

Discover



**DISCOVER
PROGRAM
2024 EDAC COMMUNITY
COLLABORATION AWARD**

AIRDRIE OUTCOMES

Airdrie's program is delivered over eight weeks, including four in-person sessions and an online group coaching session every two weeks. Airdrie delivered the program to a pilot group of nine entrepreneurs in fall 2023; spring 2024 enrolment increased ~25 per cent and will run again in fall 2024.

Participants were a combination of new entrepreneurs and existing businesses looking to add a new product/service. Per evaluation surveys, the most valuable outcomes for the pilot were:

- 86% felt more confident in their ability to execute
- 80% customer satisfaction score (how likely to recommend this program)
- Development of additional customer/revenue streams
- Understanding of modern-day startup practices including starting with the customer problem, identifying early adopters, identifying assumptions and conducting tests
- Validation before deep financial commitment

CHALLENGES AND CHANGES MADE

Airdrie's first attempt to address this ecosystem gap was to licence content already developed by Platform Calgary. Airdrie delivered the program and quickly realized that it was missing important elements for our audience.

The project team conducted a search across Alberta to find improved programming and connected with Business Link, who did not have current plans to fill this gap.

Much of the new curriculum is based on the book 'Testing Business Ideas'. Within the Alberta ecosystem, this approach is typically applied only to technology startups. Our program was developed to be digestible for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) who also must test business ideas.

The traditional approach to business development for SMEs in Alberta is to write a 10–20-page business plan, supported by market research. Our key marketing challenge is to increase awareness of an alternative approach to business development. Educational social media content and advertising was developed that shares key facts such as the top reasons startups fail and the importance of testing desirability, feasibility and viability.

ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL AND GOVERNANCE

Our project incorporated Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) elements. Successful business development impacts the social well-being of entrepreneurs, as well as the community at large. We are tracking how participants progress from idea to launch, their success with financing, impact to their revenue and impact on our workforce. We also measure entrepreneur confidence in their ability to execute within their startup before, immediately after and four months post-program.

TESTIMONIALS

” I really loved this program and felt like it built my confidence a lot. I feel more supported and able to start my business when I am ready.”

” In the past, market research felt like a very technical guessing game. This program has shown me a plan of how to get it done in a more interesting and hands-on way.”

– 2023 Discover Participants

TESTIMONIALS

“Local business and new ideas are the lifeblood of commerce and the advancement of our society. This program was so helpful because it introduced me to tools and taught me how to use them when it comes to analyzing and developing my idea for a business. So much debt is bore and so many dreams are crushed because ideas aren’t developed or matured properly and this program can spare so many from that by showing them how to calculate their risks effectively and evolve a good idea into something that is great and viable. That is what ultimately will advance our community forward. Thank you, Discover Program! I will make sure more people know about your program.”

“Thank you AEC for offering the Discover Program! This course was amazing value and had very helpful and actionable content. I feel much more confident in my ability to test business ideas and provide solutions for customers. Wendy is a great teacher and she brought so much wisdom and experience to the class. I would recommend this program to other entrepreneurs at any level, as the information was provided in such a way that we got to see it applied to many different types and stages of business.”

– 2024 Discover Participants