that the founders have tucked away, small checks from family members, capital from a friend who has a little cash to spare, or someone simply intrigued with the idea who is willing to take a flyer, this is the capital that allows founders and potentially team members to leave their day jobs and focus on their startup full time. With Friends and Family, the primary objective is providing working capital that facilitates the effort of developing a prototype.

This is often short-term capital that lasts months, not years.

Pre-Seed

Pre-Seed is often the first "official" round of funding. In our lexicon, this is the round where Accelerator funding — the equity purchase you are likely to be making, should you choose to do so — falls. It's the capital that provides the founders with runway to take a prototype and find product-market fit. Or to refine the prototype until that fit can be found.

Other investors who may participate in these rounds are individual Angels and very early stage Micro VCs. Friends and Family investors may continue to participate in this round, especially if they have received pro rata rights.

Again, this is often short term capital that lasts months, not years. More "keep the company alive" capital than "grow the company" capital.

Seed

Seed is often the first significant infusion of capital into the company. Currently, this infusion comes when the founders can demonstrate that their concept or prototype has potential in a specific market. This capital provides the runway to take the product to that market and establish traction and, hopefully, revenue.

Seed funding often comes post-Accelerator. Investors in Seed rounds include Angels, Angel Groups, Syndicates, and Micro VCs. Traditional VCs may also choose to participate in these rounds. Again, previous investors with pro rata rights — like an Accelerator — may also "re-up" in this round.

This is longer term capital designed to fuel company growth, rather than just keeping the company alive.

Lettered

Lettered rounds (A, B, C, etc.) are what most folks think of when they talk about “venture capital.” These rounds are the money that keeps the company growing, supports the company as they struggle to grow, helps them address new markets or market changes, allows them to acquire complimentary or competing companies, and address any number of other “costs of doing business” which may not be covered by the revenue the company generates.

As the rounds progress, there are more and more investors involved, either early stage investors providing “follow-on capital” to retain their positions or new investors seeking an equity stake in promising startups.

As an Accelerator taking equity, Lettered rounds are where you will experience the most dilution of your ownership position, unless you have significant follow-on capital at your disposal for defending your position in the company.

Resident

At PIE, we introduced the concept of a Resident, that was different from the Startups participating in the program. A Resident could take any of the following forms in our environment:

1. **Mentor in Residence**: This designation was reserved for Startups who had participated in an Accelerator class and then remained in our coworking space. In exchange for a rent-free existence, Mentors in Residence were obligated to work with Startups in the active Accelerator class, providing them with guidance and insights that would make the program more effective, e.g., “Make sure and meet with this mentor,” or “Don’t pay attention when Rick throws that tantrum,” or “I remember when were struggling at this stage.”
2. **Startup in Residence**: PIE started as a coworking space. As such, when we transitioned to an Accelerator, we had a number of companies who resided in our space, participated in peer mentoring and assisting one another, but who had not officially participated in an Accelerator class. We found these more objective startups so valuable, that we continued to invite Startups in Residence to hang out in the space even after the original startups had outgrown the space. Sometimes these startups would be at an earlier stage than the participants. Sometimes they were startups that had already completed another Accelerator program. Sometimes they were startups that had recently relocated to Portland and just needed somewhere to crash for a bit. Whatever the case, having these peers as resources for our startups always proved beneficial.
3. **Investor in Residence**: Some of the residents of the space weren’t even startups. They were investors who spent time with our startups, providing connections, criticism, and feedback to our startups. And the value of that different perspective provided a unique vantage for our companies and helped them better understand the investor perspective. If you have the opportunity to engage with investors and have them share your space — even if it’s only a limited exposure — it’s still incredibly valuable.

Patron

With PIE, we were very careful with the language we used to describe our primary underwriter, Wieden+Kennedy. Because they, as an organization, were consistently more concerned with soft returns on their investment — education, on the job training, and serendipitous connections. It wasn’t a financial, hard return for W+K. And so the language we chose was designed to reflect that.

We always referred to W+K as a “patron” rather than a “sponsor.” Our reasoning? We meant it as a compliment, in the same vein as those benefactors who saw the value of providing financial support for artists to pursue their work — without any guarantee that that expenditure would result in anything more than creative exploration.

> **tl;dr W+K is the founding Patron for PIE. And anything we’ve accomplished is only due to that generosity.**

Sponsor

At PIE, we saw Sponsors as benefactors who provided capital for the operating costs of an Accelerator with the expectation of a measurable return for that capital. The money from Sponsors was not put to work by making equity investments. Rather, it was used to pay for space, staff, services, and other costs associated with the day-to-day operations of the Accelerator. This helped Corporations participate in the Accelerator without the complexity of engaging as Investors.

In return, these Sponsors expected something. This is what makes them different from Patrons. Patrons assume that something will come of the investment eventually. Sponsors expect that something demonstrable will come of the investment at the outset.

Sponsors worked with PIE to cohost events, embed staff as mentors, receive consulting from PIE staff and startups, and the like.

Partner

We define Partners as an entity that provides a product or service to the organization in an effort to promote that product or service. For Accelerators, these Partners tend to be the folks who provide the "added services" that create additional value for your Accelerator.

Partner agreements are neither equity nor capital based. Instead, they are often based on "in kind" contributions to the Accelerator or its Startups.

A good example of a Partner is a hosting service that provides a limited number of "credits" for free hosting on its platform with the intent that Startups will remain on the platform and become paying customers once the credits are exhausted.

Need more definitions?

Check out the Startup Fundraising Dictionary, an open guide that helps define the terminology used in the industry.

So why did we force you to work through all of that?

Why all of the definition setting at the outset? Because the more context you have going into the situation — the more clarity and the more consensus — the better you'll communicate. And the fewer misunderstandings you'll have. And the more likelihood you'll have of success.

Now that we've defined the terms of the types of players in the ecosystem — or those completely absent from the ecosystem — it's important to describe and define the environment in which your accelerator will exist. Otherwise, how will you know what you've got at your disposal? Or what's missing?

Environmental scan

You may anecdotally understand the community in which you exist, but it's always good to survey a number of participants to determine the true composition of your community.

We recommend an environmental scan. It doesn't have to be exhaustive but it does have to accurately reflect reality. This isn't an optimistic look at your community. It's the truth.

The more honest you can be, the better off your accelerator efforts will be.

As part of this scan, you should be working to answer questions like:

- What assets/resources does your community have?
  - How mature are they? Have they been around a while or are they relatively new?
  - Are they currently accessible or are they largely inaccessible?
- Where are the gaps in the current community?
  - Are they solvable?
  - How entrenched are they?
- What types of companies generally find success in your area, independently of any support? Are there particular themes? (In PIE's ecosystem of Portland technology startups, for example, companies tend to excel at enabling technology and frameworks. To put it another way, Portland tech startups tend to be developers building tools for other developers.)

Once you've captured a variety of detail, create one of those annoying Venn diagrams. Because those things are a thing for a reason. They actually can help you visualize where the opportunity exists. It might not be where you think. But it's that point of overlap where you have the highest likelihood of success.

It doesn't do you any good to try to build an accelerator full of consumer facing products that require tons and tons of capital if you have neither consumer facing expertise nor tons of capital. That's a losing proposition.

First, play to your strengths. Once you have momentum, then you can get visionary.

Establish a thesis

Even if you're not planning to invest capital in your Startups, you should still do one thing like an investor: have a thesis.

What's a thesis? It's something that guides the types of companies with whom you want to work and often — more importantly — a guideline that prevents you from working with companies that aren't the right fit for your Accelerator.

A thesis is especially important for a first-time program. Otherwise, you'll try to take all comers, which will set you up for failure on any number of fronts.

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tl;dr A thesis will help guide all of your Accelerator activities.

You don't have to be married to your thesis forever and it can change as often as you want. But you need one. Your thesis can be defined by market dynamics, community trends, the expertise of your mentors, the success of your startups, the desires of your patron, or any combination thereof. It just needs to be defined. And you need to stick to it.

At PIE, we hit upon the fact that we were really good at accelerating technology platforms and enabling technology. Or to put it another way, we did really well with developers building tools for other developers. Why did we get good at this? There were any number of reasons but among the most important were:

- Portland has a long history of building platforms and enabling technologies, so there were more folks who had "been there and done that" with these types of businesses.
- Our mentors had expertise in building platforms.
- Our alums happened to be focused on platforms.
- The risk tolerance profile for the Portland community favored platforms and enabling technologies over consumer plays because the perceived risks and challenges are lesser.
- As mentors and alums helped us recruit companies, they inevitably drew from a community of peers — many of whom were building platforms or enabling technology

- Being founded in collaboration with a creative agency, We inherited some of the culture of the agency — a company built on the premise of helping other companies.
- We started PIE just as both the SaaS and mobile markets were exploding

Know where you suck

Know — don't assume; know — what you are truly good at doing.And even more importantly? Be willing to admit where you suck.

At PIE, it quickly became obvious that we sucked at helping startups with fundraising. We were hamstrung by several things.

First, there was a nascent investment community in Portland.

Second, the community that happened to exist did not possess a complementary risk profile for the companies with whom we were working. Because of that, the local investors had little appetite for the types of companies as investments.

Third, we had not established adequate ties with investors in other regions. We had friends here and there, but we didn't have a strong rolodex of investors whose theses matched our startup profiles.

But you know what? Admitting we sucked at that — and being open with our applicants that we sucked at that — freed us up to be better at any number of other things. And made us way better and more focused on the things we were good at doing. Not only that, but it provided us with yet another measure by which to select the companies we chose.

But also know what your strengths are

PIE mentor and Techstars Seattle Managing Director, Chris DeVore, provides a compelling list of the things that Seattle is good at doing.

While your list might not be as long as Chris' — Seattle has been at this for a while — it's important that you take the time to assess what strengths your staff, mentors, startups, and regional expertise bring to the mix.

If you've been part of your startup community for a significant amount of time, you may be able to rattle off these strengths, anecdotally. If not, you should return to your findings from your environmental scan to help you identify strengths that will benefit your accelerator and community.

CHAPTER 6

Building your accelerator's strategic framework

Let's start with this. First and foremost, the primary objective of any Accelerator should be to **create an environment of trust that accelerates creative output**. That is the most basic way to describe it.

Founders trust you to help them make sense of this whole startup thing. To be honest with them. To say the hard things that need to be said. To connect them with the expertise that helps them continue. Or the insight that helps them to quit.

But it's not just startups. Mentors trust you to engage them, if and only if, it will be worth their time. Investors trust you as a filter to help them mitigate their risk. Media trusts you as a means of identifying interesting companies and trends. People who dream of starting a company one day trust you as a resource to support them.

It's a whole bunch of people looking for something in which to trust. And that trust is hard earned. And easily lost. But that is your role. To be the trusted — and fairly objective — third party. To be the trusted advisor. To everyone.

A close second to an Accelerator's role of establishing trust? Reality.

As we've highlighted in the definitions, an Accelerator is not designed to be a protective environment. It is not a fantasy world. That's what Incubators are for.

Accelerators are about reality.

Therefore, the environment you build should be a representation of the outside world, not a utopian existence. Why? Because your objective is helping founders understand how to survive and prosper in the real world. Or, tangentially, to understand the harsh environment of reality is not the right environment for them to be pursuing their company.

Your mission

Your mission as an accelerator is create a safe but stressful environment where cofounders can experience — and more effectively resolve — the conflicts they'll experience in the real world. Your job is to harden successful teams for the rigors of the real world and to expose the fissures that will rip failing teams apart. And this has to be done quickly, because if it isn't, you risk long term — potentially irreparable — emotional pain for your founders, wasting capital from your investors, and wasted time for everyone. A company that doesn't have a realistic chance of surviving in the real world should not survive your accelerator. If it does, you're doing something wrong.

Mistakes were made

Dodging conflict is the primary mistake we made with the first class of PIE. We didn't attempt to raise issues. We attempted to mitigate them. We didn't push the founders to expose the flaws in their businesses. We sought to highlight only the positive aspects of their pursuits. As such, we did our founders, our mentors, and our community a disservice.

Order of progression

When you're first starting, the progression should look something like this:

1. **Accelerator Founders** — or cofounders — which leads to securing
2. **Funding**, which enables you to afford
3. **Space** and
4. **Staff**, which allows you to recruit
5. **Mentors**, which become the primary means of attracting
6. **Startups**
7. Which allows you to do this whole **Accelerator** thing

In terms of the amount of time you'll spend on each of these phases, the rank order looks more like this:

1. Mentors
2. Startups
3. Funding
4. Staff
5. Space
6. Founders

Three critical components for any accelerator

In our experience, there are three critical components to supporting and maintaining a sustainable Accelerator: community, funding, and promotion.

Without **Community**, there will be no resources upon which to draw. You don't use an Accelerator to create a Community. You use a Community to create an Accelerator.

Without **Funding**, there will be no operating capital for the Accelerator, whether that Accelerator chooses to invest in its startups or not. There needs to be capital for the space, the staff, and the infrastructure to support the Accelerator.

Finally, and often most overlooked, is **Promotion**. Without promotional efforts, the applicant pool will suffer, the caliber of mentoring resources may be impacted, the interest from Venture Capital may be lackluster, and the potential for startup success may be diminished.

So let's take a look at each of these critical elements in more detail.

Community

While we've defined a generic form of Community, each particular Community is different. Some are collaborative. Some are competitive. Some have an embarrassment of riches. Some struggle to make ends meet. Some have a wealth of knowledge. Some lack the expertise they need.

None of these aspects of the Community ensures your success nor dooms you to failure. They're just aspects of your Community. That said, you need to know those facets of your Community so that you can leverage the resources you have and accommodate for the strengths you lack.

A lot of these details will be anecdotal. As a participant in the Community, you'll have a good feel for the composition of the Community. But again, an Environmental Scan will help you better understand the opportunities and challenges within your Community.

Some questions to ask about your Community:

- How do you define your community?
- What are the objectives?
  - Shared
  - Conflicting
- What is the expertise (if any)?
- What are the weaknesses?
- What are the silos?
- What are the issues?
- What are the gaps?
- How can they help (if at all)?

Funding

At PIE, we get a lot of questions about how to fund accelerator operations and investments. It makes sense. Finding the money that matches up with the opportunity is a challenge. It's never easy. No matter how compelling the pitch.

Like a Community, these benefactors will have certain goals that motivate them to engage with your Community. Some of these may be in line with the Community objectives. Some of them may not be in line. You may find some benefactors who have capital to contribute but are at odds with the Community. And you may find potential benefactors who don't even realize the opportunity availed by supporting an Accelerator.

Whatever the case, your job is to find the value equation that provides value for your Community and the benefactor(s) while providing the financial wherewithal for supporting your Accelerator activities.

Again, some questions to ask:

- What are the objectives of the potential benefactors?
- What is their expertise?
- How can they help? Is it only financial or are there other opportunities for collaboration?

A benefactor can take any number of flavors — or potentially several flavors. (Note: This isn't an exhaustive list. But it gives you a pretty good idea of where to look.)

In our observations, there are four types of folks who fund accelerators. Sometimes they're actual, well, folks. Sometimes they're companies. Sometimes they're angels or venture capitalists. But here are the buckets into which they seem to fall: Patron, Sponsor, Partner, Investor.

Patron

As defined above, a Patron is a benefactor who engages with an Accelerator without a specific outcome in mind or in an effort to better understand the Accelerator's given community.

In PIE's case, our primary Patron was Wieden+Kennedy, a global creative firm. The motivation for W+K to provide operating capital and in-kind resources for the Accelerator was motivated by a desire to gain a deeper understanding of the startup community and the creative process of early stage founders.

Later in the project, we discovered other ways to engage with W+K. Some of these went beyond patronage, like when they became early stage investors in our accelerator companies. Some of them were an extension of patronage, like when we engaged with members of the creative team to provide services for our startups.

However, throughout the course of the project, the main motivation remained one of patronage, a desire to engage and learn from early stage tech startups.

To the Accelerator, a relationship with a Patron provides much needed operating capital, another party who is interested in the success of the Accelerator and its residents, and a sounding board for the management of the Accelerator. It is important to note, however, that defining a Patron's goals and metrics for success require assistance from the Accelerator, as well.

The most important consideration with a Patron is not mistaking another type of benefactor as a Patron. It's critical that you have a clear understanding of the expectations of any benefactor with whom you engage.

Sponsor

A Sponsor provides financial resources for the Accelerator in exchange for specific outcomes. These outcomes are usually defined as objectives prior to the sponsorship occurring.

Sponsor dollars are used to support operating costs of the Accelerator. They are not generally used to make equity investments in Startups.

In PIE's case, we generally worked with corporate Sponsors to help underwrite the costs of PIE. Some of these Sponsors collaborated with PIE to manage events that facilitated collaboration between the Sponsor and the startup community. Other sponsors took an active role in the Accelerator as Mentors.

Choosing the right Sponsors can be a challenge for Accelerators. Like any investor, it is important that a Sponsor's desired outcomes are in line with the objectives of the accelerator and that achieving those outcomes has a high likelihood of success during the normal operations of the accelerator.

A great example of an effective sponsor relationship is the "Powered by Techstars" model that Techstars employee with corporate sponsors. With this sponsorship arrangement, Techstars and the corporation collaborate to ensure that the Accelerator program is meeting the needs of the corporate sponsor. In addition to capital, the corporate sponsor provides validation and market expertise for the Techstars program.

Partner

Partners are organizations that support the Accelerator program with resources rather than direct capital. This is a mutually beneficial arrangement that is generally used as a loss-leader for Partners.

It is important that Accelerators are careful with partnerships, because poorly constructed partnerships could be detrimental to startups going through the accelerator program.

Even in situations where the Partner is tightly integrated into the Accelerator, it is important that there are other entities to balance the influence of the Partner. An example of this is the Techstars "Powered by" programs, where the Partner and the Sponsor are often one and the same. In this situation, Techstars provides the balance that balances the Accelerator.

One of the most prevalent examples of an Accelerator partnership is the Amazon Web Services Activate program. With this partnership, AWS provides an allotment of free credits to each company in the Accelerator. This allows startups to build on Amazon infrastructure without any out-of-pocket costs. In return, AWS has a higher likelihood of converting those startups into paying customers once the credits are exhausted.

Investor

Investors collaborate and fund Accelerator activity in an effort to improve deal flow, identify companies that have a better chance of succeeding, and gain additional validation of product market fit. The filtering that Accelerators provide, therefore, can result in a very symbiotic relationship for both parties.

Given the similarities of VC behavior and Accelerator behavior, however, it is critical that these arrangements only occur between parties whose goals are completely aligned. It does an Accelerator absolutely no good to accept funding from a VC whose investment thesis does not match the Accelerator's. And it does a VC no good to invest in an Accelerator that does not provide beneficial deal flow or services.

On the upside, venture capital can be a very effective means of funding Accelerator activity, because they are used to playing in the space of startups.

- Used to spending money on risky efforts
- Have a time horizon that is in line with company maturation
- Have the potential to provide follow on investment.
- Ongoing portfolio management can be super valuable for the continued success of your companies.

On the downside, this funding mechanism can curtail the experimental nature of an accelerator if VC is the only backing.

- VCs are in the business of making money.
- The relationship will be driven by financial motivations. Will likely be only interested in investing in. Companies that have the highest likelihood of returning capital to the fund. Companies that best match their investment thesis.

This sort of focus can hamstring accelerators and incubators who may see promise or opportunity in verticals or companies that are outside of the fund's purview.

Long story short, you don't get to "experiment" with VC money. You get to make money. An Investor will only be motivated to engage with your Accelerator if it results in return on that investment.

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500 Startups hybrid model

While we don't advocate for making Founders pay to participate in an Accelerator program, we are fans of the creative collaboration between Investors and Program that the 500 Program (Don't call 500 an Accelerator!) has put together.

In the 500 model, the fund invests in the company. Then the Seed Program charges for participation in their Program. This ensures that the Startup has working capital and a cleaner cap table, the fund has an equity investment, and the program has operating capital.

> We invest $150k in exchange for 6%. We charge a $37.5k fee for participation in the 500 Seed Program.

Promotion

aka Soapbox(es) or bullhorn(s) or campfire(s) or promotional platforms or whatever you want to call them

One of the things that dawned on us in hindsight was the value of having platforms for sharing opinions, promoting our efforts, and conversing with our community.

It seems straightforward and obvious, but it's often overlooked.

You need a soapbox. Or a bully pulpit. Or a bullhorn.

You need some way of amplifying your signal. And some way of communicating effectively with the community you're engaging.

There are any number of examples of these kinds of platforms. It could be an email list or a blog. It could be a series of events. It doesn't even necessarily need to be something you "own." It can be a social network presence. It could be a local publication that assists with your communications. It could be a blog run by someone else who wants to cover your community.

But whatever the case, you need that promotional and conversational outlet. To engage.

At PIE, we used Silicon Florist as our initial platform, because it already had a following in the community with whom we were interested in engaging. Twitter, which had an early following in Portland, was also an extremely beneficial platform in this regard. First with personal accounts, then with a PIE account. Eventually, we adopted email, a PIE blog, Facebook, Instagram, and Medium, as well. We also used the space, itself, as a promotional platform by creating our own events and hosting others. Now, Github has become a critical component of our platform, thanks to the PIE Cookbook. And we've added Slack to the mix, as well.

Admittedly, things were much more simple we started. We didn't have a great deal from which to choose. There were blogs and Twitter. And had the opportunity to watch new platforms come online, assess how they were being used, and then choose to adopt those platforms if and only if they showed promise in our community.

You, my friend, have got a much wider and frenetic breadth of options from which to choose, these days. And they all have their idiosyncrasies and communities.

So we encourage you to approach your platform choices with these questions:

- Where does your community go for information and conversation, today?
- What publications or organizations talk to the same communities you do?
- Are there certain platforms that your team simply enjoys using more than others? (If you don't like writing, starting a blog is the wrong idea. But maybe a podcast or a YouTube channel would be appropriate?)
- What are the one or two platforms which would be most successful with the least amount of effort? Just because all of the platforms are there doesn't mean you need to be on all of them. Look for efficiencies.

Other critical components

There are a number of other critical components — often subcomponents of the ones mentioned above — that will play an important role in helping to ensure the success of the accelerator program.

Mentors

The most critical of these critical components will be your mentors. These are the assets that will actually make your Accelerator work — or fail. So we'll spend a great deal of time on this topic.

It is important to understand that there are different types of mentors, different ways to apply each mentor, and different motivations for the mentors to participate in the program. It's also important that you understand the best ways to recruit, manage, and reward your mentors for their participation in your program.

Let's start by outlining the general categories of Mentors, bearing in mind that Mentors can often fall into multiple categories. We'll get into recruiting mentors later in the Cookbook.

Non-resident Mentors

Non-resident mentors are the most common mentors for an Accelerator. They engage with the Accelerator on an as-needed basis. They do not reside in the Accelerator space. Rather, they are invited by staff to present or meet with Founders.

Non-resident mentors run the gamut of experience from founders to subject matter experts to potential customers. PIE holds the firm belief that anyone can be an effective mentor. So we will continue to emphasize that it is **experience**, not **expertise** that helps qualify a Mentor. Anyone has the potential to be a Mentor if applied properly.

Role and expectations Non-resident mentors will do the bulk of the mentoring within your Accelerator. After all, they comprise the bulk of the "network" to which your startups are seeking access. And they are the asset your organization will put to work, most often.

That said, your Accelerator should have very low expectations for the amount of time that these mentors will be able to contribute to the organization. They should be used for efforts that can be completed in under an hour. And those efforts should be fairly remedial from the mentor's perspective.

You should expect that these mentors can answer questions off the cuff from the startups. They should not be engaged on issues which may take additional effort or meetings with this type of mentor.

Value to the accelerator These mentors provide any number of benefits to the Accelerator, but among the most prominent are:

- Providing guidance and feedback to the Startups within the Accelerator
- Helping to promote the Accelerator and its offerings
- Helping to recruit Startups for each program
- Helping to recruit additional Mentors for the Accelerator
- Assisting in the selection process
- Bringing an outside perspective to the Founders
- Providing objective feedback to the Accelerator about both the startups and the Accelerator, itself

Value to the mentor While the accelerator and startups are gaining value from the mentor, it is equally important that you understand the value the mentor derives from participating.

- Strong connection to startup community
- A feeling of giving back to the community
- Recognition as an important asset to the community
- Reaffirms experience and expertise
- Connections with other mentors
- Dealflow and due diligence for potential Angel investments

Value to the startups These mentors, by and large, are the reason that the startups joined your accelerator, whether they know it or not. It is the advice, criticism, and connections that these individuals provide which will enable these companies to succeed — or help the startups determine that there is no chance of succeeding.

Typical percentage of the mentor pool Non-resident mentors should comprise the vast majority of your Mentor pool. Likewise, this category of mentor should serve as the initial means of "test driving" mentors for other types of mentor roles.

Lead mentors

Lead mentors are individuals who take a particular interest in one of the companies in the cohort. That level of interest motivates the mentor to meet with companies on a regular basis and suggest other mentors who could provide valuable feedback to the startups.

We have found that it is difficult to pick or establish lead mentors at the outset of the program. Rather, Accelerators have to monitor the potential for lead mentors and when appropriate, suggest to both the startup and the mentor that both would benefit from more regular meetings.

Role and expectations These mentors will make up a small subsegment of your mentor pool. And they're very hard to assign. It's almost a "catch as catch can" arrangement.

You engage mentors with startups and founders. You observe their behavior and camaraderie. And if the timing and relationship seem right, you pull the mentor aside and talk about taking a larger role in a single startup's growth and direction. Should the mentor agree, you then talk to the startup about the potential of having a lead mentor.

This relationship is somewhere between mentor and advisor. The lead mentor is still playing a role of imparting advice. But it is on a more regular and consistent basis than other mentors.

It should be noted that this becomes a much more significant time commitment for both mentor and founder. The lead mentor should be meeting with the startup on a weekly basis for the remainder of the accelerator class.

Value to the accelerator Lead mentors provide a great deal of value to the accelerator by:

- Augmenting the accelerator staff in the management of the startups
- Providing another vantage point for assessing the startups and their progress
- Serving as an example to other mentors in a "lead by example" way
- Establishing a stronger connection to the accelerator
- Establishing a stronger connection to the startups
- Enhancing the accelerator's ability to foster community connections

Value to the mentor Serving as lead mentors can be a more rewarding experience for mentors if they have the time to commit to the arrangement. Many lead mentors gain the benefit of:

- Having a measurable and demonstrable impact on a company's progression during the accelerator
- Determining the potential for ongoing mentorship or advisorship following the accelerator
- Gaining valuable insights on early stage business issues that can highlight and inform how the mentor deals with their own business pursuits
- Establishing a tighter bond in the startup community
- Raising the visibility of their contribution to the community

Value to the startups Startups can always use more people in their respective corners. A lead mentor can be a valuable by:

- Ensuring the founders have a confidante beyond the accelerator staff
- Providing additional mentor resources that may not be obvious/accessible to the accelerator staff
- Making introductions to investors
- Helping with hiring

- Providing candid feedback in a private setting
- Working with each founder over an extended period of timing

Typical percentage of the mentor pool Lead mentors generally make up a very small percentage of the mentor pool. At the very best, there will be one lead mentor per startup in each cohort.

Mentors in residence

We've tried any number of models: paid desks, free desks, desks in trade. What has worked best for us, as an accelerator, has been the concept of free desks for "mentors in residence."

This is usually reserved for people who have been through the program, but it's also been used for companies like Sprintly, Automattic (WordPress), and Upworthy. We established a soft baseline for participation ("You have to be actively engaged in mentoring startups in the space.") And assessed and judged that participation anecdotally. Those not meeting our expectation were counseled to up their mentoring game or encouraged to leave the space. We gave them a few warnings.

These companies were familiar with the PIE process, having observed any number of classes. But we also invited PIE alums to remain in the space — or come back — so that they could assist as hands on mentors, as well.

Why do we believe this is an effective model for PIE and other accelerators? At the core, accelerators are about knowledge transfer. Retaining class participants beyond their cohort allows us to more efficiently transfer that knowledge ("You shouldn't miss that mentor talk," "You definitely need to connect with so and so," and "I couldn't help hearing you were having an issue with x. Here's how we dealt with that.")

Role and expectations First and foremost, mentors in residence are expected to work on their respective businesses. Mentoring is secondary to that. That said, we do expect them to spend some time mentoring.

Most mentoring by mentors in residences is ad hoc. The mentors will observe something or hear something that motivates them to take a startup aside and provide feedback. Other times, staff will direct a mentor in residence to work with a startup, especially if it is a problem with which the mentor is familiar.

Other times, mentors in residence may help with making connections or judgment calls for startups going through the program.

Value to the accelerator Mentors in residence serve as adjunct staff, enabling the organization to scale more effectively by:

- Serving as eyes and ears with a different vantage point than the staff
- Serving as confidantes when staff is absent or unavailable
- Keeping the staff "honest" by highlighting mentors or programmatic elements that were helpful to their startups
- Providing peer feedback and review from someone who has "been there and done that"
- Highlighting which mentors are critical and how to best engage them

Value to the mentor There are any numbers of benefits to the mentor in residence. They include:

- Receiving free office space and perks for providing mentorship
- Enabling the mentors to keep tabs on the latest trends in the startup community
- Providing reciprocal peer mentoring
- Gaining insights to different mentors and investors

Value to the startups For the startups, the benefits of having a seasoned resource at their disposal are innumerable, but notable benefits include:

- Being able to get objective feedback from a peer

- Ensuring they gain a clear understanding of the challenges facing companies, post accelerator
- Providing valuable insights into working with PIE and mentors
- Providing tips and tricks for getting the most out of the progra
- Helping startups "work the system"

Typical percentage of the mentor pool The number of mentors in residence will be dictated by the available space in your accelerator. There is no definitive percentage

Food

With a name like PIE, it only stands to reason that we would include food as one of our critical components.

We firmly believe that feeding your founders is a critical part of supporting them. Plus, it's been proven time and time again, that you get into some very interesting conversations over meals. Startups are no different.

Furthermore, it's a form of hospitality. And making it a welcoming and supportive environment.

Providing food for your founders lessens stress, keeps them healthier, and ensures that they're actually eating from time to time. And all of that ensures that they're getting the most out of the other accelerator offerings.

What's more, consistently scheduling meals and aligning them with mentor talks is a great way to ensure that the founders are around to learn from mentors. Schedule mentor talks accordingly.

Feed their body; feed their mind.

And can we ask one favor of your meal planning? If we would love accomplish one thing with this Cookbook, it would be to finally break that whole pizza and startups association.

I know. It's a little weird coming from a place named PIE. But please stop. Stop feeding founders pizza. There are plenty of events with free pizza. They'll get plenty. Trust us. Once in a while pizza is acceptable, but not consistently.

Equally infuriating — and lacking in nutrition — is the candy, chips, and soda snack stereotype. Don't fall for it. Your founders deserve better than that. So does your staff. Get creative. Some candy, chips, and soda are fine. In moderation. But maybe have fresh fruit delivered on a regular basis. Have a vegetable platter every week. Have hummus and pita. Mix it up.

Finally, you can have Ramen on hand as a snack. We get it. But it's not a meal. Ever.

Feed your founders real, nutritious food. Consistently. Make sure they're getting the fuel they need.

And please be conscious, aware, and diligent of founders', mentors', and staff dietary requirements. Maybe they're vegetarian. Maybe they have religious requirements. Maybe they have a food allergy. Maybe they're just particular. Whatever the case, listen and accommodate all of their needs. They're under enough pressure without having to deal with not having something they can eat.

At PIE, we chose to cater three meals per week, on average — one dinner and two lunches — throughout the course of the three month accelerator class. We had Family Dinner on Monday night and lunch on Tuesday and Thursday.

This was the baseline of provide meals. At times of extreme stress or as we were ramping up to Demo Day, we had the ability to call an audible and provide even more food for the founders. Sometimes, we'd even have a Family Dinner or two during the off season. Just so people had time to catch up.

Diversity and inclusion

Admittedly, PIE did a relatively poor job with a diverse set of mentors and startup founders.

We were lucky to have a number of women in each of our classes, from the coworking days through the accelerator. Nearly half of our mentors were women. This was not intentional. It just happened to work out that way.

That said, we had very little variety in terms of colors, ethnicities, orientations, backgrounds, and beliefs.

This was a mistake. One that we are actively working to correct. One that we are being intentional about improving as we continue to work on PIE. Given the opportunity to start over, we would make this one of the critical components of our accelerator foundation. So that's why we're including it here.

CHAPTER 7

Initial tactics

Now that you have the context and strategy roughed out, it's time to start moving from the nebulous to the more tangible. From the strategic to the tactical. Like the accelerator, itself.

But before you dive into working with a startups, you're going to going to have to build the framework that will support that activity. So let's walk through some key elements:

- Creating a **budget**
- Selecting and appointing **space**
- Hiring **staff**
- Recruiting **mentors**
- Establishing a **curriculum** or lack thereof
- Understanding the **cadence** of an accelerator

CHAPTER 8

Budget

Early on, one of the most challenging aspects of standing up an accelerator or coworking environment can be projecting — guessing, really — how much it will cost to run the project.

And while sharing numbers from what it takes to run a startup accelerator in Portland, Oregon, may not be terribly helpful, we're hoping that we can provide some guidance through some topics for discussion. And some ballparks for the allocation of capital.

Considerations

First and foremost, you have to determine what type of accelerator you're going to be running.

Let's start by asking a few questions:

- Are you going to invest in the startups?
- What types of startups are you going to be working with?
- Do these companies require special infrastructure?
- How many companies would you like to impact on a yearly basis?
- How many staff members are required to support the number of participants?
- How many classes per year are you planning to run?
- Do you have existing partnerships that will reduce out-of-pocket costs?
- How much space are you going to need to support the broader community?

Now that you're starting to hone in on what type of environment, staff, resources, and potential investments you're going to make, you're starting to have a better idea of how much capital this is going to take. Now, let's see if we can make that number smaller.

- In regards to these responses, what is critical versus nice-to-have?
- How lean can you run this project and still be successful?

- What is your Minimum Valuable Accelerator?

Ballpark figures

Now that you have some potential buckets for where you're going to be spending money, we can start figuring out how much capital you're going to need to be successful with your accelerator.

We're providing the following some ballpark estimates for a variety of expenditures where we can — and additional context for where we can't. And we always encourage you to plan for the worst and hope for the best. Better to make your numbers higher and have the actuals come in lower.

So here we go in order of importance.

Space

Obviously, for this model of accelerator, space is critical. You should allocate a significant amount of the capital to underwriting this expense. At the very least, you should estimate about 100 sq ft (30 sq m) for each founder in the space. At the most, you should get as much space as you can afford.

If you can buy — or work out an arrangement with the building owner — all the better. Equally beneficial, if you can round up enough capital to sign a longer lease, that will help drive down costs, as well.

And try to get space that is roughly built out, rather than raw office space. (Former warehouse and storage spaces tend to work really well.) This will save you money on tenant improvements and the like. Ideally, you'll only be adding a few extra power outlets and a few touches here and there. We don't want you sinking a ton of cash into the space.

PIE began in an empty retail space that was donated to us by the building owner during the doldrums of the mortgage crisis. As the economy rebounded and the owner sold the building, that "free" space suddenly became very spendy. In the highest rent district of Portland.

So with that in mind our numbers aren't terribly useful here. In fact, it's incredibly difficult to do any apples to apples comparison. No matter where you are. But let's take some current averages and see if that helps give you a ballpark.

If x is the cost of the space per square foot per year and y is the number of companies you're looking to help, here's a rough equation. (We'll estimate the number of founders per team at three — some will have more and some will have less — and the amount of space per founder at 100 sq ft.)

x(y(3*100)) = $TOTAL LEASE/year = $MONTHLY LEASE PAYMENT

So let's say we wanted to help 10 startups in an area where the cost per square foot is $25.

$25(10(3*100)) = $75,000/year = $6250/month

You can add other elements. Like you're going to want to account for the monthly infrastructure costs — things like internet connectivity, electricity, water, sanitation.... But this gives you a starting point for ball parking the number.

Staff

Now that you've got some space, let's get some people in that space. And some folks to manage it. For that, you'll need staff.

Like space, the pricing of the staff will be dependent on the region and cost of living and the like. But there are some industry averages floating around that will help.

On average, Managing Director/Program Manager salaries generally fall in the range of $125,000 to $175,000 per year plus benefits. For programs that make equity investments, many managing directors also receive an equity position (1 point or less) in each of the companies who go through the program and some participation in the the carry of the fund making the investments.

Program Manager salaries, on average, range from $50,000 to $75,000 per year, plus benefits. It is less likely that this role receives equity or upside from the carry.

Many programs hire additional staff — associates, EiRs, and technical experts — by providing those contracted positions with the same offer as the participating startups receive. So if a startup gets $20,000 as in seed capital, you would budget a similar number for each of these contracted staff.

A good rule of thumb for salaries — in addition to the usual "depends on experience" — is to assume that the fewer staff you have, the more each of the roles will be paid. So if you're running a lean shop, expect to pay top dollar for the staff you are hiring.

With that in mind, let's just estimated that staffing is likely going to run a minimum of $350,000/year with benefits and other associated costs.

If you can get creative, get creative. But don't skimp on staff. They're under a ton of pressure to perform, so they deserve to be compensated fairly.

Food

Throughout the accelerator, you'll spend plenty of time feeding founders' psychoses. We recommend that you also spend time and money to feed their body. Trust us. Budget for this expenditure. You'll be glad you did.

While you're welcome to cater as many meals as budget will allow, we recommend a baseline of two meals, one dinner (Family Dinner) and one lunch. At PIE, we catered three meals per week, Family Dinner and two lunches, on average.

Again, food pricing varies as much as real estate, depending on where you are. But you can ballpark it. Let's assume that an individual meal is going to cost around the same prices as entrees at your local restaurant cost. While they'll likely cost you less, this is a good starting point for your budget. If x is the number of weeks in your program, y is the number of meals you're planning to cater per week, z is the number of companies you're looking to help, a is the average cost of an entree, here's a rough equation (assuming three founders per company on average).

x(y(z(a*3))) = $TOTAL CATERING BILL/class

So for PIE the equation looks like this:

12(3(10($15*3))) = $16,200/class

That's just meals. And just for the founders. Sometimes you'll have mentors stop by. And you'll have mentors in residence eating. And people will hire staff. So, for budgeting purposes, we'd recommend rounding that PIE number up to $20,000/class.

But remember that the founders will be in your space day in, day out. And mentors will be around a lot. And investors. And other folks using the space. And events. So we'll need to budget for beverages, snacks, and other incidentals. (NOTE: If you're planning on hosting large events like opening parties and the like, we recommend budgeting for those separately.)

For PIE, let's assume that this brings the budget up to $25,000/class.

Plus you'll want to have some wiggle room in this budget for those time when you want to do a special meal or there's a birthday or something else comes up. Heck. Maybe you want to get pizza one time. (One time is okay.)

We'd recommend increasing the meal budget by at least 25% to cover these additional costs.

If you want to get more granular, just reduce the complexity of the equation above. With the same parameters, z(a*3) will give you the total cost of a single meal for your startups. For PIE that's 10($15*3) = $450. Which we'd just call $500, for budgeting purposes. So an additional 25% budget, would cover about 10 additional meals with a little left over (ahem) for snacks and beverages and stuff.

And remember, that's just during class. You'll want to be sure to reserve some budget for the off season, especially if you're going to allow folks to remain in the space.

Legal and Accounting

Like it or not, you're going to incur costs for legal and accounting. Conservatively, as a ballpark, we'd recommend budgeting $20,000 for legal and $20,000 for accounting.

If you're planning on making an equity investment in the companies your program, your legal costs are going to be more significant.

It's also important to plan for legal costs outside the normal course of doing business. For example, it's become common practice to perform background checks on participants before they enter the program. At PIE, we chose to run basic background checks on all of the founders as part of the due diligence process, once they were accepted into the program. It's purely a precautionary measure. But it's highly recommended. Pricing for this sort of service can vary, but make sure to budget for it.

Perks

Another must-have budget item is a slush fund for perks. Because at some point, you're going to need to help your founders blow off some steam. Or someone is going need a short term loan. Or there's going to being something stressing someone out in the most debilitating of ways.

Maybe it's paying for a ticket for a founder to fly home. Maybe it's hiring a babysitter so that a founder can have a date with their significant other. Maybe it's just taking the entire office out for an impromptu happy hour or shopping trip.

Whatever the case, we highly recommend that you earmark some budget for being nice and for taking care of your founders and your staff. It's these little things that make the accelerator more bearable. And make the community a community.

Slush, fudge, and breathing room

No matter how conservatively worst case your budget winds up, there are always unexpected costs that crop up. So we advise that you do more than round up. Consider adding another 10%-25% of the overall budget to account for unforeseen expenses.

Maybe you need to fly in an amazing mentor. Maybe there's an event that your startups need to attend. Maybe the whole cohort gets invited to the Bay Area to hang out at Google or Facebook. You never know.

The last thing you want to have happen is to miss an opportunity that could have been life changing for your founders, simply because you lacked the budget to make it happen. So plan accordingly.

Optional costs

There are any number of ways to customize your accelerator experience to fit the types of startups with whom you want to work. Maybe you need more equipment? Maybe you want to take an interest in each of the companies? Maybe you want to have a demo day?

These are some additional costs to keep in mind, but they're not mission critical for the accelerator to work. These are a few examples of nice to haves.

Investment

When we started PIE, the prevailing accelerator model had accelerators making an equity investment in each of the companies that participated in the accelerator. The math at that time was $6000/founder up to three founders. So, $18,000. Common wisdom dictated that investment purchased 6% of the company.

As time went on, the models continued to fluctuate and change. Some folks started using convertible notes or SAFE documents to defer equity investments to a later date. Some chose to invest even more money — or to have an investment waiting post graduation. Some chose to have a floating amount of equity based on the perceived valuation of the company and the amount the accelerator was interested in investing. Others invested capital and then had the startup pay for the accelerator services out of that capital. Still others chose to forego taking equity, altogether.

These days, there are any number of ways to approach this problem. Obviously, the most expensive — in terms of capital required — is to invest a small amount of seed capital at the beginning of the class, followed by a larger, post graduation amount. This is the model that Techstars currently uses.

If you want to use the current model as your ballpark number, then budget $20,000 + $100,000 per startup.

There is no right or wrong way to go about this. And obviously, we could spend hours going through the pros and cons of each model. But the reality is, you need to choose what works for you based on what you're hoping to accomplish and the amount of capital you have at your disposal.

We simply recommend that you always question your motives and ensure that the process and associated costs are fair and equitable to the founders. Your accelerator should be delivering value. And there should be some equitable compensation for that value.

On the converse, this is not about your accelerator getting rich. Trust us. There are far easier ways to get rich than running a risky early stage startup accelerator.

Demo Day

Like investing, the prevailing model when we started PIE included a "Demo Day" as the graduation from the program. At the time, this generally involved filling a theater with a bunch of would-be investors in an attempt to get meaningful conversation started between founders and investors.

Since then, there have been many different takes on the Demo Day model. Some are low-key events that take place behind close doors. Some are huge splashy community events — in a huge theater with a live band, a livestream of the content available to anyone in the whole world, and pomp and circumstance — that are designed as a celebration of community and accomplishment rather than a way of securing funding. (This was where PIE went with its Demo Day.) Still others have done away with Demo Days altogether.

source/images/supportland-demo-day-pie.jpg

Again, there is no right way to do this. You simply need to make the decision based on the needs of your community and your founders. Demo Days can be incredibly impactful.

But, it's important to understand that these days, that impact does not generally come in the form of raising capital. Investors could attend a demo day practically every week of the year at this point. So if connecting investors with your founders is your primary goal, get more creative about how to make those connections. Because a demo day probably isn't it.

For budgeting, you'll want to assess venue costs, A/V costs, staging and production, livestream, band, hosts, whatever... You can go as small as possible or as large as budget will allow. But do what works for your community.

Upkeep and Maintenance

If your accelerator is located within a larger office building, you may be expected to cover the costs of janitorial services or garbage. Or you may discover that you need to build another conference room. Or maybe some of your desks will fall apart because you didn't buy the IKEA desks we recommend.

One thing is for sure, your participants will do an incredibly poor job of keeping the space clean. And your staff will likely be more than busy trying keep tabs on all of the activities. So if you can afford to allocate budget to help keep the space more hospitable, please do so.

Whatever the case, you're going to need to spend some money keeping the space up to snuff — or maybe even improved. So earmark a portion of your budget to account for those expenditures.

Sample pro forma

To get you started on the budgeting process, we've wiped a pro forma that PIE used for budgeting. It's a good way to start thinking through your budget. Feel free to make a copy and retool it to suit your needs.

NOTE: This is a pro forma for one fiscal year of an accelerator that is already in operation. It does not account for startup costs, like buying furniture or tenant improvements.

Google Sheets: PIE - Sample pro forma

CHAPTER 9

Space

Create a Minimally Valuable Space

At PIE, we're huge fans of coworking. Despite its detractors. And critics of the open floor plan. Heck, we started as a coworking space. We get it.

We think that coworking — as a model — works uniquely well for building and reinforcing the connective tissue that makes a community, well, a community. That same connective tissue that, over time, becomes the muscle that supports a thriving ecosystem.

Coworking might not be the best solution for a solitary company in a vast sea of other disconnected companies, with people treating the entire office space like a water cooler. But in our experience, it tends to work really well with a bunch of small teams — and this is critical: small teams who share something in common — cohabitating in a larger space. We've found that the random collisions that occur among these peers are worth the "loss of productivity." And we think that being human and collaborative in a workspace with other humans has an intrinsic value. Full stop.

We firmly believe in a shared space for your accelerator program. We see it as an intrinsic part of the experience of being in an accelerator — and a critical component of the community you are working to enhance.

Build an accelerator space

But you're not building a coworking space for your accelerator participants. You're building a accelerator space for that has some facets of traditional coworking, like shared resources and an open floor plan.

Yes, people will cowork out of your accelerator space. But your accelerator space is not a coworking space. This is an important distinction, so let's unpack that a bit.

Coworking space is comfortable

We've noticed a tendency in the accelerator industry to deck out your shared workspace with the latest and greatest. Swanky furniture. Gaming equipment. Tons of outlets. Sit/stand desks. Comfy office chairs. Bean bags. Ping pong tables. Catered kitchens. . .

Honestly, we could go on and on.

Yes, people ooh and ah when they see the space. And yes, if you're running a coworking space, the aesthetic makes it easier to defend the prices you're charging them for space. And yes, it can provide a certain sense of pride for the folks running the space.

There is a certain je ne sais quoi to a cohesive interior design aesthetic.

It's an aesthetic that's required for coworking. Because you need people — people who could otherwise roll out of bed and start working — to feel the motivation to commute into an office space. You need people to feel that there is intrinsic value in the space you're providing. And you need people to be comfortable with the prices they are paying in return for that investment.

But, to be honest, more often than not, those are false positives. They don't really make for a great community space. Or accelerator space. That design element makes for a great coworking space.

Over designing is a mistake.

Don't feel guilty. PIE fell for this trap too. It happens. But this is about you making new mistakes, remember? Not repeating ours.

At the PIE space, our initial build out was the equivalent of Hollywood set design for the quintessential startup workspace. Complete with painted and distressed closet doors as desktops supported by heavily welded — and rustically beautiful — sawhorses.

But for as compelling as the aesthetic was, it simply didn't work.

Accelerator space is awkward

Why? Well, what we've learned over the years is that the space must be viable and functional. Aside from that, it should never be comfortable. It should never be easy. The space should be just difficult enough. Without being frustrating.

> **tl;dr We encourage you to think of the collaborative workspace in terms of being "utilitarian." It should be awkward at best. Leaning toward uncomfortable.**

It's not that we didn't have the ability to make the space more comfortable. It's simply that it *shouldn't* be comfortable. That is not the purpose of the space. The space, like building a startup, should be difficult. And awkward. It should always cause friction. And discomfort.

> Perfection is achieved, not when there is nothing more to add, but when there is nothing left to take away. Antoine de Saint-Exupery.

Your only requirements are a solid wifi connection, access to power, a surface for a laptop, and a chair. That's it. Beyond that, you provide less than is needed.

Think less office space, more coffeeshop or bar.

You should have too many people in the space. It should be noisy. You should have too few conference rooms. People should be eavesdropping on conversations whether they want to or not. You should have passible coffee and, if it fits your culture, beer. And most of all, everyone should be in one another's way.

source/images/2015-03-13-13.55.06.jpg

Why put the startups through additional stress and turmoil? Because your objective is not to coddle startups. If you want to coddle them, then start an incubator. Protect them with warmth and comfort. Shield them from the outside world. Create a utopian existence for them. That's what an incubator does.

Your job as an accelerator, however, is to get them moving further faster than they would on their own. Your job is to get them to grow up — and, ideally, out. Your job is to create a microcosm of the real world. A biome of startup life. They same way it exists outside of your doors. But with a few safety nets strewn here and there.

And then you need to poke the startups so that, from time to time, they tumble into those safety nets.

If you provide a space that is too comfortable and too accommodating then the startups will stay there. Forever. And that isn't what you want. You want churn. You want growth. You want backfill. And activity. And hustle.

Yes, your Founders are amazing people to be around. And there is no end to their creativity and drive. But you need to get them out of the space. And you need to encourage them to move out. And they need to want to do that. That needs to be a motivating factor. An unspoken rule.

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tl;dr We are inviting you into our space because we want you to leave.

Like being embarrassed to bring your friends over to your parents' house because their idea of decor is decades out of date. Your accelerator is — both literally and figuratively — your Founders' parents' basement. And it should be just as awkward as that arrangement.

There are also fringe benefits to this sort of interior design. You, as an accelerator staff, remain scrappy. You feel less comfortable. You don't get to have it easy, either. You're dealing with the same awkwardness that your Founders are experiencing. And that's just how it should be.

source/images/pie-kitchen-table.jpg

Potential investors walking into the space shouldn't see opulence. They should see a situation that they want to help your startups escape. The space should inspire one prevailing thought: "We need to get you out of here."

The best space is the space you have

The best Accelerators tend to be the ones that make do with the space they have. It's not the space you want; it's the space you've got. So use it. Don't get hung up on it. Just get started.

Conversely, many Accelerator projects stumble when trying to source "the perfect space" for their home. "It's not the right size," "It's not the right location," "It's not configured well."

It doesn't matter. Have you found a space? Is it available? Can you afford it? Good. Make it work.

Physical dimensions

For the actual physical dimensions of the space, you can approach the problem one of two ways:

1. If you already have a space, figure out how many people you can wedge into that space.
2. If you're searching for a space, figure out how many founders/companies you'd like to have in a cohort.

Adjust accordingly.

At PIE, our patrons, W+K, were granting us a space. It was roughly 3500 square feet (1000 square meters) of unimproved retail space. And it was oddly shaped. But it had its own entrance. And it's own kitchen area.

As a rule of thumb, we used — and continue to use — the ratio of 100 square feet (10 square meters) per founder when determining what a space will handle — or when deciding what sort of space to pursue.

After some quick sketches of layouts and desks, we determined that we could fit roughly 30-40 Founders in an Accelerator cohort, while reserving some space for meeting areas and phone booths and whatnot.

So we went after 10 companies for our first Accelerator class. (NOTE: This was too many for staff to effectively handle, but the space supported it effectively. So remember, it's not just what the space can handle but what staff and mentors can handle.)

More on how we arranged those startups will follow.

Infrastructure

More often than not, Accelerator spaces are a "work with the space that you have" sort of proposition. And there doesn't tend to be a lot of capital for tenant improvements or build out. That said, there are certain aspects of the space that you simply have to make work. Even if that means spending a little money to make it feasible.

PIE focused on early stage tech startups who were usually pursuing Web based or mobile based products that were hosted in the cloud. For that reason, the vast majority of our companies were people banging on laptops.

But even that sort of setup requires some infrastructure.

Here are some of those "must haves" for an Accelerator to even function as a workspace.

Power

At the very least, you should plan on having one outlet and one surge protecting power strip per person. This may require you to spend money on additional power drops in your space. Or you may be able to make due with extension cords and trip guards, within the realms of fire code. But no matter what, it will definitely require you to purchase a lot of power strips — or have someone donate them to your cause.

> **tl;dr At a minimum, provide one outlet and one power strip per person.**

Note: PIE did not do this well. This was one of our mistakes. We didn't have enough power outlets for each person to have an outlet. And, at times, it caused more stress than we care to admit. Later, we managed to get more power added, especially when startups needed the additional power to function.

Internet

Regardless of the types of businesses with whom you're working, high speed internet connectivity is a must. So figure out a way to pay for it or get it donated.

At PIE, we went for an enterprise grade cable connection. If you can get fiber, get fiber. It's worth it. And again, worth mitigating the stress of dropped connections or large file transfers.

Wifi

While some of your company may require physical internet drops, wifi will likely suffice for most of your participants.

PIE was hilariously bad at selecting wifi routers early in its existence. And this plagued us for about a year. Until we tore out the system we had set up and rebuilt it from scratch.

Spend the time and money to get the wifi done right.

And be extremely liberal with the number of simultaneous connections your router can support. Especially if you're hosting events in your space. But it helps day-to-day, as well.

Rest assured, you'll be surprised how much good wifi connectivity can result in a positive impression of the space and your events. Because it's hard for people to tell others about your Accelerator if they can't get online to talk about it.

Printing/copying

It sounds ridiculous in this day and age, but you need a printer and copier. Inevitably there will be a contract or term sheets or employee documentation that requires this. It's a cost of doing business.

At least these days it's possible to find a single multipurpose device to handle your needs. And try to make it as efficient as possible. Because no one wants to be sweating a 30 page document completing a print run before a deadline.

Also prepare to take on the cost of supplies and maintenance for this unit. Because it will break. Usually at the most inconvenient times.

If you want to be really nice, make sure that this device is networked. PIE never managed to accomplish this. It's still a dream that we will, one day.

Finally, don't be tempted to charge per copy or anything silly like that. Just eat the cost as a cost of doing business.

Restrooms/Locker rooms

This is obvious but we don't want to ignore the obvious. You're going to need restrooms for your Accelerator residents. Preferably multiple facilities.

But while restrooms are definitely a necessity, it's not a requirement that they be part of the main space itself. They just need to be accessible.

For the first few years of PIE, we used a shared restroom for several retail locations in our building. Then we got a slight upgrade when W+K provided access to their locker rooms, which allowed our startups to access to showers and lockers, as well.

Kitchen

Given how much time the founders will be spending in the space, a kitchen is a critical component of the Accelerator setup. Please note that it also becomes a completely hassle in terms of custodial upkeep. In our experience, it's like one kitchen in a living space with 40 roommates.

That said, it's still critically important that you have it. And that you plan appropriately for its ongoing maintenance — and communicate those responsibilities and — potentially — chores to the residents of the space.

Our kitchen became so important to the space — serendipitous collisions and compelling conversations started in there all of the time — that we used the term "Kitchen" to describe the general chat room on our chat environment.

Here's how ours was outfitted for the class.

Coffee/Tea

Probably the most critical component of the kitchen for founders: the convenient conveyance of caffeine.

If possible, invest in a coffee maker that with piped in water. Not only is it more efficient when people are making pot after pot of coffee, it ensures that there is one less possibility of making a mess in the kitchen area.

Also invest in the highest quality coffee and tea available. It's of minimal additional cost but it goes a long way in helping the startups feel at home.

Make sure to have a wide selection of teas, caffeinated, caffeine free, herbal, and green.

Refrigerator(s)

Have at least one full size refrigerator for the kitchen. Just like you would have at home.

Founders will often bring in their own meals — or need a way of storing doggy bags from lunch and dinner meetings. Help them stretch their budgets as far as they can.

Plus, if you're feeding them as often as we will encourage you to do, you'll need somewhere to store those leftovers, as well.

At PIE, we were lucky enough to have two full-size fridges. And if you can afford the same setup, we highly recommend it. We labeled one public and one private.

In the public fridge, anything was fair game. This is where we would store things like condiments, leftovers from PIE group meals, and other food that founders deemed fair game for the rest of the group. Sometimes, you're lucky enough to get founders who enjoy cooking for everyone. And when you do, you want somewhere to put that.

In the private fridge, we required folks to label all food. This was specifically hands off sort of stuff. Like sack lunches. Or that extra special cream that someone wanted for his coffee.

Like the kitchen, itself, cleaning the fridge(s) will become a chore and a bone of contention. Plan ahead for that.

Cupboards/storage

You're going to need somewhere to put all of the coffee and tea and cups and plates and whatnot. And you'll need drawers for silverware and stuff. Make sure these are well stocked with plates, bowls, mugs, glasses, silverware, and serving wear. As an added bonus, consider storage containers for leftover food.

You'll also need room to store snacks. And soups. And other dry storage sorts of things that folks will bring into the space. It's like any kitchen. And folks are living out of the space for the most part. So treat it accordingly.

Again, it is the responsibility of the accelerator to stock commonly used items like coffee and tea, spices, hot sauce, condiments, and the like.

Like everything else in the kitchen, get ready for these to become messy and disorganized. And set aside time or assign chores accordingly.

Garbage and Recycling

Even if your space is occupied exclusively by folks typing on keyboards, you will still accumulate refuse. So it's a good idea to have places to put it.

Being from Portland, we had for correctly disposing of rubbish. But at the very least, we recommend the following:

- Recycling (glass, cans, plastic, paper, cardboard, as sorted by your sanitation services)
- Compost (food waste, compostable containers, coffee grounds)

- Garbage (stuff that can't be used in a different way)

Sink(s)

At least one sink is necessary. Multiple sinks are preferable. Otherwise you get a line up of people whenever you've had a meal. Try to make it as efficient as possible. Or as efficient as your space will allow.

More so than any other area, the sink will become your nightmare. No matter how many times you remind folks, no matter how many signs you post, no matter who is assigned clean up, the sink will pile up with dishes. Always.

Plan accordingly.

Kitchen nice to haves

At PIE, we were lucky to have a few things that made life in an accelerator easier. You can get by without these things, but if you can afford them, we highly recommend them.

Microwave

If you have a bunch of leftovers, someone at some point is going to want to reheat some leftovers. Or pop some popcorn. So maybe consider having a microwave on hand to handle some of that.

Dishwasher

Arguably, this falls into the "nice to have" category. But if you have the option to have a dishwasher, we highly recommend it. (See the note about the sink, above.)

Also, invest in a cheap "clean/dirty" magnet. Or be totally disruptive and make your own sign. Either way, make it happen. The dishwasher is a nice to have. If you have a dishwasher, the sign is a must have.

Like the fridge and the sink, it's probably a good idea to assign chores to make sure that this is taken care of.

And if you can't afford a dishwasher or the space will not allow for one, make sure to purchase a drying rack. Because someone is going to have to clean those dishes in the sink eventually.

Water Cooler

Startups cannot live by caffeinated beverages alone. And it's important that you try to keep folks as healthy as possible. So hydration is imperative.

That's why we were happy to have a water cooler in our office. Sort of by accident. (It was a residual benefit of the aforementioned livestreaming telethon.)

To kegerator or not to kegerator

In Portland, it's a common occurrence to have a kegerator — a fridge with a tap that allows you to store a keg of liquid, keep it cold, and easily dispense it — in startup spaces. That kegerator could have beer or wine or cider or kombucha. Some even just serve sparkling water.

It's something that speaks to an underlying culture of craft distilling and brewing in Portland. And Portland has a rich history in many types of alcohol production. In fact, we often reference how the growth of the startup community directly emulates the culture and community of the wine and beer industries in our region. But it's not for everyone.

We chose to have a kegerator in the space because nearly everyone in the space drank beer. And there were times when retiring to the kitchen and sharing a beer with a peer resulted in some really interesting conversations.

But it's a choice. Not a requirement. So do as you see fit.

Additional items

Part of the magic of the kitchen is allowing your startups to customize the space to their own particular needs… and then gratuitously appropriating their good ideas.

Some of those good ideas include:

- **Toaster**: Folks like toast. And toasted bagels. This might work for you.
- **Toaster oven**: Reheating leftovers or for melting cheese on bagels.
- **Sodastream**: Despite the awkward sounds emanating from the kitchen, the Switchboard team really seemed to love their Sodastream.
- **Blender**: We may or may not have had a representative of a certain margarita maker in the space for a time. But that said, smoothies and veggie blends are something your startups may want.

Note: We have blown the circuit breaker on a regular basis. Especially when we had the toaster and microwave going when the fridge kicked on. We were lucky that the kitchen was on a separate circuit. Well, on a circuit with our conference room. Long story short, be aware of your power consumption and the load on the circuits as you appoint your kitchen.

IKEA is your friend

Now that you have a space and some infrastructure in place, we'll need somewhere to put all of those Founders so they're not sitting on the floor.

Don't make furnishings a major line item. We used low cost dining room tables from IKEA. And even though we bought them in 2011, they're still holding their own today. And look practically brand new.

You're welcome to choose whatever you want, but at this price point, we're ever hopeful that IKEA never discontinues the Melltorp.

Want a standing desk? Combine that kitchen table with a coffee table to make a fairly ergonomic standing desk for most folks. Melltorp plus Lack? Congrats on creating a standing desk for less than $100 US.

Long story short, take care of the basics. Like power. And internet. And desks and comfortable office chairs. (Your Founders are going to be sitting in them for hours upon hours.) It's fine to put the onus of purchasing laptops, monitors, phones, accoutrement, and the like on the founders. But don't make them hunt down things like power strips or extension cords or dry erase markers. That's base infrastructure. That's your job.

Arranging the desks in the office space

Some Accelerator programs use long tables along which a number of startups will sit. Others use individual desks.

We chose individual desks which we would arrange in "pods" by company. Sometimes, smaller companies would share a single pod. Sometimes, founders would separate their desk from their company pod.

You never know how founders will want to work with their cofounders. So we allowed founders to arrange the desks however they wanted. Some founders would choose to sit side by side, so they could easily engage pair programming or look at one another's screens. Some founders liked sitting across from one another, so that they could more easily converse — or know when the cofounder was in Do Not Disturb mode. Still others had a hub and spoke set up. Or some other combination.

We wanted our founders to be as effective and efficient as they could be. So we let them adapt the space to their needs, no matter what that did to the overall aesthetic of the space.

Mistakes were made: Where the staff sits When we started the accelerator, we made the assumption that the founders would do a better job of acclimating and engaging with one another if we gave them the run of the main space. We located the PIE cofounders and staff in the far corner of the space, out of the way.

We made two mistakes with this arrangement.

First, we didn't have enough staff to make effective use of the space. Which meant we had empty desks in our corner. In an effort to alleviate this issue, we brought one of the teams into our corner. While the corner wasn't completely shielded from the floor of the Accelerator, it was protected enough to make it feel like a separate space.

This negatively impacted the team that sat with us. They didn't bond with the other startups as effectively. And they managed to keep themselves excluded — by choice — when they should have been forced to be included.

Second, the staff suffered by being separated from the startups. We didn't have our finger on the pulse. We couldn't feel the vibe of the room.

It wasn't that the staff was inaccessible. We weren't. And the founders felt totally comfortable coming into our corner and chatting with us. But we missed out on the times when people weren't seeking us out. And the nonverbal clues. And the gut checks you get when you're embedded within the active space.

There is no caste system here

At PIE, one of the most important things we discovered — through trial and error — was that staff and startups had to be perceived as equals in terms of workspace.

What we realized, relatively quickly, was that the staff had to be on the same level as the startups, both physically and figuratively. The staff didn't get perks. They didn't get private offices. Or special considerations. The staff has to be down in the muck with all of the other Founders. They have to experience the struggle firsthand. They have to be accessible. And interruptible. And perhaps, most importantly, tangible and real to the Founders going through the Accelerator.

> **tl;dr Don't play favorites. Embed the staff in the trenches.**

Anything less, and you're compromising the opportunity to bond with your companies. And bonding with your companies is what this is all about. Because you're in this for the long haul.

Without getting too graphic, the staff belongs in the shit. They need to be down in the trenches or foxholes or ditches or whatever analogy you need. The staff needs to be side-by-side with the founders. Because they need to feel the pulse of what's happening in the space. Day by day. And minute by minute.

Ongoing build out

The space you start with doesn't have to be perfect. It's like building any product. Start with what you have. Figure out what's working. Figure out what's needed. And improve from there.

When we started PIE, there were no conference rooms. Or phone booths. So people took calls in the space. Or out on the stoop. Or while walking laps around the block.

We had a pseudo conference room that allowed a small group of people to gather. But it allowed for little privacy.

It was just a circle of high back leather chairs around an old Starbucks sign coffee table. But it provided enough of a conference room effect to be useful. In the short term.

Conference room

As time went on, we identified the need for an actual conference room. So we took another corner of the office space and walled it off to create a conference room space.

It was overly warm and stuffy. The chairs were uncomfortable. The electricity rarely worked. The whiteboard was difficult to erase. But it had a door. And it served its purpose.

It is important to note that we did not start with a conference room. We started with what we had and, through use, identified that a conference room was needed. Only then did we incur the expense to create the conference room. And this was after we'd inhabited the space for quite some time.

While it's fairly safe to assume you'll need a conference room, you might want to see how people make use of your existing space before you act on that assumption. Or see how they compensate for the lack of conference room. There might be some interesting learning there.

Meeting areas

Whether you have a conference room in the space or not, you're going to wast to establish some meeting areas in your space. These can be as simple as a couch. Or they can have more structure to them.

When we say "meeting areas," we mean open areas within the coworking area or nearby. These should be places where people can be overheard. And where privacy or confidentiality are secondary.

Why? Because this sort of arrangement serves three very important functions:

1. Encouraging people to have meetings within earshot of their peers helps establish a level of comfort and trust with the entire cohort. As folks become more and more comfortable with one another — as that trust builds — you'll see fewer and fewer meetings occurring with closed doors and secrecy.
2. People will overhear what is going on. They'll realize that other founders are struggling similar issues. They'll empathize and, eventually, sympathize with the other founders in their cohort. And if all goes well, they'll start to help one another more effectively. "I couldn't help by overhear… I have some ideas for you."
3. Last but not least, it helps create a sense of activity in the space. You want a dull roar. You want people collaborating. You want it being a little noisy. Don't try to eliminate that. This isn't a library in the 50s.

Phone booths

When we started PIE, one of the most obvious — and noisy — things about it was the lack of privacy. There was absolutely nowhere in the space where a person could take a phone call or have a private conversation without everyone hearing.

For this reason, most people started talking calls outside on the stoop. Or started taking walks around the block for private meetings.

That worked fine when the weather was good. But that didn't work so well in the winter. Or during the rainy season.

So we were motivated to find a better solution.

Mail

One of the fringe benefits of sitting in an office space is getting an official business address. For many of our startups, this was the first actual address that the company had had. A number of them even incorporated while they were in PIE.

We chose to use a single physical address for all of the startups. Since we were all sitting in the same space. In the early days, this was manageable through a single inbox. As the number of PIE alums grew, we found it more effective to create mailboxes for current residents. As such, it became the responsibility of the staff to sort the mail and alert alums when mail had arrived for them.

Be advised that the mail thing goes two ways. Not only will you be dealing with inbound mail, your startups will want outbound services and shipping as well. Make sure you have adequate envelopes, boxes, tape, and postage at your location.

The downside of all of this? Most of your startups will only share the space with you briefly, but you will be receiving mail for every single one of your startups for the rest of your life.

CHAPTER 10

Staff

Once you have your space sketched out, you're going to need some folks to run your accelerator. We say "folks" because we've determined that it's nearly impossible to run an accelerator with fewer than two full-time employees focused on the effort.

It can be done, mind you. (PIE, for example, was staffed by one FTE supported by a bunch of volunteers for its first accelerator class.) But it will result in less value to your startups and more headaches for your staff.

We recommend the following two roles as critical to the success of the accelerator:

- Managing Director/General Manager
- Program Manager

Let's take a look at their roles and responsibilities.

Managing Director (or General Manager)

Role

The Managing Director (sometimes referred to as "General Manager") works to ensure that current startups, mentors, alumni, investors, brand sponsors, and accelerator staff have a mutually rewarding experience that improves the perception and quality of entrepreneurial ventures associated with the program.

Primary responsibilities

- Serve as primary contact point for mentors and alumni
- Coordinate mentor and startup relations
- Recommend strategies and tactics that improve the program for all participants
- Recommend strategies and tactics that promote the accelerator program, startups, alumni, and mentors
- Manage strategic planning and goal setting

- Manage relations with mentors, investors, and alumni
- Work to ensure the program participates in the larger startup and accelerator communities
- Manage online presence, including but not limited to:
  - Web content
  - Blog
  - Social
- Participate in weekly checkpoints, including but not limited to:
  - Monday morning kick off meetings
  - Family Dinner meeting
  - Weekly check-ins with each company
- Provide a weekly status report on accelerator progress, issues, and resolved issues
- Document the accelerator experience from all perspectives
- Manage facilities, including but not limited to:
  - Physical space
  - Furniture
  - Keg, coffee, water
  - Kitchen
  - IT
- Propose and manage tools that enable and facilitate communications and management

Secondary responsibilities

- Assist with schedule for curriculum and mentor visits
- Assist with major events like Demo Day
- Assist with weekly checkpoints
- Assist with weekly progress reports for startups
- Work with sponsors' and patrons' communications teams to promote the accelerator within their respective industries

Program Manager

Role

The Program Manager works to ensure that the current class of startups has the most rewarding and beneficial experience while in the space. This role also serves as the primary startup liaison and ombudsman.

Primary responsibilities

- Serve as primary contact point for startups, from application through graduation
- Recommend strategies and tactics that improve the program for startups
- Manage day-to-day relations with accelerator class members
- Monitor and moderate stress within the environment through creative use of meals, perks, contests, parties, and the like
- Manage weekly checkpoints, including but not limited to:
  - Monday morning kick off meetings
  - Family Dinner meeting
  - Weekly check-ins with each company
- Provide a weekly status report for each company
- Manage the schedule for curriculum and mentor visits
- Manage major events like Demo Day
- Manage startup relations with internal teams from sponsors and patrons
- Manage the application process, from initial forms through final selection

Secondary responsibilities

- Advise on strategic planning and goal setting
- Communicate with management teams from the accelerator, sponsors, and patrons

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(sidebar)

Good Cop, Bad Cop

One of the reasons we believe that it's nearly impossible to run an accelerator program with less than two staff is the "good cop, bad cop" dynamic. Not that anyone has to be bad cop. But you need to two people listening to the startups. Because they hear different things.

It helps if one of those folks — usually the program manager — is closer to the startups on a personal level. This is the good cop. The person that the startups trust. The confidante.

This relationship allows one of the staff members to better assess the mental state of the founders. It provides a more effective barometer of the levels of stress in the accelerator environment. And it enables the staff to take in candid feedback on what's working and what isn't.

Another staff member — usually the managing director — should remain more focused on the business, the founders' development, and the access to the mentors. This is the bad cop role.

This role allows the staff member to keep a more objective relationship with the founders. It enables the staff to listen for business problems or opportunities independent of the emotional turmoil. And it allows for the staff to listen for mentoring opportunities that have more to do with the business than the founders.

Obviously, the magic of the good cop, bad cop dynamic is that the two cops are in constant communication with one another, keeping the entire staff appraised on the emotional and business issues currently impacting the founders. And allowing them to assess and mitigate the tenor of the class — from one-on-one insights to the stress level of the entire class.

CHAPTER 11

Optional roles

If budget allows — or if the unique structure of your accelerator creates more work than two people can effectively manage — we recommend considering these nice to have roles, next. PIE experimented with each of these roles throughout the course of our program.

Corporate/Brand Manager

Role

The Brand Manager works to ensure that corporate/brand sponsors and patrons derive demonstrable value from their engagement with the accelerator. This role serves as the primary liaison and ombudsman for the accelerator's corporate/brand mentors.

Primary responsibilities

- Serve as primary contact point for brand representatives and mentors
- Coordinate brand relations and communications
- Recommend strategies and tactics that improve the program for brand participation
- Recommend strategies and tactics that facilitate brand activations
- Manage sponsor involvement from a financial and contractual standpoint
- Manage sponsor visits and schedules
- Manage interaction among sponsor and patron corporate/brand account teams and startups
- Serve as a conduit for brand and startup collaboration
- Formalize process for brand mentor engagement from role definition through engagement
- Advise startups and mentors on brand engagement

- Participate in weekly checkpoints, including but not limited to:
  - Monday morning kick off meetings
  - Family Dinner meeting
  - Weekly check-ins with each company
- Provide a weekly status report to sponsoring brands on PIE progress

Secondary responsibilities

- Assist with schedule for curriculum and mentor visits
- Assist with major events like Demo Day
- Assist with weekly checkpoints
- Assist with weekly progress reports for startups
- Work with corporate/brand communications to promote brand sponsors within their respective industries

Entrepreneur in Residence (EiR)

Role

The entrepreneur in residence role is designed to serve two critical functions. First, the role is designed to be the "been there, done that" confidante for startups in the space, engaging in conversations that startups might not be comfortable broaching with accelerator staff or mentors. Second, the EiR is charged with assessing and highlighting opportunities within the accelerator environment that may result in efficiencies or revenue generation.

Primary responsibilities

- Work to formalize and codify accelerator processes and programs
- Document the accelerator experience from a startup perspective
- Serve as confidante for startups, both current and alums
- Manage relationship with corporate/brand technical mentors
- Recommend strategies and tactics that improve the program for startups
- Lead build vs. buy decisions for accelerator management tools
- Work to ensure the accelerator is visible and participates in the larger startup and accelerator communities

Secondary responsibilities

- Assist with schedule for curriculum and mentor visits
- Assist with major events like Demo Day
- Assist with weekly checkpoints
- Assist with weekly progress reports for startups
- Assist with online presence, including but not limited to:

- Web content
- Blog
- Social

Additional roles

If budget and available management resources allow, accelerators may also choose to augment staff with roles like interns, associates, and the like. We will explore these roles in future editions of the PIE Cookbook.

CHAPTER 12

Recruiting mentors

Once you have space and staff, the next priority for your accelerator is recruiting the mentors who will help your startups. Mentors are the lifeblood of any good accelerator, but they're especially critical for new accelerators.

> **tl;dr New accelerators are judged primarily by their mentor pool. Operating accelerators are only as good their last class.**

Identifying potential mentors

As you start working with startups, you will be able to identify the skill sets that have the most impact on your founders. This will become an ongoing process as you identify opportunities.

But at the outset, you need to work on recruiting a varied pool of founders, subject matter experts, and people who represent potential target markets.

Anyone can (and should) be a mentor

As we've mentioned previously, PIE firmly believes that anyone has the potential to be a mentor. It's not just "experts" who have the ability to do so. For that reason, we suggest that you try to recruit a variety of experience levels for your mentor pool.

By effectively leveraging these different viewpoints around a single problem or topic, you'll provide additional value to your startups and founders, by revealing flaws and opportunities that might not be obvious to experts or individuals with a wealth of experience.

It takes all kinds of people to provide valuable mentorship to your startups. Don't be afraid to mix it up.

Start with who you know

Portland is a community filled with any number of talented founders and potential mentors. Your community is no different.

When you begin recruiting mentors, start with who you know. Maybe you don't have a rolodex developed over fifteen years of working in the startup community. That's okay. If you've been active in the community, you'll have a handful of folks whom you can readily identify as potential mentors.

Intentionally recruit "known" mentors

If you're a new accelerator, recruiting your first class of companies will be largely dependent on the perceived strength of your mentor pool. For that reason, it's important that you work to recruit a few mentors who are recognizable to the startup market you are targeting.

At PIE, we were lucky to have the W+K name as part of the pursuit, but we were also lucky to have mentors from internationally recognized companies like Twitter, Kickstarter, and Techcrunch, among others; investors who had name recognition among our target audience; founders of local startups that held cache with our target audience; and known contributors from the open source community.

NOTE: "Known" doesn't have to mean "famous." Some of your most well-known mentors may, in fact, be only well-known to the target market you're pursuing. Don't fall for celebrity. Seek well known. But if you can get a few celebrity mentors, then do that.

The pedigree of our original mentors enabled us to effectively recruit our first class. The success of that first class enabled us to both add those founders to our mentor pool and recruit a variety of new mentors. It becomes an ongoing process, a virtuous cycle.

Look for the busiest people

While we stumbled into this technique, we often find that the busiest potential mentors are often the most likely to accept your invitation to mentor. Why? We found that the busiest people were already among the most giving and collaborative, hence their level of activity. But more importantly, we found that PIE's mentorship structure gave them two important things:

1. Context that their mentorship was having significant impact, and
2. A construct for providing mentorship that helped them better organize their time.

In future versions of the PIE Cookbook, we'll spend more time digging into recruiting techniques for mentors. But for now, you should use these tips to start recruiting your initial mentor pool.

As you effectively recruit and sign up mentors, you should spend time making sure they have context for what you're looking to accomplish. Even if they have mentored before.

So let's spend some time talking about onboarding. It's something we, at PIE, did incredibly poorly. And we don't want you to recreate our mistakes.

CHAPTER 13

Onboarding mentors

In order to make the experience most valuable for the mentor and most valuable for your founders, it is important that you define the mentor role and the expectations you have for that mentor before they are introduced to Founders.

For example, if you want a mentor to assist as a subject matter expert, make sure they are given the appropriate platform for conveying that knowledge. Don't make them present if a workshop is a more appropriate format. Don't make them take 1:1 meetings if their knowledge is relevant to every company — and will result in them repeating the same advice to 10 different companies.

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tl;dr Be thoughtful and respectful of how you use a Mentor's time.

Time commitment

Once you've chosen to work with a mentor, your most important job is to understand that mentor's level of time commitment. Some mentors will want to help but have absolutely no time. Other mentors will be willing to show up for office hours several times a week. It runs the gamut. Your challenge is making the best use of the time they are willing to commit so that they are deriving value from their participation.

Sliding scale

At PIE, we found the best way to help assess a mentor's availability was to present the engagement options as a sliding scale. On that scale, the minimal level of commitment was fairly low and the maximum level of commitment was decided by the mentor. There's was no high bar. Just a lowbar.

Just as importantly, we used other well know Mentors as examples of time commitment bands — "Mentor X generally presents onetime per class; Mentor Y holds regular office hours at PIE every week" — which provided even more context for their potential engagement. Plus, when a Mentor hears that one of their peers or someone they recognize — "[Mentor name] at [Startup] has done this to great effect and is consistently one of our most popular mentors" — they are given more context for how others are volunteering to do.

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tl;dr You must be this tall to ride. Set your mentor time commitment as a low bar, not a high bar.

At PIE, our lowest time commitment — our low bar — was "Be willing to grab coffee with one of our startups. Roughly 20-30 minutes. One time." That was it. Thirty minutes of commitment per year. And you're a PIE mentor.

At the upper end of the scale were things like, "Work out of the space on a regular basis and be open to interruption, as if you were one of the startups," or, "Be willing to take one of the companies under your wing and meet with the Founders consistently over the course of the class."

In every case, we began the conversation with "What are you hoping to get out of mentoring?" And "How much time do you feel you have to volunteer?"

In many cases, we were lucky and humbled to have Mentors consistently increase the amount of time they spent with our Founders — even if they originally thought they could only spare 30 minutes a year.

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tl;dr Mentoring is addictive. Mentors will often find they enjoy it more than they thought.

Mutual respect

And if you do it right? You'll find they'll be a lot more willing to commit more time to the program in future class. Culture of trust and all that.

Respect mentors' time and they will repay that respect with more time.

Mentoring the mentors

Around the time PIE was starting the accelerator phase of this ongoing experiment, David Cohen, cofounder of TechStars, shared the TechStars Mentor Manifesto. And it served as an inspiration for me. A post by Micah Baldwin, a former TechStars mentor , provided a similar nudge for me.

I'm often reminded to go back and reread both of these posts. And am inspired, again and again. So I thought I'd take the opportunity to augment the PIE mentor guidance a bit with some things that we've learned from observing PIE startups and mentors over the years.

We shared these tips with the PIE mentors and a few of them suggested we turn it into a blog post for the broader mentor community.

So we took that mentoring to heart.

If you're thinking about becoming a mentor for startups—either in a formal accelerator program or independently—here are some tips for thinking about how to work with entrepreneurs.

10 tips for mentoring startups

1) Common sense is not common.

Mentors often worry that they need to come up with some earth-shattering insights to be of value. This couldn't be further from the truth. Fact of the matter is that you spend day-in, day-out working in your area of expertise.

> You make intuitive leaps that are all but impossible without having had the experiences you've had.

All of that—all of that built up knowledge—is of incredible value to an entrepreneur who is in the middle of a maelstrom of activity. Or who hasn't yet gained the experience. So think of the simple things. Think of the obvious. And share those insights.

Because your common sense is not common.

"Common sense" is not common

As I was working on my "Mentoring the Mentors" post for PIE, I recalled an older piece of mine where I dug into the whole "common sense" fallacy. It seemed timely and, potentially, helpful. So, I'm sharing some of those thoughts, after a little bit of refreshing the content.

> Common sense. It seems so, well, common.But fact of the matter is that it's not.

I mean, common common sense is prevalent. I'll give you that. Those widely held understandings. And things that most people seem to know. Sense that is common across a community or population. Yes, that exists. Common common sense is common.

But your common sense? Nope. Not common, at all.

You see, your common sense is different than everyone else's common sense. And that's because your common sense is based on the experience and insights that you have derived from doing the same thing, day in and day out. Or by being part of something for a period of time. Or from repeatedly trying, failing, and iterating.

> Your common sense is a byproduct of your focus, your vantage, and your experience.

And because of that, it is completely subjective. In fact, even if I were doing exactly the same thing you're doing, day in and day out, the same things that are obvious to you wouldn't necessarily be obvious to me. Even worse, I might have my own cadre of common sense that I thought you should already know. Common sense is, counterintuitively, uncommon.

So that stuff that seems so obvious? It's not. And that forehead-slapping "What is that person thinking? Isn't it obvious that you do [or don't do] that?" response you have on a regular basis? Whatever it is that is so painfully obvious to you may not even register for the person you're observing.

Like it or not, we are all victims of the "curse of knowledge." And that's really difficult to shake. And it's nearly impossible to unthink or unknow.

And that's why, be it for business or mentoring or whatever, I am constantly challenged—and fail regularly—to do two things:

a) Stop assuming intuitive leaps have been made.

I have a really bad tendency to assume that everyone has already thought about what I'm thinking about. As such, I assume that they're making the same intuitive leaps I am. So I don't say anything. Or share thoughts.

The problem with this is that—more often than not—they aren't making those leaps. It's not because I'm smarter. (That, I can guarantee.) It's just because I'm working with my set of common sense. So, even if it feels like I'm backtracking, I'm working to start with the reasoning behind my thinking. To ensure that everyone is on the same page.

What's more, I'm really trying to focus on beginning at the introductory level—the 101—and go from there. Without being pedantic or dismissive. Because you can't just jump into the deep end of the pool and assume that everyone knows how to swim.

b) Over-communicating what I think I know.

If I'm not sure where my peers stand, then the onus is on me to be more effective at communicating. And I need to be more conscious and deliberate about sharing my opinions. No matter how small our company or our organization, we should be over-communicating when telling one another what is important, how we think things should be done, and how we have learned to get there.

Even better? We should be documenting what we know to provide a common lexicon for those discussions and a foundation for new folks entering the fray. The value of our common sense lies in the very fact that we have produced it from our unique vantage. And because of that we need to, first, understand that it has very real and intrinsic value, even if we don't perceive that it does. And second, we need to do a better job of sharing it and not assume that it's common.

> We need to get away from assuming that "Everyone else knows this stuff. I'm nothing special."

You know more about what you do than I do, or he does, or she does, or they do. In fact, we're all incredibly ignorant of your unique flavor of common sense. And we would all be better off with you sharing those insights which you incorrectly assume we have already had.

> That thing that seems so completely obvious to you? It isn't to the rest of us. Your common sense isn't common.

2) Your mistakes are often more valuable than your successes.

While sharing your victories can be motivating for startups and entrepreneurs, being open about your failures and mistakes can often be more helpful. The stumbles and downfalls are the things that caused you to lose sleep, to stress, and to doubt. Share those. So that everyone can learn from them.

> Mistakes are why you changed what you were doing. Failures are the things that taught you how to do your job.

We always say that PIE is about "making new mistakes." There are two reasons: 1) If startups are repeating mistakes our mentors have already made, we're failing them and 2) If the startups go out and make new mistakes, then they can come back as mentors to prevent others from making those mistakes.

3) You don't have to know everything.

You were asked to mentor because of your experience. And because you're awesome. But that doesn't mean you need to know everything. Nor does it mean the onus is on you to know everything.

> You know what you know. Share that.

You'll be surprised at how seemingly simple things can drastically improve a startup's potential and perspective.

4) You are more than your role or profession.

This one became especially clear with our corporate mentors. Sometimes, you have to take off your "brand hat" and put away your business card.

> Sometimes, your most valuable feedback comes not from what your company would say but from what ***you*** would say.

You are an incredibly talented individual who has made it to the position you're in because of the decisions you've made. And its your insight and intellect that guided those decisions—that brought you to your current role. Sometimes, just being you and providing personal advice can be incredibly beneficial.

5) Know your limitations.

Don't over promise. Don't under deliver. And don't get yourself into a mentoring situation that has you feeling stressed. An hour of your time is valuable. If that's all you have to give, that's all we're asking you to give.

> Don't make this a chore. Mentoring is a reward.

It's the opportunity to share what you've learned. And to prevent others from making the mistakes you've made. It should be seen as such.

6) Advise as if you were an employee.

Mentors are often driven individuals who have attained their position through sheer determination and hard work. They're often people who take the wheel and try to steer others in the right direction. And they're used to leading.

> But your role here is not to lead. Your role is to advise.

And fact of the matter is that—no matter how vehemently you support or oppose an entrepreneur's decision—in the end, it is his or her decision to make. Not yours. And s/he has to be the one to make it. Not you.

We take this from the vantage of an employee or consultant advising his or her superiors. "This is my opinion on what should be done, but you're the boss." Mostly because I'm fairly sure I'll be working for one these entrepreneurs one day.

7) Be honest.

While mentoring can be a lot about bolstering the outlook for new entrepreneurs and motivating them to change the world, that's not the goal of mentoring. The goal of mentoring is positive. But the path may not be.

> The most valuable mentoring comes from being honest. Not nice. But honest.

Sometimes, your feedback will be negative. Sometimes, your feedback will be difficult. But it should always be honest and critical—in both the positive and negative sense of the word.

8) You can't fix everything. Nor should you.

You're not here to rescue anyone. You're here to provide startups with feedback. And you're here to challenge them. That's all we ask. If you want to take an entrepreneur under your wing, please feel free. But don't feel obligated to solve their problems.

> Your job is to push startups to solve problems themselves.

More often than not, the problems you see haven't even dawned on them yet. So tell them. But don't try to fix the problems for them.

9) Take it personally.

We want you to be invested. We want you to be happy and frustrated and proud and confounded. We want you along for the rollercoaster ride. We need you to take this personally.

> As a mentor, what comes from your gut and your heart is often more important than what comes from your brain.

At times, it will be completely aggravating. But that means you're taking it personally. And that's what these entrepreneurs need.

10) Mentor one another.

You're not just here to give. You're here to get. It's a two-way street. So talk to other mentors. Get advice from the startups. Get advice from your peers. Get advice from anyone in the community.

> If you see another mentor in need of guidance—in need of your common sense—then pull them aside and share it.

And be equally willing to listen when another mentor wants to impart their knowledge to you.

Mentoring, like many accelerator things, is messy

As a mentor, it's important to understand that "accelerator" is often a misnomer. Accelerators are actually about slowing down, making connections, and contributing to community. They're about making busy people focus. About creating lines where there are only dots.

If they accelerate anything, they accelerate connection. For both those mentors who choose to participate. As well as for the founders who are selected.

We need to stop focusing on accelerating business and spend far more time and energy accelerating connections and value. For founders. And for our community.

Mentorship is messy. And honest. And weird. Because it is human.

It does not scale. It cannot be automated. And yet, if left to its own devices, it won't happen. Mentorship rarely happens organically.

It doesn't have metrics. Or milestones. Or process.

But it does have technique. It does have examples. And guidelines. And guardrails. For both the mentors and those being mentored. And for peers.

Mentorship in Practice (via @eighteyes)

Mentoring is an alignment of perspective. Here, you have to take the life experiences of another person, and have them understand your perspective. As a mentor, you must take the time to know a person, how a person thinks, what their experience is. A handy way to approach this is to speak about complicated material in the form of metaphors.

Metaphors are powerful teaching tools (via @eighteyes)

Think about when you have learned a difficult subject. When it started, you had a slight familiarity with the subject, say 20% of the related material was understood. Here you stumbled around in the dark, with prior knowledge and experience as a candle lighting the way. Then you find it, that one critical insight your mind needed to begin to understand the other 80%.

Metaphors can help to provide that critical insight by bridging the experience gap using imagination.

> Example: 'Marketing is like a river. It is comprised of millions of little efforts, or drops, which gather in different channels, or tributaries, to bring customers to your business, like cargo to port'

From here, you have a framework to begin to explain the practices of Marketing to someone with no experience. This is done by translating the language of a particular industry into a reference they are familiar with so you can begin to have a conversation about more abstract topics.

Industry Language (via @eighteyes)

As professionals, we depend on language to determine the expertise of others and evaluate our own progress. If a designer is talking about figure-ground relationships, while a data scientist is talking about k-clustering, they each may have a passing familiarity with the expertise of the other, but not the deep experience necessary to truly understand what it means to work with these ideas.

As a mentor, is important to have a deep understanding of one or several subject matters, and a conversational familiarity with others. These are all touchpoints where you can convey your experience to someone else, using terms and ideas they already understand.

Share freely (via @eighteyes)

Entrepreneurship often involves the challenge of connecting discrete ideas, so during a mentorship it is extremely important to share whatever information seems relevant, even if it is not topical to the established mentoring relationship. Knowledge does not fit neatly into boxes, it broadly crosses many connections. You never know what may `click` for someone else, it is best to flow with the conversation instead of following a script.

Learn Openly (via @eighteyes)

One of the amazing things about people is that everyone sees their own connections and brings their own experiences. Young people especially, are more fluid in their thoughts, and have more free time to deeply pursue interests. Make time to listen, when you're scheduling time to talk.

CHAPTER 14

Curriculum

As a program, PIE has worked to continually refine its highly intensive mentorship model — through both traditional mentors as well as peer mentorship — in a way that can be customized on a company-by-company basis. We have continued to refine the model so that it even supports the program's ability to focus on the concerns and issues of single individuals, as needed.

We equate the curriculum of this program to an "independent study" model in a traditional learning environment. Every Founder in the class shares a collective experience with one another, but their individual learnings are tailored to each of their specific needs — be those needs be individualized by company or person — on a case-by-case basis.

This high-touch, intensive, and collaborative approach has been proven to be a far more effective means of working with, educating, and accelerating companies than a traditional "one track" curriculum based approach. Why? We have learned that entrepreneurs are interested in solving the most painful problem they are currently encountering, before moving on to the next problem. Our methodology has been adapted to the way an entrepreneur's mind works, rather than attempting to force fit those entrepreneurs into a system.

More independent study than classroom

Founders are extremely creative and driven, but they are also intently focused on the immediate problem at hand. To them, nothing else matters but the problem they are working on right now today. Which, of course, tends to differ from startup to startup. And while those startups may *eventually* all experience the same problem, they will not intuit that the problem exists until they encounter it. Therefore, it is our opinion that it is nearly impossible to teach at scale in a classroom environment on an ongoing basis.

PIE's high-touch, intensive, and collaborative approach has been proven to be a far more effective means of working with, educating, and accelerating companies than a traditional "one track" curriculum based approach. Why? We have learned that entrepreneurs are interested in solving the most painful problem they are currently encountering, before moving on to the next problem. Our methodology has been adapted to the way an entrepreneur's mind works, rather than attempting to force fit those entrepreneurs into a system.

While curriculum can be valuable for Bootcamp programs, "101" type programs, and where participants have a significant amount of time to learn — or review — the content of that curriculum, it is not terribly effective in the Accelerator environment. This is one of the reasons we suggest that Accelerator programs avoid purchasing established curriculum programs for their use. (Another reason is that Accelerators often have very little capital at their disposal and there are better uses of that capital, at the outset.)

Likewise, we advise against spending a lengthy amount of time creating your own rigid curriculum for your program.

> **tl;dr PIE took weeks developing a curriculum prior to our first Accelerator class. We threw it out a few days into the program.**

Rather, we suggest that Accelerator Staff and Mentors always be on the lookout for opportunities where every startup is experiencing the same exact problem at the same exact time. Take advantage of those opportunities. But take advantage of them ad hoc, and on the fly.

Some examples of these struggles that impact all founders simultaneously, follow.

Common issues

Entrepreneurs come into our program with a wide of variety of experiences, which more often than not, requires us to provide assistance on a variety of different subjects at entirely different times for each entrepreneur.

That said, every entrepreneur and company will struggle with the following issues:

1. **Working with cofounders**: For most Founders, this experience will be their first time working with a cofounder — or pursuing a business on their own. The stress of going through the program tends to exacerbate and accelerate these issues. We spend a significant amount of time mitigating these conflicts.
2. **Working with mentors**: When exposed to advice, which is often contradictory, from successful Founders, every Founder experiences "mentor whiplash." This can be debilitating and confusing. As such, PIE staff spends time working with our Founders to learn how to manage and act upon this feedback.
3. **Learning how to meet**: While many of your Founders have participated in meetings, it is highly unlikely that they will have experience with the volume, tenor, and stress of the meetings they will encounter during the Accelerator program. Teaching Founders how to meet can be a critical component of insuring their success in your program.
4. **Product market fit**: Every Founder believes that their product concept has value. Successful Founders understand that they need customers to validate that belief. PIE works with Founders to ensure that they gain an understanding of what product offering will be the most successful.
5. **Financial projections**: Even if your teams are lucky enough to have a financially minded cofounder, it is highly unlikely that any of the cofounders have had to deal with financial projections from such an early stage. It is even more likely that this way of thinking about the company, its product, and its business model will be completely foreign to everyone in your cohort.
6. **Pricing**: Pricing will always be wrong because it's nearly impossible to get right. But your Founders have to start somewhere. Learning how to set pricing, test pricing models, and revise and optimize pricing will be critical knowledge for all of your Founders.
7. **Funding**: With the popularity of startups comes some misconceptions, like the idea that every company has to raise venture capital. At PIE, we work with entrepreneurs to help them understand the variety of ways they can fund their ongoing efforts, whether that means pursuing equity investment or not.
8. **Pitching**: Whether the Startups plan to pursue venture capital or not, being able to effectively tell the story of their company is a critical skill for every Founder. Even if you choose to forego the concept of a "Demo Day," your programs should still spend a significant amount of time working with Founders on crafting a pitch.

9. **Marketing**: Once companies have established a product market fit, entrepreneurs need to understand how to engage with that market. With PIE's history in marketing and advertising, one of our strongest offerings is helping entrepreneurs learn how to market their product more effectively.

Timing

In a perfect world, Accelerators would be able to schedule and deliver education on each of these topics in a very programmatic way. Unfortunately, the opportunities to do so are rare.

Every Founder will require education on the topics they all share in common, but there is very little likelihood that every Founder will all be experiencing these issues at the same time. It is up to Staff and Mentors to monitor these opportunities for shared learning as they arise. It is up to the Staff to be prepared to take advantage of these opportunities whenever possible, as a means of making the most efficient use of time for both Founders and Mentors.

The most critical aspect of delivering shared curriculum is understanding when to time that content for your class. It's not when you think it should be timed, it's a matter of determining when the Founders will be most receptive to engaging with the Mentor (or Mentors) who can best provide that education.

> **tl;dr There is no convenient programmatic path — no effective curriculum — for educating Founders. Accelerator Staff must be attuned to the ebb and flow of learning and take advantage of opportunities as they arise.**

The time when founders will be most receptive to the delivery a shared, class-wide learning experience is when the majority of Founders have had the opportunity to struggle with the topic at their own pace. At times, you will need to allow the Founders to fail on their own, before they will be receptive to learning more about the topic.

Over the years, we learned that you can use the Accelerator program format to artificially introduce factors that cause all Founders and Companies to experience the same problem at the same time.

Which is how we came upon the idea of creating a cadence and "The Three Ps."

CHAPTER 15

Understanding the cadence of an accelerator

One of the most critical efforts for the accelerator staff is that of managing the cadence of the class. Both in terms of introducing stressors and pulling pressure-release valves, as necessary.

There is no prescribed timing here. You add more pressure when it is needed. And you try to break the tension when needed. There is no schedule here. You just have to play it by ear. And act with your best instincts.

That said, there are some clear guardrails to help guide your efforts.

First off, it's very important to understand the emotional rollercoaster of the accelerator.

The emotional ebb and flow of a startup accelerator

We've all heard it. "Going through an accelerator is an emotional rollercoaster." And we'd be the first to agree. It's not an easy or smooth experience. For anyone.

But what, exactly, does that rollercoaster look like?

At PIE, we've spent time analyzing the behavior of founders in both our accelerator as well as other programs in which we've had the opportunity to participate. And that analysis has led to a rough sketch of the general ebb and flow of emotions that founders experience throughout the course of an accelerator program.

> **tl;dr Recognizing and understanding the emotional rollercoaster gives staff insights as to when it is reasonable to increase the stress in the accelerator and when they would be wise to pull the pressure valve.**

Now, granted, this is a sweeping generalization that may not apply to every founder in a program. But we've found that paying attention to this emotional cycle — and managing the program accordingly — can be beneficial for founders, their partners, families, mentors, and the accelerator staff.

So with that caveat in mind, let's walk through the emotional rollercoaster that is an accelerator. (Note: We've noticed a similar cadence with folks who chase and receive venture capital, as well, for what it's worth.)

source/images/pieAcceleratorEmotionalRollerCoaster.001.png

Right? That's a lot to take in. Let's break it into sections so that we can deal with all of this mayhem you're putting your founders through.

Pre-Accelerator

It's highly likely that your startups have had some existence prior to their experience with your accelerator. During that time, they've had a series of highs and lows where they've experienced any number of leaps forward and, likely, an equal number of setbacks. I mean, that's why they're looking for some help, right?

We're not going to claim that we can predict every up and down, but let's take a look at some of the key moments in the experience, prior to joining your Accelerator program.

source/images/pieAcceleratorEmotionalRollerCoasterPreAccelerator-Detail.png

1. **False Ceiling of Euphoria** We've learned that the Accelerator environment accelerates, among other things, emotions. As such, we've learned that the highs are far higher than they have seemed to the founders in the past. For that reason, we categorize the pinnacle of euphoria for founders prior to the accelerator as a "false ceiling." Accelerator staff and mentors need to be prepared to help accentuate the good times — and to help regulate euphoric misconceptions.

2. **False Floor of Despair** If the "highs are higher," then guess what? That's right. The lows are way lower. Within the accelerator environment, we often find founders struggling with depression and negativity that surmounts anything with which they had to deal prior to entering the accelerator program. Accelerator staff and mentors need to be prepared for how paralyzingly acute these lows can be.

3. **"I found the perfect Accelerator for us¡‘** When startups are looking for support, finding an Accelerator that best matches their needs can be a high point for them. It's important that Accelerator staff understand and appreciate this moment of euphoria and do their best to cultivate a relationship with each and every Founder who has an interest in their Accelerator.

4. **"It's been 30 seconds and they haven't responded. They hate us."** Just as quickly as Founders get excited about your Accelerator, they'll get equally despondent if you don't respond to them immediately. Make sure that you're adequately staffed to deal with the influx of questions and inquiries. Automate as much as you can to ensure that Founders always get a response to every request. For example, make sure that there is some indication that a submitted application has been received and is being reviewed. Otherwise, you'll get multiple questions from each and every Founder.

5. **"We made it through the entire process and they accepted us¡‘** Once accepted to a program, Founders often experience a sense of euphoria coupled with relief. To many Founders, the recognition and acceptance create a false sense of accomplishment. When in reality, it is actually the starting line for a much more difficult — and emotionally taxing — phase for their company.

6. **"Maybe we've made a mistake. Is this the right move for us?"** While the period of euphoria may last for some, most Founders will experience a return to a more calm outlook prior to their beginning the program. This

may also manifest itself as having second thoughts or cold feet about joining the Accelerator program at all. Be prepared for questions and Founders seeking reassurance.

Month 1

Now that the company has been accepted to the program and is starting the accelerator process, they'll go through some severe swings of emotions.

As we mentioned above, PIE generally worked with founders who were confident with building product. Your founders may be similar. Or you may attract founders with different points of confidence.

Whatever the case, it is important that you begin the accelerator program focusing on the area or topic where your founders boast the most confidence. The accelerator environment can be exceedingly stressful and emotionally taxing. By starting your founders in an area of strength, you give them the best chance of surviving the emotional onslaught of their new reality.

source/images/pieAcceleratorEmotionalRollerCoasterMonth01Detail.png

1. **"Acceptance! We've made it! The sky is the limit."** Once the Founders accept that the Accelerator is the right thing for their startup and cofounders, there is a palpable upswing in emotion. But it is important to note that there will be first date jitters and nerves. Each Founder deals with it differently, but it tends to be an incredibly positive and reassuring time for most companies. The nerves are perceived as excitement rather than dread. And the notion that someone not only believes in the Founders and their idea but is willing to help them succeed is an incredibly heady feeling for most.
2. **"We are killing it!" aka Breaking through the false ceiling of euphoria** What happens when you get a bunch of euphoric and excited Founders together? That's right: mass hysteria. As Founders' emotions play off of one another, individual Founders find that heady feeling growing at an exponential rate. What previously seemed like the height of happiness — the False Ceiling of Euphoria — pales in comparison to the feeling of giddiness most of the Founders begin to experience. But as the Founders begin to realize their new existence in the Accelerator program, this feeling of euphoria begins to ebb. *Note: This will likely be the last time Founders feel emotionally positive for months.*
3. **"We're doing it wrong." aka Crashing through the false floor of despair** The stress and strain of the new environment, the seemingly relentless strings of new tasks and expectations, Mentor whiplash, and a feeling of being unable to navigate — let alone manage — the Accelerator environment can be emotionally crushing. This would be bad enough, alone. But it's exacerbated by the fact that the Founders are coming down off of the highest peak of euphoria. We often see Founders barreling down from this crest at breakneck speed, culminating in a descent into the lowest of lows. Lower, in fact, than any of the worst days prior to entering the Accelerator program. It's a true bottoming out. Previous failures and bad days pale in comparison to the Founder's current emotional state. They feel like complete failures and become very inwardly focused, detaching from their peers and cofounders and grasping to find something that they feel capable of handling.
4. **"Everybody else seems to be struggling with the same issues."** Once the startups get settled, the founders get comfortable with one another, and folks begin to settle into a daily rhythm, participants will stop being so inwardly focused — and will begin refrain from continually beating themselves up. They'll start to notice the struggles of their peers. They'll begin conversations about how they're struggling. And they'll discover that they're not alone. This causes a slight improvement in attitude. Not stellar, but an upswing.
5. **"We're still the worst company in here."** But that upswing is short lived as founders rapidly return to self criticism. This is usually based on their misperception that every other founder in the program is handling the stress and scheduling more effective. Or is making better use of the resources at his/her disposal. While this

viewpoint is often ill founded — no one is actually doing terribly well at this point — it can still cause a dip founders' emotional states. It's especially important to note that this mindset can be reinforced by other founders celebrating wins. So it's important to keep both the positive and negative stuff in check.

6. **"And folks here seem to get what we do."** We recommend that the first month be wholly focused on an area of strength for the Founders — since the bulk of PIE Founders were product-centric, we focused on product — the opportunity to share that strength is an uplifting one. While Founders rarely have a cohesive story about their Startup at this point, other Founders can intuit motivations and functions, giving the companies a sense of belonging. This reinforces the feeling that the Startup idea has merit. And it helps reinforce the Founders' feeling of belonging in the Accelerator program.

Month 2

This is by far the worst month for most startups in an Accelerator program. The winter of our discontent? A staggering understatement. You'll find companies remaining well below the midline for this entire month. It's rare to see them even begin to approach it.

And there's really no way to fix this or prevent this. If you've done your job correctly as an Accelerator, you've put your Founders under a significant amount of pressure in the first month in a new environment — and so much has changed about their business — that your Founders will be feeling pretty beat up. And they'll feel like they're bumping along the bottom of the tank of despair.

The false floor of despair is long forgotten. This is their new reality.

Some of your Founders will have higher amplitude in their spikes and troughs. Others will simply bump along throughout the month. Regardless, every Founder will have a rough second month. So be aware of what they are going through.

source/images/pieAcceleratorEmotionalRollerCoasterMonth02Detail.png

1. **"I thought we were getting it, but we're not."** Coming off the affirmation of Month 1, founders may be able to retain some semblance of euphoria. But it's far more likely that this "accomplishment" will quickly erode into stress about all of the other thing that the Startup has to accomplish during the Accelerator. This is the classic point where Founders feel completely overwhelmed. Emotions and egos are extremely fragile at this point in time. And burn out is a significant risk.

2. **"We can do this."** If anything, Founders are resilient. And stubborn. And they'll figure out ways to rebound. Even in short bursts. No matter what you throw at them. This difficult time is often the most rewarding and reinforcing of the Accelerator. Confidence is built. Egos are rebuilt. And Founders start to feel like they're actually starting to get a handle on this new existence. They're not overly confident. But their confidence is building. As is their understanding of how to manage themselves, their companies, and their peer relationships, both within the company and within the cohort. That's what makes this the perfect point to teach — and challenge — the founders on their greatest weaknesses. Because they've developed the resilience to handle it.

3. **"We don't seem any worse off than anyone else."** Not only does confidence build, but Month 2 is the month where founders gain the most empathy for their cofounders and peers. They start to recognize that everyone is struggling. And that even the most confident and capable Founders in the cohort have their weaknesses. So when you introduce subject matter with which everyone struggles — and everyone recognizes that one another is struggling — you enforce a tendency toward collaboration, support, and peer mentorship. Which, in turn, fortifies the connections and feeling of community among the participants.

Month 3

This will be the most rewarding month for your startups. Not only will you see them making significant progress, they will make *tangible* progress that the Founders, themselves, will recognize. That progress, in turn, will directly impact the future of their companies.

source/images/pieAcceleratorEmotionalRollerCoasterMonth03Detail.png

1. **"After talking to folks, I'm not sure our company is viable."** The beginning of month three is often a low point for folks. They've just come out of one of their most challenging learning experiences in month 2. They have grown used to the constant mentor meetings and the speed at which things are going. So much so, that they have a difficult time recognizing how much they're accomplishing. They have, to put it colloquially, established a new normal. And that can make them feel like they're not progressing or succeeding.
2. **"We get to pitch! We totally get pitching."** Whatever the reason — be it their acceptance into your Accelerator, the bevy of pitch contests to which a startup is exposed these days, or simply having family and friends providing less than critical feedback — most Founder tend to exist under the delusion that they already know how to tell the story of their company. Unfortunately for them, nothing could be further from the truth. But at this point, they'll come into Month 3 with more confidence than they've had in weeks — potentially months.
3. **"No one got our pitch. We're not even going to make it to the stage."** Companies start to pitch. And that illusion of "We totally get pitching" begins to crumble. And as more truly critical feedback comes rolling in — from staff, from mentors, and perhaps worst of all, from their peers — Founders come to realize that their pitch needs a ton of work. In fact, in most cases, what they thought was their pitch has to be totally scrapped. This realization has the potential to crush confidence and further demotivate even the most confident Founders.
4. **"Wait a second. This is working."** Slowly but surely, the feedback starts to sink in. And the pitch starts to improve. The Founders regain their confidence. And the pitch actually starts to improve. From everyone's perspectives. And with practice, the pitches become more and more compelling. And with finessing, the Founders grow more and more confident in their ability to tell the story of the company they are building. And as the opportunity to get on stage — and get out of relentless pitch practice — draws nearer and nearer both mood and nerves are ever on the increase.
5. **Demo Day: "This is the best day of my life."** If everything goes as planned, Demo Day will be the most rewarding experience of any Founder's life. In fact, we often tell them that, backstage. "This will be the most fun you ever have with your startup." Again, part of that might be the knowledge that they will soon be free of the constant haranguing of the Accelerator environment. But the majority of this feeling comes from a sense of accomplishment. And confidence. And the recognizable ability to tell a compelling story — and then to celebrate the telling of that story in the gathering that happens after everyone leaves the stage.

Now that you have some generic context of the rollercoaster, let's break down those three months in terms of the subjects PIE used to educate Founders of tech Startups.

The Three Ps

So even those three seemingly short months have to be broken down into smaller chunks. To manage the cadence of the class. To manage the stress. To ensure — and endure — momentum. And perhaps, most importantly, to give the startups a sense of progress over the course of the class.

By class three (Coconut Creme), we had learned to break the class into three marathons, each about a month a piece. A series of stages and gates that culminated in the performance at Demo Day.

Throughout the course of these stages and gates, we tailor the mentor talks to match the topic — or to queue up the obvious need for the startups to focus on these particular topics.

Here's how we broke it out. We refer to it as "the three Ps": product, projections, and pitch.

Product (Month 1)

Because PIE classes generally consisted of groups of developers who understood how to build products, we started in a place of strength and confidence: product development.

The challenge? Be ready to demo the current version of the company's product in front of the others startups in the class. The deadline was one month into the class. And it was a required activity.

For some, this was a relatively simple request and in line with their product development schedules. For others, it required a great deal of effort to meet the milestone.

But that led to some interesting things, as well.

Those who were further ahead on product often discovered that they lacked the language to effectively convey what they were building. Worse yet, they sometimes that the current version of the product was difficult, if not impossible, to demo to a diverse audience.

We get to question assumptions, clarify utility, and make suggestions, as a class — in a group environment. Companies get to respond directly to queries, jot down feature ideas, and generally scratch their head a great deal and ask "Why **did** we do it that way?"

So month one, get the product momentum going. And reward those who are making progress. Because that's going to be the crux of everything going forward.

It's a safe place to start. Because we choose companies that have a solid developer or development team. And its gives both the developer and business cofounders the chance to show off what they're doing to a trusted group of peers. (After one month of accelerator stress, those bonds have already formed.)

Projections (Month 2)

Product development, of course, continues throughout the course of the class — and for the life of the company. But we reduce the focus on that activity in month one. Giving the CTO/developer breathing room to resolve issues raised during the first month and work through the issues list as they prepare to release beta.

Now that we've stressed out the developers, we put the stress on the business people. Who, more often than not, are developers learning how to business.

And in our experience, nothing makes a business person feel more businessy than creating a spreadsheet with lots of dollar values in it. So that's exactly what we focus on during month two, projections.

We usually choose a 12 month window, because none of us know what's really going to happen in the future. But a year seems like a viable window to explore these numbers.

With projections, we experience the polar opposite of product. No one feels confident in their numbers. Most companies don't even know where to begin.

To support, we offer templates, mentors, and office hours to help. But it usually doesn't. And it becomes a last minute scramble, rife with cries of "Do we really have to do this?"

The answer is "Yes." It's a required element of the class.

From this position of lacking confidence, the revealing of the projections to peers in the a group becomes a very different exercise. With the presenting founder often asking more questions than the audience.

"How did you do this?", "Does this seem realistic?", "What's missing?"

A second month of stress induced collaboration has heightened the trust among peers from a feeling of camaraderie to a dynamic of peer mentorship. And this is exactly what we're trying to engender.

But this is generally a crushing demonstration, leaving the founders feeling exposed and confused. But it's a critical part of figuring out their business. And the strengthening of the class relationship, alone, is worth the friction.

Pitch (Month 3)

Both product and projection development continue in month three. But now that we've established the context of what the team is building and what they need to do to succeed financially, we have established the focus of their pitch and the presentation they will be delivering at Demo Day.

It's important to note that many programs choose to pitch throughout the course of the entire class. We've found this to have diminishing returns if run for longer than a month. It's also a good chunk of time which we feel is better focused on things like product and projections.

If the product demo is the area of the most confidence and projections are the area of least confidence, the pitch is somewhere in the middle. But it's often the most difficult to refine and finesse, so plan to spend a great deal of time doing it.

At PIE, we played it by ear, with no fewer than two full group pitch practices per week. With individual staff, mentor, and peer-to-peer pitch practices rounding out the month of activity.

We began with no slides, only story. Because it does no good to waste time building slides for a story that is going to change drastically anyway. We continue with no slides until we feel the stories are starting to solidify. Then we move to pitches with slides and story.

Group pitch practices are attended by all startups and staff. Mentors are invited to attend when and if they can. Presenters receive feedback from staff, peers, and their team members.

But there is one distinct difference from the previous two milestones. The difference — and this is critically important — is that while previous presentations are a conversation among the presenter and the audience, this feedback loop is one way. The audience can critique the presentation, but the presenter cannot respond.

Why? Well, we learned from our speaking coach mentor that this is a critical step in getting people to actually implement changes and improve their talks. You see, if they respond to the feedback, they subconsciously assume that they've fixed the problem. So don't let them respond. And they go and actually fix the problem.

Once the story and deck are starting to come together, start recording the presenters. Not only will it give them a valuable asset to review, it will present another stressor that breaks them out of their comfort zone.

Another piece of feedback we've received from the startups?

The last week is pretty much nonstop practice, where we not only continue to finesse the story and the deck, but we start getting the presenter to give the pitch in the uniform that they plan to wear on stage. We've learned that the more we gradually attempt to mimic the environment and conditions they will experience on Demo Day — even if it can't be done perfectly — the better the presentations are.

If you can, take the opportunity to have the presenters practice in the venue. We've had difficulty doing this because of competing auditorium schedules. So for us, it's rare for startups to get the chance to practice on stage prior to day-of. We compensate two ways: We use the W+K auditorium space to practice and we get to the venue early on Demo Dy and do a few dry runs before the audience arrives.

CHAPTER 16

Running an Accelerator Class

Now that you have your initial strategy defined, a space for your efforts, staff to implement the program, mentors lined up, and a a rough framework for the class, itself, we're finally ready to get down to the tactics of running the accelerator program.

Let's get started by walking through the application and selection process by:

- Building your application
- Recruiting applicants
- Reviewing the applicants
- Selecting companies to participate

Application and selection process

We used three phases of inquiry as part of our information gathering. Fewer and fewer applicants would continue on to the next phase.

Those phases were:

- Written application
- Written follow up questions
- Face-to-face interview

Applications

Our first phase of the process was a Web-based application — Google Form or the like — that allowed us to capture some basic information about the team, the product, and why the applicant was interested in PIE.

PRO TIP: Select an application format that provides a confirmation upon form submission. This will ensure that applicants know the form has been submitted and will save you from strings of follow up emails.

As part of the experiment, we would set the deadline as close as two weeks or as far as six weeks from the application opening date. No matter how long or short the application period, we generally received around 400 separate company applications.

This probably won't come as a shock to anyone, but the vast majority of your applications will be submitted within 24 hours of your deadline.

So what kinds of questions should you ask? How many should you ask? We recommend keeping it as simple as you can. But you'll want to make sure you're getting all of the basic questions answered.

Here's an example of the types of things PIE wanted to know.

Sample PIE application

Thank you for your interest in PIE, the Portland Incubator Experiment. PIE is a partnership among leading brands, technology innovators, and Wieden+Kennedy — the largest privately held advertising and communications company in the world. It serves as a hub for community, entrepreneurship, and creative thinking.

Each year, we invite startups to join us for nine months — three months for an accelerator program and an additional six months of office space as they gain their footing. To qualify, startups must go through a formal application process.

Applications are due [DATE]. Fields marked with an asterisk (*) are required. We will only accept applications submitted via the PIE application form or via AngelList.

Let's get started.

PRODUCT

We're really interested in what you're building and why it's going to change the world. So let's start there, shall we?

- Name of your product*:
- URL:
- AngelList profile:
- How are you telling the story of your product? Give us a link where we can experience that story. In whatever form you like. It could be a video or a demo walkthrough or an Instagram image of the sketch on the back of a napkin.
- Dream big but write concisely. What will your product do? You've got 560 characters. C'mon. That's like four whole tweets, Tolstoy. (And yes, we will count each and every character.)*
- Who are your current/future customers?
- Who are your primary competitors?
- What scares you most about your product?
- Why does your product matter? Why are people going to love it? Why is the competition going to hate it?
- Why are you and your co-founders the right team to make this happen? (This is what we call a "segue.")

PEOPLE

Tell us a little bit about the team that's going to be spending an incredibly stressful three months with us – and a whole bunch of other startups. Because if we're going to be burning the midnight oil together building something awesome, we'd like some more details. (NOTE: The primary contact will be automatically added to the PIE email list.)

Co-founder 1 (Primary Contact)

- First*:
- Last*:
- Email*:
- Role*:
- Skills*:
- Favorite online profile (e.g., AngelList, LinkedIn, Google+, personal blog, Github, about.me, Twitter)*:
- Favorite brand*:
- Have you applied to PIE previously (either with this idea or with another one)?*

PRO TIP: Please feel free to add additional founder profiles as necessary.

There will be room for four founders on the official application. Only one founder is required.

MORE TEAM

Now that you've provided details about each of the founders as individuals, we'd love to hear about how you work together as a team.

- Tell us a story. How did you team up?
- You've got geek cred, right? Prove it.
- We know you've screwed up before. Revel in it. Describe your most spectacular failure to date.
- Link to something on the web that depicts your team dynamic. Be creative. This could be a video where you show us your team in action. Or it could be a session of layer tennis among team members. Or it could be a dribbble account. Or a screenshot of your latest IRC exchange. Or you could just treat us to something that already exists on the Web which captures your team dynamic. We, for example, when asked this question would probably just send you a link to Grumpy Cat or whaling (the human version, not the terrible Blackfish version) — or a bunch of Grumpy Cats whaling. Did we mention "be creative"?

MISCELLANEOUS COMPANY CRAP

- Are you incorporated?
- Have you raised money? If so, how much?
- Are you currently raising? If so, how much?
- Have you been through another accelerator program?

WHY PIE?

We like PIE a whole bunch. And we love expanding the PIE family. But we'd love to know why you think PIE is the right place for you.

- Well, why PIE?*
- Clearly, you're going to be the next big thing. I mean, you're kind of a big deal already. But why else should we pick you?
- One of the most crucial elements of PIE is the opportunity to work with other startups in your class to mutual benefit. We call it peer mentoring. Startups call it a support group. So what do you hope to bring to PIE to help everyone succeed?
- PIE has an added benefit of collaborating with Wieden+Kennedy — an agency recognized as one of the most creative in the world. That means, when we see an opportunity, we get to work together on projects. Does the prospect of collaborating with W+K excite you, frighten you, or is it just "meh"?
- Why?
- If you could pick one mentor—living or dead—who would it be? Why?
- Anything else we should know about you, your team, your product, or your amalgamated awesomeness?

REFERENCES (optional)

PIE is a growing family of amazing companies, mentors, and investors. We look to this group to provide us with guidance on our selection process. So if you can name a PIE alum, mentor, or investor who will vouch for you, that can go a long way with us. A long, long way.

PRO TIP: Even though it's optional, it's very, very highly valued by the selection committee.

. . . and you're done!

That wasn't so bad was it?

NOTE: This is a rhetorical question. It is not a question on the official application.

MORE INFO?

Feel free to contact us at info@piepdx.com, follow us on Twitter at http://twitter.com/piepdx, like us on Facebook at http://facebook.com/piepdx, or follow us on AngelList at http://angel.co/piepdx.

Selection process

Without question, the most common query we receive — from both Founders and other Accelerator programs — is "How do you choose your startups?"

It only makes sense. Because it's honestly the most challenging part of this whole process.

What's more, to the outside world, it's the metric on which the "success" of your Accelerator will be judged.

And everyone is interested in this topic. Other programs want to make sure that they're picking the best candidates. And candidates want to be sure they're providing the details that make it more likely for them to get picked.

Grading criteria

Over the course of the programs PIE ran, we came up with a way of grading startups on a series of weighted factors. And we know this will come as a shock, but we made those factors into an acronym.

We've created a mnemonic device for helping your remember the components of our grading system. Our grading system for PIE is PIE. Ta dah! But in this case, PIE stands for People, Idea, and Enchantment. So let's go into detail on each of those things.

Note: We used these criteria at each phase of the selection process.

Participant selection PIE has a proven and refined methodology for selecting participants in its programs. At a macro level, this methodology includes a weighted average of the following elements:

- **People** (5.0x): We analyze the entrepreneurs to determine their level of coachability, the extent of their experience in business and/or the market they are pursuing, their existing knowledge and learning to be had, their ability to work in a collaborative space, and their willingness to participate in the program as a mentor to other members of their cohort (peer mentoring), as well as their potential to assist future members of the program (ongoing mentoring).
- **Idea** (2.0x): Staff, partners, and mentors are asked to analyze the potential of the business idea, the market(s) to which the idea may be attractive, the feasibility of developing a product for that market(s), and whether the product is appropriately timed for the intended market(s).
- **Enchantment** (1.5x): Staff, mentors, and partners assess the less tangible elements of the team and the product they are pursuing. Is it intriguing? Will it benefit other companies in the cohort? Are the founders likely to be helpful to their peers? Are there mentors who could have a meaningful impact on the entrepreneurs and their businesses? Is there a value to the community or other sponsors?

Let's take a moment to dive into each of these topics.

People

People — or in this context "Founders" — is by far the most heavily weighted aspect of this decision. Because good Founders — who are collaborative Cofounders and respect one another — can work their way out of any problem. Even if "working their way out of a problem" means killing the company they set out to build.

> **tl;dr The only thing that matters is picking good Founders.**

That's why we spend so much of the application process dealing with people issues rather than business issues. This is more of a psychology evaluation than a business plan competition.

It's a lifeboat quandary. A stuck overnight in an airport test. A who's got who's back. And who can be reliable and effective.

So we recommend doing whatever you have to do to get the Founders to reveal those sorts of traits. To figure out how they interact. To figure out where the flaws and cracks and stress points are. To discover what is going to motivate them. Or send them spiraling.

And to use all of that information to pick the best people for your program. Not Cofounders. Not business people. Not rockstars or ninjas or wizards. Just people. Pick good people.

So we ask questions like:

- Is this Founder coachable?
- How does this Founder interact with his/her Cofounders?

- Do we trust him/her?
- Will this Founder be a good peer mentor?
- Can this Founder be collaborative and cooperative in a shared workspace?
- What would happen if you were stuck in an airport overnight with this Founder?
- Will this Founder be a good Mentor for future PIE companies?

Idea

After People, the next grading criteria is the Idea. Not the product, mind you, because that will change over the course of the Accelerator. It's the Idea.

So we ask questions like:

- Does the idea have potential?
- Does the idea have a target market?
- Is that market attainable?
- What will it take to engage that market?
- Is there significant competition? (Not a a disqualifier, at all.)

Enchantment

This is kind of our catch all category. It can serve as a tiebreaker. Or as a multiplier. Or simply as a way to reaffirm what we believe the other two categories have told us.

Okay. To be honest, we actually call this category "Serendipity." But we didn't like that acronym. So we changed it to "Enchantment." Because it's a little bit magic. And gut. And luck.

To qualify Enchantment, we ask questions like:

- Are we illogically enchanted with this idea?
- Are there other Founders in this class who would benefit and collaborate with these Founders?
- Are there adjacencies or complementary products or business opportunities with other Startups in this Class?
- Are there adjacencies or complementary products or business opportunities with other PIE alums?
- Do we have Mentors who would be particularly adept at helping this Startup?
- Do they present an interesting collaborative opportunity or creative challenge for our Patrons or Sponsors?
- Do they have a product that matches the thesis of our closest investors?
- Is this just interesting for some odd reason?

Stages of the selection process

First cut

Following the close of the initial applications, PIE staff and selected mentors would each go through the applications by themselves — ranking them by the People, Idea, and Enchantment criteria — reviewing all of the applications with a triage mentality.

That consisted of three buckets:

- Keep: Companies that seemed like a good fit for PIE
- Question: More details required to determine if the company was a good fit
- Cut: Companies that did not seem like a good fit for PIE

Once each reviewer had completed their personal assessment, the review committee would meet to compare notes, resolve differences, and agree upon the companies moving into the next round — and those companies that did not appear to be a good match for PIE based on their application responses.

This triage process usually resulted in us eliminating 50% of the applicants (Cut) and continuing to work through due diligence with the remaining 50% (Keep and Question).

Cut companies were alerted immediately that they would not be continuing in the process.

Second cut

Candidates who fell into the "Question" category received follow-up questions via email. We used this technique to dig into the details that may have required more explanation or areas that we felt were nebulous or unclear.

At times, we would question some of the Keep candidates. Specifically if they were working in areas where staff or mentors had specific expertise.

The questions allowed us to test assumptions or get additional data.

We generally gave the startups a week to respond to our questions.

The review committee would then review and assess the responses from the applicants and decide whether the "Question" companies were be moved to "Keep" or "Cut" lists.

This generally eliminated 50-75% of the remaining companies, leaving us with up to 25% of our original applicants still being processed for inclusion in our accelerator class.

Cut companies were alerted immediately that they would not be continuing in the process. Companies continuing along the selection process were contacted to arrange for face-to-face interviews.

Final cut

The face-to-face interview is the final stage of the selection process. There is no more labor intensive — or insightful — method for selecting the startups in your class.

Interview teams consisted of PIE staff and — when warranted — mentors who had expressed interest in talking to the company. PIE encouraged all founders named in the application to attend, if not in person than by phone. If the startup was unable to travel, PIE would often opt to send one staff member to meet with the team in person, while the remaining interviewers called in by phone. Worst case was a phone meeting or video conference.

PIE planned 30-45 minutes for each interview, including time for founders to ask the interview team questions.

Questions consisted subjective topics for the individual founders, digging into topics that could not be easily assessed via written responses, and determining progress and traction since the written response had been submitted, week earlier.

For the most part, the in person interviews were a means of determining the working dynamic of the team and the potential coachability of the founders.

Following this interview, staff members compared interview notes and individually ranked each of the candidate companies. Those lists were compared and normalized.

The final list was presented to the selection committee, critiqued, argued, and normalized to a rank order list of approximately 20 startups for the 8-10 spots in the PIE class.

A staff member — usually the Managing Director — then worked down the list, from first choice to last, calling each candidate on the phone to share the news and assess their willingness to participate in the program. Once 10 applicants had been verbally accepted, the calling ceased.

The remaining candidates were alerted by phone that they were not selected for the class. They were also informed that they were still under consideration for participation and, should any of the accepted candidates fall through, they would be offered a spot in the class.

Acceptance

No matter what format your accelerator takes — whether you're investing or not — accepting a startup into your program generally means one thing: paperwork.

We started the process with a formal acceptance letter which included a formal offer and a request for cap table details. The most important part of this letter is the details about when the class starts.

Following the formal acceptance, we proceeded to request permission and conduct background checks on each of the founders. Purely a precautionary measure, but one that we felt necessary.

If the startup chose to forego acceptance or the background check raised concerns, we would formally terminate the offer. We would then contact the first company on the alternate list to determine their desire to participate in the program, continuing the process until we had a full complement of companies for our class.

With acceptance letter and a background check complete, we considered the startup to be a formal participant in the accelerator class, enabling them to participate in the program.

NOTE: It's not unusual for the completion of the paperwork to drag out past the official start date of the class. We allowed startups to participate in the program on day one. But we did not cut checks until paperwork was complete.

Onboarding

With the growing prevalence of Accelerators and the popularity of programs like Y Combinator, Techstars, and 500 startups, it has become common to assume that people are cognizant, if not deeply knowledgeable, about Accelerators, what they are designed to do, how they operate, and how to make the most of being a participant in one.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

In fact, one of the biggest mistakes most accelerators make — and we've made it a few times — is with onboarding. Or, to put it another way, assuming that participants realize what the accelerator is designed to do, what resources are available, and how to make best use of those resources.

If you're building an early stage tech accelerator, you can sometimes skate by without doing a great deal of onboarding. And just get lucky. We wouldn't recommend it, but you could do that.

Why? Because most early stage tech companies are familiar with the concept of accelerators. They know what they are designed to do. And they understand, at a high level, what they're supposed to get out of the accelerator.

Other industries? Not so much. The accelerator is not a common concept. So we've found that assuming folks will know how to engage is a huge mistake. You have to tell them.

Tech founder or not, fact of the matter is that most Founders — regardless of their familiarity with Accelerator model — have a limited understanding of how an Accelerator works, how to make use with the resources being offered, or how to effectively engage with the firehose of connections to which they're being exposed.

Granted, learning to deal with these issues is part of the educational process of being in the Accelerator. But part of it is just an unnecessary waste of Founders' and Mentors' time and Accelerators' resources. So give your startups the best chance of succeeding by preparing them with some Accelerator 101 onboarding.

Day 0: Give the startups context

It's important to recognize that joining an Accelerator program — despite the potential upside for the company in the long run — is a huge, immediate disruption for the Founders. And the transition from a typical startup day-to-day of "building a company at your own pace" and "being in charge of your own schedule" into the Accelerator environment can be jarring, at best. And going from working out of a coffee shop or a kitchen to a structured accelerator program is a big transition.

Some individuals may have relocated to participate in your program. Entire companies may have pulled up and moved to your town. Even people who call your town home may soon be spending time in a part of town that's unfamiliar. Or that they're not used to visiting, day in and day out.

So we recommend that you do what you can to help mitigate this feeling of displacement by making them feel at home.

Some suggested welcome wagon items that you can provide ahead of time may include:

- Housing suggestions, referrals, or Airbnb listings
- Maps of the city
- Information on public transportation
- Places to buy groceries and shop
- Available on-demand services like Instacart, Postmates, and Lyft
- Restaurants
- Coffeeshops
- Bars

Again, those are just a few examples. We just encourage Accelerator staff to put themselves in the Founders' shoes. What would you want to know if you were moving to a new city or a new office? What kind of information would you find valuable about your town or the Accelerator's neighborhood. Start there. Because your startups will want to know that too.

We recommend providing documentation and creating some sort of reference for startups so they know what to expect as the program becomes more structured. It'll also help them be clear on deadlines for deliverables and the expectations for them.

Here are some examples of letters we've used:

- What you're getting yourself in to
- Woohoo! Here's what to expect on your first day. (Along with acceptance letter)

Consider providing these docs along with a welcome basket of swag. Again, it's about making folks feel welcome. The more comfortable your startups feel in the space, the sooner they'll be feel the motivation to work — and begin building up the trust that will enable them to succeed in this environment.

We recommend an intake survey for participants, so you can get a better feel for them as individuals, before they're in the space. Make these questions more personal for the founders:

- Do you have any dietary requirements?
- Do you have any allergies?
- Are you an early bird or a night owl?

Day 1: Take it slow

We've found that too much scheduling the first few days can lead to a bumpy kickoff for companies starting the program. The first day of your program should be dedicated to introducing teams to one another, giving an office tour, letting people get settled and then finally, letting them get to work.

Introduce the startups the space

Make sure to take some time introducing the founders to the space and lay some of the ground rules. We always made sure to let the founders know "This is your office now. You're welcome to use it however you choose. But please bear in mind that it is a shared environment."

Introduce the startups to one another

Don't assume that founders are going to get to know one another. Some will be outgoing and gregarious. Others will be shy. Make sure you take the opportunity to introduce everyone without putting anyone on the spot.

Introduce the startups to the concept of working with mentors

Just as the startups will need context for what the accelerator is designed to do, they'll also need context on how to work with mentors. We feel it's best to do this sort of stuff in person, so we wait until the startups are in the space.

Here's an example of one way we use to bring the startups up-to-speed:

Advice for startups: Working with mentors**

Are you interested in engaging with mentors? Good. That's what we're here to do.

Here are a some tips:

OVERALL

- These folks are volunteering their time because they want to give back to the community. Please be cognizant and respectful of this contribution.
- Please understand that while our program is a priority for them, they have day jobs and families and whatnot.
- Following the deep dive meetings, management has compiled a list of mentors who will be helpful to your startup. We will make those introductions on an ongoing basis. Please use one of the two methods below for engaging with those mentors.
- If you're not finding mentors who meet your needs, please alert management with your concerns and we will recruit mentors to assist with your particular situation.
- Shit happens. Sometimes they'll need to cancel and/or reschedule.

AD HOC MENTOR MEETINGS

Need an intro?

The database was designed to be an easy way of searching through the mentor network. Feel free to search through and find folks who are of interest to you.

Ping management with requests for introduction or schedule time via mentor's office hours

Once you're introduced…

- Once management makes an email introduction, immediately follow up to schedule a time and place with the mentor.
- Do one last follow up/confirmation via email evening before/morning of your meeting.
- Following the Office Hours, send a follow up email touching on any salient points.
- Fill out the mentor feedback form

OFFICE HOURS

- Keep tabs on the Office Hours page and be on the lookout for mentors who you find interesting
- If management staff sees a mentor with office hours who would be beneficial for you, we'll generally nudge you to set up some time.
- Once you've secured time, confirm the time and place via email. Mentors are busy and sometimes a single email gets lost in the fray.
- Do one last follow up/confirmation via email evening before/morning of your meeting.
- Following the Office Hours, send a follow up email touching on any salient points.
- Fill out the mentor feedback form https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1vwn3OQRAiZbGaDNYUt38BOkdPVqnmMG77qRLJMXFn

Getting into the flow

Once the startups get settled, it's important to get into the typical flow as quickly as possible. Don't let this take more than 48 hours or so. Otherwise, your startups will settle into a routine and breaking them from that routine will be difficult.

As the first true accelerator activity, we recommend starting with Family Dinner.

Family Dinner

Arguably, Family Dinner is one of the most important parts of the program. As the name implies, Family Dinner is a weekly gathering — over dinner — designed to be an exclusive opportunity for our company founders to come together, share status updates, and give guidance to one another. Think of it as it a support group with food.

Having a gathering like this is crucial to the health of your program — and the mental well-being of your founders — that will deepen the connections among companies participating in the class. Peer mentoring is not something that can be forced, but in a setting like family dinner, it is only natural that folks will offer help to their fellow founders.

Here are a few tips for how to effectively run a family dinner – because it's not just as simple as ordering food.

For a program of 6-8 companies, dinner usually run for an hour and a half. Any longer than that and folks will start tuning out. And trust us, it will go longer than that if you're not in control.

To avoid dinners that drag on, staff should help your founders either cut to the chase by calling out specific issues staff knows the founders are having or know when to politely cut folks off and move to the next company. You don't want to discourage any dialog that happens, but you do want to be mindful of everyone's time.

If you get into a particularly interesting but lengthy discussion, suggest the founders continue the conversation after dinner.

As a management team, it is your responsibility to know what buttons to push and what levers to pull to get your founders to open up. Group sharing might not come naturally at first, so it is important to create a safe space to facilitate sharing. Adopt the "what you hear at family dinner, stays at family dinner" motto or a Friend-DA.

These dinners are always open to founders who are alums of the PIE program, and if you're running your dinners right, your alumni will be regulars.

We recommend hosting your dinners on-site rather than at a restaurant, unless you can get a private room. Having the meal catered means it's easier for folks to get up from their desk and join, rather than being tempted to go home and stay there before joining you at restaurant.

Consider family dinner mandatory. And rest assured that it will take a while for you to find your Family Dinner groove. At PIE, we made a bunch of errors with the format before we honed in on what worked for our companies.

Family Dinner 0.9 Beta (Coworking version)

The original PIE Family Dinner had very little to do with dinner. It was held on a weekly basis — usually a Thursday around 4:00PM — and consisted of a group of folks grabbing a beer and sitting around chatting about what they were experiencing.

We called it Family Dinner because that's what Y Combinator called their gathering. And we liked the implications of family and strengthening the connections among the members of the PIE folks.

As far as participants, it tended to be a mixture of folks from a number of the early stage startups as well as other individual contributors working out of the space.

There were a few regular attendees. But the mix changed and morphed from week to week. Conversations ranged from business to personal life to business' impact on personal life.

Then something interesting began to happen. Rather than simply sitting around and engaging in small talk, folks began to share issues and problems they were having. They began to explore the stress and emotions of running a startup. And they began to shed the "entrepreneurial veneer" of "Everything is awesome! We're killing it!" to reveal what was really happening. And to start to ask for help.

Family Dinner 1.0 (Coworking version)

As Family Dinner moved from Happy Hour to Reality Hour, something interesting began to happen. More folks attended. More folks participated. More folks shared. And more folks were encouraged to share.

> Rather than opting for voluntary participation, the weekly event became an exercise in peer mentoring.

Each person who arrived was required to talk about what they were going through that week. In turn, other folks around the table were required to comment, critique, and collaborate to help that individual. Family Dinner began to solve problems — or identify those problems as intractable.

Family Dinner problems began to take three distinct forms:

1. **Been there done that.** An individual would highlight a problem that they had experienced. If that problem had already been solved by someone else around the table, the two parties would collaborate to accelerate the resolution of the issue.
2. **Now, that's interesting.** An individual would raise an issue that no one had ever dealt with previously, and yet folks were motivated to solve collaboratively. Multiple folks would gather after the discussion to begin collaborating on a resolution of the issue. Sometimes, this took less than an hour. Other times, this would take several weeks of effort.
3. **Stop. Do not pass Go.** An individual would raise an issue that folks had tried to solve before, but it would be defined to be a completely intractable problems with no solution. Rather than continue to struggle, the individual would be encouraged to move on — or move around — that problem.

But it wasn't without its flaws. Some folks begin commanding more airtime than others. So we put a time limit on it. And enforced a requirement for everyone to talk. We tried to create a culture of collaboration. Where everyone was getting value out of the gathering. Not just a few squeaky wheels.

Family Dinner 2.0 (Accelerator)

When we decided to shift from coworking space to accelerator, we felt that Family Dinner was one of the more valuable activities that should make the transition, as well. But, in so doing, we failed to retain some of the parameters that had made it successful previously.

First of all, we let folks talk about whatever they wanted to talk about. More often than not — being founders — this resulted in discussions on "what went well this week" or, even worse, with chest thumping.

Inevitably, one startup or founder would be having a good week. They would highlight all of the amazing things that were happening that week. And then the other founders in the group would feel even worse about their progress.

Rather than being something positive for peer mentoring, it became competitive and weird. We recognized this and tried to correct some of those bugs.

Family Dinner 2.5 (Accelerator)

This was the final model for Family Dinner in the accelerator environment. These were the guiding principles:

- No bragging.
- Share what's going wrong.
- Everyone has to talk.
- If you can help, help.

During the course of the three month accelerator program, we catered Family Dinner every week for Founders. The gathering was required attendance for at least one Founder from every startup — but we encouraged the entire team to show up every week.Founders from previous classes were invited to attend.

A PIE staff member — usually the program manager — managed the flow of conversations, calling out specific founders to speak and cutting off founders who were going over.

Again, Realizing that sharing successes tends to discourage any folks who are further behind or have had a rough week, we encouraged folks to keep conversations to topics where other founders could use help and support. They were allowed to share successes but they were encouraged to share issues.

We encouraged folks to keep updates short, but we would never cut anyone off who was digging into some deep issues. And we would specifically call out founders who we believed to have expertise that would be helpful to other founders.

Perhaps the highlight of all Family Dinners — and a nod to how valuable they were — was when Founders who were on the road would take time to call into Family Dinner. (Orchestrate was especially good at this.) If they were on video conference, we would make sure that everyone got face time with the founder calling in.

Following the first Family Dinner. . .

I know, it was awkward right? Don't worry. it will get better. I promise.

. . . you'll start to get into the cadence. Let's take a look at what that might look like.

Typical week in PIE

We often get asked, "What's a typical week like in your accelerator?" And while the term "typical week" is an oxymoron for PIE, there are some things that occur with enough regularity — and provide enough structure for participants — that we can describe them.

So here's an imperfect look at a typical week at PIE:

Monday

8:00AM Staff arrives and meets with one another about the week's upcoming events. Some startups are already working.

10:00AM Workspace is full. All startups have arrived. Staff holds one-on-one meetings with each team.

5:00PM Family Dinner starts. Founders and staff leave the workspace to have dinner together. Non-founding team members remain in the space working.

7:00PM Family Dinner ends. Startups return to workspace and continue working. Staff returns to space. Compares notes. Continues peer mentoring momentum from Family Dinner.

8:00PM Workspace is about half full with the founders who prefer the late shift. Staff remains online in the chat room or accessible via email.

Tuesday

8:00AM Staff arrives. Continues making mentor connections for startups based on issues raised during family dinner. *Note: It may take as many as two or three mentors with subject matter expertise to help each startup resolve each issue. Your job, from a staff perspective, is to help make this process as efficient as possible.*

> Make things as simple as possible but no simpler. Albert Einstein

10:00AM Workspace is full.

12:00PM Catered lunch in the workspace. Some startups sit together and chat. Others simply eat at their desks. (There is no required socializing. Just a request that the founders make time to eat.)

1:00PM Anecdotal founder story from a PIE mentor, followed by Q&A.

2:30PM Return to work. Mentors often remain behind to continue the conversation with a startup or two.

7:00PM Staff and startups start to thin out in the workspace. Staff remains online in the chat room or accessible via email.

Wednesday

8:00AM Work day for startups and staff. Staff arrives. Checks in on progress. Spends day meeting with mentors, potential mentors, alums, and future recruits.

10:00AM Startups working in the workspace.

11:00AM Random visitor pings staff. Staff invites the visitor to grab a desk and hang out in PIE for the day.

1:00PM Random visitor provides an informal talk and Q&A for startups.

2:30PM Startups working in workspace. Staff meetings with W+K account and creative teams.

5:00PM Startups encouraged to attend a targeted community event and spend time networking with the rest of the Portland tech community. Staff suggests they drag the random visitor along for the ride.

8:00PM Startups return to space and continue working and discuss event. Or opt to grab drinks with the random visitor.

Thursday

8:00AM Staff arrives. Startups start to roll in.

12:00PM Catered lunch in the workspace.

1:00PM Workshop based on common problem all startups are experiencing. Staff, mentors, and peer-to-peer engagement encouraged.

3:00PM Startups return to work. Small groups break off to work on issues that arose during the workshop.

7:00PM Staff departs. Space starts to clear out.

Friday

8:00AM Staff arrives. Startups start to roll in.

10:00AM Staff learns that there is an investor in town to meet with a PIE alum. Staff invites the investor to run the gauntlet. Investor agrees. Startups are given 15 minutes each to meet with the investor.

12:00PM Staff talks with startups about what happened, what went well, what could be better.

4:00PM Happy Hour with PIE mentors, alums, and community members.

7:00PM Happy Hour winds down. Startups go back to work.

8:00PM Founders who clicked with the investor meet up to continue the conversation

Saturday and Sunday

Staff and startups in space sporadically. No scheduled events.

Engaging mentors in an accelerator class

So that all makes sense. But there's an awful lot of mentoring in there. How does that stuff start to happen?

At PIE, we experimented with a number of different means of activating mentors as they engaged with startups. How we worked with the mentors depended on both the mentor preference as well as the startup's or founder's immediate needs.

We'll take you through each of these elements from least amount of engagement to most engagement between founder and mentor:

- Presentation with Q&A
- Workshops
- Speed dating
- Matchmaking
- Office hours

A note about bad actors One of the most challenging things about attempting to manage community — and then activating that community in the form of an accelerator — is the presence of bad actors.

No matter how well you curate and cultivate your mentor pool, it's bound to happen.

When we say "bad actors," we mean individuals who are more interested in personal gain than the gain of the community or the founders in your program. It happens. Sometimes it's intentional. Often it's not.

So how do you deal with it?

Well, we recommend follow Brad's advice in Startup Communities. The community has to be open to everyone. You have to welcome everyone. And you have to build the type of community that rewards good behavior. And discourages bad behavior.

But even with all of that working, bad actors still enter the fray. So what to do?

Honestly, from an accelerator standpoint, sometimes bad actors are more beneficial than one would think.

Let's provide an example.

One class of PIE, we had arranged to have a serial founder come into to present to the class. The founder was currently employed by another company and, as such, took our invitation to mean we were interested in hearing about that company and its product offering. And not the founder's journey with previous companies.

Shame on us for not setting the context correctly. Lesson learned.

With that misunderstanding as the impetus, things went from bad to worse. With a swirling schedule and multiple overlapping commitments, the founder canceled at the last minute. But rather than leaving us hanging, the founder decided to send an alternate speaker. The person the founder sent was a salesperson for the company.

So through no fault of the founder and no fault of the salesperson, we wound up in a bad actor situation.

Our founders showed up dutifully to hear a founder talk about their experiences, challenges, and failures. But what they got, instead, found was a sales pitch for a product they neither wanted nor, honestly, needed.

And no matter how much staff would try to redirect the speaker — "Hey that's great. Maybe you can talk a little bit about what it's like to be in a sales role for this kind of company. . . ?" — the sales pitch continued. "What do you do when an audience isn't receptive to your sales pitch?" Still continuing. "When do you walk away from a pitch?" And on and on.

There was no derailing it.

So when it was over, the staff scurried to tie it off and hustle the speaker out the door.

The Founders were, understandably, miffed. And any number of conversations were sparked by that experience. Some were critical of the program for allowing it to happen. Some were critical of the company and the former founder for sending that presenter. And some were upset that the presenter did not clue into the environment.

It became a running gag for the remainder of the class.

But you know what? It resulted in a lot of good conversations. A lot. Like an irritant creating a pearl, the poorly placed and unintentional bad actor had not only created a context for interesting discussion, the salesperson had unintentionally become a common enemy against which every one of the founders in that class could rail.

It went from a negative moment to a teaching moment.

Best of all, it occurred in a safe environment. Somewhere that the founders could discuss what happened. And discuss why it happened. And why it was bad. And that made it incredibly valuable on any number of fronts.

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tl;dr Every moment of an Accelerator has the potential to be a teaching moment. Act accordingly.

And with this happy accident it dawned on us that these founders were going to encounter these situations out in the wild — in the real world. And now, thanks to this awkward and aggravating experience, they would be better equipped to handle similar situations when they occurred after these startups were released into the wild.

And so we started introducing bad actors intentionally. To recreate those interesting moments of conversation and learning.

Presentation with Q&A

Often the least taxing — but still incredibly valuable — way to engage mentors is to have them present in front of the class of startups in a lecture format, followed by substantial time for questions after the presentation.For some accelerators, this can happen sporadically. For others, it can take place several times a week.

At PIE, we found a cadence of two talks — where a single mentor addresses the entire class — per week seemed to be the best. But if there were serendipitous opportunities — for example, a random mentor popping into the space or visiting Portland — we took the opportunity to have them speak.

Variety, am I right?

Potential staff misconceptions about mentor presentations

In our experience, we've found that there are a few misconceptions some communities have about mentors presentations. So we wanted to dispel those immediately.

1) Mentors who want to speak are the mentors that should speak

Despite rumors to the contrary, there will likely be a large contingent of your community that actually enjoys presenting in front of an audience. They enjoy the stage. And they enjoy public speaking. And as your program — or programming — becomes more prominent and recognized, these folks will seek out your program for speaking opportunities.

Sometimes they're amazing speakers. Sometimes they're not. There is value in each of those outcomes.

Amazing speakers really help the startups. Not so amazing speakers can provide great conversation points for the startups and staff.

But don't think you have to take all comers. Like so many things that happen in the chaotic environment of the accelerator, you have to determine if the timing is right. For the content. For the personality. And for the startups.

Because wasting a good speaker at the wrong time is just as bad as having an off topic speaker at the right time.

2) Mentors who don't want to speak shouldn't speak

While shouldn't you take all comers, the converse is also true. Sometimes, you have to seek out the mentor who doesn't want to present in front of the class. Because they have valuable insight. Or interesting stories. Or the startups simply need to have a little boost.

Act accordingly.

While it may take more cajoling and prepping, it is critically important that you always find the right speakers. Not just the speakers to which you have immediate access. And not just the folks who want to speak.

You're here to help your founders. And your mentors want to help founders. Sometimes that's awkward and uncomfortable.

3) Mentors need to be experts

Another misconception is the idea that mentors need to be expert in their field.

We believe that anyone and everyone has the potential to be a mentor. Likewise, anyone and everyone has the potential to speak as a mentor. And to provide valuable insights to your founders.

Your challenge as a staff member is to figure out how to apply those mentors.

Expertise is not a prerequisite. Insights, willingness to share, and relatable stories are. So find the people who can talk honestly about their experiences and share relevant feedback. Whether they are considered "experts" or not.

CAVEAT: Most of your speakers will be either founders or experts. But your entire mentor pool can have a ton of variety and levels of expertise — or lack thereof.

4) Speaking is more important than listening

Sometimes, being a good speaker isn't what startups need. They need someone who listens.

We find that some of our best mentor speakers are those who spend less time presenting and more time chatting — or just listening. So make sure to find folks who are comfortable with that dynamic.

You're much better off to have a so-so presentation with a lively Q&A session than to have a polished oratory followed by crickets.

Startups are in your program to explore opportunities, question assumptions, and get their hands dirty. They are seeking opportunities to learn about practical applications and unique insights. Not to revel in theory. So make sure founders have speakers who draw that conversation out.

5) You need a formal setting for presentations

We've pretty much covered this in the space design. But to hit it one more time. . .

We talk to a lot of folks who dodge the whole speaker thing with, "Well, we don't have anywhere to do it."

Bullshit.

PIE's mentors had, arguably, one of the most thankless presentation platforms ever. A cavernous concrete room. With huge columns. And a scattered litany of desks.

Tough room, as the comedians say. We made due.

And I would argue that the very nature of the raw space lent itself to more candid discussions. That by forcing founders to pull back from their desks and wheel their chairs away from obstructions caused them to be more engaged. That even those founders who remained intently typing away throughout the presentation gained something. Because they were immersed in the moment.

The best stage is the stage you have. Make due.

For the mentor

Once you've selected a mentor to speak, it will benefit both the community and your program if you adequately prepare them for the talk.

Even the most seasoned CEO with a completely polished pitch can become a babbling idiot when trying to describe how they built the business — or how they failed. But those are the stories that provide the most value to the startups you're trying to help.

So give your mentors some guidance before they wind up on stage.

Here are some of the ways we tried to do that in PIE.

Give them guidance on the room

With PIE's mentors, most folks had visited the space before they presented there. But if they were visitors or hadn't been in the space, we made sure they were aware of how difficult the room was.

If they were giving a founder talk or doing a Q&A session, they got different prep than a workshop format.

We didn't require slides. But if folks had them, we let them know we had a dinky projector and a white wall onto which we would trow their deck.

If they were doing a workshop, we'd make sure that they were well armed with whiteboards and markers. (Sometimes founder talks require whiteboards as well.)

And we made it clear that we didn't have any audio equipment. No matter what the format.

If you plan to record, get permission

As time went on, we started recording the presentations. Not for public consumption. But so that founders could return to previous content as needed. Or in case they missed a mentor session.

If you choose to record your sessions, get permission from the mentor ahead of time.

Trying to use this format as an educational platform is extremely challenging, if not ripe for failure (and not the kind of failure we want)

Let's be completely blunt here. It will be extremely rare that all of your founders are all experiencing the same problem simultaneously. And even if they are? A lecture based format is about the worst format for them to be dealing with the problem.

So save these sorts of educational sessions for workshops or one-on-one meetings.

Founders don't want to hear about the problems they're having. They want to fix the problems they're having. So we don't recommend that you choose this lecture format as a means of solving problems. It rarely works. And there are better ways of addressing those issues (which we'll get into later).

That's why. . .

Founder stories are the best

The best use of the lecture format is putting a founder in front of your class of founders. So whenever possible choose speakers who are founders.

Founders love the stories from the trenches. Because they're not actually stories about failure, at all. They're stories about perseverance. To talk about how they battled against all odds to win. About how they managed to string things together and come out on top.

It's part of the culture.

Plus, most founders don't even need to prepare to tell these stories. They tell them all of the time.

But you might need to prep them for the parts of the story that are most valuable to your startups.

NOTE: Workshops get a pass here. Most workshops, you'll want a subject matter expert whether they happen to be a founder or not.

Encourage mentors to tell stories of mistakes and failure

Talking about naive decisions and stumbles and screw ups. Sharing awful fucking mistakes. And heartbreaking failures. They aren't pretty. But to other entrepreneurs they are way more important than recounting the completely random lucky set of circumstances that landed you where you are today.

Because unlike that celebrated and yet unrepeatable path to success, avoiding those failures and mistakes can be critical to your peers.

Wisdom isn't always about winning. And if you've created an environment of trust in your accelerator, these stories will be pure gold to your startups. Or the sustenance that keeps them going.

Let's face it. Any founder could tell you the entire journey of his or her successful company — step by step in intricate detail. You could take scrupulous notes, ask for clarification and additional color, and document each and every step of the journey with complete precision.

Then you could carefully, methodically follow that guideline, note for note. Without falter. Down to the most seemingly insignificant detail.

Would that enable you to launch a successful company exactly like that successful founder? Of course not.

Because for all the control and precision — for all the efforts and decisions of the founder — there are an untold number of additional factors weighing on that success. Timing. The market. Collaborators. Whether it was raining or sunny.

It could have been the market. It could have been the timing. It could have been, well, luck.

No matter how much you know about what led to success, you can never recreate it. And while those stories are great and inspirational and all that. Sometimes, they're simply not helpful.

> **tl;dr You can't recreate the same success. But you can avoid the same mistakes.**

Now what if, instead, you explored things that failed? Would you fail in the exact same way? Probably.

Because failure is a different story. Knowing the story of failure will enable your startups to better understand how things go wrong, how bad decisions come about, and how those things can be avoided. Or, at the very least, they'll know that similar decisions have a high likelihood of failure. And they can go into the situation with their eyes open.

Ask mentors to talk about mistakes and failures? Won't that be difficult? No. It won't. And if it is? Then that's likely a red flag that you have chosen poorly with that mentor. Or the wounds are still too fresh. In which case, you should save that mentor for sometime in the future.

Be prepared for Q&A to be awkward

Most early stage founders don't have enough experience to ask good questions. Don't worry. They'll get better as class goes on.

To exacerbate matters, most founders aren't used to standing on stage and revealing all of their errors.

So the question and answer periods can get a little awkward. It happens. Especially in the workshop format. Because your founders are often trying to consume, process, and apply all at once.

At PIE, we relied on staff to help ask pointed questions — because we were the best informed. We knew exactly what problems everyone in the room had, from speaker to startup. And we could use that knowledge to draw out interesting stories from the speaker that would be relevant to the startup founders in the class.

But we also began to put more and more pressure on the startups to ask questions. And to do due diligence on the speakers before they were standing in front of the room. Because this sort of prep serves them well for any number of meetings. Teaching moment.

And guess what? Our best speakers did an equal amount of prep and due diligence on the companies in the cohort. Before they took the stage.

Being engaged is better than being polished

Try as they might, some founders are just really bad in front of a crowd. (I can say this because I happen to be one of them.) But fact of the matter is that they can be even more engaged by being awkward.

It's more authentic. More genuine. And more engaging if they've let their guard down.

What's more, polished stories start to feel stilted in this sort of environment. They're great for pitches. Or for the big stage. But in this sort of intimate setting, they can fall flat.

Even if it's a workshop. It should still feel more natural than forced.

So encourage speakers to be real. Because that will help them have more impact on your startups.

Don't sweat the slides

Some folks need slides. Some don't. Some are better with slides. Some are worse.

Long story short, don't require speakers to have slides to speak. In fact, more often than not, you might want to ask them to leave the slides behind.

The caveat here is that the workshop format can be helped by slides. But the vast majority of your talks won't be workshops.

Don't make it a sales pitch

Just don't.

For the founders

Founders will need to experience a few of these talks before they will learn how to effectively engage and get the most out of the format. This is to be expected. Even the most seasoned startup founder can find this format difficult, at first. It's open and awkward. By design.

Encourage participants to do their due diligence on the speaker — and this is critically important — on their own.

For the first few talks, give the participants substantial context on the speaker when scheduling the talk. And try to give participants as much warning and prep time as possible. Provide context again as you're introducing speaker. (If it's a pop-in speaker, we encourage you to spend extra time setting the stage during the introduction.) And then, when the talk is over, encourage the founders to follow up with a thank you.

Again, this is only for the first few talks. The idea is to start training your founders to do their homework ahead of every meeting. And to follow up effectively after every meeting.

Feel free to accept questions like "Who is this?" or "What should I know about this person?" for the first few talks. Provide information and context. As the class goes on, we encourage you to respond to those questions with questions of your own, like "What can *you* tell *me* about this person?" and "What kind of questions do you have prepared for this speaker?"

This is an accelerator. Not an incubator. Teach your founders how to survive in the real world.

Workshops

At times, it will be more valuable for participating founders to engage, as a group, with mentors in a workshop format. These are most effective when all of the participants are struggling with the same issue, so topics like projections, pricing, public relations, story telling, speech coaching, and raising money all work well in this format.

Ideally, you have a location within your space that works for this type of conversation. Since there is often a lot of conversation and interaction. Usually with a great deal of whiteboard scribbling. If not, make due.

Participants should leave any workshop session with homework to complete. Workshops are called workshops for a reason. They create work for the participants. Make sure there is an assignment after each one.

For the staff

In this format, staff should be looking to engage subject matter expert mentors. This is an incredibly scaleable and efficient way for those types of mentors to share their knowledge, en masse.

These mentors should be comfortable with a conversational teaching environment.

For the mentor

Encourage mentors to set the context of the workshop, provide background on their experience or expertise, and then actively make examples of the startups or founders. This should be an engaging and dynamic process designed to help all participants learn the subject matter.

Make sure the mentors understand that they should be assigning homework. And make sure that they realize that the assignment should drive the teachings home or take participants to the next stage of developing the concepts explored during the workshop — and this is important — as they apply to the founder and/or their startup. They need to make the assignment applicable, not just educational.

For the founders

Encourage participants to be as open and participatory as they can during the session. They should bring up real problems, rather than hypothetical ones, enabling the mentor to help them resolve their issues in real time.

Like the mentor presentations, encourage the founders to do their own homework on each of the workshops.

Experimenting with the format: Lunch and Learns Sometimes a mentor talk, other times a workshop, sometimes led by peers, lunch and learns are scheduled twice a week during the three month program during the lunch hour. Speakers can range from founders with anecdotal "war stories" to subject matter experts. We often bring our higher profiled mentors in for these talks, as it is easier to schedule for them. These are some of the most valuable learning opportunities of the program.

Despite how straightforward these sessions sound, we've discovered a few snags. There is a chance that any given topic, might not be something a company is dealing with that particular day or week, but trust us, they will – and when they are dealing with it, they might not have a chance to meet with that mentor again. This is one of those; take advantage of the opportunity while you have it, moments.

Teams will be busy and claim they just don't have the time for another meeting. Again, see above. These opportunities aren't always on the table so they should be treated as such.

Active engagement is crucial for the companies and for the speakers. A silent room means that your companies aren't paying attention or asking questions and maybe even more importantly, it means that your speaker is wasting their time and becoming less and less likely to mentor for your program again. We ask our companies to step away from their machines and actively listen / take notes when during the session – it's only an hour.

Oh, and don't forget to supply lunch – as it's in the name and presents an opportunity for peer mentoring among the companies or a chance to talk more with the speaker. We've found it's best served before the talk.

This doesn't have to be mentor led. This can be peer led. Some of the most interesting lunch and learns are peer led.

Example topics:

- Getting the most out of an accelerator
- Pricing Model roundtable – multiple mentors
- The importance of documentation
- Minimum "Valuable" Product

Speed dating (aka running the gauntlet)

With the speed dating format, either a startup or a mentor is assigned an area within the accelerator, usually a conference room or section of a larger worker area. For this example, let's say it's the startup founders, the accelerator participants. The other party — in this case, the mentor — is assigned the task of moving from station to station to meet with the other party. This usually occurs on a very short timeframe, most commonly between 10 and 30 minutes.

At PIE, we would use this format with individual mentors, sending a volley of startups to meet with them in short succession. This worked well for our space. Less often, we would use multiple mentors or groups of mentors with which each of the startups would engage, round robin style.

The round robin style can be even more difficult to manage. There is usually a smattering of mentor types, expertise, and skills in these situations, given people's busy schedules. With large groups, it often defaults to a "we'll take who we can get on this day" approach.

The process is designed to make efficient use of time for both mentors and startups, giving each party the chance to briefly meet the other. And to give mentors a general lay of the land for the cohort as a whole. It also avails the opportunity for each party to identify folks with whom they would like to be working.

From the Mentor's perspective, progress goes something like this:

- Mentor 1 meets with Startup 1
- Mentor 1 meets with Startup 2
- Mentor 1 meets with Startup 3…

From the Startup's perspective, progress looks more like this:

- Startup 1 meets with Mentor 1
- Startup 1 meets with Mentor 2
- Startup 1 meets with Mentor 3

So as you can see, the best number of mentors to schedule for a speed dating session is less than or, ideally, equal to the number of Startups in your Accelerator. Too many, one way or the other, and someone's time is being wasted. Too few, and its value is questioned.

But what if you have three times as many mentors wanting to participate as you have startups? That's right. You schedule separate sessions. In this case, you schedule three separate sessions. They could all occur on the same day. But divide the mentors evenly among your startups. It just works best.

> **tl;dr Speed dating works best when the mentor to startup ratio is 1:1.**

Don't try to have multiple mentors sit down with each Startup. That can be awkward for both the Startups and the Mentors. Unless… they already know one another well.

We've experimented with groups of mentors meeting with Startups in this round robin fashion. It's another way to handle a large number of mentors meeting with the Startups, in an efficient fashion. But we've found that these Mentors need to know one another on a collegial or friendly level before this works. Otherwise, comfort levels tend to compromise the value of this model.

Where we have found this permutation effective is with Angel groups and Venture Capital partners and/or associates. You can group three Investors from an Angel group or VC, together — especially ones who know one another well and who use a similar due diligence style — and they'll do just fine. That said, the Startups may feel a little ganged up on.

> **tl;dr Speed dating between groups of Mentors and Startups works if, and only if, the Mentors know one another well, like Investors from the same group or fund.**

In our mentoring experience with other Accelerators, we have found that many programs lean heavily on speed dating. This can have its drawbacks.

The dark side of speed dating

While speed dating seems to be the most efficient way to engage mentors and startups, in PIE's experience, it does have its drawbacks. So we encourage folks to use the speed dating model in addition to other means of engaging mentors, rather than relying on speed dating as the only means of introducing mentors and startups.

These drawbacks, which we'll cover in more detail, include but are not limited to:

- Mentor and Startup fatigue
- Perceived lack of meaningful connections
- Perceived lack of tangible results
- A feeling of "missed opportunities" or time wasted by both Mentors and Startups

For the staff

It is imperative that the staff management this round robin of engagement. Keep folks moving. Don't let folks run over time or other startups suffer.

Without a doubt, these sessions are the most staff intensive.

For the mentor

Ensure that the mentors are familiar with the format and the expectations. If they have not participate in this format before, spend some time bringing them up-to-speed with the dynamic.

Most important for mentors, encourage them to come to the session with a few questions they plan to ask every startup.

For the founders

Help the founders understand how taxing this format will be for them. Ensure that they have a quick intro and then encourage them to get into questions with the mentor.

Like other formats, it is imperative that the founders take the time to do their homework on the mentor(s) with whom they are meeting.

Matchmaking

While speed dating can be an effective way of engaging multiple mentors with multiple startups, simultaneously. It does, as we have highlighted, have its drawbacks.

In our experience, matchmaking provides a far more beneficial and rewarding experience for both the mentors and the startups. That said, matchmaking requires far more effort and engagement from accelerator staff.

With matchmaking, the connections between mentors and startups are less serendipitous and more intentional, based on a series of factors, such as:

- Current problems plaguing the founders
- Stage of the product or company
- Skill set and expertise of the mentor
- Personality of the founders
- Personality of mentor
- Likelihood of availability

There is no set day or timeframe. Staff introduces the startup and mentor and leaves it the startup to schedule the meeting. Staff then follows up with both mentor and startup to understand the outcomes of the meeting and to help decide next steps.

We define three different formats for matchmaking:

- 1:1
- 1:Company
- Many:Company

1:1

This format is the typical "meet for coffee" sort of meeting between a founder and a mentor. It can be used for anything from specific founder issues to companywide guidance.

These sessions can go from anywhere from 20 minutes to an hour.

For PIE, this comprised the vast majority of our mentor meetings. And we would have as many of these going in rapid succession for each startup as the staff could handle. This is where the work gets done.

For the staff

It is imperative that you use this format for problems you have identified with a participating company, be they at the founder level or the business level. Using this format poorly can result in significant mentor burnout.

This is not a "chat." This is talking through a problem.

Make sure the founder understands what problem or issue prompted the introduction to the particular mentor. Make sure the mentor understands the problems with which the startup is currently wrestling.

Just as important is your role of understanding the personality of the founder and the mentor you are introducing. Do your best to create connections between folks who are likely to hit it off. Otherwise, you'll be frustrating both mentor and founder.

It does you no good to introduce folks who will annoy one another.

For the mentor

Recognize that you will be engaging with founders who are frustrated that they have not been able to resolve something on their own. This causes founders to be more guarded and less trusting. It's your job to break through that veneer.

The staff has introduced you to this founder because they believe your experience and expertise can be an effective means of resolving a founders problems. Even if it's not obvious to you at first, trust that the staff has made this connection for a reason.

Nowhere does the guidance on mentoring become more important than this format.

For the founders

The staff has introduced you to this mentor because they believe that the mentor may have relevant advice for your current issues. They do not have the answer or a resolution. They have advice.

1:Company

One mentor meeting with the entire company is either the most difficult format for both mentor and participating startup or the easiest. There is no in between.

These meetings may occur naturally throughout the course of the program, as mentors and founders create relationships with one another. Or when a visiting mentor has expertise that is useful for an entire company. Staff may join these meetings to ensure that both parties are getting the most out of the engagement.

Staff should only force this format to resolve the most steadfast and entrenched company problems; problems that cannot be solved through 1:1 mentoring sessions. This is a closed door meeting. Staff should not attend, in this case. Allow the mentor to consult with the company directly.

A good example of the appropriate use for this format is ongoing conflict between cofounders.

For the staff

You'll know when you need this. It will be obvious. Have the courage to actually make it happen. Don't avoid the issue.

For the mentor

Mentors need context for the meeting, especially if its the staff arranging the meeting. These aren't easy. Make sure to prep them as best you can.

For the founders

They already know. Trust us.

Many:Company

This is a typical format for investors to engage with startups in the cohort, like an associate and a partner or multiple angels from an angel group. A number of mentors meeting with an entire company is often a very casual and comfortable mentor meeting. This can be both good and bad.

It's important to ensure that everyone is getting value out of the format, and that it's not just a chat.

For the staff

It's highly advised that you make time to sit in on these meetings. Without proper guidance, they can devolve to chitchat. It's fine if the group wants to go out later to chat, but during the time in the space, this should be focused on deriving value from the meeting.

For the mentor

This can be the easiest meeting to have and the most difficult meeting from which to quantify value. Mentors will be more comfortable with peers in the room.

For the founders

Make sure the founders understand that they need to be focused on getting something out of the meeting — even if it's a follow up that is more laid back and social.

Office hours

One of the benefits of having a collaborative coworking space is that sometimes the most engaged mentors will offer to hold office hours at the space on a regular basis. This can be hugely valuable for your startups and incredibly rewarding for the mentor.

But it takes a great deal of time commitment.

So we don't recommend presenting this as an option to all mentors. Play it by ear. If a mentor seems to be working with all of the startups in the cohort and enjoys hanging out in the space. Offer up the concept. And some desk space.

But don't force it.

When we had mentors who provided office hours it would generally consist of a set time period (generally four hours) held once a week on the same day. Like a professor at college.

Founders were engaged on a first come, first served basis. Sometimes, one founder would exhaust the entire time period. Other times, the mentor would simply sit in the space and work, because no founder expressed a pressing need to meet with the mentor.

This can be a great way of mixing up the dynamic of the space, so if the opportunity avails itself, we encourage you to experiment with it.

CHAPTER 17

Graduating from the program (Demo Day)

Graduation requirements can be modified to fit your programs needs or specialities. Most, if not all, programs choose to culminate with a demo day. When we say "demo day," we mean a presentation format where one founder gives a 6-8 minute pitch about their company in front of an audience.

We believe that the focus of demo day should be about gaining attention, not funding. Checks don't get written at demo days, but conversations get started. Your demo day can be as large or small, open or private, as makes sense for your program.

But while all of the above is true, it is important to understand that demo days are occur regularly, these days. They're not special. That means you're going to have to work very hard to get attention from the media and investors — and you still might not get it. Their dance cards are typically full.

That doesn't mean you shouldn't have a demo day, because it's important to have something that signifies the culmination of the program. It just means that you need to be considerate — and intentional.

The hand holding doesn't stop just because they've gone on stage.

If you decide to proceed with a demo day, We believe it's important to put just as much effort and energy into that event as the companies put into their pitches. For many, this day is "the big reveal," signifying their public launch. It is your responsibility to make their splash as big as it can be.

Objectives

Make sure to spend some time with staff, mentors, patrons, sponsors, and startups determining what they hope to get out of a demo day format. Be intentional about those objectives. And create an event that satisfies those objectives.

If getting introductions to investors is the primary objective, then a big shindig with hundreds of people may be entirely counterproductive. But if launching a product is the primary objective for each of your companies, then the bigger the audience, the better.

No one says you have to do this. Make sure there is a reason for doing it.

Audience

Once you've established your objectives, define the audience(s) that will help you achieve those objectives. Then determine how large that audience is and how you can best get them to attend your event.

- Are they local or remote?
- Are they easy to convince or will this be like pulling teeth?
- What are they reading? Where do they hang out?
- Are they more likely to attend in person or virtually?

Get creative

Demo Day is designed to showcase your companies, not just on stage, but in the real world. For that reason, we encourage you to consider creative ways to incorporate the presenting startups' products into the Demo Day, itself.

For example, we provided PIE Demo Day 2014 content via Read The Docs on the their Demo Day to showcase how useful and compelling their solution was.

Logistics

To help you stay on schedule, we're sharing this PIE Demo Day: Run of Show document.

Invites

We manage our invites through Eventbrite and reserve groups of tickets for Investors, Media, Friends and Family, and Community. This enables us to control guest numbers within each group. There is no cost to attend demo day, but you can make the invite password protected if that makes sense for your event.

Venue

Ideally you'll find one that that not only meets your needs for capacity, but can also handle the technical requirements you'll have. Make sure that your venue gives you time for walkthroughs with the presenters as well as rehearsal time.

It's an added bonus if you find a venue where you can host your post presentation reception. PIE had our first demo day at a locally owned theatre and served popcorn. Our reception amounted to a bunch of us standing near the orchestra pit chatting.

We've since held it at a nicer venue. The details are important here. Find a venue that matches the vibe you're wanting to create.

As a reference we used the main theatre and mezzanine for our reception here: http://www.pcs.org/rent-the-armory/

Technical requirements

Number one rule

Set your presenters and your audience up for success. Having the right equipment will make your presenters and your program feel more polished.

Projector + Screen

Make sure that the projector and the screen are large enough that any one in the house can see. Set your screen up in a place on stage so that presenters aren't standing right in front of their presentations.

Confidence monitors

THESE ARE MANDATORY, or at least should be. While we expect our speakers to be prepared for anything during their presentations, ya know, technical glitches, power outages, booing (kidding), we like to provide them with a little bit of a security blanket. 1 for current screen, 1 for presenter notes.

Lav + hand mics

Presenters should use lav mics, period. This is especially crucial if they're going to be transitioning their own slides via a clicker. Too many things to hold and they'll find themselves juggling. Hand mics should be reserved for anyone doing presenter introductions or show opening and closing notes.

Wifi

A definite nice to have, but can get expensive if your venue isn't equipped.

Livestreaming: Another nice to have. We reach another 1000+ viewers by having a live stream of our demo day. This is great for folks who don't have time to make a trip just for your event, but would still like to participate.

Entertainment/music:

Most demo days have their companies walk on stage to a theme song. We like to take that up a notch and have a live band perform the song. The band stays on stage and adds a little extra flavor to the whole show. Year after year, we get a ton of compliments on the band. If you can swing it, you should.

What to wear:

We have teams wear logo branded t-shirts, each team has a different color. Why do we do this? Well because after 1.5-2 hour long presentations, folks tend to forget names and faces, but can recognize a t-shirt color / logo that they wanted to talk to. Trust us. It makes a difference. How do you decide what colors folks wear? Well, you can let them fight to death, or you can decide for them. Logos are either black or white - keep it simple.

Demo day swag:

Sigh. You could do it, but do you wanna? (inside joke ftw) It's really not worth the time or the money to create swag specific to your demo day. We know because we've done it. We've even created awesome notebooks with pages dedicated to each team so that while they present the user could take notes on that teams specific page AND it had their business card attached to the page! Pure genius and a total waste of money that no one used or cared about.

Post show reception (1.5 hours)

To facilitate conversations post presentations we host a private reception for our companies, media, and investors, immediately after curtain call. Work with teams to find out who they'd like to attend and help make those introductions happen. This is not a wrap party, but you should provide some bites and drinks. After all, the majority of the attendees just sat through an entire presentation.

Denouement: Repair to dinner

One of the things we tried time and time again was to get the startups to take mentors and potential investors out to dinner after the event. From giving them money to do so to planning their itinerary. It never really worked as expected, but we still think it's a great way of continuing the conversations in a more intimate environment.

CHAPTER 18

Post mortem

If you've done your work on pitch practice correctly, your startups will be primed to turn the tables on you.

> "You critiqued my pitch? Let me critique your job."

At PIE, we even couch it as such. Like pitch practice, PIE staff may not respond to any criticism during the post mortem. We can take notes and ask for clarification on feedback. But we are not permitted to try to explain away any blemishes the startups describe. Nor are we allowed to defend our actions.

Not saying that all of the feedback is negative. Quite the opposite. But after the first thirty minutes or so, the founders start to run out of niceties. And then they get down to provide the truly valuable feedback.

We receive feedback over the course of an hour to ninety minutes from each startup, preferably with all members of the founding team. If necessary, we meet with founders separately and then consolidate the feedback.

Then we look for common themes and concerns. We place role-specific elements into buckets. Like if the CTOs all referenced a particular aspect of the program. Or if the majority of the CEOs had a similar complaint.

We're looking for things that we need to change to make the program more effective. Not easier. Not less stressful. But more effective.

To this end, we can almost guarantee that one of the most consistent pieces of feedback you will receive throughout the post mortem process is "I wish you would have told us [x] sooner" or "If only I'd be taught [x] earlier in the class."

Rest easy. Had you told them any earlier, they wouldn't have heard you. They would have ignored it. Or they would have believed that the problem would never affect them.

Don't believe us? Try telling your next class earlier and see what happens.

CHAPTER 19

Conclusion

To reiterate what we said at the start, one of the primary motivations for writing the PIE Cookbook was the firm belief that this programmatic model for assisting founders and companies could inform the development of additional accelerator models. Or entirely new ways of managing this sort of mentorship.

For that reason, we want you to take this guide as inspiration, rather than fact. Our motivation to share the PIE Cookbook isn't to convince you to recreate PIE. It's to inspire you to create something new—and better.

Because, let's be honest, no matter how much you love tech and innovation and all of the hype, the thought of starting some also-ran tech startup accelerator isn't terribly interesting, these days.

> **tl;dr It's your job to improve upon the PIE recipe, not simply repeat it.**

With that in mind, please don't try to recreate PIE. The world needs more variety—not less. And together, we all get better.

Maybe you could come up with something completely unique. Maybe you could use the PIE recipe to build new curricula at a college. Or to create a nonprofit accelerator. Or to change the dynamic of an R&D shop. Or to rethink craft brewing. Or to create agencies. Or to help Kickstarter projects survive, post funding. Or to change the world of VR. Or to help bloggers build better business models. Or to give artists an environment to create. Or to help a diverse slice of indie game developers change the face of gaming. Or to build a maker space. Or to help lifestyle companies succeed more efficiently. Or or or or. . .

The point is that the PIE Cookbook is designed to inspire you to do something. To get creative. Not repetitive. To give you courage. To provide suggestions and inspiration. It's designed to help you understand—or to educate your superiors—that it's actually okay to try this stuff. To show them it's not just acceptable to participate, but it's exciting and critical to survival as well.

Not interested in building a generic tech startup accelerator? **Good. Please don't. Go do something more interesting than that.**

And, by all means, please keep us in the loop. We're looking forward to learning from—and with—you.

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CHAPTER 20

GitHub

You can find this document on GitHub: https://github.com/piepdx/pie-cookbook