Accelerator Model for the Policy Innovation Lab

Program Overview

Carnegie Mellon University's Heinz College is piloting an Accelerator Model for their Policy Innovation Lab. The vision is to encourage graduate level students to explore how to improve government through the launch of new products and ventures. This document provides an overview of the Accelerator and Partnering resources. It's a free and open-source resource for the greater Public Interest Technology (PIT) University Network.

Why an Accelerator?

The need to modernize government is a multi-dimensional problem that can be viewed through the lens of People, Process, and Systems. The table below summarizes three common examples and how the Accelerator thinks about it.

	Common Challenges	Accelerator Approach
People	How do we get more people into government? An aging workforce and a general talent pipeline shortage exists at Federal, State, and Local level.	Grad students with cross-disciplinary skill sets.
Process	How can innovation thrive and what approaches should be included? The Adoption of Open-Source, Agile, and Human-Centered Design methods can be an uphill battle.	Students work on real-world problems through an accelerator model that encourages open-source, agile, and human-centered design.
Systems	How do legacy systems keep pace with the times? Legacy technology can be hard to modernize due to vendor lock-in (either from a technology or system integration perspective).	The desired outcome of AMP is a "sustainable technology or business" that can live within government or support government in the private sector with mission-driven principles (such as a B Corp designation).

Application Process and Timeline

1. What Students get out of the Experience

The goal of the Accelerator is to enable students to successfully launch new products and ventures in the Public Interest Technology space. Therefore, at the very beginning of the student journey it's important to lay out the "art of the possible" and how students can proceed from stage to stage.

From a venture creation standpoint, the high-level process incorporated in the Accelerator consists of three steps: Problem Identification - MVP - Launching a Sustainable Enterprise.

1. Problem Identification - Motivation and problem exploration
2. MVP - minimum viable product, to create an early solution to the problem
3. Launching a Sustainable Enterprise - determining the long-term path.

The Policy Innovation Lab at Heinz College aims to formalize these steps through it's Accelerator, and leverage the existing body of work in the civic tech ecosystem.

2. Program Timeline

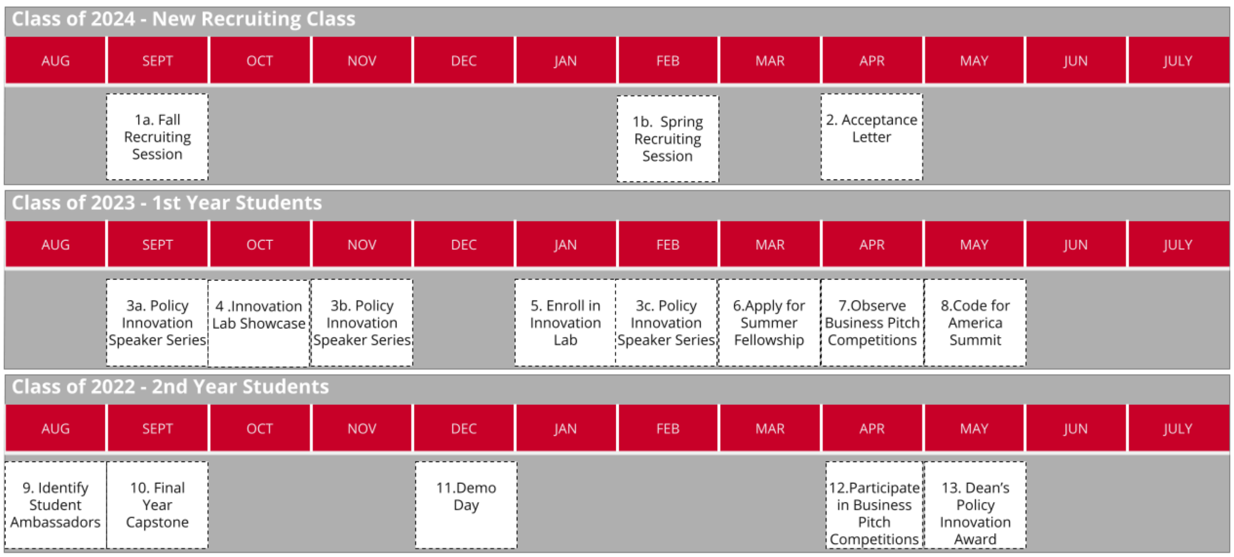
	1st Year - Fall	1st Year - Spring	1st Year - Summer	2nd Year - Fall	2nd Year - Spring
	Foundations	Lab	Fellowship	Capstone	Launch
What is It	Foundational coursework in Policy and Innovation curriculum.	Collaboration between agencies and students on real-world problems.	Development of MVP and testing / validation with users.	Work with customers on a beta program and develop ROI case-study.	Selection of a viable business model, business plan creation, and launch. (ex. 501c3 or B Corp)
Outcome	Baseline Knowledge Set	User Research and Prototype	Minimum Viable Product (MVP)	Beta Program Launch and ROI case-study.	Business Plan Creation and Launch
Example Cohort Size & # of Teams	All Students	All Students Eight Teams	16 Students Four Teams	8 Students Two Teams	4 Students Two Company

3. Recommendations

In order to grow participation in the program across all stakeholder groups (students, partners, and the broader community), consider how the program fits into the entire lifecycle of the Grad Student experience at Heinz.

Suggested Timeline for Student Engagement, Fall 2021-2022

The diagram below illustrates how this can be broken up into three different views, based on audience: New Recruiting Class, 1st Year Students, 2nd Year Students.



New Recruiting Class

1. Recruiting Sessions
    a. It's important that any recruiting effort for Heinz College as a whole, has a "one-slider" on the Innovation Lab with a compelling case project case study. This should be provided to the admissions office and integrated into their recruiting website assets, physical collateral, and slide decks for info sessions (both in-person and virtual) for prospective students.
    b. Around the time of applying, student ambassadors for the Innovation Lab should be included in "panel discussions" and have a way to directly connect with potential recruits. During on-campus visits, emphasis should be placed on getting students to shadow an Innovation Lab class.
2. Acceptance Letter
    a. When students get accepted to Heinz, what collateral do they receive about the Accelerator, or email messages? There should be at least one touch point

at the Acceptance / Registration stage at the beginning of their journey. Because printed collateral can be limited in the amount of space or messages that can be included, a work-around is to simply include some Innovation Lab swag (like laptop sticker, etc) as part of a larger promotional materials sent to students.

Measure of Success

b. To understand if awareness and engagement is High with new students entering Heinz, two measurements should be performed annually:
    i. Attendance to the Policy Innovation Speaker Series Kick-off (Session #1)
    ii. Enrollment in the Innovation Lab course offered 2nd semester

1st Year Students

3. Policy Innovation Speaker Series
    a. For students already on campus, a Policy Innovation Speaker Series for the benefit of the entire Heinz community. It will also serve as a recruiting tool for the Innovation Lab, and program ambassadors can help coordinate the promotion of the events and event logistics.
4. Innovation Lab Showcase
    a. Show and tell from 2nd Year Students (who have been in the Lab) to 1st Year Students, in order to help increase enrollment and excitement for the Spring course.
    b. This could also be part of a larger Social Impact New Ventures Fair, or virtual event, hosted by CMU at the university level. It would allow for representatives from funding sources to share information with students on upcoming grant deadlines, summer fellowships, and additional information. Examples to include Schmidt Futures, The Knight Foundation, Shuttleworth Foundation, Kapor Center, and more.
5. Enrollment in Innovation Lab
    a. Key stage gate in the overall program strategy (see funnel diagram).
6. Apply for Summer Fellowship.
    a. Key stage gate in the overall program strategy (see funnel diagram).
7. Observe Business Pitch competition.
    a. 1st Year Students should be invited to observe Business Pitch Competition. The purpose is to get the students to begin thinking about if they will try to launch a new venture in their 2nd year, and what success might look like.
8. Code for America Summit.

   a. Students should participate in the Code for America Summit to integrate more fully in the PIT ecosystem.

2nd Year Students

9. Identify Student Ambassadors
   a. Student ambassadors (may overlap with TA pool) should be identified from the 2nd Year Student pool who can support recruiting events, speaking engagements, and generally help recruit new talent to the program.
10. Final Year Capstone
    a. Key stage gate in the overall program strategy (see funnel diagram).
11. Demo Day
    a. Demos and presentations that result from the Capstone, should be presented to Heinz faculty and leadership, and current and prospective Partner organizations in the form of a Demo Day. The goal is to strengthen relationships across the stakeholder groups, and drive strong partner commitments for the Spring semester Innovation Lab. This was done for the Civic Digital Fellowship at the U.S. Census Bureau, and a key mechanism for other government agencies to buy-in for future engagement.
12. Participate in Business Pitch Competitions
    a. To facilitate the launch of new ventures, there should be an in-house Business Pitch Competition for Social Enterprises. Additionally, students should be encouraged to partner with MBA students and participate in the broader Business Pitch competition circuit.
    b. This can also be framed in such a way for all universities in the Public Interest Technology (PIT) network to participate, and help lift up all potential ventures in the space with funding sources, similar to MBA pitch competitions.
13. Dean’s Policy Innovation Award
    a. To recognize the most impactful project or new venture launched in a given year, an annual award should be given (can include monetary value, or just the recognition by itself)

Additionally, have core elements that build awareness throughout the year.

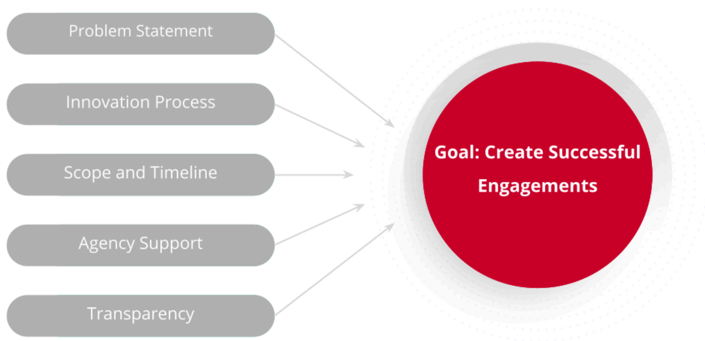
- Physical Presence: Signage in Heinz College facilities / study areas.
- Online Presence: Creating formal messaging (including website landing page, visual identity, etc) around the Accelerator would be helpful for students to understand it’s a larger effort than a single engagement point. It doesn’t have to be it’s own brand, but it needs to stick out.

Partner Playbook

1. How We Partner

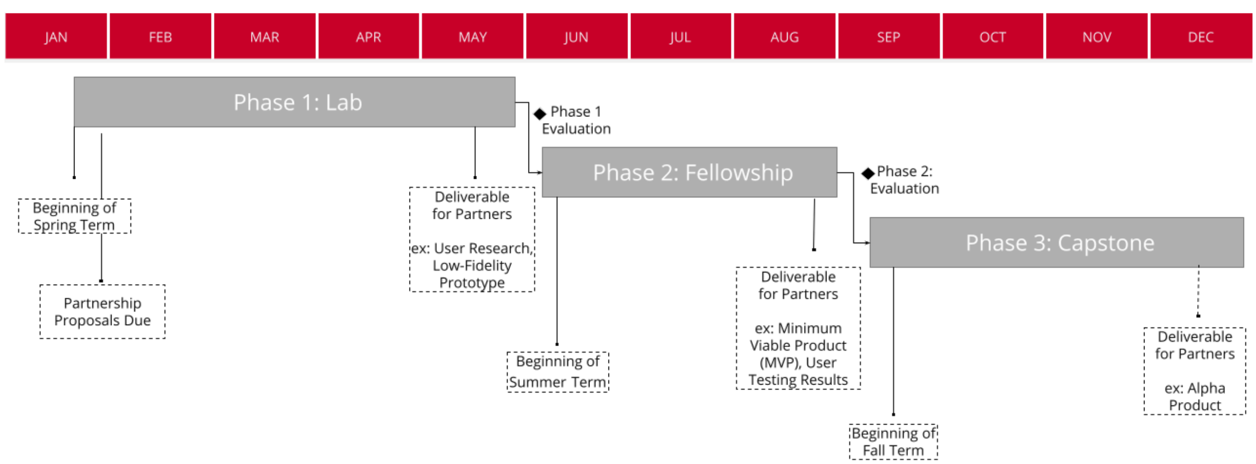
A key goal of the Policy Innovation Lab is to create successful collaborations with partners in the government, industry, academia, and non-profit space.

In order to ensure positive outcomes, a Partner Checklist is used to help both Heinz College and the Partner in the project selection process. Project fit will be determined across five criteria areas: Problem Statement, Innovation Process, Scope and Timeline, Agency Support, and Transparency. [1]



2. Example Engagement Timeline

The timeline below shows how Partners may engage with the program for one or more Phases of the collaboration.



[1] This partnership approach has been inspired by best practices established at Code for America, 18F, and The Opportunity Project.

3. Checklist

	Ideal conditions for project fit:	Example of a project that is not a fit:
Problem Statement	The Problem Statement for the project should be clearly stated with (1) description of the need, (2) who is the user, and (3) desired outcomes.	A technical project that is already fully scoped, or provided as a punch list (i.e. build a dashboard, fix a website) would not be a fit.
Innovation Process	Where an innovation process including elements of User-Centered Design, Agile, and Open-Source is supported by the Parter.	A project where users cannot be brought in for user research, interviews, product testing, etc would not be a fit.
Scope and Timeline	The Scope and Timeline should account for 6 to 8 week design sprints. The types of deliverables that may be possible include: (1) User Research, (2) Low-Fidelity Prototype, and (3) Minimum Viable Product (MVP).	If a project can be completed in just a few days, the scope is probably too small. Conversely, if the project can't come together in time to support the design sprints (i.e. the scope is too large or unknown), it would not be a fit.
Agency Support	The most successful project teams have support including (1) Sponsorship, i.e. air cover to work on the project; (2) Mentorship, i.e. weekly or bi-weekly check-ins for guidance; and (3) access to other key stakeholders.	If the project is not considered a priority, or access to mentorship and key stakeholders cannot be provided, then the project would not be a fit.
Transparency	In order to support the greater Public Interest Technology ecosystem, projects are intended to be built "in the open" with key milestones published. The team will work with agency sponsorship to align on the milestones, and agency input will determine what project details may be published or not.	A project that doesn't have any elements that can be worked on openly and shared with the broader community would not be a fit.

Appendix: New Venture Resources

1. Choosing between Non-Profit, For Profit, or Public Benefit Corp

Three common business models are Non-Profit, For Profit, and Public Benefit Corporation. Each has pros and cons and should be carefully evaluated based on the long-term company objectives. When evaluating which path to choose, the most important question is ***"which business model will provide the most long-term sustainability?"***

This table describes key attributes across these business types, and offers an example of each.

	Non-Profit (501c3)	For Profit (S Corp)	For Profit Public Benefit Corporation (B Corp)
Governance and Accountability	Accountable to a Board of Directors.	Accountable to Shareholders and Directors.	Accountable to Shareholders and Directors.
Relation to Public Good	Works solely towards achieving their mission, without the intent of making a profit.	Aims to maximize profits to all stakeholders. No obligation to work toward a public benefit.	Works to create a profitable business, but has no obligation to work towards public good.
Ownership Model	No owners or shareholders.	Has owners and shareholders.	Has owners and shareholders.
Revenue Generation	Must rely on revenue generating streams that closely aligns with the mission.	Can rely on sales from standard products and services.	Can rely on sales from standard products and services.
Tax Implications	Tax free and can accept tax-deductible donations from donors.	Must pay taxes and cannot accept tax-deductible donations.	Must pay taxes and cannot accept tax-deductible donations.
Fundraising	Most commonly raise funds through donations and grants.	Can raise funds through a variety of means: crowdsourcing, raising venture capital, and limited grants. Donations are not common as donors do not receive tax incentives like a non-profit.	Can raise funds through a variety of means: crowdsourcing, raising venture capital, and limited grants. Donations are not common as donors do not receive tax incentives like a non-profit.
Benefit to Society	Work solely toward their mission.	Must meet high standards set forth by B Lab, including	Not required to meet standards set forth by B Lab.

		donating a portion of time / proceeds, engaging in fair labor practices, and more.	
Reporting Requirements	Not required to report progress to members, but typically will do so.	Must report progress to shareholders.	Must report progress to shareholders.

2. Non-Profit Example: Coding it Forward

Coding it Forward's mission is to build a talent pipeline for civic tech. As a non-profit, they have established a recurring revenue stream through a "services" model that helps recruit and place students and recent graduates in roles with government agencies. Additionally, they have successfully raised money through numerous grants.

Key Take-away: A balanced approach (both services and grants) has helped Coding it Forward have a sustainable model.

3. For-Profit Example: Amazon

By design, for profit corporations are created to maximize shareholder returns. The governing model assures this will happen. However, for profits can still positively impact through their Social Impact efforts. This usually sits in a team called Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). One way Amazon provides a public good is through their Open Data program that offers the hosting of large government data sets. This is valuable for the community, because the hosting cost would be cost prohibitive for each researcher to manage on their own.

From a business standpoint, it's common that for profits will position their Social Impact efforts in such a way that align to their overall business, because again the goal is to maximize shareholder returns. In the case of Amazon, Amazon Web Services (AWS) is the most profitable business unit, so getting researchers on their platform (even for free) can eventually make good business for Amazon as those users become paying customers.

Key Take-away: Building a social impact within a for profit organization, or having them be one in the same is definitely possible. The revenue producing parts of the business can in turn fund the social impact parts of the business. However, in dire business times it's likely that all functions will be cut that aren't directly tied to maximizing shareholder profits.

4. B Corp Example: data.world

Unlike for profit corporations, b corps are not required to maximize shareholder returns above all else. Data.world's Public Benefit Corporation statement includes the following:

> "strive to build the most meaningful, collaborative and abundant data resource in the world in order to maximize data's societal problem-solving utility"

That doesn't mean a viable business can't be established to compete with for profit corporations. Data.world has been successful in raising multiple rounds of VC funding and sells cloud software (a data catalog product.)

Key Take-away: A B Corporation structure can offer the "social impact" possibilities of a non-profit, but through a For Profit business structure. This makes raising VC capital and other fundraising sources a viable option for scaling your social enterprise. A word of caution, is that competitors may arise that don't have the same B Corp requirements and those competitors may threaten your business viability.