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Entrepreneurs for the Future (e4f)

Supporting local tech startups

Young startup businesses benefit from tailored support and being part of a community. That's what makes Birmingham's 'Entrepreneurs for the Future' (e4f) programme stand out: it offers bespoke support and the chance to join a network of like-minded startups.

Tailored approach

Upon entering the e4f programme, each startup is given an in depth diagnostic assessment to identify its individual needs and plan activities around these. The programme is for technology startups, and attracts budding entrepreneurs in growth sectors such as IT, digital and cleantech. Activities include mentoring from an experienced 'entrepreneur in residence' and advice on legal, tax, finance, marketing and communications issues.

But it is not just the tailored support that is so important for fledgling businesses, but the being part of a wider community. Within the community, startups are encouraged to group themselves according to specific interests, with e4f providing meeting space for this purpose. As a result, e4f now hosts a monthly 'tech Wednesday', bringing together 70 technology professionals to discuss relevant topics; and one of the startups also hosts weekly games testing sessions.

Support package & funding

The services and support are offered for free for the first six months, after which any startup wishing to remain part of the community must take out a paid support package. The programme offers physical space as well as support, including: access to a 24/7 hotdesking, superfast broadband and phone connections, and virtual incubator facilities with video conferencing.



Not just an ordinary office. E4f is a vibrant community of multidisciplined entrepreneurs working on a variety of tech start-ups.

Mike Bandar, director, Turn Partners



cities in action

June 2014

where: Birmingham, UK
what: economy
when: 2009+

When the programme launched in 2009, the initial funding came from Birmingham City Council's Working Neighbourhood Fund. This allowed e4f to establish their premises and appoint an incubator manager. This funding ended in 2011, but e4f was successful in securing ERDF funding of £1,337,000 (€1,659,251) until 2015, as the programme has continually achieved – and exceeded – its ERDF outputs. The rest of the costs are covered by Innovation Birmingham, the city council-owned innovation centre. The 2014 budget amounts to £212,000 (€264,000).

Retaining talent

Being part of a community also helps to keep local talent in the area. Despite having five high quality universities, Birmingham has a history of 'leaking' graduates to other parts of the country. With e4f encouraging entrepreneurs to form clusters and collaborate with each other, it is helping to boost local economic activity and stimulate job creation.

For example, a cluster of games companies is attracting a range of high profile events to the area, while a growing number of cleantech businesses receives increasing support through the EU's Climate-KIC programme.

The idea behind e4f was to help the next generation of entrepreneurs to sustain and deliver on their creative aspirations, and with the majority of entrepreneurs graduating from the programme intending to stay in Birmingham, it is successfully contributing to local economic activity.

Success

To date, e4f has generated 100 startups, which on average generate £100,000 (€117,000) and have created an important number of jobs. Despite launching in the midst of the economic crisis, e4f has proven successful.

A 2011 evaluation of the programme cited its 'excellent, supportive and collaborative environment' and 'highly experienced team of mentors' as key success factors. As a result, e4f made a number of tweaks to strengthen its offer, including: a quarterly rather than continuous intake; the introduction of in depth diagnostic assessments; and attracting an IP legal firm to provide free advice.

Programmes such as e4f do not require prohibitively large resources and could work across a range of sectors, and are therefore easily replicable. Already, partners in Saxony Anhalt (Germany) and Vastra Gotaland (Sweden) have expressed interest in the concept. The programme was also shortlisted for the 2013 EUROCITIES awards in the 'smart jobs' category.



The project was featured in our 2013 'Cities supporting inclusive entrepreneurship' publication: <http://bit.ly/1i72p8s>



We understand how difficult it is for startup companies to turn an idea into a commercial business which is why we have developed the incubator programme to help tech startups grow. We offer specific support to give them the best possible chance to build their business. Our aim is to create growth and jobs for the West Midlands while also growing a great tech community.

Michelle Rayner, programme manager, e4f

