



BLACK RIVER INNOVATION CAMPUS

Actuator 8-Week Startup Course Syllabus

Idea Stage Companies & Business Concepts

Summary:

This 8-week course provides a comprehensive understanding of the key topics required to develop and launch a startup business. The combination of facilitated discussions and real-world case studies equips participants with practical insights and strategies for entrepreneurial success.

**Specific cohort materials (readings, videos, documents, tools, deliverables) are all available through BRIC's Entrepreneurship Network Platform.

Target Audience: **1)** Anyone with an idea for a new tech or tech-enabled product, service, or business who is looking to ideate and validate their concept; **2)** Founders who have, or are working towards, a Minimum Viable Product (MVP) and/or are engaged in customer discovery and research; **3)** Technology, Manufacturing, and Tech-Enabled Businesses who are innovating new products/services, seeking growth opportunities, or are interested in NASA technology.

Founder participation occurs in three ways (*Estimated 4-5 hours of participation per week*):

1. Reviewing assigned case studies (2-3 short articles or videos) and an introductory presentation for each weekly topic. ***Estimated time: 45 mins***
2. Attending weekly Wednesday Workshops from 4-6pm (in-person or remotely) to digest case studies, discuss topics with guest Subject Matter Experts (SMEs), and participate in Q&A with SMEs. ***Estimated time: 2-2.5 hours***
3. Application of learning material to businesses or business concepts using the Actuator StartupWind platform and other tools. ***Estimated time: Varies depending on founder/concept***

Facilitators:

Vin Fusca, *Executive Director, BRIC*

Chris Maggiolo, *Director of Development, Operations, and Finance; BRIC*

Darren Mark, *Founder, humNET*

Dates: Jan 17, 2024 - Mar 6, 2024 for course; Mar 21, 2024 for Capstone Event

Location: BRIC HQ - 60 Park Street, Springfield, VT 05156 unless otherwise noted

Virtual Participation Link:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/89968986576?pwd=OVc4OEErenlyWlq1ZTN2M2RnMlFuQT09>



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Weekly Workshop Structure (Wednesdays from 4-6pm)

Workshops feature 2 guest Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) who will participate in discussions and Q&A.

- **Welcome Remarks and Introductions (30 mins)**
 - Facilitator Welcome and Introductions (5 mins)
 - SME 1: Personal Background (5 mins)
 - SME 2: Personal Background (5 mins)
 - Cohort Elevator Intros - (15 mins)
- **Case Study Overview (30 mins)**
 - SME 1: Case Study Remarks (5 mins)
 - SME 2: Case Study Remarks (5 mins)
 - Cohort Remarks (20 mins)
- **Small Group Sessions (50 mins)**
 - Group 1 w/ 1 Mentor and 1 SME
 - Facilitated Q&A w/ SME to discuss questions specific to businesses/concepts
 - Group 2 w/ 1 Mentor and 1 SME
 - Facilitated Q&A w/ SME to discuss questions specific to businesses/concepts
- **Looking Ahead to Next Week (10 Mins)**

Week 0: Orientation

Date: 1/10/2024

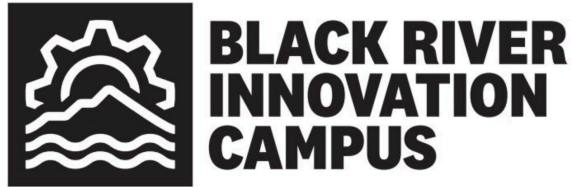
Introduction to Actuator program and tools. There is no workshop this week, but we will have a short (1hr) Zoom meeting.

- Enrollment in Actuator platform
- Creation of platform founder profile
- Enrollment in Proximity/Brivo (BRIC's coworking tool, for campus/workshop and access)
- Reviewing brief introductory videos on startup life and lean canvas tools

Week 1: Value Proposition

Date: 1/17/2024

- Understanding the importance of a strong value proposition
- Identifying and defining your product/service's unique value



- Crafting a compelling value proposition statement

Business Case Studies

1. **Apple:** Analyzing how Apple's value proposition transformed the music industry.
2. **ThinkMD:** How a researcher saw a need for a better field medicine service (VT Company).

Week 2: Customer Persona (Customer Discovery and Segments)

Date: 1/24/2024

- Conducting customer discovery interviews and surveys
- Creating detailed customer personas and segmenting your target audience

Business Case Studies

1. **Lululemon Athletic:** How Lululemon Athletica Beat Nike By Creating A New Category
2. **Reconciled:** Cloud-based bookkeeping for entrepreneurs (VT Company)

Week 3: Hypotheses and Prototyping

Date: 1/31/2024

- Formulating hypotheses about customer needs, problems, and solutions
- Building and testing prototypes to validate assumptions

Business Case Studies

1. **Bivo:** Designing a better water bottle (VT Company)
2. **Beta:** Electrifying Aviation with Kyle Clark of Beta Technologies (VT Company)

Week 4: Channels and Ecosystems (Marketing and Go-to-market)

Date: 2/7/2024

- Exploring different marketing channels and strategies
- Designing a go-to-market plan to reach your target audience effectively



Business Case Studies

1. **Unnecessary Inventions:** Solving problems that don't exist (VT Company)
2. **Red Bull:** The Ultimate Red Bull Marketing Strategy Study

Week 5: Revenue Modeling

Date: 2/14/2024

- Developing different revenue models and pricing strategies
- Calculating the lifetime value of a customer and customer acquisition costs

Example Business Case Studies

1. **Syntax + Motion:** Serial entrepreneur exploring audio, video, and synthetic media
2. **Spotify:** Understanding how Spotify's freemium model and personalized recommendations have contributed to its revenue growth.

Week 6: Key Partnerships and Resources

Date: 2/21/2024

- Identifying potential partners, suppliers, and collaborators
- Leveraging key resources to enhance your business operations
- Discussing Intellectual Property and Legal Structures

Example Business Case Studies

1. **Visura:** a curated marketplace that connects image buyers, media publications, and organizations with professional, local visual storytellers worldwide (VT Company)
2. **Mamava:** Supporting mothers throughout their breastfeeding journey (VT Company)

Week 7: Costs, OKRs and KPIs

Date: 2/28/2024

- Analyzing fixed and variable costs associated with your business
- Defining key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure success

Example Business Case Studies

1. **Understanding OKRs (Google, Bono, Intel):** Watch “Why the secret to success is setting the right goals”, TED2018 talk by John Doerr



2. **Widewail:** a cutting-edge trust-marketing platform (VT Company)

Week 8: Storytelling

Date: 3/6/2024

- Crafting a compelling pitch for investors, stakeholders, and customers
- Practicing effective presentation techniques and storytelling

Storytelling Guides

1. David S. Rose on Ted U: "**How to Pitch to a VC**"
2. Andrew Stanton on TEDx: "**The Clues to a Great Story**" - Pitches are stories.

Capstone Presentation Event

Date: Thursday, Mar 21, 2024

Presentation and Networking Event w/ curated guest list of mentors, investors, stakeholders, and founders