

TECH Fort Worth's Entrepreneurial Programs Fuel Growth for Emerging Technologies

TECH Fort Worth is carving out a unique position as an emerging technology development center with a talent for helping innovators with new and novel ideas explore the commercial potential of their discoveries. An entrepreneurial program approach is fuelling their growth and cultivating a thriving community with a common goal – to push high-impact ideas into the marketplace.

Building on strong roots in pharmaceuticals and biotech, TECH Fort Worth has quickly turned into the go-to destination for commercializing proprietary technologies with significant potential for growth and success – in everything from medical devices to clean energy and eco-friendly building materials.

"We've been able to grow so quickly because of our programs and the value they deliver," says Darlene Boudreaux, Executive Director of TECH Fort Worth (pictured at left with Jorge Varela, Assistant Director).



"Innovators are drawn by our track record of success and the connections to our rich network of partners, who in turn have a deep interest in getting game-changing ideas to market."

TECH Fort Worth's entrepreneurial programs engage innovators from ideation to growth, starting with the Pre-incubation Workshop, where they explore and shape their ideas using WKI's So what? who cares? why you?® methodology and tools. It's a hands-on coaching model driven by the commitment and energy of innovators to realize the full commercial impact of their ideas.

"So what? who cares? why you? equips people with a toolset to discover and communicate the business value of their technologies," says Boudreaux. "Our role is to coach, mentor and relentlessly push them toward success – and match their passion for the idea with the resources of the community."



Visual Tools to Engage Innovators

In 2006, TECH Fort Worth adopted WKI's So what? who cares? why you?® methodology and toolkit for the Pre-incubation Workshop, bringing “applied entrepreneurship” to the discipline of shaping a technology idea into a successful, high-growth business.

Boudreaux, a former CEO from a successful pharmaceutical start-up, immediately recognized the perfect fit for So what? who cares? why you? in a program that puts innovators at the center of the process and injects entrepreneurial thinking into their DNA.

“So what? who cares? why you? matches the way we think about commercialization and entrepreneurship,” says Boudreaux. “Using the visual models and tools, we can engage innovators in different types of conversations about the value of their ideas – and in the process help them to communicate that value to investors and partners.”

After joining TECH Fort Worth in 2012, Assistant Director Jorge Varela quickly identified with the WKI methodology because it mirrored his own experience. “So what? who cares? why you? formalizes the approach I’ve been applying all my life as an entrepreneur leading 14 successful start-ups,” says Varela.

“So what? who cares? why you? gives people a framework to explore their ideas from many angles – and forces them to make critical decisions early on about the value.”

Close Up with eMist

Profile: Founded by a farming family in North Texas

Technology: Developed a spray that can get underneath leaves for fumigation – created a prototype for virus management

Goal: Determine the value and viability of the idea for a healthcare application; find the right team to bring it to market

So what? who cares? why you: Discover and communicate the business value; identify market segments and early adopters/stakeholders; define the go-to-market strategy

Results: Partnership with Texas Health Resource, investment (\$150M, with follow-on funding); attracted a seasoned CEO, COO, Board of Directors

“Parents can only give good advice or put them on the right paths, but the final forming of a person's character lies in their own hands.”



CUSTOMER CASE STUDY

Ideation in the ThinkLab

Inside the Pre-incubation Workshop's ThinkLab, Boudreaux and Varela work hand-in-hand with innovators as they explore and shape their ideas. Small groups of six – only the "idea founders" are allowed in – gather for half-day, weekly sessions of intensive discussion, brainstorming and debate.

Dry erase posters of the So what? who cares? why you? tools set the stage for hands-on working meetings. Innovators are on their feet sketching, mapping and discussing their ideas – using the visual tools in So what? who cares? why you? as their common platform.

"We are not about renting space, but space is absolutely important to support our program," says Varela. "The ThinkLab is where we ideate, so we've set it up as a creative meeting place where innovators use the visual So what? who cares? why you? toolset to model their ideas."

ThinkLab "graduates" emerge with answers to key questions and clarity on the path ahead:

- Is there value in the idea?
- Am I communicating that value effectively?
- What's my go-to-market plan?
- Can I articulate the business model strategy?

"We help people figure out what they are doing and arrive at the right answers about their business model," says Boudreaux.

"There may be no way to make a technology work as a business, so the best answer might be to give up. But we don't know that in the beginning, and even if we think we do, So what? who cares? why you? allows us to brainstorm and debate the possibilities – and sometimes even get past our own biases."

A Coach Approach

Coaching through the tools provides the catalyst for igniting rich conversations and "ah-ha" moments.

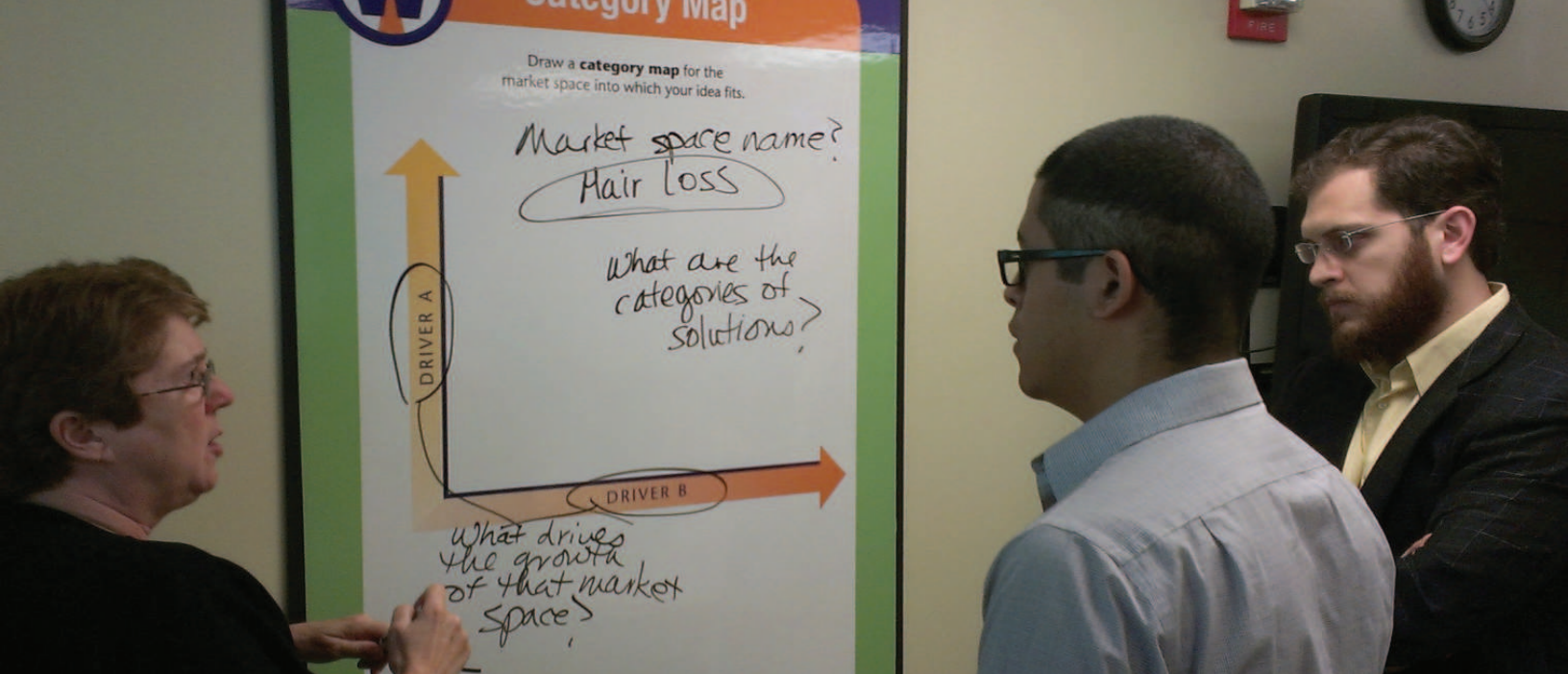
"Engaging innovators in a group coaching session gives them input from other very smart people in the room," says Boudreaux. "Our role is to challenge and provoke innovators to think about their ideas in new ways. So what? who cares? why you? equips them with the tools to explore different avenues until they feel confident they are heading in the right direction."

"Our role is to challenge and provoke innovators to think about their ideas in new ways. So what? who cares? why you? equips them with the tools to explore different avenues until they feel confident they are heading in the right direction."

–Darlene Boudreaux, Executive Director, TECH Fort Worth

ThinkLab Ideation

- Group coaching with the So what? who cares? why you? methodology
- ThinkLab room set up for sketching and modelling on dry erase posters of key tools
- Six entrepreneurs in weekly half-day sessions with rolling enrolment (join any time)
- WKI Certified Coaches provoke conversations and challenge thinking about business value
- Fail fast or go forward – innovators discover the value proposition and define the business model strategy
- Ideas with commercial potential move into full incubation at TECH Fort Worth



Boudreaux and Varela coach and guide the discussions, but the innovators drive the meetings.

“We don’t give them advice, we arm them with the tools to discover for themselves where they need to go,” says Varela.

It’s this “coach approach” – not consulting – that keeps innovators engaged in the ThinkLab as they use the tools to arrive at decisions and outcomes in every session. The collaborative, roll-up-your sleeves style builds trust and feeds a powerful dynamic for challenging conversations, honest feedback and discovery.

Adds Boudreaux, “We make it clear that it will be challenging and uncomfortable, but we’re not teaching a class and letting them figure it out alone – we’re here to figure it out with them.”

Making a “Breakthrough”

Universities are a rich source of ideas with the potential to create high-growth business opportunities, so it’s not surprising that TECH Fort Worth has extended their reach into the university community with the “Breakthrough” program for research commercialization.

University partners include the University of North Texas Health Science Center, TCU Neeley School of Business and the University of Texas (UT) Arlington, which recently formalized a multi-year initiative with TECH Fort Worth to commercialize university discoveries and give faculty and research teams access to their entrepreneurial network.

Close Up with Encore Vision

Profile: Based in Massachusetts; startup founded and funded by the Egg Factory incubator; experienced executive leadership

Technology: Drop for presbyopia that increases the elasticity of eyes to improve vision in people over 45

Goal: Engage research and investment partners

So what? who cares? why you: communicate value, identify early adopters, go-to-market strategy

Results: Partnership with UNT Health Science Center to develop solution; raised more than \$5 million

“Parents can only give good advice or put them on the right paths, but the final forming of a person's character lies in their own hands.”



CUSTOMER CASE STUDY

As part of the Breakthrough program, university researchers work with So what? who cares? why you? tools to shape the commercial value proposition for their discoveries. It's not about finding the next CEO in the lab – most often the goal is to better focus the ideas for industry partners and the investor community.

“Breakthrough gets researchers and professors to understand the magnitude of what they have and move it closer to a market application,” says Boudreaux. “We get them to the middle of the bridge to meet the business world and communicate the value of their ideas – where they can spark the interest to carry it forward.”

Measuring Impact

Since 2007, TECH Fort Worth clients and ThinkLab “graduates” have contributed more than \$152 million to the North Texas economy. Yet for all of the ideas that become viable business ventures, it's just as important to look at the ones that don't ever make it to market.

“If we put an idea through the program and it fails fast, that is not failure – it's a success just as much as the idea that goes ahead and becomes a great opportunity,” says Varela.

Many innovators who fail fast come back with new concepts and a better understanding of what it takes to commercialize an idea. And people who pivot out of one idea move into another – at any stage in their company's

development. To reflect this cycle of innovation, TECH Fort Worth is evolving from a linear program structure to a continuous process that moves through value discovery, start-up and accelerated growth.

“So what? who cares? why you? gives us an entrepreneurial platform to coach innovators and challenge their thinking about the value of their ideas,” says Varela. “Ideas fuel growth, whether you're just starting out or seeking to validate a new product concept to get to the next \$100M.”

As their community extends beyond Fort Worth and North Texas – reaching across the state and around the world – the incubator is rebranding to TechFW and bringing their entrepreneurial program model into an ever-expanding network of partners and innovators with a passion for turning emerging technologies into successful, high-growth business ventures.

**Learn more about TECH Fort Worth
and their entrepreneurial programs
for innovators and emerging technologies
@ techfortworth.org**

“So what? who cares? why you? gives us an entrepreneurial platform to coach innovators and challenge their thinking about the value of their technologies. Ideas fuel growth, whether you're just starting with an early stage venture or seeking to validate a new product concept to get to the next \$100M.”

–Jorge Varela, Assistant Director, TECH Fort Worth