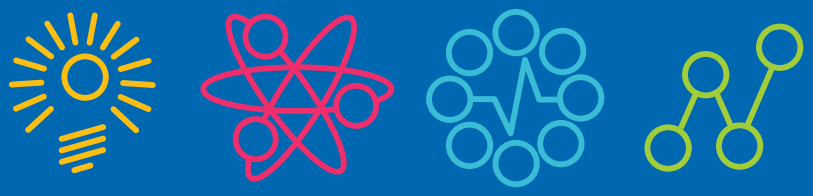
MaRS Data Catalyst



Seeding Success:

Canada's Startup Accelerators

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Contents

Introduction 5

Rationale for report 5
Objectives 6
Methodology and data collection 6
Incubators and accelerators 6
Benefits 7
Accelerators—a global phenomenon....9

Accelerators in Canada 12

By the numbers....12
Origin....13
Structure and stakeholders....14
Selection process....14
Supply and demand....15
Program format and content....16
Mentoring....17
Graduation/Demo Day 19

Performance measurement and impact 22

Measurement today 22
Measurement challenges 23
Impact 25
Performance transparency today....25
Transparency in Canada 26
Benefits 27
Proposed scorecard 28

Future of accelerators 33

Conclusion 34

Appendices 36

Appendix A – References and Reading List....37
Appendix B – Accelerator Table....38
Appendix C – Interview Guide 41

Introduction

Rationale for report

Launched in Silicon Valley less than a decade ago, the seed startup accelerator model has been adopted around the world. In Canada, over 30 accelerators and accelerator-like programs[1] have emerged since 2010, with accelerators alone graduating over 400 entrepreneurs and 200 startups to date.

The proliferation of accelerators within Canada—and elsewhere—has prompted some public debate within the startup community about an "accelerator bubble" and about the impact of these programs.[2] At the same time, significant government funding[3] is being invested in Canadian accelerator programs both directly and indirectly. Both this discussion and these funding decisions, however, are being conducted with limited data and insight into these programs. Without accessible, comparable data about accelerators and their performance, this new model for supporting startup development is difficult for entrepreneurs, mentors, investors and policy-makers to assess and support.

Drawing on the results of a series of interviews conducted with accelerator directors and entrepreneurs, this report attempts to provide a foundational understanding of Canadian accelerators. As a preliminary qualitative and quantitative examination of key processes, stakeholder dynamics and outcomes, the report is also intended to contribute to the ongoing dialogue about the role and value of accelerator programs in the startup ecosystem.

1 "Accelerators" and "accelerator-like programs" will henceforth be referred to collectively as "accelerators" or "accelerator programs" except where differences between the two types of programs are significant.

2 For examples of this kind of debate, see: http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2013-03-14/waiting-for-the-accelerator-bubble-to-pop, http://techcrunch.com/2011/06/24/is-there-a-european-tech-incubator-bubble/ and http://www.instigatorblog.com/startup-accelerator-making-money/2011/07/29/.

3 http://business.financialpost.com/2013/03/22/budget-earmarks-60-million-for-accelerators-incubators/

Objectives

This research set out to answer three questions:

1. What does the accelerator landscape look like in Canada?
2. How are accelerators defining and measuring success?
3. What is the future and potential of accelerators in Canada?

Methodology and data collection

Between March and May 2013, researchers affiliated with MaRS Data Catalyst conducted interviews with 18 directors and founders of accelerated companies. The interviews were typically 60 minutes long and followed the interview guide found in Appendix C. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, then coded and analyzed for use in this report. Simultaneously, the researchers collected descriptive data from the web about accelerator programs in Canada. Whenever possible, interviewees were asked to validate the data collected about their program. A summary of this data can be found in Appendix B. The researchers also conducted a preliminary quantitative analysis to examine the impact of Canadian accelerators, using three initial cohorts from three programs.

Incubators and accelerators

"Incubator" or "accelerator"? While these terms are often used interchangeably, accelerators have recently emerged as an innovation model distinct from incubation. While the first accelerator materialized less than a decade ago, incubators have a much longer history and have been a key tool for regional economic development for several decades now. Statistics Canada[4] defines a business incubator as "…a business unit that specializes in providing space, services, advice and support designed to assist new and growing businesses to become established and profitable." This definition is broad enough to encompass accelerators as well, and indeed both share the goal of assisting new and growing businesses. The difference between accelerators and incubators lies in the "how."

Accelerators can be characterized by:[5]

- An open, highly competitive application process
- Pre-seed investment, usually in exchange for equity
- A focus on small teams, not individual founders
- Time-limited support comprising programmed events and intensive mentoring
- Startups supported in cohorts rather than individual companies

4 Statistics Canada, 2005.

5 Miller & Bound, 2011

Extreme Startups, Toronto

Some accelerators may also offer:

- A "Demo Day," where participating ventures present to audiences of qualified investors and other guests
- Working space for the founding team, with office services such as Internet access
- Access to free or discounted technology and professional services such as legal advice

There may also be a qualitative difference between the accelerator and incubator experience. This report's interviewees describe accelerators as "proactive," "intense," "structured" and "hands on," whereas incubators share a similar goal but in a more "reactive," "opt-in," "self-serve" way.

The accelerator model is not static. While some Canadian accelerator programs share all of the above characteristics, some organizations are experimenting with the model. The researchers also looked at several "accelerator-like" programs (for example, those that may not provide funding or take equity), and these are included in this report as noteworthy innovations.

Benefits

Interviewees identify several benefits to entrepreneurs in joining an accelerator program:

Collaboration

> *Compared to when you're working in your basement, when you're in this open space of 2,000 square feet and you're working with another 10, 15 entrepreneurs or engineers or designers or marketing people, there's a lot that happens.*
>
> **Ben Zlotnick, INcubes**

Education

> *It's very much like going to university. That's how we set up our program, and the reason why we set it up that way is because we realized through our insight discovery that entrepreneurs in the city of Toronto were lacking that type of accountability and that type of engagement and training, and that's what they really need.*
>
> **Tamara-Melissa Huggins, DRIVEN**

Network

> *One of our alumni from the first year is getting all his connections for his ventures in Silicon Valley through The Next 36. Years later we will hope to support people and share their successes with them, whatever venture.*
>
> **Claudia Hepburn, The Next 36**

Reputation

> *We've taken the top 1% of the companies. When we introduce them to the VCs we say, "We've vetted these from hundreds and hundreds of applications, so you're seeing the top 1% of what we've seen." It carries a lot of weight.*
>
> **Andy Yang, Extreme Startups**

Efficiency

Patrick Riley of the Global Accelerator Network makes the case that the main benefit of accelerators is efficiency:

> *[Accelerators] make everything more efficient… If a company can go to one place and get mentorship, investments and collaboration and friendships with other companies, that's the ideal world.*

Focus

The most common reason for joining an accelerator given by interviewed entrepreneurs was the opportunity it offered to ensure—and test—the commitment of all members of the founding team to the venture. Participation in most accelerator programs interviewed requires a full-time commitment from all founding team members and the cessation of part-time or full-time studies or work outside the venture.

> *There was a bunch of us working on this thing, and it was getting frustrating because I really wanted to do it. We figured if we were doing an accelerator and took it seriously and said, "If we're doing this, everyone is going," it was our way to weed out those who really didn't want to be there.*
>
> **Adam Jarczyn, HOVR.IT**

It is worth noting that none of the accelerator directors interviewed identified their program's investment in or funding of startups as a benefit.

Accelerators—a global phenomenon

Originating in the United States less than a decade ago, accelerators such as Y Combinator, TechStars and 500 Startups are highly successful programs with very public success stories such as Airbnb and Dropbox.

However, accelerators are now a global phenomenon. While no comprehensive census exists, the website Seed-DB,[6] which relies on self-reported data, lists over 169 accelerators operating around the world, with 2,600 companies accelerated, $2 billion in funding raised and $1.2 billion in exits. (It is worth noting here that the highly prolific Y Combinator accounts for 20% of the companies, 55% of the funding and 86% of the value of exits reported by Seed-DB). Seven Canadian accelerators are listed on Seed-DB (five are still operational), but the data reported there is incomplete.

Academic research on the topic of accelerator programs is embryonic. While over 250 articles have been published in peer-reviewed journals on the topic of incubators, a literature search found that no similar articles exist on accelerators. The research base currently comprises reports commissioned by think-tanks and governments, discussion papers and dissertations; two popular books profiling Y Combinator and TechStars have also been recently published.[7]

6 http://www.seed-db.com/accelerators

7 See Appendix A for titles.

FounderFuel

"What we look for is companies that have product in market, a very deep insight in a space… that have some signs that this is going to work, that have big ambitions and big goals, but they're certainly at a point where they're not exactly sure what to do next."

Ian Jeffrey, General Manager

Accelerator: $50,000* for 9% equity, 12 weeks, Demo Day

As of mid-2013: Three cohorts, 37 startups

One of the busiest accelerators, FounderFuel has accelerated 37 startups in two years. Launched by Real Ventures and based at Notman House in downtown Montreal, the program focuses on community engagement and fundraising.

FounderFuel's management team is very active in the community and has extensive experience with US accelerator TechStars. Each month of the three-month program focuses on a theme such as "refine, crank, raise." Demo Day has attracted over 800 attendees, including 200 VIPs.

**FounderFuel is one of four Canadian accelerators whose graduates are eligible to receive a $150,000 convertible note from the Business Development Bank of Canada, in addition to any upfront investment (investment is dependent on successful completion of the program).*

Notable graduates:

Epilogger – Event social media management
Openera – Web and mobile application for managing files

founderfuel.com/en/

GrowLab

"With our network, our experience and our partners and investors we're looking for companies that are closer to raising [a] venture capital round."

Mike Edwards, Executive Director

Accelerator: $20,000–25,000* for 5% to 9% equity, 16 weeks, Demo Day

As of mid-2013: Three cohorts, 16 startups

Anchoring Canada's west coast, GrowLab is led by a well-known active angel investor and focuses on preparing companies for fundraising. Associated with GROW Conference, the management team is very active in the community and introduced Launch Academy for earlier stage startups focused on finding their product/market fit.

**GrowLab is one of four Canadian accelerators whose graduates are eligible to receive a $150,000 convertible note from the Business Development Bank of Canada, in addition to any upfront investment (investment is dependent on successful completion of the program).*

Notable graduates:

Mover – Platform for moving files between cloud storage systems
ePACT – Online emergency support network

growlab.ca

Ryerson Futures, DMZ

"RFI is looking specifically for companies backed by innovative intellectual property that can scale massively."

Matt Saunders, President

Accelerator-like: $50,000 convertible debenture for up to 10% equity, 16+ weeks, no cohorts (continuous intake), no Demo Days

As of mid-2013: Three cohorts, 10 startups

Based at Ryerson's Digital Media Zone in downtown Toronto, Ryerson Futures selects startups from DMZ applicants for investment and participation in a program which focuses on customer acquisition. Led by a team of experienced entrepreneurs and investors, it leverages the DMZ and Ryerson alumni for mentors and advisors.

**RFI-funded companies have the ability to leverage additional non-dilutive financing which can amount to over $150,000.*

Notable investments:

Sensibill – E-receipt solution
Sensorsuite – Cloud-based sensors and building automation

ryersonfutures.ca

Accelerators in Canada

By the numbers

Over 200 startups and 420 entrepreneurs have graduated from or are currently participating in Canadian accelerator programs.[8]

Of the 37 programs reviewed, seven programs meet the formal definition of accelerator as outlined earlier and are currently in operation. Canadian accelerator programs have three[9] or fewer cohorts, which run from three to eight months (most commonly three to four months). Cohorts typically consist of five startups but can range in size from three to 10, and teams usually have two or three co-founders including at least one technical co-founder.

By definition, the seven accelerators offer investment in exchange for equity, typically $20,000 to $50,000 for 5% to 10%. The "accelerator-like" programs typically do not provide any financial investment; and, three charge a fee for participating.

Accelerators list 60 mentors on average, with counts ranging from 16 to over 130. Of the 800 mentors in the ecosystem, 7% are listed as mentors at more than one accelerator. Mentors come from the investment community; the most active firms represented include iNovia, OMERS Ventures, Real Ventures, Rho Canada Ventures and the Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC). They also come from local technology companies; the most active of these include The Working Group, Wave, Jet Cooper, OpenText and BlackBerry. Less frequently, mentors come from international technology firms such as Google or Facebook.

Over 200 unique organizations sponsor or partner with Canada's accelerator programs. On average, each accelerator lists 16 partners and sponsors, but the number can range from four to 56. Professional firms like KPMG, Ernst & Young and Deloitte are the most common partners, along with BDC.

8 As of May 2013

9 Extreme Startups and its predecessor program, Extreme University, have produced three cohorts each.

Geographically, the distribution of accelerators in Canada is heavily weighted to Ontario with only a few programs in Quebec, Alberta and British Columbia. Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada has also recently invested in a series of "accelerator-like" programs based in major US centres for Canadian startups.

Origin

Interviews with accelerator directors reveal that most programs were initiated to address a perceived unmet need: the education and mentoring of entrepreneurs within their community.

Some accelerators were born out of the personal experience of the accelerator's founders:

> *If I was part of an accelerator or if I had that proper mentorship, some of my original startups then potentially wouldn't have failed.*
>
> **Ben Zlotnick, INcubes**

> *We noticed that there aren't a lot of females and people of colour that are founding digital companies; [however,] when you look at the consumption, women especially are on the high side of using the technologies, but we're not the ones creating it.*
>
> **Tamara-Melissa Huggins, DRIVEN**

Some programs were driven by an aspirational goal:

> *Although we're good at growing little entrepreneurs who sell companies, we have a real shortage of those [who are] extraordinary: the Mark Zuckerbergs, the Sam Waltons, the Jimmy Pattisons. Canada needs more of them.*
>
> **Claudia Hepburn, The Next 36**

Most commonly, accelerator directors cite friendly competition as a key rationale for starting a program; the desire to hold one's own against peer institutions or regions was often mentioned as a driver.

> *Just like Stanford can say Google, or MIT can say whomever comes from MIT. We wanted to be able to say this company came from U of T.*
>
> **Lyssa Neel, UTEST**

Structure and stakeholders

Canadian accelerator programs, whether for-profit or not-for-profit, typically consist of one or two general managers or executive directors and a small staff responsible for operations, marketing/publicity and stakeholder management. Given the early stage of Canadian accelerator development, most programs are funded through sponsorships, donations or investment by a key stakeholder such as a university or government agency. Direct investments in the startups are frequently made using a formal investment fund structure, and those costs are separated from accelerator operating costs.

Accelerator partners are usually professional services firms or technology companies that offer their services and products to each cohort at a discount or for free. Some partners actively participate by holding workshops in their area of expertise; for example, a law firm might speak to a cohort about protecting their intellectual property. Sponsor organizations can overlap with partners and also include venture capital firms interested in gaining access to a pipeline of promising ventures.

Selection process

The effectiveness of the startup selection process is key to an accelerator's success. Once or twice a year, each accelerator interviewed for this report initiates a highly competitive selection process. With the combination of a public call for applications and proactive recruiting, a Canadian accelerator may consider up to 400 applicants for a given cohort of typically five startups. For some accelerators, program alumni and mentors are beginning to act as "scouts," attending demo events and hack weekends to identify promising talent.

Applications using a video question-and-answer system are emerging to either supplement or replace lengthy written application forms. Accelerator directors interviewed state that a video-based format helps identify those with strong presentation and off-the-cuff speaking skills. Accelerator directors, staff and often sponsors and partners then evaluate the pool of applicants against a predetermined set of criteria—for example, the "traction, team and technology" rubric used at DRIVEN or the 'Business Model Canvas' model employed by HYPERDRIVE.

In developing their short list, all accelerator directors emphasize the importance of candidates' attitude and temperament, mentioning such characteristics as an "X factor," "hustler mentality," "hunger," "tenacity" and a "willingness to pivot" when describing ideal founders.

Mike Edwards of GrowLab stresses the importance of getting this first stage right:

> *We hunt talent, and then if we hunt talent and we do a good job of hunting talent, then when we execute well, and then that talent executes, then therefore our applications will increase in quality and we'll be able to get more and more out of the application process.*

UTEST, Toronto

One notable variation on the selection process is The Next 36's selection weekend. The Next 36 selects individuals who form companies after joining the program. After several rounds of reviewing applications to filter the initial list of candidates, the program brings the top 70 applicants together for a three-day weekend. Executive Director Claudia Hepburn describes it as follows:

> *At selection weekend, [each applicant has] 10 interviews and four or five keynote talks and several workshops. Then they do mutual speed dating or mutual interviews [with prospective team members]. Then we do call-back interviews—and then we select.*

Supply and demand

In the last year, a different dynamic is emerging as the supply and demand of startups and accelerators shift. As the supply of accelerators has increased both in Canada and internationally, startups are applying to more than one accelerator. Later-stage startups are being approached and actively recruited. Accelerator directors report that they are doing more "selling" to sign up the most promising startups. This can include negotiating terms, especially with startups that have already shown traction in the market.

> *I think it's a comfortable tension between, "I think I'm more valuable than the terms you're giving me." They are greedy for their own equity, and that's something I really like because they obviously value their company.*
>
> **Andy Yang, Extreme Startups**

A key challenge for both entrepreneurs and accelerators is valuing the services provided during and after the program, including advice from seasoned mentors, access to investors and the "reputational bump" of being selected by a respected accelerator.

> *The companies too often see us as money more than partners and mentors. They'll say, "50K for 10%, that's like $500,000 valuation. That's terrible." But they're getting a lot more than that valuation.*
>
> **Ian Jeffrey, FounderFuel**

Accelerator directors are acutely aware that this trend is likely to continue:

> *My job is to have more proof points that I can add value to this company.*
>
> **Mike Edwards, GrowLab**

Program format and content

There is considerable variation in the structure and content of Canadian accelerator programs. Interactions between directors, staff, mentors and company founders take many forms: workshops, coaching, one-on-one "accountability" sessions and cohort dinners, among others. A few programs use a monthly theme, such as "refine, crank, raise" employed by FounderFuel, and some have a weekly theme. Program content covers the basics of building a product, running and financing a business, but the emphasis varies according to the goals of the accelerator and composition of individual cohorts. The intensity of the experience, the degree to which program time is scheduled and structured, and the flexibility to adapt and modify curricula also differ from program to program. The tone of the team managing the program can also vary.

One accelerator director states:

> *We're a nurturing incubator. We're not trying to smack them down. Some [accelerators] have more rigorous behaviour. We don't [want] anyone to slack, but we're not here to kill them either.*

Another director describes their approach:

> *In order [for entrepreneurs] to complete [the program], we're very strict with them; everybody has to attend everything. This year, we have actually kicked out a couple of people. This is the first year that we have had a team not complete.*

Another accelerator director compares their accelerator's experience to that of a love affair:

> *It's like any sort of relationship—you're in love, it's romantic, "this is so awesome going into an accelerator"—then "holy s--t, this is a lot of work, oh my God, there's a lot of work to be done," so the stress level goes up. There is a level of intensity for sure associated with [this accelerator] but at the same time, it's a lot of fun.*

Mentoring

Mentors volunteer their time and expertise—a critical component for every accelerator interviewed. Startups participating in accelerators benefit from access to a pre-vetted group of industry veterans looking to contribute to the development and success of their local startup community.

While mentors such as CEOs of high-profile companies can attract applicants to a program, they often have limited time to commit to one-on-one coaching. Both the startup founders and accelerator directors report that often the most valuable contributions—both in terms of time spent and practical advice—are made by entrepreneurs who have recently conducted their own small exit and who are willing to share their recent, hands-on experience as startup founders. Andy Yang from Extreme Startups states:

> *We want [mentors] to be entrepreneurs, because those are the types that have "been there and done that" before. They can shepherd a team. If you get an investor as a mentor, as a lead mentor, there is the fear of a signalling effect. If you have a lead mentor from a venture fund and they don't invest in you, is that a bad signal?*

How mentors are incorporated into the program differs between accelerators. FounderFuel introduces their mentors and founders at a mentor day. The founders then select their own eight to 12 mentors to form an advisory board for the course of the program. Creative Destruction Lab relies less on individual mentors and more on their "G7 Fellows," seven successful entrepreneurs who evaluate each company's performance during a day-long session held every six weeks.

JOLT, Toronto

Mentors provide a great deal of expertise at no charge but can be problematic for accelerator staff and startups. One director describes a challenge common to several interviewees:

> *The most difficult [challenge] is logistical. Our mentors are very accomplished, very senior, sometimes very wealthy. Getting them to come in for two hours at a specific date and time is very difficult. Some are more difficult than others. If they are doing their own startup, they are very heads-down and focused.*

A related issue is managing volunteer mentors whose contribution to and engagement with the program are not meeting expectations. As one director notes:

> *I still don't think we've found the secret sauce on how to engage the mentor network in an optimal fashion, and we need to do a better job of cutting people out of the network when they don't actually step up to the plate to participate and add value to the program.*

FounderFuel, Montreal

Graduation/Demo Day

The accelerator program often culminates in an event called Demo Day, which effectively marks graduation for the cohort's startups. Typically an invitation-only event, Demo Day involves each startup in the cohort "pitching" or presenting to an audience of dozens or hundreds of stakeholders: potential investors, media and the accelerator's mentors, sponsors, partners and alumni. Some accelerators report using up to a third of their program time to prepare the startups for their Demo Day pitch.

> *If you think about Demo Days, it's really a chance to show your product and what you've accomplished in the last 12 weeks. The challenges are yeah, it's a lot of work. Getting the messages just right, getting the timing, the tone, the pace, the body gestures, the body language—all those things feed into each other. You want to project an aura of confidence but not cockiness.*
>
> **Andy Yang, Extreme Startups**

After the presentations, potential investors are invited to meet with the startups of their choice, with the hope that business will get done that day with term sheets signed and investment cheques written. So far, for Canadian accelerators, this has been rare.

More commonly, investor introductions are made and discussions and negotiations occur over the following weeks and months. One director notes:

> *My belief is [Demo Day is] a false construct for Canada because Demo Days are built around the Valley and New York and people are writing cheques that night. In fact, it's orchestrated for people to write cheques that night. I'm really hard pressed to think of an example where someone got a cheque that night or the next day in Canada.*

The Next 36

"We believe that Canadian prosperity can be impacted by having more high impact entrepreneurs."

Claudia Hepburn, Executive Director & Co-Founder

Accelerator-like: Up to $80,000 for 8% equity, longer than average program duration, individuals apply and then form startup teams after acceptance

As of mid-2013: Three cohorts, 31 startups

The Next 36 program is focused on selecting undergraduate students from across Canada and helping them develop into entrepreneurs in nine months. Acceptance is granted to individuals who form teams at the beginning of the program; each team focuses on building a new venture. The Next 36 delivers a strong academic program, featuring faculty from Rotman (Toronto), Ivey (Western), Sauder (UBC), Harvard Business School, MIT and more.

Notable graduates:

Kira Talent – Video screening platform (used by other accelerators)
Mobicare – A mobile caregiving platform (acquired April 2013)

thenext36.ca

DRIVEN

"Our mission is to diversify the founder level."

Tamar-Melissa Huggins, Founder and Chief Visionary Officer

Accelerator-like: no funding/equity, small participation fee, longer than average program duration (five months)

As of mid-2013: Two cohorts, eight startups

Located in the Centre for Social Innovation in Toronto, DRIVEN is a unique accelerator-like program in Canada as it focuses on teams with founders from two under-represented populations in the startup community: females and minorities.

The diverse management and mentor team uses a structured program with weekly themes to help accelerate mobile, web app, consumer Internet and cloud computing startups over a five-month period.

Notable graduates:

ROXI – Nightlife brokerage service
Fargifts – Application for sending gifts internationally

drivenaccelerator.com

UTEST

"Our goal is that when companies come out of UTEST, they're going to be strong contenders to move on to the high potential list at MaRS."

Lyssa Neel, Co-Director

Accelerator: $30,000 for 5% equity, longer than average (six months), presentation day

As of mid-2013: Two cohorts, 11 startups

University of Toronto Early-Stage Technology (UTEST) is a joint venture of MaRS Innovation and the University of Toronto that helps inventors with very early-stage technology ideas find their commercialization potential.

Based at MaRS in downtown Toronto, the focus is on building the foundation of a company based on research-intensive innovations that cannot be easily reproduced.

Notable graduates:

Crowdmark – Academic grading software
Whirlscape – Makers of Minuum mobile typing keyboard

http://www.marsinnovation.com/company/university-of-toronto-early-stage-technology-utest/

Performance measurement and impact

Despite the growth in the number of accelerator programs across Canada, and an influx of funding and funding commitments from different levels of government, little is known about how well accelerators actually perform.

Most accelerators, including those found in Canada, are only just beginning to engage with performance metrics and measurement. No standards are in place to support comparability and benchmarking.

The process of starting and growing a company is not a linear one. Different stakeholders have different interpretations of success. The cost of joining an accelerator for the startup founders is not only a portion of equity but also their time and opportunity cost. The cost for other stakeholders—sponsors contributing their money, mentors devoting their time, parent organizations devoting their space and support—is also significant.

Given this investment of substantial human and financial resources into accelerator programs, a discussion about the state of accelerator performance measurement seems appropriate and timely.

Measurement today

Canadian accelerators are tracking performance with metrics that vary from program to program. Largely driven by the accelerator's accountability to key stakeholders, two broad categories of measurement were revealed in the interviews:

1. Metrics related to the survival and growth of the startups, usually aggregated by cohort. For example:

- Startups' current status (operating, closed or acquired), cited by 55% of interviewees
- Number of employees, cited by 73% of interviewees
- Number of startups who have received investment or amount of investments, cited by 73% of interviewees
- Customer acquisition, cited by 27% of interviewees

2. Metrics related to the operation of the program, aggregated by cohort or fiscal year. For example:

- Number of applicants, cited by 18% of interviewees
- Mentor engagement, cited by 18% of interviewees
- Number of investors attending Demo Day, cited by 18% of interviewees
- Net Promoter Score as rated by participants, cited by 11% of interviewees
- Participant exit interviews and surveys, cited by 36% of interviewees

Measurement challenges

The challenges associated with measurement are significant for accelerators. Accelerator directors describe their key issues below.

Resources

First and foremost, the accelerator directors interviewed cite a lack of adequate resources as the key barrier to collecting more data, or collecting data more consistently over time. Accelerator staff are focused on supporting the current cohort, recruiting the next cohort and managing stakeholders—leaving little time to collect and collate data, and report on performance. One director states:

> *We don't have the manpower to do [an annual report].*

And another interviewee reflects on their efforts:

> *It's ad hoc but we keep track on paper as best that we can. We revisit it continuously although we're not [currently].*

Data collection

It is also challenging to collect data from program alumni after graduation, particularly as an accelerator's portfolio increases in size over time. A notable exception is those programs that have made an investment in exchange for equity, as founders are obliged to regularly report their financial performance to investors. Otherwise, data about startup success from external news sources is irregular and the dollar value of investments is often not disclosed publicly.

Metrics

Other issues involve the very nature of metrics and measurement. Without common, shared definitions, even seemingly straightforward metrics like "jobs" or "revenue" can be interpreted in different ways, resulting in data that is not directly comparable.

Extreme Startups, Toronto

More importantly, definitions of "success" vary across accelerators. For example, interviewees indicate that the number of patents filed by or granted to companies is important to most university-based accelerators, while job creation is a key outcome for government-supported programs. Both these metrics are less meaningful to venture capital-affiliated accelerators, which are focused on generating a return for their investors.

Even company exits by accelerator graduates, while celebrated in the press, cannot be automatically classified as successes or failures. An exit that does not deliver a meaningful return to its investors or results in the transfer of Canadian jobs to a US firm has failed at least one set of stakeholders. Company failure is similarly ambiguous. Many interviewees mention the "stress test" value of the accelerator model and at least one interviewee tracks failure as a metric:

> *Something we measure as well although we don't brag about it—for me, it's very important—[is that] we accelerate the failure as well… [The entrepreneurs] still learn so much in the process and we didn't waste their time and they were on to the next business.*

Accelerators can help companies "fail fast" and this outcome can be beneficial for both founders and the broader startup ecosystem.

Tools

Purpose-built applications to track the performance of accelerators and their startups are scarce and have not yet reached wide adoption. As a result, Excel, online survey software and CrunchBase[10] data are the typical tools deployed by accelerators looking to generate and maintain a set of metrics—all tools requiring time to set up and maintain. Two new venture capital portfolio management applications, Dashboard.io by Paul Singh of 500 Startups' fame, and Hockeystick by Canadian startup Scalability, are being used by a few Canadian accelerators and may address some of the challenges associated with data collection, management and reporting experienced by accelerators.

Impact

As a very preliminary step in quantifying the impact of Canadian accelerators, the researchers examined the performance of three initial cohorts from three programs. Key findings from this analysis include:

- **Sixteen of the 19 companies in the first cohort of three different accelerators are still active (all graduated at the end of 2011 or in early 2012).**
- **Three of the 19 companies in the first cohort of three different accelerators received disclosed funding after graduation.**
- **One company out of the 19 companies in the first cohort of three different accelerators was acquired (Vuru).**

The analysis was compromised by the limited public disclosure of investments. It should be noted that one accelerator included in this analysis claimed significant funding after graduation for its cohort that was not recorded in either the public media or in a proprietary venture capital database—a discrepancy likely explained by the reality of non-disclosure in venture capital investing.

Performance transparency today

Given the investment of time and resources—private and public—into accelerator programs, it seems appropriate to open up the model for evaluation and evidence-based review and move away from the largely anecdotal, opinion-based discussion seen to date. This means regular, open publication of metrics that are ideally comparable or consistent with those published by other peer programs.

Outside Canada, a number of initiatives are helping advance the case for more transparency and better measurement of the results and outcomes of accelerators.

10 http://www.crunchbase.com/

US-based accelerator TechStars publishes perhaps the most robust set of metrics of any accelerator.[11] Its published data encompasses survival (active, acquired, failed), average funding per company and jobs created. TechStars provides a summary of the data but also breakouts by cohort and individual company performance. Based on CrunchBase data, the metrics are self-reported by each company and 96% of TechStars' companies have updated their profile in the last year. TechStars is also a vocal and persistent advocate for transparency by accelerators more broadly.

Nesta's foundational report on seed accelerators, Startup Factories[12], makes a similar call for transparency in part to quantify returns to investors, and also to understand other benefits to the community and local economy.

Seed-DB, the database of seed accelerators and their companies, is also trying to address the problem of transparency around accelerator outcomes. It aggregates CrunchBase data to analyze the performance of accelerators and its graduates; 169 accelerator programs are currently listed and tracked. As noted previously, only five active Canadian accelerators are listed on Seed-DB, and the data provided about these programs is incomplete.

Tech Cocktail's annual ranking of accelerators,[13] done in conjunction with Northwestern University's Yael Hochberg, is a similar attempt to better understand and compare the results of American accelerators. Its ranking uses a number of measures and relies on qualitative input as well as quantitative outcomes.

Transparency in Canada

In Canada, very little data is available about the performance of accelerator programs and their graduates. Outside of some limited information in CrunchBase (which is now rolled up to Seed-DB), none of the accelerators interviewed report their metrics publicly, though one director states:

> *We have nothing to hide. I'm actually really proud of our metrics… I can easily post it.*

When asked about publishing their performance metrics, 91% of interviewees state that it is too early in their program's development to publish their results. One director claims:

> *We haven't [published results] yet. We're still very young compared to [Y Combinator]. It's something that we'll probably do eventually but I feel it's too early yet.*

11 http://www.techstars.com/companies/stats

12 See Appendix A for publication details.

13 http://tech.co/top-startup-accelerators-ranked-2012-08

Some interviewees express apprehension that results could be taken out of context or used in an "unfair" comparison. For example, an accelerator that targets earlier stage startups with more risk could result in less impressive follow-on funding outcomes. In response to the question, "Would you consider publishing your results in the future?" one accelerator director states bluntly:

> *When they're good.*

Another director expresses concern that increased transparency could negatively affect government funding:

> *Obviously, the political ramifications of [publishing results] are [a government agency] is trying to get more money out of [another government agency] all the time, so if you produce data that says they're not doing a good job, well…*

Benefits

While the challenges associated with measuring the performance and impact of accelerators are substantial, these do not mitigate the value of and need for robust, comparable metrics. A number of benefits are associated with a more rigorous, standardized and open approach to data collection and reporting, as follows:

1. A standard set of metrics supports program benchmarking and evaluation. This data can be used by:

- Accelerator directors and staff looking to improve their program
- Entrepreneurs making the decision to apply to or join an accelerator
- Sponsors and donors assessing their financial support of accelerators
- Mentors considering donating their time and expertise
- Government agencies and policy-makers evaluating the role and use of accelerators as a small business support or regional economic development tool

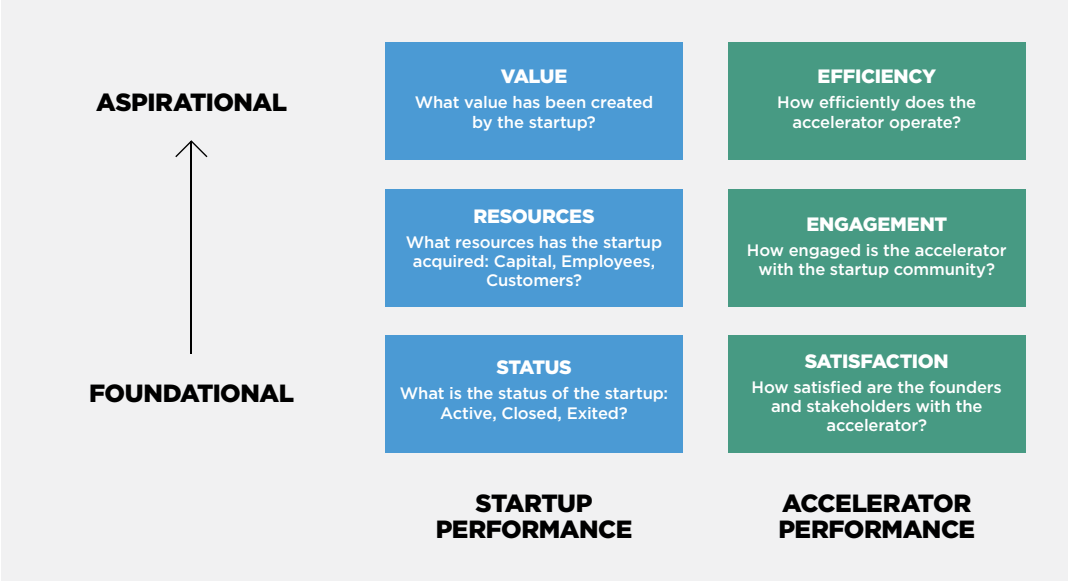
2. More abundant and better quality data helps practitioners, policy-makers and academics better understand the process of creating high-growth companies. By attaching data to key milestones and outcomes, the lifecycle and progression of companies can be analyzed and used to refine models and suggest best practices.

Proposed scorecard

The researchers have developed a scorecard as a basis for further dialogue and discussion around accelerator performance measurement.

The proposed scorecard contains six parts divided into two sections and allows for phased implementation over time. Three parts of the scorecard relate to the performance of the accelerated startups; the remaining three parts relate to the successful operation of the accelerator itself.

This scorecard is not intended to comprise an exhaustive list of all metrics to be tracked by accelerator staff; however, it does include important metrics that lend themselves to cross-accelerator comparability. It is also not intended to be used as a startup's own internal scorecard.



The scorecard's first section focuses on the performance of an accelerator's startups. All of the interviewees share the view expressed by one that:

> *"The success of the accelerator is the success of the startups."*

Status

At a foundational level, accelerators should track and publish the status of their startups—active, closed or exited—at regular intervals after graduation. This measure provides a baseline that can be tracked over time. This data can also be used to generate firm survival rates for the accelerator. The one-to-five-year graduate survival rate calcu-

INcubes, Toronto

lated from a number of accelerator programs could then be compared to those associated with other innovation programs such as incubators, as well as those of unassisted early-stage companies.

Resources

The second set of metrics captures a startup's resources including capital, employees and other assets such as patents. This group represents a number of metrics that are regularly tracked today—number of jobs created, number of startups that have raised follow-on capital, amount raised, patents pending or IP licensed. Customer acquisition could be a measure considered for this category but may need to be approached or measured differently in certain sectors. For some stakeholders, these metrics currently represent the "end result"—for example, government-backed programs often consider job creation a key success measure. The growth rate of metrics in this category is useful, as well as the absolute values.

Value

This third category is aspirational in nature, as value is clearly challenging to measure. Quantifying value is difficult for companies that have not exited (or have exited but the value of the deal was not disclosed), so proxies such as revenue or valuation during subsequent investment events must be used. This group of metrics is not intended to measure the value created that is attributable to the accelerator program.

The scorecard's second section contains three groups of measures related to the accelerator's performance.

Satisfaction

Measuring satisfaction of the program's participants or recent graduates is a foundational step and helps accelerator directors and staff pinpoint specific aspects of the program for improvement. It also can capture many of the non-financial benefits of accelerator programs. Accelerators may also consider using a Net Promoter Score™ type of question "How likely is it that you would recommend this accelerator to a friend or colleague?".

Engagement

Some interviewees refer to measures in this category as "vanity metrics," but accelerators are currently tracking many of them, and they do indicate the degree to which a startup community interacts with, participates in, or is visible in their local startup community. These include:

- Number of applications
- Community attendance at major events such as Demo Days
- Alumni participation in the accelerator after graduation
- Press coverage
- Social media metrics

Over time, metrics in this category could capture not only the quantity but also the quality of interactions and engagements.

Efficiency

The long-term sustainability of accelerators will be measured not only by the value they help create, but also by the costs associated with doing so. Capturing "costs"—such as annual operating budget, volunteer hours, number of staff—and using them as the denominator for many of the metrics in other categories could generate new insight into accelerator programs.

Cost data could be used, for example, to calculate the cost per job created or the cost per surviving startup after 12 months. In interviews, two accelerator directors also suggest that a cost ratio measure commonly used in a not-for-profit context could be adapted for accelerator programs. Just as many non-profit organizations track and report the percentage of funds raised that are spent on fundraising and administrative expenses, so too could accelerators track and report how much funding is directly invested in the startups as opposed to accelerator operations. As today's accelerators near the end of their current two- or three-year mandates and look to secure re-investment from sponsors and donors, this category of metrics will become increasingly important.

Extreme Startups

"We're looking to help build the next billion-dollar company here in the heart of Toronto."

Andy Yang, Managing Director

Accelerator: $50,000* for 10% equity, 12 weeks, Demo Day

As of mid-2013: Six cohorts, 27 startups

One of Canada's earliest accelerators, Extreme Startups began in 2009 as Extreme University. Relaunched in 2012 as Extreme Startups and relocated to a bigger workspace on Queen Street West in Toronto, the program focuses on small cohorts and fundraising.

The management team includes a former venture capitalist and has extensive experience in and links to Silicon Valley. The program has a deep mentor pool, and Demo Day is well-attended by potential investors, media and entrepreneurs. Extreme Startups also features a "pre-celerator" for a group of earlier stage companies—so far, one of which has gone on to join the accelerator program.

**Extreme Startups is one of four Canadian accelerators whose graduates are eligible to receive a $150,000 convertible note from the Business Development Bank of Canada, in addition to any upfront investment (investment is dependent on successful completion of the program).*

Notable graduates:

Shifthub – Online employee scheduling and communication software
Granify – Machine learning platform used in e-commerce

extremestartups.com

INcubes

"We look at out-of-the-box entrepreneurs as well as startups."

Ben Zlotnick, Founder and CEO

Accelerator: Undisclosed funding for 7.5% equity, 12 weeks, Demo Day

As of mid-2013: Three cohorts, 13 startups

Founded by an entrepreneur, INcubes participants work out of a downtown Toronto office for three months. The program focuses on each startup's business, product and investment strategies. A recent Demo Day included a visit from startup community "superstar" Brad Feld.

Notable graduates:

HOVR.IT – Image recognition used to help online shoppers
Videogami – Web platform for teaching hands-on skills

incubes.ca

Creative Destruction Lab

"We want to build massively scalable companies."

Jesse Rodgers, Director

Accelerator-like: no funding/equity, lowest performing venture dropped every six weeks, longer than average program length (eight months), limited working space

As of mid-2013: One cohort, 18 startups at the beginning of the program

Based at the Rotman School of Management on the downtown University of Toronto campus, Creative Destruction Lab was started by Professor Ajay Agrawal, also affiliated with The Next 36. Over the course of eight months, a group of experienced entrepreneurs—the "G7 Fellows"—reviews the progress of each venture on a periodic basis; based on the results of that review, the lowest performing team is dropped from the program.
The program also facilitates the "matching" of graduate-level technical students with business students and uses the G7 Fellows in place of traditional mentoring.

Notable participants:

Thalmic Labs – Armband for gesture control
Bionym – Biometric recognition system using cardiac patterns

creativedestructionlab.com

HYPERDRIVE

"We're looking for entrepreneurs who have an idea that has big potential."

Steve Currie, VP, Venture Services

Accelerator: $40,000* for 6% equity, 12 weeks, Demo Day, longer than average program duration

As of mid-2013: Two cohorts, 18 startups

Part of Waterloo's Communitech, HYPERDRIVE attracts startups from Canada and around the world. HYPERDRIVE focuses on building companies and preparing them for Series A funding. The program includes ongoing "post-graduation" mentorship for up to two years.

**HYPERDRIVE is one of four Canadian accelerators whose graduates are eligible to receive a $150,000 convertible note from the Business Development Bank of Canada, in addition to any upfront investment (investment is dependent on successful completion of the program).*

Notable graduates:

Incentivibe – Cost-sharing program for businesses offering giveaway contests
BuildCircle – Communication application for contractors and subcontractors

hyperdrive.communitech.ca

Future of accelerators

The widespread adoption of the accelerator model worldwide since 2010 has prompted some observers of the startup community to proclaim the imminence of an "accelerator bubble."[14]

Some of this report's interviewees echoed this view, but others expressed different opinions when asked to predict the future of accelerators.

> *I think there are going to be fewer programs or maybe one per major city. I think there will be a lot more collaboration between them. We're already talking to a bunch of programs to see how we can work together for the greater good of the startup community in Canada rather than just thinking about our backyard.*
>
> **Ian Jeffrey, FounderFuel**

> *My belief is that we'll have some sort of premier league, so some sort of group of accelerators that have some commonality. My belief is that commonality is going to be either investors or backers.*
>
> **Mike Edwards, GrowLab**

> *I think there will be a threshing out. I think in two to three years' time, there will be a separation between the haves and the have-nots. It's really going to be delineated between the quality of the companies. You'll see a clear quality separation between the companies that one accelerator produces versus another.*
>
> **Andy Yang, Extreme Startups**

> *It definitely will change. There will be either a million more accelerators or there will be no accelerators or it will be changed to something different.*
>
> **Ben Zlotnick, INcubes**

14 See footnote 2.

Conclusion

In just three years, Canada has seen over 30 accelerators and accelerator-like programs open their doors. While many are now an intrinsic part of their local startup ecosystems, our research suggests that in many ways Canada's accelerators are in their own "startup phase" and pivots—variations on the accelerator model—abound. These continued iterations contribute to the refinement of best practices and could potentially lead to new, distinct models in the future.

This report aims to promote a better understanding of the Canadian accelerator landscape by describing key program elements and beginning an exploration of the issues and challenges associated with measuring accelerator performance. It is hoped that these insights will lay the groundwork for more informed discussion about the role and contribution of accelerators and related programs in Canada and the need for greater transparency and meaningful metrics, leading ultimately to better outcomes for accelerators, their graduates and the broader startup ecosystem.

JOLT

"I look at MaRS as this open API that we can plug in all of these assets that add value to the support and the successful commercialization of startups."

Sue McGill, Co-Founder and Executive Director

Accelerator: $50,000 for 9% equity, 16 weeks, Demo Day

As of mid-2013: Two cohorts, 12 startups

Based in the MaRS Commons in downtown Toronto, JOLT benefits from the extended ecosystem that comes with being a MaRS program. The program focuses on early-stage web and mobile startups and brought its most recent cohort to the Launch Festival in San Francisco.

Notable graduates:

Greengage Mobile – Employee engagement platform
StyleKick – Online shopping fit comparison and recommendation engine

jolt.marsdd.com

Canadian Technology Accelerators

"Some startups really need access to very unique types of resources that you can only find in high concentrations in just a few spots on the Earth such as in Silicon Valley."

Thierry Weissenburger, Consul and Senior Trade Commissioner, Canadian Consulate General - Boston

Accelerator-like: no funding/equity, 12 to 24 weeks, capacity varies by program

As of mid-2013: Seven programs launched across the United States

The Canadian Technology Accelerator (CTA) is an initiative supported by the Canadian Government through the Trade Commissioner Service. There are multiple accelerator-like programs, based in different locations across the United States.

Typically, Canadian startups participating in this program base one or two founders in Silicon Valley, Boston, Denver or New York while the rest of the team remains in Canada. The focus of the program is on facilitating connections in the local community, rather than traditional product development or mentorship. Some programs/locations specialize in digital media, cleantech or life sciences startups.

Notable graduates:

REGEN Energy – Wireless electrical energy management provider
Authintic – Analytics for retail personalization from social data

http://tradecommissioner.gc.ca/eng/document.jsp?did=141338

Appendices

Appendix A

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Appendix B

Accelerator Table

Program Name	Program Type Acccel-erator = A Acceler-ator-like = AL	Program Status	Prov-ince/ State	Country	Founded	Num-ber of Cohorts To Date (current & gradu-ated)	Program Duration (weeks)	Compa-nies per Cohort	Team Mem-bers	Location
Canadian Technology Accelerator @ Boston Cambridge Innovation Center (CTA@Boston)	AL	Active	MA	USA	2013	2	12	up to 8	up to 2*	Cambridge Innovation Center One Broadway Kendall Square-MIT Cambridge, MA USA 02142
Canadian Technology Ac-celerator @ Mission Bay QB3 (CTA@Mission Bay)	AL	Active	CA	USA	2012	2	up to 24	up to 5		QB3, University of California 1700 4th Street, Byers Hall, Suite 214 San Francisco, CA USA 94158-2330
Canadian Technology Accelerator @ New York City General Assembly (CTA@NYC)	AL	Active	NY	USA	2013	5?	12	up to 6		General Assembly 902 Broadway, 4th Floor New York, NY9 USA 10010
Canadian Technology Ac-celerator @ Philadelphia (CTA@Philadelphia)	AL	Active	PA	USA	2013	0	12			University Science Centre 3711 Market Street Philadelphia, PA USA 19104
Canadian Technology Accelerator @ Plug and Play (CTA@PnP)	AL	Active	CA	USA	2009	2	26	up to 6	2	Assembly Coworking Space Suite 400, 119 14th St NW Calgary, AB T2N 1Z6440 Plug and Play Tech Center North Wolfe Road Sunnyvale, CA USA 94085
Canadian Technology Ac-celerator @ San Francisco RocketSpace (CTA@SF)	AL	Active	CA	USA	2011	5?	16	up to 6	1*	RocketSpace 181 Fremont Street San Francisco, CA USA 94105
Canadian Technology Accelerator Clean Tech NYC & Silicon Valley	AL	Active	NY	USA	2013	1	16	up to 12		CGCNY 1251 Avenue of the Americas New York, NY USA 10020
Creative Destruction Lab	AL	Active	ON	Canada	2012	1	36	18 then cut 1 every 5-6 weeks	1 - 5	105 St.George Street Toronto, ON M5S 3E6
DRIVEN	AL	Active	ON	Canada	2012	2	20	5	2 - 4	720 Bathurst Street Toronto, ON M5T 2S6
entrepreneurship@Alacrity	AL	Active	BC	Canada	2011		39 - 52	n/a		1400- 1055 W Hastings St Vancouver, BC V6E 2E9
entrepreneurship@uVic	AL	Active	BC	Canada	2011		39 - 52	n/a		
Extreme Startups	A	Active	ON	Canada	2012	3	12	5*	2+	639 Queen Street West Third Floor Toronto, Ontario M5V 2B7
Flightpath Ventures	AL	Active	AB	Canada	2012	Continuous intake	16	Ongoing intake	2 - 3	10359-104 Street Suite 301 Edmonton, AB, T5J 1B9
FounderFuel	A	Active	QC	Canada	2011	3	12	10	2+	51 Sherbrooke Street West Montreal, QC H2X 1X2

Program Name	Program Type Acccel-erator = A Acceler-ator-like = AL	Program Status	Prov-ince/ State	Country	Founded	Num-ber of Cohorts To Date (current & gradu-ated)	Program Duration (weeks)	Compa-nies per Cohort	Team Mem-bers	Location
GrowLab	A	Active	BC	Canada	2011	3	16	5 - 7	Up to 6	128 West Hastings Street Suite 300 Vancouver, BC V6B 1G8
HYPERDRIVE	A	Active	ON	Canada	2012	2	12	10		151 Charles St W Suite 100 Kitchener, ON N2G 1H6
IdeaBoost	AL	Active	ON	Canada	2012	2	16	7	6 to 8	101 College Street, Toronto, ON M5G 1L7
INcubes	A	Active	ON	Canada	2011	3	12	5	3 to 5	70 Peter Street Toronto, ON M5V 2G5
JOLT	A	Active	ON	Canada	2012	2	16	6	3+	101 College Street, Suite 230 Toronto, ON, M5G 1L7
Kinetic Startups	AL	Active	ON	Canada	2012	Continuous intake	52	N/A	Any	934 – 1 Yonge St Toronto, ON M5E 1E5
Launch 180	AL	Active	ON	Canada	2013	0		N/A		51 Wolseley Street Toronto, ON M5T 1A4
Launch36	AL	Active	NB	Canada	2012	2	22	5 - 7	2+	644 Main Street Blue Cross Centre, Suite 102 Moncton, NB E1E 1E2
Ryerson Futures	AL	Active	ON	Canada	2013	Continuous intake	16+	N/A	1+	10 Dundas St. East Suite 600, Toronto, ON
Startupify.Me	AL	Active	ON	Canada	2013	0	17	up to 5 FT, 10 PT		349 Woolwich St, Guelph, ON N1H 3W4
The Next 36	AL	Active	ON	Canada	2010	3	35	9 - 12	3	130 Bloor Street West, Suite 702 Toronto, ON M5S 1N5
UTEST (University of Toronto Early Stage Technology)	A	Active	ON	Canada	2012	2	26	5 - 6		101 College Street Suite 320 Toronto, ON M5G 1L7
Venture Acceleration Program	AL	Active	BC	Canada	2012	Continuous intake	26?	up to 20	2	2659 Douglas Street, 2nd Floor Victoria, BC V8T 5M2
Canadian Clean Technolo-gy Accelerator @ Environ-mental Business Cluster	AL	?	CA	USA	2011	2	up to 12	3	1 - 2	Toronto, ON M5T 1A4
CIX Canadian Technology Accelerator	AL	?	CA	USA	2011	2	up to 12 weeks	3	1 - 2	
Bootup Labs	A	Closed	BC	Canada	2008	3	32 (max)	5 - 7		311 Water Street - Suite 200 Vancouver, BC V6B 1B8

Program Name	Program Type Acccel-erator = A Acceler-ator-like = AL	Program Status	Prov-ince/ State	Country	Founded	Num-ber of Cohorts To Date (current & gradu-ated)	Program Duration (weeks)	Compa-nies per Cohort	Team Mem-bers	Location
entrepreneurship@ Wavefront	AL	Closed	BC	Canada	2010	2	52			1400-1055 W Hastings St Vancouver, BC V6E 2E9
Mercury Grove	AL	Closed	ON	Canada	2012 (re-launched)	1		4 (current)		738 Bank Street, Suite 202 Ottawa, ON K1S 3V4
Year One Labs	A	Closed	QC	Canada	2010	1*		5*		420 Guy Street Montreal, QC H3J 2L2
entrepreneurship@AO (Accelerate Okanagan)	AL	Now part of Venture Accel-eration Program	BC	Canada	2012	1	52	up to 15		#201-1405 St. Paul Street Kelowna, BC V1Y 2E4

To view and download a more complete and comprehensive version of this table, please visit: http://bit.ly/16hkeHs.

Appendix C

Interview guide

Overview

What was the rationale for starting the accelerator?

What is the focus of the accelerator? How would you describe its overall objectives?

What makes your accelerator unique? How does that benefit your participants?

Describe your ideal participants.

Describe your key stakeholders.

Describe your selection process, programming and mentoring during the program, and demo day/graduation. What are the best practices, lessons learned and challenges you've encountered at each stage?

Impact

What do you see as the role accelerators have in the startup ecosystem? What do they contribute?

[For accelerators associated with academic institution] What do you see as the role of an accelerator within an academic institution? What does it contribute to a university and its students?

What do you consider to be the differences between an accelerator and an incubator?

What do you think are the advantages of the accelerator model over other approaches to supporting entrepreneurs, such as incubators or other education programs?

What do you think of the growth of accelerators in Canada and around the world? Is it a positive or negative development for startups and entrepreneurship?

What do you see as the future for accelerators over the next five or 10 years?

Measurement

How do you define success for the accelerator? What specific metrics do you track?

How do you define a successful graduate? Do successful graduates equal a successful accelerator? What accelerator outcomes are independent of the graduates?

[Accelerators associated with academic institution] With your association with an academic institution, are there additional metrics you track? Is there a challenge balancing academic outcome goals and graduate goals?

How do you track graduates once they've left the accelerator? How often? What challenges have you had?

Some accelerators, notably Y Combinator and TechStars, have openly published their results. Do you? Why or why not? Do you have plans to do so?

Community

Who do you look to as an example of a high-performing accelerator? Which accelerators do you look to for ideas around programming, services, and so on?

Do you connect with other accelerators? If so, for what purpose?

Wrap-up

Is there anything else you'd like to share about accelerators?

MaRS Data Catalyst

Seeding Success:
Canada's Startup Accelerators

http://datacatalyst.marsdd.com/startupaccelerators

MaRS Data Catalyst brings together data and analysis from a variety of partners to track, quantify and grow Ontario's innovation economy. MaRS Data Catalyst uses data and insight to support the province's entrepreneurs, researchers, policy-makers and innovators.

June 2013