

20 Years of Impact

Creative HQ 2024 Impact Report

Your place of innovation.

Reflections from CEO and Board Chair

As we reflect on the remarkable journey of Creative HQ, we are filled with a profound sense of gratitude and pride.

Two decades ago, Grow Wellington (the predecessor to WellingtonNZ), through the launch of Creative HQ, embarked on a bold mission to transform the region into a thriving hub of innovation, a place where new businesses flourish, jobs abound, and investment flows. It is a privilege to have been part of the team which has collectively created such a large impact over that time.

From our humble beginnings as a small local service provider, Creative HQ has evolved into a nationally and globally recognized leader in innovation. We've empowered **over 35,000 people** in our programmes, including **1,029 startup founders**, to pursue their entrepreneurial dreams. We've catalysed the creation of **417 startup ventures**, generating **1320 active jobs**, with **801** of those right here in Wellington.

The economic ripple effect of our endeavours is profound, with an estimated **\$66 million** annual contribution to the Wellington economy and **\$300 million** raised by companies in our accelerator programs alone, **\$191 million** of which has flowed right back into Wellington. The current valuation of active companies stands at **\$1.3 billion**. Moreover, our impact extends far beyond financial metrics. **Forty percent** of our startups remain active five years post-program, underscoring our commitment to fostering sustainable businesses. Through **544 unique programs**, we've nurtured capability, confidence, and connectedness among participants, laying the groundwork for enduring success.

None of this would have been possible without the unwavering support of our ecosystem — a vibrant tapestry of startup founders, public sector leaders, private enterprises, mentors, coaches, advisors, investors, and, most importantly, our dedicated team and our predecessors. Special mention must go to the Wellington City Council, Greater Wellington Regional Council and WellingtonNZ for their vision and continued support. To each and every one of you, we offer our heartfelt thanks.

Looking ahead, the future brims with even greater promise. In 2023, The Startup Advisors Council issued a report for the Government, called UpStart Nation, on how best to support a thriving environment for startups in New Zealand. In alignment with the ambitious targets outlined in UpStart Nation, we aim to contribute more than **400 thriving startups to New Zealand's ecosystem by 2030**, doubling the current count. Achieving this vision demands continued collaboration and innovation across sectors.

Creative HQ is committed to leading this charge, fostering collaboration among academia, research institutions, local and central government, policymakers, and corporate partners to nurture the next generation of entrepreneurial trailblazers. Together, we will cultivate a vibrant ecosystem that not only generates economic prosperity but also fosters positive social, environmental, and cultural outcomes for all New Zealanders.

As we embark on the next chapter of our journey, let us remain steadfast in our dedication to innovation, collaboration, and inclusive growth. Together, we can realise the full potential of New Zealand as a global leader in sustainable value creation, and to Wellington - the capital of entrepreneurship.



Catherine Jones
CEO, Creative HQ



Lance Walker
Board Chair, Creative HQ

20 Years of Creative HQ



Creative HQ was opened by Helen Clark in March 2003, while she was the Prime Minister of New Zealand. Here are her thoughts on our 20th anniversary.

Kia ora everybody.

It was 20 years ago when, as Prime Minister of New Zealand, I had the pleasure of officially opening Creative HQ in Wellington. At the time, it was part of a bold new vision for Wellington, which set out to grow innovative new businesses, create new jobs, and bring new investment to the city. But as for any new venture, the future was a bit uncertain.

Nonetheless, there were high hopes for Creative HQ, and it had great people, and it had a very supportive city. Still, there was a mountain to climb in order to succeed. Well, now 20 years on, those kinds of doubts have been well and truly banished. Creative HQ has worked with literally thousands of founders and innovators. It's contributed to creating over a thousand new jobs for Wellingtonians, and to attracting \$300 million in new investment into Wellington, and to building businesses valued at over \$1 billion.

It's great too that the impact has not only been economic, important as that is, but also social, cultural, and environmental. For example, Creative HQ has worked on challenges like ensuring Māori data sovereignty, stopping immigrant exploitation, revitalising the tourism sector, and it's even facilitated the development of New Zealand's first fully community owned response to climate change. It's this combination of impact which makes Creative HQ such a success story for Wellington, and that's something of which we can all feel very proud.



So, to all who have so generously supported Creative HQ, whether with your time, funding, hard work, and/or expertise, thank you. And to the team at Creative HQ, congratulations and well done.

Here's a big cheer for the next 20 years.

Helen Clarke
Former Prime Minister of Aotearoa, New Zealand

Creative HQ was created under the leadership of Dame Kerry Prendergast when she was the Mayor of Wellington. Here are her thoughts on our 20th anniversary.

Wellington experienced a Golden 18 years of leadership from 1992 to 2010, culminating in our city being named **"The Coolest Little Capital in the World"** by Lonely Planet.

Dame Fran Wilde invested in infrastructure; Mark Blumsky marketed Wellington and created events; Under my leadership we used the "Creative Wellington, Innovative Capital" vision in everything we did or spoke about after its launch in 2002.

We set up Creative HQ to allow budding entrepreneurs to start from scratch and grow wings. It has been a huge success, being the nest in which many small businesses were hatched, were fed, fledged, and then flew the nest to find their own territory.

Good luck, Creative HQ, for your next 20 years and beyond.



Dame Kerry Prendergast
Former Mayor of Wellington

It Takes a Village to Create a Startup

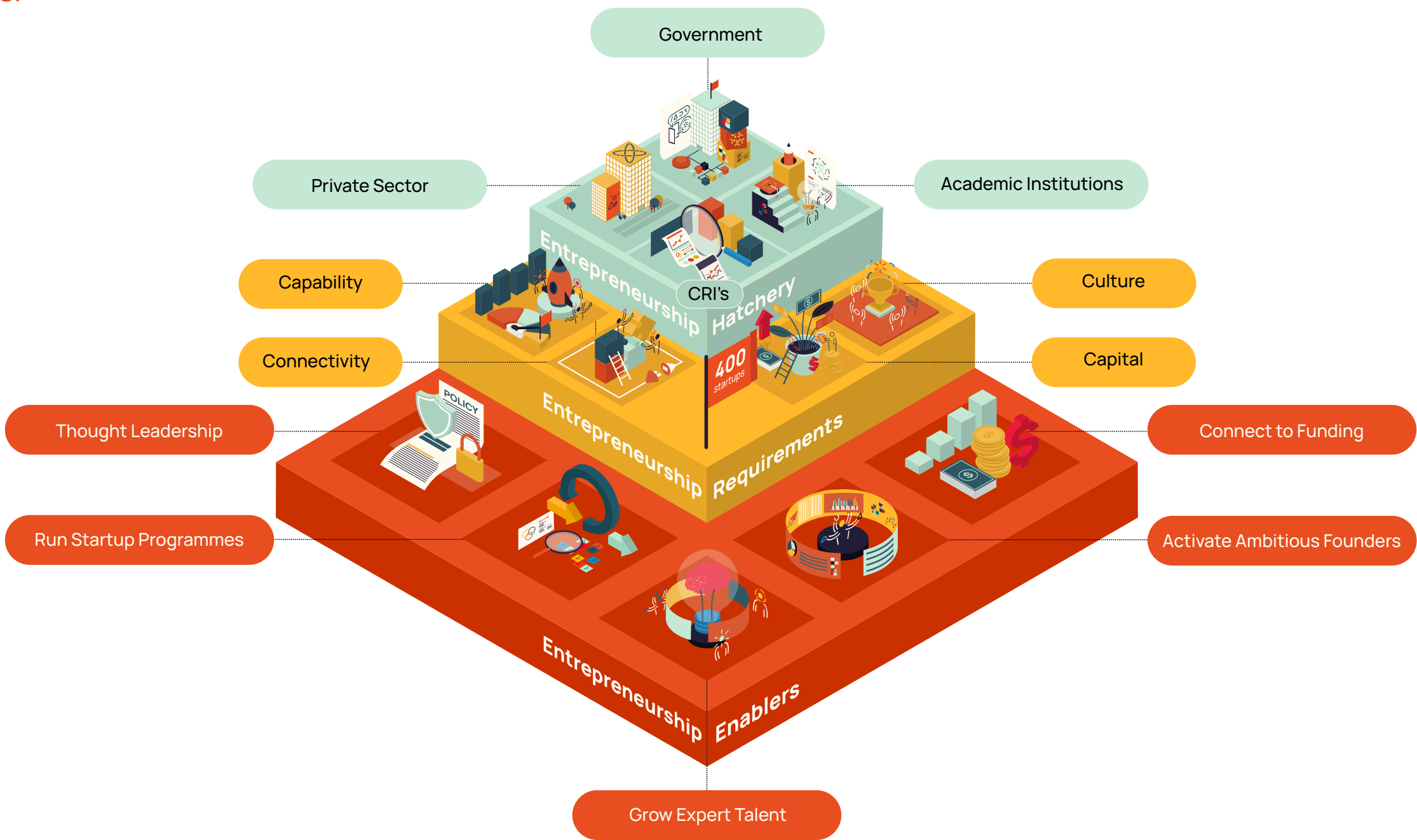
Ideas and startups come to life when the requirements of a strong entrepreneurial ecosystem are met through a high performing foundation of enablers.

We see the startup ecosystem in Wellington and across New Zealand as being made up of three main components:

- 1. The Hatchery**
Where ideas are born within the intersection of key stakeholders (the Government, Private Sector, CRI's and Academic Institutions).
- 2. The Requirements**
Key conditions that allow entrepreneurs to flourish.
- 3. The Enablers**
Those who currate the environment and key conditions for entrepreneurs to flourish.

We are proud to have been a key enabler of the startup ecosystem in Wellington and across New Zealand for over 20 years, and we look forward to continuing to play this role for many years to come.

We will continue to foster relationships within all corners of the Hatchery. We will continue to support founders from those corners through programmes that build capability, culture and connectivity, and continue to connect founders to sources of capital at the right time.



Vision and Creative HQ Strategic Pillars

2024 marks the start of a new chapter for Creative HQ. We have matured enormously throughout our own journey of impact creation and want to ensure that we are in the best possible position to amplify that impact over the next 20 years.

By activating ambitious founders and running targeted programs, we empower entrepreneurial talent to flourish. Connecting founders to funding sources ensures vital financial support for growth, while growing expert talent enriches the ecosystem's knowledge base and capabilities. Furthermore, providing thought leadership to policymakers and influencers ensures alignment with broader industry trends and fosters an environment conducive to innovation.

Together, these pillars form a comprehensive strategy geared toward fostering innovation, growth, and sustainability, positioning ourselves and our founders for long-term success and impact.

Creative HQ Strategic Pillars

Our focus to achieve this will be on the following five strategic pillars which encapsulate the holistic approach we've learned in our first 20 years is needed to cultivate a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem.



Activate ambitious founders

We fuel ambition through our programmes and events that connect founders with the stars of our ecosystem and provide them with the tools to help their ideas take flight.



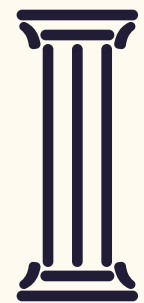
Run startup programmes

Programme support and events to connect the ecosystem are our speciality - from early stage founder launch to our flagship accelerator programmes.



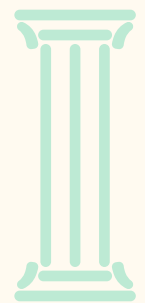
Connect to funding

We provide a trusted connection between entrepreneurs and high quality investors for early-stage funding.



Grow expert talent

Our School of Innovation builds talent that contributes to the long-term success and competitiveness of companies, and ensures that companies can access talent as they scale.



Thought Leadership for government

We provide thought leadership for policymakers to ensure our public service is accessible, encourages risk taking and supports entrepreneurs.

The remainder of this report looks at each of our five pillars in more detail and shares case studies for each pillar that highlight some of the founders, startups, funders, project teams and government organisations we have worked with over the past 20 years.

Activating Ambitious Founders

Startup founders play a pivotal role in the economic development and cultural diversity of a region, acting as catalysts for innovation, job creation, and social change.

By launching new ventures, these entrepreneurs inject vitality into the local economy, driving growth and attracting investment.

Startups often explore uncharted territories, bringing to market novel solutions that address both local and global challenges, thereby fostering a culture of innovation and resilience.

Furthermore, startup founders contribute significantly to the cultural diversity of a region. Entrepreneurs from varied backgrounds bring unique perspectives and solutions, enriching the local business landscape with a mosaic of ideas that reflect the multiplicity of society itself. This diversity not only enhances the creative potential of the ecosystem but also promotes inclusivity and understanding, breaking down barriers and building stronger, more cohesive communities.

We believe in the power of founders. We have had it as a central mission of Creative HQ throughout our 20 years of existence to support and develop founders so they can take on the world. We focus on building their capabilities, confidence and connections in the startup ecosystem.

According to the 2023 UpStart Nation report, **New Zealand needs 5000 active startups by 2030 across various stages of growth nationally to become an “UpStart Nation”.**

To achieve this, we need to spark inspiration and ambition in tens of thousands of potential founders. Creative HQ plays heavily in this early activation stage through our startup programmes.

In 2022, we began to build a suite of offerings to inspire more people to start a company, give them the tools and capabilities they need to make it work and connect them with the people who can help through the various stages of their journey. We call this our **Pre-Incubation programme**.

Some of the key components of the Pre-Incubation programme are:

- **Startup Sessions**
Small group (30-50) person workshops with subject matter experts offering a 101 snapshot into their field. We bring in marketing, legal, finance, sales, capital raising experts and others to run sessions with budding founders.
- **Founder Launch**
We have built an e-learning platform for founders to walk through the formative stages of their development. Each stage has video content, guided advice and actionable outcomes.

Most recently, we are very proud to partner with Callaghan Innovation and the Ministry of Awesome to develop and implement the Startup Aotearoa Programme.

This programme, which commenced in early 2024, works with regional partners to build consistent, one-on-one coaching and support resources for founders located anywhere in New Zealand.



¹ Data from Creative HQ Accelerator programmes



Case Studies

Founder Stories

The following case studies share a few of the many founder journeys we have been privileged to have been a part of over our 20 years.

Trent Mankelow

Founder Stories

Trent Mankelow was one of the first founders to ever work with Creative HQ when he brought his company, Optimal Usability, into Creative HQ in 2003. Trent has stayed an active member of the startup ecosystem since that time and is now on the board of Creative HQ. We routinely gain inspiration from Trent and we sat down with him to help us tell his founder’s journey story.

Optimal Usability Origins

Trent and his co-founder Sam Ng met during their time together at Unisys back in the early 2000’s. Their respective backgrounds in computer science and industrial design, coupled with a shared fascination for human-computer interaction, sparked the idea to create a consultancy called Optimal Usability. The venture aimed to improve the digital experience by closely observing and refining how users interacted with websites and technology.

“

The theory was that we would go into organisations that had websites (apps weren’t really a thing back then) and we would do observational research to find out all the things that were confusing, annoying and frustrating and make recommendations for improvements.

We went into it thinking we would be bankrupt after year one!

”



Founders Trent Mankelow and Sam Ng, with Former Prime Minister Helen Clarke at the opening ceremony for Creative HQ.

Instead of bankruptcy, the business started to flourish. Creative HQ began its own journey around the same time as Optimal Usability, and it was in the Creative HQ space that Trent and Sam spent their startup’s early years. This facilitated their access to a community of fellow entrepreneurs, fostering camaraderie, shared learning and a lot of fun too.

Trent’s early entrepreneurial journey was characterised by a steep learning curve, from learning how to manage and grow teams, to understanding business operations and the importance of transparency and networking.

“A big thing that I learned was, when you ask for help, people often give it”.

Many years later, Optimal had some 30 staff across Auckland, Wellington and Sydney and was eventually sold to PwC in 2014.

“An 11-year ‘overnight success,’ as they tend to be.”

Evolution of a Founder

After growing and ultimately selling the business, Trent continued to influence the tech ecosystem through roles at Trade Me and Summer of Tech, alongside advising and investing in startups. His experience highlights the varied paths an entrepreneur can take post-exit, from leading significant projects in established companies to giving back to the community and fostering the next generation of tech talent.



Founder Trent Mankelow.

Learning - In Business and in Life

Trent’s reflections on his journey emphasise the importance of recognising and maximising the seasons of life and business.

“

If I remember when I was running Optimal, there was a season where sales was really important. There was a season where people management was something that I really needed to learn, and there was a season when strategy, vision, values, culture was the most important thing.

The same idea applies to a career, there are times when things are up and times when things are down. And I think with the benefit of hindsight and a few years under my belt, there’s something to be said about not hurrying the season that you’re in, just acknowledging that’s where you’re at. And trying to maximise and squeeze the juice out of that season, and trying to learn as much as you can.

”

Emily Blythe

Founder Stories

Emily Blythe started her founder’s journey at an early age and we started working with her when she joined our first Venture Up young founders programme back in 2015. Emily has gone on to have a very impressive founder’s journey which includes founding the company Pyper Vision and being named the Innovator of the Year in 2023 by the New Zealander of the Year Awards. We sat down with Emily to help us tell her founder’s journey story.

Beginnings

Emily Blythe could be said to have had a penchant for entrepreneurship since childhood. Growing up in Christchurch, Emily remembers spending weekends picking pine cones up from her uncle’s farm and selling them at the gate and kickstarting a tomato nursery business with her Nanna. It was in year 12 of high school though that things kicked up a few notches. Emily’s first startup, Flatpak, was developed through the Young Enterprise Scheme (YES) and the positive influences of an inspiring economics teacher to solve a real problem - namely how to safely transport tools on quad bikes.

“

Our economics teacher was absolutely determined that his team was going to be solving a big problem and not creating an existing product that’s already on the market.

”

Venturing Up

The Venture Up program run by Creative HQ came along at an opportune time to support Emily. Venture Up was created to help those promising young entrepreneurs from the YES programme to take their ideas even further. The programme helped refine the team’s thinking on product design and better understand their customer needs, and it provided crucial business insights. Venture Up’s emphasis on community building and entrepreneurial thinking significantly influenced Emily’s approach to business.

“Venture Up really just kind of drowned us in all this information of one entrepreneur after another who had typically dropped out of school or found a problem, dug in on it, found a unique solution, backed themselves and just had gone and done it. And so I think part of it was just hearing that repetitive thing again and again and again, that this is possible.”

Pyper Vision

After the team decided to close down Flatpak, Emily reflected on the many learnings from the experience such as the importance of a scalable pricing model, the necessity of aligning customer messaging with product offerings, and understanding market needs. These insights were crucial in shaping her approach to future ventures.

After a year spent working for a Christchurch R&D company, Emily began breathing life into her next startup - Pyper Vision. This involved addressing a problem that had been on Emily’s mind since right back in the days of the Young Enterprise Scheme, namely the disruption caused by fog.

Flight disruptions due to fog are a common frustration for many and costly to the airline industry. Pyper Vision is focused on addressing this issue, by creating fog dispersion technology to prevent such disruption while also enhancing flight safety.



Founder Emily Blythe.

Evolution, Recognition and Reflections on being a founder

As Pyper Vision has grown and evolved over the last few years, so too has Emily’s role within it.

“My role is less now about coming up with the solution to a problem and more about how can I enable my team to do it”

The startup is going strong, with recognition coming for the business and it’s founder - Pyper Vision were recently named as one of Callaghan Innovation’s ‘ones to watch’ in the Sir Paul Callaghan 100 list and Emily herself was named the Innovator of the Year in 2023 by the New Zealander of the Year Awards.

When asked to think about the learnings from her founder journey thus far, Emily reflected on the importance of having a clear vision and being open to unconventional approaches. She emphasised the value of authenticity, building strong relationships, and being open to collaboration and partnership opportunities. These elements, she believes, are crucial for navigating the complexities of startup life.

“

Don’t be afraid to think outside the box or create something that works for you rather than just going off a template that someone else has used before.

”

Mike Lovegrove

Founder Stories

Mike Lovegrove started his founder journey by creating Bot the Builder (later named JRNY) back in 2017. We first started working with Mike when he brought his company into the 2018 Lightning Lab FinTech Accelerator. Mike’s story is a fantastic testament to the power of resilience, continuously learning, and giving back to the startup ecosystem. We sat down with Mike to help us tell his founder’s journey story.

Startup Inspiration

Mike Lovegrove’s entrepreneurial journey began not with a specific problem to solve, but with a desire to start a company.

“Later, I learned that is not a good reason to start a company”.

His first company, Bot the Builder, later known as JRNY, was inspired by financial necessity and an interest in chatbot technology. The startup initially lacked a clear focus, but through experimentation and customer engagement, it evolved into a business providing solutions in the insurance space.

Working with Creative HQ

Participating in Creative HQ’s Lightning Lab FinTech Accelerator was a turning point for Mike and JRNY. The program helped Mike land seed investors, secure the company’s first insurance customer, and most importantly, help Mike understand the value of focusing on a specific vertical. The accelerator’s customer discovery and sales sprints were instrumental, providing Mike with tools and skills that he continued to use in his subsequent ventures and still uses today.

Early Learnings

The most significant takeaway from the Creative HQ accelerator for Mike was the importance of narrowing focus to a specific vertical. This strategy, initially counter-intuitive to him, proved to be vital for accelerating business growth.

“Now, if I’m ever talking with startups, I’m harping on about the urge for choosing a vertical and narrowing a focus, because it speeds everything up.”



Founder Mike Lovegrove.

Post-Creative HQ

After JRNY, Mike faced the challenge of adapting to the changing market conditions brought by Covid-19. The pandemic’s impact on the insurance industry, combined with the startup’s lack of product-market fit, led to JRNY’s closure.

“That was a really tough time for me mentally. And at that point in time, I was like, Man, if I can feel this way, I think anybody can. So I wanted to do something in the mental health space. I got connected with a team that was called Groov and it was just was a perfect fit.”

At Groov, Mike learned from a great entrepreneur, Adam Clark, and further honed his skills in sales, team leadership, and strategic thinking.

Continued Learning and Growth

Mike’s journey didn’t stop with Groov. He moved to London and went on to work with a growing startup called Fresha, bringing his expertise to a larger scale operation. His ability to apply lessons from past experiences was evident in his success at Fresha, where he implemented strategies that resulted in substantial growth within a region that was critical to their growth.

Reflections and Advice

Reflecting on his founder’s journey, Mike emphasises the value of staying in the startup ecosystem and giving back.

“I thought that I had learned too much not to give back to the ecosystem.”

His advice for new founders also includes surrounding yourself with experienced people and learning as much as you can from them.

Looking Ahead

Currently, Mike is working with another company that has gone from startup to high growth, helping them launch their UK office. He continues his entrepreneurial journey, staying connected to the startup ecosystem. His story is a testament to the resilience, adaptability, and continuous learning essential for success in the startup world.

Mike’s journey from the founder of a fledgling startup to a seasoned entrepreneur offers valuable insights into the challenges and triumphs of the startup ecosystem. His experiences underscore the importance of adaptability, customer focus, and the willingness to learn and apply lessons in varied business contexts.

“You have to pick a key problem that you want to solve. You have to be in love with that problem. Fall in love with solving that problem.”

Shalini Divya

Founder Stories

Shalini Divya started her founder’s journey by creating the company Tasmanlon as an extension of her PhD research on new battery technologies, which she started back in 2018. We first met Shalini when she brought her company into Creative HQ’s 2021 Climate Response Accelerator. Her founder’s journey is a great example of success in the challenging world of commercial value creation from academic research. We sat down with Shalini to help us tell her founder’s journey story.

Startup Origin

Shalini Divya rooted her academic research on aluminium ion batteries during her PhD. Recognising the global potential of her work, she was inspired to transition from the lab to the marketplace. This journey from research to entrepreneurship marked the beginning of Tasmanlon, a startup aimed at revolutionising energy storage solutions.



Founder Shalini Divya.

A Catalyst for Leadership

Shalini entered the Climate Response Accelerator at Creative HQ during a pivotal moment of transition from founder to CEO.

This assistance was instrumental in her evolution as a leader, preparing her for the challenges of the startup world and connecting her with many of the key stakeholders who would help her to embrace her role as CEO with confidence and determination.

“I applied for the program because I was a founder but not a CEO... Creative HQ came at the right time because, not only financially but I think emotionally, it prepared me for the startup world and gave me the confidence that I am capable of becoming a CEO.”

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Lessons from Creative HQ

The programme’s impact on Shalini extended beyond the financial.

“

The one thing that I absolutely loved in my cohort was...everyone was sharing their stories, you know, their sad stories, their happy stories...and I think the advisors that Creative HQ came up with gave me many of their own stories of success and failure...about you know, it’s okay to make mistakes when you are new at your job- it is all part of the steep learning curve.

”

These interactions imbued her with the resilience to embrace her mistakes and the understanding that the journey of a CEO is distinct from her personal narrative.

Fundamental Insights

A critical lesson for Shalini was the need to detach emotional investment from her startup and adopt a more rational, vision-oriented approach.

“The biggest lesson I learned was, try not to treat your technology as a baby because it’s a startup...You have to be really rational and practical about it.”

Learning to balance emotional narratives with the practical aspects of running a startup was a significant turning point, allowing her to communicate more effectively with investors and stakeholders.

Post-Program Progress

In the time after the Climate Response Accelerator, Tasmanlon has successfully attracted three investors, enabling the expansion of its lab and team. Shalini has also secured substantial non-dilutive funding, facilitating ongoing research and development. The journey has included challenges, such as translating technical achievements to investors, but these experiences have fostered growth and resilience for her, both personally and professionally.

Advice for New Founders

Reflecting on her journey, Shalini emphasises the importance of openness and honesty for new founders, especially those transitioning from academia.

“Young founders must feel comfortable in voicing their opinion. I think it’s important for them to understand that disagreements are okay, but ensure everyone in the room understands your vision.”

Vision for Tasmanlon

Shalini envisions Tasmanlon playing a significant role in providing affordable and sustainable energy solutions worldwide, especially in economically disadvantaged areas. Drawing from her personal experiences in India, she aims to replace traditional energy storage methods with Tasmanlon batteries, enhancing access to reliable power and contributing to global environmental sustainability.



Founder Shalini Divya at the 2021 CRA Innovation Evening.

Scotty Diamond

Founder Stories

Scotty Diamond started his founder’s journey by creating Fit Rewards in 2022. We started working with Scotty when he brought his company into Creative HQ’s 2023 Impact Accelerator. Scotty has an inspirational story about overcoming adversity and giving your all into something you believe in. We sat down with Scotty to help us tell his founder’s journey story.

Backstory

Scotty Diamond's journey from a seasoned chef to the founder of Fit Rewards is a tale of resilience, transformation, and the pursuit of fulfilment. With over two decades of international culinary experience, Scotty found himself at a crossroads, slightly disillusioned with his profession despite the success he had achieved. His life took an unexpected turn one fateful night in Sweden when he was struck by a car in a near-fatal accident. This harrowing experience left him hospitalised for six weeks in the ICU, followed by a gruelling 18-month recovery period dedicated to regaining his ability to walk and restoring his health.

It was during this time of rehabilitation that Scotty was spurred to make a big shift in direction; leaving his culinary career behind, going back to university and getting a business degree. It was then over the period of the Covid-19 pandemic that the concept of Fit Rewards began to crystallise, namely the concept to promote exercise by rewarding people for their time and effort with products and services that fit their lifestyle.

“I think having that serious accident made me really aware of the time that I have... and wanting to make the most of it.”



Founder Scotty Diamond at the 2023 Impact Accelerator Showcase.

A StartUp Life

Upon returning to Wellington, Scotty sought support for his nascent startup idea, leading him to connect with the startup up team at Creative HQ. After initial discussions he realised the potential in his concept but also acknowledged his lack of knowledge in the startup space. Encouraged by the positive feedback and recognising the need for guidance, Scotty applied for and was accepted into the Creative HQ Impact Accelerator program in early 2023.

This program, aimed at businesses promoting social change, provided him with the opportunity to refine his idea, create a prototype, and validate his business model with the support of the Creative HQ team, his fellow start-ups in the cohort and the wider start-up community.

Scotty's experience was transformative, teaching him the importance of simplifying his business idea, validating it with the market, and communicating effectively. In the months that followed the end of the programme, Scotty's focus shifted towards the development of a Minimum Viable Product (MVP) and the continuing work to expand his network. He has been reaching out to venture capitalists, angel investors, participating in networking events, all while navigating the complexities of market competition and product development, raising funding and building a team.

Scotty is travelling through the unknown and it can at times be a lonely journey, but as he says himself - if you don't try you will never know.

“My goal every day is to try and be a little bit better than I was yesterday, like in all aspects and if I can achieve that, then I’m winning.”



Founder Scotty Diamond.

Running Startup Programmes

Today’s startups represent the future of New Zealand’s economy. We support high-potential startups at an early stage through our incubators and more intensive accelerator programmes.

Through startup programmes, participants can build the capabilities, confidence and connections they will need to survive and thrive. These programmes provide startup founders with a safe testing ground for breakthrough new ideas, and help them supercharge the development of innovative new products, ideas and processes.

To be successful, startups need to have good ideas, execute well and move fast - the speed of disruption is accelerating and the barrier to entry is reducing. Time is a founder’s most scarce resource, and their challenge is to create a lot of value in a short amount of time.

Working with the talent they bring, we equip them with the tools to help them be efficient and effective, and wrap them into the ecosystem who then help propel them to the next level, fast. In our accelerators, we typically help startups create a year’s worth of progress in just three months.

Over the last 20 years we’ve run 50 different startup programmes, supporting 417 companies from all across New Zealand and internationally. Over 40% of these startups are still active today, a statistic that is in keeping with the best accelerators globally².

We’ve run programmes across many verticals including climate response, tourism, financial services, energy, sports, arts and culture, female founders, public sector innovation and more. Our programmes have run across New Zealand and internationally including Australia, the Philippines and the Middle East. And, our programmes have been recognised as being world leading. As compared with some of the top startup support programmes in the world, Creative HQ has graduated 3 times more startups, with almost twice the number of them closing seed funding (46% for Creative HQ vs 26% global average), and 28% more of our teams having female founders in them.



Lightning Lab 2013 Demo Day.
² Global Accelerator Network Annual Survey 2023

417

Total Startups supported in accelerator and incubator programmes

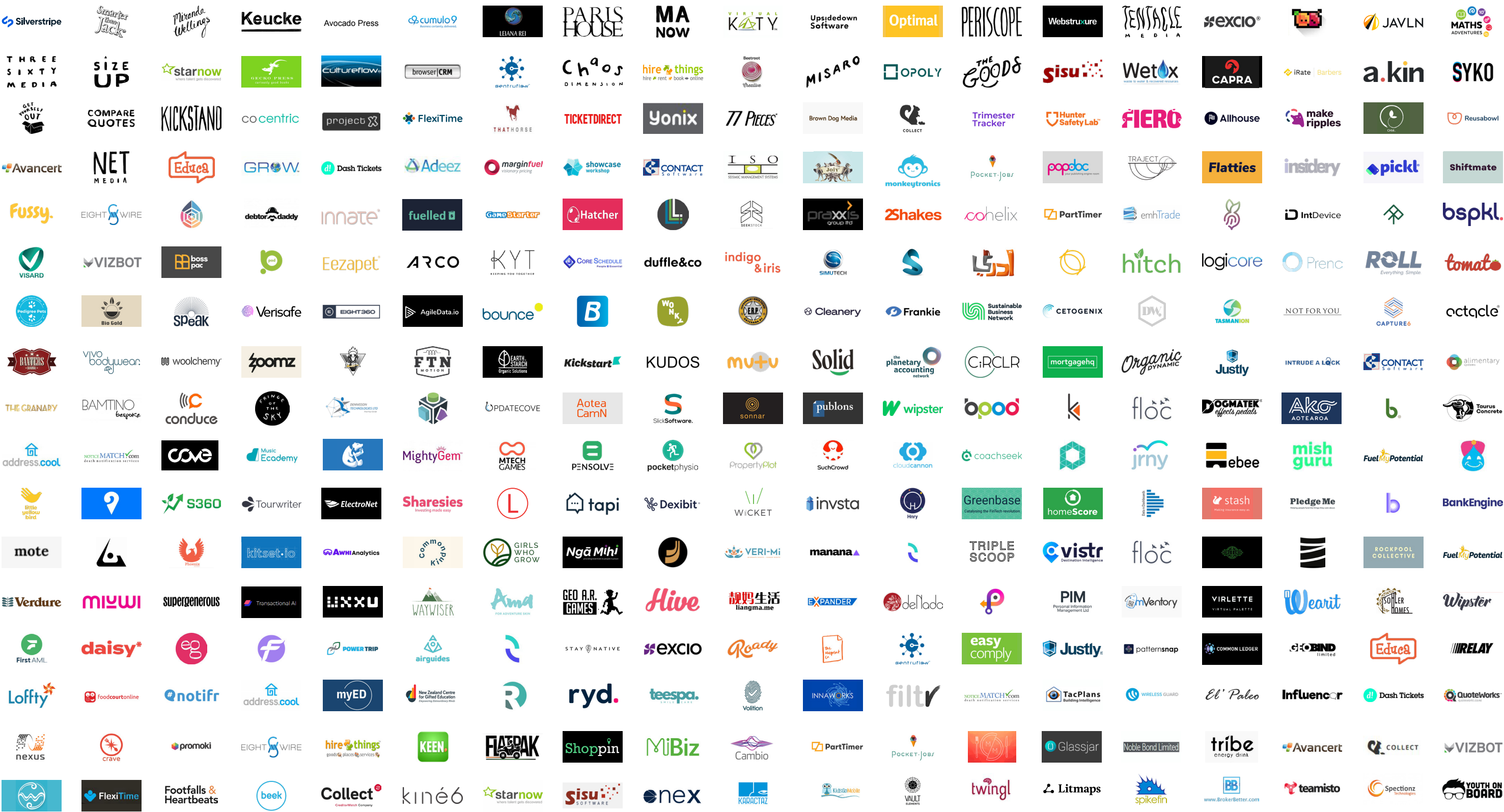


“When we compare these stats to those of other startup hubs around the globe, we know that our ecosystem is smaller and less mature than others, yet we produce more startups and more jobs, and hold the same percentage of companies that raise investment. Yet another example of New Zealand punching above its weight. And an example that Creative HQ is proud to be a part of.

Catherine Jones, CEO, Creative HQ

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Creative HQ Alumni





Case Studies

Startup Stories

The following case studies highlight a few of the startups we have worked with over the years and demonstrate the power of startups to change the world.

Silverstripe Startup Stories

How many companies in New Zealand can claim that they played a critical role in our Covid-19 response and helped Barack Obama get elected? Silverstripe can, and they can also rightfully claim to be a key part of the fabric of the Internet in New Zealand. This great Wellington company got its start at Creative HQ back in 2003 as one of the first startups we ever helped. We sat down with Sam Minée, the founder and former CEO of Silverstripe to help us tell their story.

Introduction to Silverstripe

Silverstripe, initially named Totally Digital, was co-founded by Sam Minnée, Tim Copeland, and Sigurd Magnusson in February 2000. The young founders, fresh out of high school and early university years, embarked on a journey fuelled by ambition and a keen interest in technology. By 2003, when they joined Creative HQ, Silverstripe had developed its first version of a content management system (CMS), a pioneering move at a time when simple, user-friendly web CMSs were rare.



Early days at Silverstripe. Source: silverstripe.com/about-us/

The Journey Begins

The decision to apply to Creative HQ was sparked by a desire to elevate the business. At this stage, Silverstripe was a small team transitioning from a service-based company to focusing on their CMS product. Creative HQ offered an opportunity to gain insights, networks, and the necessary push towards commercialisation.

The Creative HQ Impact

Creative HQ's incubator program was helpful in shaping Silverstripe's early days. The co-working space, advisory network, and connections facilitated by Creative HQ provided Silverstripe with visibility and access to Wellington's business and local government scene. The environment at Creative HQ fostered camaraderie among startups and offered a platform for growth and learning beyond technical skills.

“

Creative HQ helped to level up our thinking about what running a serious business actually involves... It was a great time while we were there. The connections, the advice and camaraderie were the three big pieces.

”

Overcoming Challenges

The journey wasn't without its lows. Financial constraints were a significant hurdle, with the team experiencing periods of virtually no income. Mistakes in client engagements and the learning curve of transitioning from a group of tech-savvy teens to a professional company marked their early years. Yet, these challenges were critical learning experiences that shaped the company's resilience and professionalism.

“We were learning to be a professional company in those early years... We were just smelly teenagers for the first few years and you know, some of those early clients, I am thankful for their patience back in those days.”

Key Milestones and Highs

Silverstripe's decision to release its CMS as open source was a turning point, greatly increasing their international presence and the scale of projects they undertook. A major highlight was developing the website for the US Democratic National Convention Committee. With 10s of millions of people viewing it, Barack Obama was selected over Hillary Clinton, which was a pivotal moment in American history, and it was managed on a Silverstripe website. Such a high-profile project boosted their credibility and led to larger engagements, including the significant win of the New Zealand government's Common Web Platform project.

“

That was transformational for our business... You know, our international notoriety grew a lot. The scale of the projects that we took on got bigger and bigger.

”

Where are they today?

Today, Silverstripe plays a pivotal role in providing digital experiences across New Zealand. With a focus on public sector projects, the company has contributed to more accessible and user-friendly web experiences for New Zealanders.

“Heaps of sites out there that lots of people use, like the Covid-19 website, have been delivered by Silverstripe. And a lot of people who work in government have heard of Silverstripe, because of our work through the Common Web platform.”

Reflecting on Impact

Reflecting on Silverstripe's impact, Sam highlights the importance of the team and work culture as sources of satisfaction.

“

Something that has surprised me is just how much actually bringing a team of people together that love where they work and love their colleagues is one of the most lasting sources of satisfaction about starting a company. More than the specific products or services or projects or customers.

”

Publons

Startup Stories

The story of Publons is a great illustration of the power of vision and determination, and the impact you can achieve with a startup. Publons was one of the 10 companies in our first startup accelerator programme, Lightning Lab 2013. They were also the first of all of our accelerator alumni to have an exit that returned significant value to their investors. We sat down with Daniel Johnston, one of the two founders at Publons to help us tell their story.

What is Publons?

Founded by Andrew Preston and Daniel Johnston, Publons tackled a significant challenge in the academic research space. It aimed to revolutionise peer review by creating an online platform that recognised and credited researchers for their review work, a critical yet undervalued component of academic research. This innovative approach sought to improve how researchers were evaluated, focusing on a broader range of their activities beyond just publication.

Stage of Business at Creative HQ Accelerator Programme

When Publons entered the Creative HQ accelerator, it was at an early stage. Andrew and Daniel had been working on it part-time for over 2-years. With a strong mission and vision aligned between the founders, the company had foundational ideas but lacked a developed product, users, and a clear path to market. This early stage was characterised by a significant learning curve and the need to solidify their business model.

Learning from Lightning Lab

Participation in the Lightning Lab was pivotal for Publons. It forced the founders to focus intensely on their startup, moving from treating it as a side project to a full-time commitment.

This period was marked by constant learning, refining their understanding of the industry, and articulating their vision. Despite challenges in finding mentors with specific industry knowledge in the academic research area, they benefited greatly from the mentorship of Dave Moskovitz and Simon Swallow, who became key investors and supporters.

“

The most important thing was that it really forced you to change your mindset...it forced us to get serious, to obsess about it, to really learn our industry in order to justify our thinking.

”

Highs and Lows After Lightning Lab

After Lightning Lab, Publons experienced a series of ups and downs. The most stressful periods were marked by the times when they were getting short on money, and had to have tough negotiations with investors and face the prospect of abrupt failure amid signs of imminent success. However, building a strong team culture and achieving milestones in user growth and product development were among the highs.

“The team we created was amazing...the culture...continues to this day...It was always so incredible to look up from your desk and see all these amazing humans here working on this thing we had started.”

The Acquisition

The acquisition of Publons was unexpected, as the company initially sought investment from a larger industry player, but not a sale. However, the strategic fit with Clarivate Analytics led to a successful acquisition by them. Although the acquisition period had its challenges, the integration of Publons into Clarivate was very successful, allowing the Publons team to stay together and operate independently within the Clarivate offerings, keeping and expanding the Publons brand.

“We had three beautiful years [the acquisition earnout period] of the combination of corporate resources and startup culture, of autonomy and influence. After all the dire warnings we'd heard of what happens after acquisitions, our experience was a dream. We produced an incredible amount of quality work over that time.”



Early days of Publons in the Creative HQ Lightning Lab 2013 programme.

Impact on the Scientific Community

Publons' impact on the scientific community has been quite profound.

“We pretty quickly became the thought leaders about peer review and led a wave of appreciation and innovation in this critical aspect of research...from the humbling early days of being the sole voice for peer review on the conference circuit, we built a platform that had all industry stakeholders working with us to modernise all aspects of peer review, in ways that would have seemed impossible only a few years prior.”

As a catalyst for change, the company led the reshaping of perceptions around the role of peer review in science. Their platform facilitated faster peer review processes and experimentation in transparency, contributing to the acceleration of scientific research.

Reflection and Advice for Entrepreneurs

Reflecting on the journey, Daniel Johnston emphasised the importance of staying true to a vision and finding early investors who share that belief.

Daniel highlighted the critical role of support from accelerators like Creative HQ's Lightning Lab in connecting with influential mentors and investors. While acknowledging the hard work and challenges of entrepreneurship, Johnston affirmed the rewarding nature of the journey and the value of building a team that shares a common mission.

Sharesies Startup Stories

Sharesies has become a household name in New Zealand. We were lucky to be able to work with them when they were a team of six founders in Creative HQ's 2017 FinTech Accelerator programme. Their story provides a great example of what you can accomplish when you operate with focus and integrity, move with speed, and follow through on your promises. Below is an excerpt from a 2022 story we wrote based on an interview with Leighton Roberts, one of the founders and co-CEO of Sharesies.

Two Mates Throwing Ideas Around

It's not often you come across a startup with six co-founders at the helm. In 2017, the minds behind Sharesies - founders Leighton Roberts, Brooke Roberts, Sonya Williams, Ben Crotty, Martyn Smith and Richard Clark - were working together on different projects but had never all met, and never explored the idea of an entrepreneurial relationship.

That was until Sonya began to question why investing was not accessible, easy or even possible unless you had a significant amount of money. The average Kiwi was missing out.

At the time, Leighton happened to be running an investment group as a hobby. Each week, he and a handful of others would deposit \$50 from each person to invest together. Sonya caught wind of it, and after a few coffees and inviting 4 others into the conversation, they came up with their business idea: they wanted to financially empower Kiwis and give everyone equal access to investing, whether they had \$5 or \$5 million.



Founding team in the Kiwibank FinTech Accelerator 2017.

The Leap of Faith Deadline

In 2017, Creative HQ and KiwiBank teamed up to launch the KiwiBank FinTech Accelerator. The programme gave the founders a deadline of sorts, to give up their day jobs and start working full time on the startup.

They took the giant leap of faith, being granted three months of unpaid leave from their employers to tackle the startup head-on. At this point, they knew they wanted to create a platform that provided a balance of financial education and access to investing for everyday New Zealanders. They needed a programme to focus the idea and develop it into a product.

If you want to take a good crack at it, I think it is important to go all-in on your business dream if you are able to. It was a big decision since we were all pretty happy in our careers, but we decided quickly that we wanted to take the leap of faith and really throw ourselves into it. Even though I was only going on three months' leave from KiwiBank, I made it clear that I had no intention of coming back."

”

Learnings from the Creative HQ Programme

Among other things, the team spent the first weeks of the three-month programme identifying their purpose, values, and priorities as a business. With the wide range of experiences offered through the accelerator, the team was able to cherry-pick what best suited their needs and would be most valuable to them.

“

During the accelerator, there is so much choice in front of you, but you really need to own the experience because you're there to create a business for yourself. The accelerator creates a great environment to start a business – you've just got to make the most of it because you're there for a very finite period.

”

After the Accelerator

With their vision, purpose and elevator pitch polished, it was time to begin building the Sharesies platform to enable everyday Kiwis to access investment, with no minimum dollar amount required. While startups in Creative HQ programmes often launch their businesses before the end of the accelerator programme, the Sharesies team knew that they weren't quite ready for go-live.

"When you're dealing with people's money, and high-risk stuff, you've absolutely got to make sure that you wait until the time is right to go live. And we knew that we weren't ready to launch at the end of the programme – you've got to cut your own path and do what is right for you. So, the day after the accelerator ended, we turned up to Creative HQ for our official first day of work on our own."

The team ended up working out of the Creative HQ co-working space for a month before they moved into their own office space.

"Arriving at our own office is still one of our proudest moments as a business. Looking back on our growth, it felt slow at the time, but it moved fast. In that one year, we moved around a lot because we quickly outgrew the spaces we moved into."

Across the Ditch and Beyond

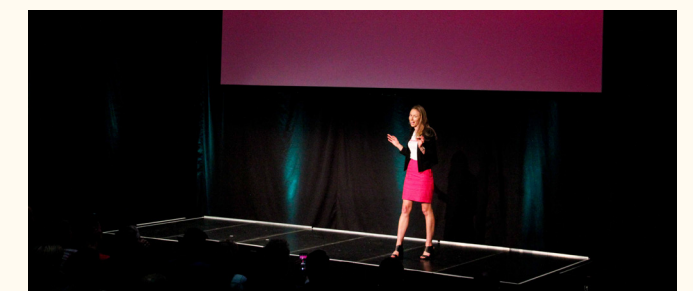
Nowadays, Sharesies is home to 230 full-time employees and provides an investment platform that is used by approximately 550,000 people in New Zealand, 40,000 of whom are children. That's over 10% of New Zealanders.

Despite its huge growth and success thus far, Sharesies still considers itself a small company but has grand ambitions for the future. They've launched in Australia, and are keen to continue growing the number of Australians currently using the platform. The team have also set their sights on expanding to other countries in the future.

Advice to Founders

Leighton says their biggest piece of advice to anyone starting out is to keep your purpose front of mind because you need to be able to clearly articulate what impact you are going to make.

"A common misconception about business is that you cannot be equally motivated by purpose and profit at the same time. At Sharesies, our purpose is what got us started, and our profit is what will enable us to grow. They are equally important, and we will be keeping them as parallel priorities in our business going forward. There is absolutely no need to sacrifice one for the other, they work best together."



Founder Brooke Roberts at the Kiwibank FinTech Accelerator 2017 Demo Day.

Hnry

Startup Stories

The FinTech Accelerator programme alumni Hnry is a great example of the power of building a scalable solution on a straightforward problem that is experienced by many people. We sat down with James Fuller, the co-founder and CEO of Hnry to help us tell their story.

What is Hnry?

Hnry, founded by James and Claire Fuller, is an all-in-one accounting service for sole traders that takes care of all of their payments and expenses, their taxes, and all of their accounting needs on a pay as you go basis. It basically simplifies the financial aspects of self-employment.

Lightning Lab FinTech 2018 Program

When Hnry applied for the Lightning Lab FinTech 2018 program, the business was in its infancy with a beta product it launched in April 2017. The company, which consisted of Fuller and his partner Claire, operated on a bootstrap model with around 35 customers and minimal revenue. The early days involved lots of manual processes and a focus on the validation of their business idea.

“

You’d never really know whether it was going to be something unless we go full time into this and spend three months and, you know, if it doesn’t work, after three months, at least, you’ve given it a proper go.

”

Impact of the Accelerator Program

Participating in the accelerator was a turning point for Hnry.

“The program itself forced us to take our business seriously”

They were able to justify quitting both of their jobs and dedicating full-time effort to its development.

The program’s environment fostered creativity, provided valuable networks, and helped refine their business model. This intensive period was crucial in determining the viability and future direction of Hnry.



James from Hnry at the Kiwibank 2018 FinTech Accelerator Demo Day.

Post-Accelerator Highs and Lows

After the accelerator, Hnry experienced a mix of successes and challenges. They raised funding, grew their team, and expanded cautiously, mindful of their responsibilities to investors. While some early experimental advertising campaigns didn’t meet expectations, key hires who believed in Hnry’s mission contributed to its growth. Over the years after the accelerator, the company has been able to surpass its expectations for its significant milestones, which has built enthusiasm within the team and amongst Hnry’s stakeholders.

Expanding to Australia and Growing Today

This expansion proved timely, allowing the company to establish itself in Australia and grow significantly. Hnry now handles over \$2 billion in annualised payments, has over 100 staff and serves tens of thousands of customers across multiple countries.

Advice for Aspiring Entrepreneur

Fuller advises aspiring entrepreneurs that starting a business is challenging and will test one’s resolve.

For those going into an accelerator programme, he emphasises the importance of working hard, being open to challenges, and realising that success in an accelerator program is about pushing your limits and justifying your business idea in a competitive environment.

“

Starting a business, having an idea, taking it to fruition, that is difficult. Being in an environment around people who will get the most out of you by pushing you, by asking the difficult questions is very important, because no one else is going to ask you difficult questions.

”

Impact Created by Hnry

Hnry’s impact extends beyond financial services; it has democratised self-employment by reducing the fear and complexity associated with tax and compliance.

“

Self-employment came with a huge amount of baggage and anxiety. People didn’t feel comfortable earning self employed income, whereas Hnry has kind of made that a possibility and a reality for so many people. There’s this excitement about the possibilities of going out on your own and doing your own thing.

”

The platform empowers individuals to confidently pursue self-employment, contributing to economic growth and recovery. This positive effect is felt not only by the sole traders but also by the governments benefiting from efficient tax collection.

FTN Motion

Startup Stories

You can't go far in Wellington without seeing a Streetdog from FTN Motion cruising by you on the roads. They are rideable works of art. We were fortunate enough to be able to work with the FTN team in our startup incubator programme starting in 2020. Their story is a great example of the unique challenges of building a consumer product company, especially during a global pandemic. We sat down with Luke Sinclair, one of the founders of FTN Motion, to help us tell their story.

Origin Story

Friends Luke Sinclair and Kendall Bristow were based in Auckland when they began toying with the idea of creating electricity powered street bikes. Not e-bikes, not quad-bikes but beautifully designed, smart and locally manufactured street bikes. Engineers by trade, the pair began tinkering in their garages with the idea of strapping electric power onto pushbikes, before eventually playing with the idea of converting a classic moped to run entirely on electricity. But the idea stayed in the garage until the pair moved to Wellington in early 2020.

Like many Kiwis, Luke and Kendall took the 24-hour window before the Covid-19 lockdown hit to head out and snap up as many supplies, tools and materials as they could get their hands on. The duo saw the lockdown-induced downtime as a prime opportunity to focus on actually building a real, working electric street bike prototype.

"It was forced time off from the day job, so we were presented with a real opportunity to get creative and crack into building out some early prototype designs for the bike. At that time we still didn't really know what we wanted to do with the idea. We just knew that lockdown was a great opportunity to work on the project."



Kendall Bristow, Saskia Thornton and Luke Sinclair from FTN Motion.

Building a Business

Post lockdown and now with a prototype, the duo were told by a friend that they should look into Creative HQ.

"The terms incubator, accelerator, startups were all foreign concepts to us. We were engineers, not entrepreneurs. But once we looked into it, we figured out pretty quickly that it sounded exactly like the kind of programme we needed to see where this bike prototype could go."

The team entered the 2020 Creative HQ Incubator. The incubator provided the team with the necessary office space, mentorship, and guidance to transition to building a viable business. Creative HQ connected them to Angel HQ and other investor networks, helping them navigate the capital-raising world. This environment was pivotal in fostering a positive and optimistic atmosphere for the founders. By the end of March 2021, a full year after the first prototype was built in lockdown, FTN had raised half a million dollars in capital.



FTN Motion workshop.

Post Incubator

By this time, the lockdown-garage-prototype had evolved into the beautifully designed FTN Motion 'Streetdog' electric street bike. Like many startups, the FTN Motion team now had to find early adopters to sell to. They ran a campaign to pre-sell 100 spots to early adopters and:

"The slots were all snapped up within the course of a single weekend following a story in the paper about the Streetdog".

The team then went back to their original investors for a second capital raise, seeking \$700k to fund the manufacturing of the first 100 bikes. This raise was a breeze compared to the first, with \$900k total being raised in the space of a month.

The Electric Future for FTN Motion

FTN Motion has delivered approximately 160 bikes to customers, with more on a wait list. Additionally the business is working on new products and expanding into international markets.

Looking ahead, FTN Motion aims to make the two-wheel community more accessible to a broader market, particularly focusing on the low-speed city commuter segment. The company sees potential in expanding beyond the Streetdog model and developing scalable products that appeal to users who would not typically consider riding a moped or motorcycle.

FTN Motion have recently made the move to base their manufacturing in Hamilton, but will still have several team members based in Wellington. Luke credits the supportive conditions in Wellington and the opportunities provided by Creative HQ as crucial elements in FTN Motion's journey.

“

For us, I can't imagine having made the progress we have in developing a company in the way we have, if we were somewhere else. I think it's an incredible environment.

”

GeoBind

Startup Stories

GeoBind is one of the more recent success stories to come through Creative HQ's doors. Founded by partners Alice Hosted and Doug Sturrock, GeoBind is a great illustration of the highly creative, impact-focused companies that are now being built in New Zealand and taking on the world. They participated in our 2023 Impact Accelerator. We sat down with Doug and Alice to help us tell their story.

Origin Story

GeoBind's vision is to provide an environmentally friendly alternative for the construction industry, helping to achieve New Zealand's 2030 carbon reduction goals and healthier homes.

The pioneering startup has developed a blended mineral-based bio aggregate binder for carbon-neutral walling solutions. Their product can be used to create a strong, concrete-like product called hempcrete. Hempcrete can be made into panels, and as a building material is breathable, regulates temperature and humidity, and is also mould resistant and fireproof.



Alice Hosted and Doug Sturrock, Impact Accelerator Showcase 2023.

Acceleration

GeoBind had been ticking away as a project in the background for Doug and Alice for some three years before they applied and were accepted into the 2023 Creative HQ Impact Accelerator.

The 12-week programme came at an opportune time for GeoBind's development, providing the team with essential tools and strategies.

“It was a gap analysis that we didn't know we needed. The accelerator took us I think, in a way from basically a couple of people who had a good idea to entrepreneurs.”

”

After the Accelerator

Post the excitement of the three months of coaching, connection making, mentoring, capability workshops, and pitching, GeoBind's next phase was equally as busy, involving fine-tuning financial projection and gathering additional data, awards recognition and a first major sale.



Doug Sturrock.

Now and Next

GeoBind is currently transitioning from pre-revenue to commercialisation. With logistics and supply chains established, the company is poised to expand into new markets, focusing on product development, marketing, and international sales. Utilising their New Zealand experience as a foundation, the company's sights are set on Australia and California initially. They plan to leverage partnerships to ease entry into these new markets, with an emphasis on sustainable and modular building systems.

The team has ambitions to significantly influence the sustainable construction landscape, educating and connecting communities around alternative building materials and fostered a movement towards more environmentally friendly construction practices.

“We want to give people options for different ways of doing things.”

“We made our first big sale just after we left Creative HQ. We managed to fulfil a shipment down to Nelson with 30 tonnes which was huge. That was a real milestone for us.”

”

Connecting to Funding

Early-stage funding is crucial for startups in New Zealand, serving as the lifeblood that supports their journey from conception to growth. This initial investment enables entrepreneurs to transform innovative ideas into viable businesses by providing the essential resources needed for activities like sales and marketing, product development, and operational setup.

Early-stage funding acts as a catalyst for momentum, allowing entrepreneurs to achieve key product and revenue milestones, which in turn, increase the value of their company.

In our close-knit startup ecosystem here in New Zealand, early-stage funding offers more than just financial support; it comes with mentorship, strategic advice, and access to a network of industry contacts, which can be invaluable for navigating the challenges of the business world.

We know from the 2023 UpStart Nation report that, despite the growing number of Kiwi UpStart success stories and the early-stage heavy lifting done by private and angel investors, there's a pressing need to enhance the availability of seed capital to sustain and grow this vibrant ecosystem. We believe that a healthy relationship between the entrepreneur community and the investor community in New Zealand starts with the support of more founders who commit to their ventures, prove value and become attractive investment opportunities.

Creative HQ helps all of the founders who engage with us to make their startups more investable. And for those who wish to seek external investment, we help prepare them for those conversations

and introduce them to some of the highest quality, early-stage investors in New Zealand. Sometimes that first investment is the \$50,000 required to sustain them to the next stage of validation. Other times their first investment is a deep, multi-million dollar pool of capital that fuels their rapid growth. The current average size of a first raise for startups exiting our accelerator programmes is \$614,000.

Through the course of the Lightning Lab accelerator programmes, Creative HQ created 12 Limited Partnerships which raised a total of \$1.8 million from the early stage investment community to help 86 startups with the initial investment which allowed them to take full advantage of our programme. Over the years, we have also been privileged to have sponsorship from key New Zealand Enterprises of over \$3 million to help run our startup programmes, with an additional \$80,000 in grant funding from them that went directly to startups.

\$300 M

Total funding raised by Creative HQ startups

\$1.3 B

Total valuation of active Creative HQ startups

46%

Of startups in accelerators who raise funding

57

Investors in Creative HQ accelerator limited partnerships

3200

Attendees at Creative HQ investor showcases

10

Creative HQ investor showcase

\$614,000

Average size of first raise for Creative HQ accelerator startups

¹ Data from Creative HQ Accelerator programmes

Creative HQ and Angel HQ Relationship

Funding Stories

The strong relationship between Creative HQ and Angel HQ is a testament to the symbiotic relationship between startups and investors that is thriving in Wellington. It also demonstrates the collaborative nature of the startup ecosystem here in New Zealand. We sat down with Dave Allison, Manager of Angel HQ, to help us tell the story of the long-time relationship between Angel HQ and Creative HQ.

A Shared Vision for Startup Growth

Angel HQ was initially developed in 2010 as an extension of Grow Wellington, the parent organisation of Creative HQ. As an early pioneer in startup investment, Angel HQ's formation was driven by the need to support emerging companies, a goal closely aligned with Creative HQ's mission. This shared vision laid the foundation for a robust partnership that would help shape the emerging startup landscape in Wellington. Angel HQ went on to become an independent incorporated society in 2013.

Collaborative Efforts in Accelerating Startups

One of the most significant collaborations between the two organisations was the Lightning Lab Accelerator program. Launched by Creative HQ in 2013, the program was a groundbreaking initiative in New Zealand's startup history. It was the first startup accelerator programme in New Zealand and one of the first in the southern hemisphere. Integral to the success of this first program was the investment and support from the Angel HQ network.



Angel HQ meet-up.

“We had support from those investors for a brand new program, based on the credibility of Creative HQ, and the relationship that already existed with them.”

The accelerator created a limited partnership and a fund that both provided investment into incoming teams and helped provide funding to run the programme. Most of the initial investors in the limited partnership were Angel HQ members.

“There was a time when we were getting closer to launch and ...we couldn't confirm that (the government) would fund the program...The investors were all ready to support either way.. One of the investors... provided free space for the programme, which is transformational.”

The investors went on to be the key mentors in the programme. Their role proved to be critical for the companies both within and after the programme, as they sought to secure funding for growth.

“The reason companies were happy with their lead investors at the end wasn't just in the investment that came but they had three months of spending time together and learning about one another...And that's powerful and kind of uniquely positioned in Wellington for just how accessible everybody is.”

Adapting to the Evolving Ecosystem

As the startup ecosystem matured, the dynamics between Creative HQ and Angel HQ evolved. Recognising the changing needs of startups, both organisations adapted their strategies to provide more targeted support. The Lightning Lab programme maintained an advisory board made up of Angel HQ investors. Early feedback indicated that the teams needed to reach a higher level of maturity before pitching for investment. So, programme elements were added and applications were evaluated differently to meet these needs.

As Angel HQ matured as a group, it started putting on more investment events. In turn, Creative HQ responded by shifting their programme demo days from being investor events to being community events, and they channelled teams seeking investment to the Angel HQ investment events. This adaptability underscored both organisations' dedication to the long-term success of the startups they nurtured.

“Financial literacy and startup literacy has grown massively in the last 10 years. Once upon a time, my main job was helping people to just talk about what they were trying to do. Just explain that and understand that they needed a customer, someone paying to make that viable in a business sense...the average pitch that I see is a million times better than it used to be.”

The Future of Creative HQ and Angel HQ

Looking ahead, the relationship between Creative HQ and Angel HQ remains crucial in guiding the startup community through an ever-changing landscape. Their ongoing collaboration is expected to continue shaping the trajectory of startups, emphasising the importance of early-stage support and building strong relationships within the investment community.

“I think there will always be people meeting people and deciding to back ideas at an early stage.”

Spotlight Events

Events designed to stimulate the minds of innovators, entrepreneurs, creatives and designers within Wellington.

We have run over 300 events with over 15,000 attendees



Spotlight International Work

Creative HQ has worked closely with New Zealand G2G the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and New Zealand Trade and Enterprise to export our services to the world and connect innovators around the world back to Wellington.

In doing so, we shine a spotlight on Wellington and New Zealand as global leaders in Innovation, and validate the quality of our services and the depth of our expertise against the best in the world.

The map below illustrates where we have delivered our services around the world, including:

- India
- Philippines
- Indonesia
- Japan
- Vietnam
- Singapore
- Sri Lanka
- Australia
- Saudi Arabia
- Thailand
- Vanuatu



Growing Expert Talent

We have been growing expert talent through educational programmes since 2015. This work led to the creation of our School of Innovation, which is thriving and growing today.

The UpStart Nation Report highlights the shortage of appropriately skilled and experienced talent required to help startups to grow and more mature companies to evolve and adapt.

This matches our findings over the last decade regarding the need for work ready problem solvers, and it is why we have invested our time and energy into our School of Innovation offerings.

School of Innovation

In 2019 we began to develop courses specifically designed to fill this gap. Our [School of Innovation](#) was officially launched in 2021, as a place to grow expert talent in innovation. The roots of these teachings, as with all of our work at Creative HQ, stem from our experience of working with startups. After years of helping startups succeed, we realised that a lot of the tools and methodologies from the startup world are actually useful for creative problem solving in a wide range of areas and can be used to help all kinds of organisations to unlock their innovation potential.

Mission

The key mission of Creative HQ's School of Innovation is to build Connections, Capability and Confidence to innovate. We believe in the power of innovation tools and methodologies and mindsets to solve problems - big or small. Our programs nurture creativity and empower teams to think big, move fast, and drive change. We provide a safe space to experiment and push boundaries.

Our structured programmes give teams the skills and mindsets needed to drive innovation from within. We go beyond textbooks and lectures. Our programmes are designed to be immersive and experiential so that participants can immediately apply their learning to their real life.



School of Innovation cohort.



School of Innovation cohort.

Our Track Record

We've had the privilege of working with hundreds of participants from a diverse range of organisations - from charities in Aotearoa New Zealand like Plunket to large international organisations like the Asian Development Bank. We have supported participants to solve problems in areas such as health care, education and international development.

Our Vision for the Future

Albert Einstein said that **"No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it."** Looking ahead, the School of Innovation will continue to work with a wide range of organisations to support the cross pollination of skills and ideas. We want to empower more and more people and organisations to innovate and drive change.

80%

Participants who said they were more capable, confident and connected as a result of their experience with Creative HQ

38

SOI programmes run

498

Total number of of SOI participants (2021-2023)



Case Studies

Growing Expert Talent Stories

The following case studies highlight some of the impact we have been able to create through our earlier education programmes and our School of Innovation offerings.

Venture Up

Growing Expert Talent Stories

Creative HQ has been empowering New Zealand's youth to think differently since 2015. We see youth entrepreneurial development as essential to building a vibrant startup ecosystem and to expanding the pipeline of entrepreneurs. Since we started Venture Up in 2015, almost 250 youth (16–24 years old) have completed the programme, learning essential entrepreneurial leadership skills for their future. Here is the story of the Venture Up programme.

Origin of Venture Up

Venture Up was launched as an avenue for young founders to learn and develop their innovation capability as they begin to make their mark in the world. The first programme was formed as a collaboration between The Lion Foundation Young Enterprise Scheme (YES) and Creative HQ, sponsored by Wellington City Council and Victoria University.

Following the success of the 2015 pilot programme, funding from the Ministry of Youth Development and other partners has paved the way for the young founders programme.



Venture Up cohort.

How We Did It

Partnering with Young Enterprise to form a pipeline of young founders, the Venture Up programme focused on teaching participants to manage time efficiently and strengthen self-motivation to stay on track and achieve their goals.

Venture Up's 2021 programme ran from January to February 2021, with a mix of in-person and digital workshops, speaker events and coaching sessions. This immersive and practical way of learning ensures youth are equipped with the tools, techniques and mindset to practice innovation in the modern-day workplace or turn passions into successful ventures.

"I'm leaving with a different perspective of what it means to be an entrepreneur, that moves away from the fantasy and hype. My motivation to change the world has never been higher."

Sam Waayer, Venture Up Alumni

Venture Up's 2021 hybrid model, saw a combined library of self-led innovation resources, alongside video content from former participants, startup founders from the wider New Zealand ecosystem, and support from the programme team both virtually and through strategically-timed in-person workshops.

The programme included:

- Weekly coaching, with the programme lead – an experienced founder.
- Mentoring sessions on request, with subject matter experts, where participants received one-on-one advice on creating sustainable business models, brand development and marketing, and more.
- And the programme culminated in an "Ultimate Business Day" event, where participants could connect in-person within the cohort, hear from founders and employees within startups, and build their networks.

The Result

We ran eight Venture Up programmes from 2015 through 2021. The young founders have been spread out across Aotearoa, in both the north and south island, from Whangerei to Invercargill.

The programme's focus on building an entrepreneurial mindset has empowered our participants to not only start their own ventures but also to take those thought processes into roles and work innovatively within existing organisations. You will see some of the stories of Venture Up alumni in some of our other case studies.

“

...A sign of real education is a change in behaviour – and we have surely seen proof of that tonight. These young people are the very people who are going to change things. They constantly challenge the routines we cling so tightly to by asking 'why not?' – we want to seed our community with people like that!

Ian Williamson, Former Pro-Vice-Chancellor. Professor of Victoria University's School of Business

”

Get Funded

Growing Expert Talent Stories

We have been helping scientists get their big ideas funded since 2015. GetFunded, a collaboration between KiwiNet and Creative HQ, was developed to help scientists commercialise their intellectual property (IP). This is a great illustration of the power of collaboration between two organisations to tackle a problem that has challenged New Zealand for years. Here is the story of the GetFunded programme.

Origin of Get Funded

In 2015, we partnered with Kiwinet to take scientists from all over the country who have amazing big ideas, based on years of research with mega-reams of data and ask them to condense this into a 5-minute funding pitch. Pretty tough. But we were bold and we wanted to experiment.

How We Did It

Two days, four teams, plenty of food and a fast-paced workshop in that first pilot programme

We started by learning about how to protect your IP and understanding the high-impact problem being addressed and why the solution is unique. Then, we helped the teams learn about their customers and their pain points and build a lean canvas that lays out their business proposition on a single page.

With a solid basis to work on, we moved on to pitching. Our participants spent the second day getting a masterclass in pitching and then developing and practising their pitch culminating in a final presentation to a panel of experts. The panellists were able to give them advice on their presentation style as well as how to sharpen their case for potential investment.



The Result

Over the two days, we helped people by:

- Giving them the basics around IP.
- Helping them clarify and condense their problem so the ordinary person could understand it.
- Developing personas around their key audiences.
- Developing a one page business plan.
- Giving them a masterclass in pitching.
- Rapidly crafting a pitch deck.
- And giving them real pitching experience.

After just two days, four teams in that first programme had turned their roughly scrawled one-page ideas into a compelling pitch that had the three judges excited about the future of the projects.

The “GetFunded” pilot workshops we delivered with KiwiNet in 2015 were deemed so successful that the programme has since grown into a national initiative which is run annually in Auckland, Christchurch and Wellington attracting hundreds of academics each year. We ran GetFunded with KiwiNet through 2021, when they took over running the programme themselves. It is still an active and successful programme for Kiwinet.

The tight time frames applied to the workshop forced teams to distil what was important and concentrate on what elements of their pitch would really move the dial. Teams better understood the steps they needed to take to be in a position to pitch for funds. And above all, they had made connections and learnt things that they could take back into their workplaces.

“

I wanted to say to you and your team – I have been so awestruck on how you all rolled with the various challenges with ease, and it has been a joy and privilege to work with you on our GetFunded projects.

GetFunded 2015 participant

”

Whānau Āwhina Plunket

T7 Masterclass

Growing Expert Talent Stories

Whānau Āwhina Plunket is a charity and Aotearoa's largest support service for the health and wellbeing of tamariki under-five and their whānau. We helped Whānau Āwhina Plunket build their capabilities and confidence through our most extensive School of Innovation programme - the T7 Innovation Masterclass. We sat down with some of the participants and stakeholders from this programme to help us tell their story.

The Opportunity

Recognising their need to innovate, Whānau Āwhina Plunket had two objectives: to grow their internal innovation capability by developing innovative skill sets and to explore different funding models to diversify their reliance on government funding.

Our Approach

Creative HQ has a T7 Innovation Masterclass Programme which equips people with the tools and techniques of innovation necessary to solve complex problems in a structured, confident and efficient manner, applicable across multiple contexts. Plunket chose to work with the first four tiers of the Programme to develop their skills to a level that would enable them to facilitate internal innovation design processes.

The Creative HQ approach to learning is to learn while doing and the challenge of diversifying funding streams was a perfect opportunity to solve a critical problem while learning skills.

A small group of six, representing organisational diversity, was chosen to participate in the Programme. All participants also had demanding day jobs so the programme was designed to span four months with one tier completed each month. The monthly programme was a combination of 2-4 day sprints to top and tail the Tier with meetings in between times to progress tasks, check in and learn from each other.



Plunket team in Creative HQ's T7 Masterclass, 2021.

How We Helped

The Programme provided a well-tested structure on which to explore the problem and test a solution with potential users. The generous time allowed for discussion throughout the programme meant that the team had the opportunity to build strong and supportive relationships with each other as well as test what they were learning in their everyday jobs.

Creative HQ's ability to bring in entrepreneurs and additional subject matter expertise and connect them with the Whānau Āwhina Plunket team was extraordinarily useful as the concept and business case developed.

"I recommend this program to all people no matter their age, background or field of work. This program has given me the confidence to harness my skills and focus them into a project or direction that gets the best outcome. This program also has connected me to people out of my normal day to day life so I really love that."

The pacing of the programme allowed the team to present regular progress reports to their senior leaders resulting in strong high-level support for the work to continue once the T7 Masterclass Programme was completed.

The Results

The solution developed during the T7 Masterclass Programme resulted in strong Board support to build a Minimal Viable Product (MVP) for an online marketplace to support parents of under 5 years of age. The intention of this platform is to combine Plunket's offerings with an external marketplace to connect the parental community with products and services.



Plunket team in Creative HQ's T7 Masterclass, 2021.

“

A great programme. Unlike other innovation programmes that I have been involved with that simply bring people into your business and leave you with a plan, the Creative HQ Innovation Masterclass, brings your people together, developing and embedding skills that you get to retain, as well as a tested plan that you can move forward with.

Participant

”

Datacom Talent Elevator

Growing Expert Talent Stories

Creative HQ was contracted by Datacom in mid-2022 to help develop the Talent Elevator programme – talent development that puts innovation and an immersive experience at the core of the graduate experience. To develop the programme, the Creative HQ design team worked closely with Datacom to not only map out and develop the graduate programme journey, but also to identify and address potential barriers in the career pathway process for young New Zealanders.

The Talent Elevator Programme

Talent Elevator is now a pioneering initiative, reshaping the entry and growth path for newcomers in New Zealand's tech sector since its launch in early 2023. Centred on comprehensive onboarding and development, it's crafted to instil a sense of belonging, elevate technical and interpersonal skills, and ready participants for customer engagements. The programme's innovative approach includes a one-week induction, regular masterclasses, mentoring, and a year-long suite of activities geared towards career development, teamwork, and innovation, underpinned by managerial feedback and performance metrics for ongoing enhancement.

“

Working with Creative HQ on this project ensured we created a high-value and sustainable programme. Talent Elevator has created a launch platform for our graduates by giving them a strong start to their career by creating a sense of belonging to Datacom and the core skills for success.

Farnoosh Farahi
Associate Director, Engagement and Wellbeing, Datacom

”

Its inaugural year marked significant achievements, successfully implementing a customised onboarding experience that garnered high praise for fostering connections, deepening understanding of Datacom's culture, and enhancing readiness for professional roles.

Talent Elevator's tailored agenda includes scheduled activities and updates to refine and broaden the year-long programme. This reflects Datacom's dedication to innovation in talent development, aiming to cultivate a skilled, unified workforce. Through its unique and groundbreaking approach, the Talent Elevator programme not only supports the individual growth of industry newcomers but also aligns with the broader vision of fostering a competent and cohesive tech workforce in New Zealand.



Datacom Talent Elevator cohort, Australia 2022

Spotlight

Corporate Innovation

Corporate Innovation is vital for maintaining competitiveness in dynamic markets, adapting to changing landscapes, driving growth through new revenue streams, enhancing operational efficiency, meeting evolving customer needs, and attracting top talent. Embracing innovation enables companies to differentiate themselves, capture market share, and build resilience, ensuring long-term success in an ever-evolving business environment.

Our journey into Corporate Innovation began in 2016 with Trade Me. Since then, our footprint has expanded significantly. This has included the design and delivery of the Fonterra Disrupt Programme, partnering with Beca to implement their New Ventures Accelerator, and designing the Transpower Innovation Playbook. Over the past eight years, we have worked with and for an illustrious array of entities, including Zespri, Datacom, Janssen, Sanford, Waste Management, Contact Energy, Tax Management NZ, Flick, and Power Co, Kiwibank, Westpac among others. Each project has been a testament to our unwavering commitment to excellence and our steadfast belief in the power of innovation to drive meaningful change across organisations large and small.

As we reflect on our journey, as with our work across all sectors, we're reminded that true progress is not measured by individual achievements but by the collective strides we make together and the connections that we are able to make, both across executives from different companies, and between the private and public sectors and startups.

Creative HQ continues to work with corporates. Some of this work is from our School of Innovation, helping them to build an innovation mindset across the organisation, to adopt disruptive technologies such as AI, and to establish their own pool of skilled facilitators. With others, we engage around their CSR, ESG and Philanthropic Strategies.

The common catalyst across all of our work with Corporates is transitions thinking: understanding that large organisations, like startups, encounter regular transition points that present opportunities for them to adapt and grow.

The Thrive Programme

Growing Expert Talent Stories

In 2020, more than ever, we realised the importance of rising to common challenges with a spirit of community and contribution. Covid-19 forced business owners who had run their business the same way for a decade – or longer – to look for new ways to generate revenue and keep their doors open. Businesses had to adapt to remote delivery reality, and client-facing businesses had to quickly re-think their offering in line with the ever-evolving quarantine restrictions. As Covid-19 hit, we worked with WellingtonNZ to develop a programme to help small businesses get through it with new ideas and new ways to deliver value. The programme was called Thrive, and here is the story of it.

The Thrive Programme

Creative HQ developed a series of workshops with online course support, run in partnership with WellingtonNZ, to reach small and medium-sized businesses in Wellington who were facing challenges due to Covid-19.

The programme involved cohorts of up to 10 participants per session who attended workshops virtually and, during Covid-19 Level 2, in person. These workshops were supported with online course materials and work done by participants between sessions.

With the Thrive self-directed course and facilitated workshops, we've effectively created a crash course in entrepreneurial problem-solving for local businesses to use in these new and very uncertain times.



The Result

Through the Thrive programme, we helped 118 businesses across the Wellington region to rethink their post-Covid-19 strategy, to pivot or validate new ideas.

Some of the key learnings Thrive participants took home were:

- Re-thinking the way they approach problems and brainstorm solutions.
- How to interview customers to understand their problems and validate that new solution concepts are valuable to them.
- Learning new, valuable tools they can apply to solve any challenge in their business.

“

I came out of the workshop with a completely different plan than what I thought I would be doing. It was making time to look back over what you've been doing and see opportunities that you hadn't thought of yet. It was great being around a group of other creative, motivated people. It was energising.

”

Spotlight

Young Innovators

We know from research that Gen Z, the generation currently finishing up high school and entering the workforce, want to be more innovative but many feel they lack the skills to put their ideas into practice.

Through our School of Innovation, Creative HQ runs a number of programmes that focus on fostering the next generation of innovators and entrepreneurs. One of them is the Young Founders Incubator which supports startup founders aged 17-25 to develop their business ideas.

This 12-week program is designed to develop the skills, capabilities, and confidence of Gen-Z entrepreneurs. The program brings together a cohort of young entrepreneurs and provides them with access to the innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystem. The approach includes mentorship, subject matter expert speakers, ecosystem involvement, and opportunities for validation and pivoting. The programme allows some teams to validate and pivot their ideas while taking some startup ideas to their next phase of business development. The 2023 cohort included startups such as Melitta Skin and Better Buzz.

Another programme is our Youth Innovation Hack which empowers a cohort of youth to tackle challenges faced by New Zealand businesses, guided through Creative HQ's innovation process and tools.

The Youth Innovation Hack was launched in 2022 and so is now in its third year. It was born from a desire to support local businesses recovering from Covid-19, while helping New Zealand youth build the right skills to enter the job market. For the past two years, we partnered with organisations such as Callaghan Innovation, Datacom, Kiwibank, Z Energy, Zealandia and Wellington on a Plate to frame up challenges that can benefit from the creative minds of Gen-Z. We then invited cohorts of 16-24 years old participants to join the programme and come up with innovative solutions to solve the real life problems facing our partner organisations.

For example, one of the challenges in the 2023 Wellington Youth Innovation Hack was from Kiwibank - "How might Kiwibank better support Gen-Z (specifically 13-18 year olds) to be better off financially?" The programme provided the cohort with the tools to conduct research on their peers, and design and test solutions that can help fellow Gen-Zers.

We are big believers in using immersive and hands-on learning as a way to really get young people on board and get them excited about learning new concepts. By using real-life problems presented by well-known local businesses, the participants get more invested and are inspired to dig deep and come up with great solutions.

Providing Thought Leadership for Government

2024 marks 10 years of Creative HQ working with the public sector to encourage, foster, and deliver innovative projects that solve important problems for New Zealand.

Over the past decade, we have helped intrapreneurs in the public sector take on projects ranging from helping prevent Albatross extinction, to helping people break the cycle of poverty, to providing more seamless help for victims of crime, to protecting indigenous peoples’ data sovereignty, to overhauling incentive programmes for innovators, to leveraging lidar data for better environmental sustainability, and on and on.

These projects all have some of the same things in common. They are all taking on new ideas to solve challenging problems and they all have dedicated and talented people driving them with bravery and determination. We have been privileged to work with them all.

Our cornerstone public sector innovation programme has been the GovTech Accelerator. We started running startup-style accelerators in the public sector in 2015 with the R9 Accelerator for the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. In 2017, we branched out on our own and started the New Zealand GovTech Accelerator. The impact of this programme has been undeniable. Over the last seven years, the GovTech Accelerator programme has worked on **52 projects** from **32 different public organisations** with a success rate of **62%**. We have demonstrated our expertise in guiding government projects from ideation to fruition, fast-tracking pilots and solutions within government agencies.

We have also worked in conjunction with New Zealand G2G, New Zealand Trade and Enterprise, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade to help other governments around the world to innovate. Our work has ranged from helping governments be “better for business”, to building startup ecosystems, to helping solve social and environmental challenges in new ways. See the Spotlight Map for all of the countries we have helped. In doing so we have shone a spotlight on Wellington as a Capital City leading the world on creating a better public service for it’s citizens through innovation.

This year marks a strategic shift in our approach to government engagement. Our new focus lies in influencing government strategies and decisions, leveraging our rich experience and insights gained from years of frontline involvement. We aim to be the bridge between innovative ideas and policy formulation, ensuring that the needs of a dynamic startup environment are met with responsive and forward-thinking governance.

As we pivot to our new role, we carry forward the legacy of the 10 years of frontline delivery – the learnings, the collaborations, the network and the successes. Our goal is not just to influence government policies but also to embed an innovation-first mindset within the public sector. We envision a future where government agencies are both facilitators and participants in the innovation journey, creating a sustainable and prosperous ecosystem for New Zealand.



Mayor Tory Whanau at GovTech Accelerator Showcase at the Beehive.



Showcase Day at the Beehive.





Case Studies

Government Innovation Stories

The following case studies highlight some of the impact we have been able to create through our public sector innovation programmes over the last decade.

Protecting Our Albatross

Government Innovation Stories

In our first GovTech Accelerator programme in 2016, we supported a team from the Department of Conservation (DOC) and Fisheries NZ to develop new technologies to protect the Antipodean Albatross population. The team showed enormous creativity and resilience as they chased many opportunity pathways only to find unmovable constraints until they came to the solution that worked. Here is the story of that team, called EARS (Electronic Automated Reporting System), and what they accomplished.

Background

The Antipodean Albatross raise their families in New Zealand and are part of our cultural heritage, but the population is critically endangered due to by-catch mortality in international waters. Mitigation techniques are regulated and when used, they work, but we have no visibility or enforcement of commercial fishing vessel compliance.



Sally Hett of EARS at GovTech Accelerator 2016 Showcase.

How We Did It

The GovTech accelerator helped the EARS team by addressing threemain areas:

- 1. Cost**
Significantly reduced the cost of their Request for Proposal for providers for EARS by an estimated \$360,000 as Fisheries NZ knew exactly what they were tendering for.
- 2. Time**
The accelerator reduced the development time by 12-24 months. This was significant because the population is declining by 10% per year.
- 3. Cross-agency collaboration**
DOC and Fisheries NZ collaborating from the get-go, meant Fisheries NZ understood that the solution was more aligned to their work (in fisheries monitoring than DOC Seabird Biodiversity) and they then led the tendering process.

The Result

In addition to the two years and \$360,000 of savings, the work in the accelerator led to the creation of an electric automated monitoring system to ensure commercial fishing vessel compliance with internationally regulated mitigations (night setting, streamer lines, and lineweighting) while incentivising vessels with better management and supply chain transparency. This should have a significant impact on curbing the extinction rate for the Antipodean Albatross.

Manaaki Tairāwhiti

Government Innovation Stories

Manaaki Tairāwhiti was a project team in our 2021 GovTech Accelerator programme whose focus was on enabling all whānau to flourish. They worked very closely with the New Zealand Ministry of Social Development. Theirs is a story of the perseverance required to create fantastically positive outcomes for people. Here is the story of Manaaki Tairāwhiti.

The Problem

Aotearoa spends more than 50 billion dollars annually on social services that are designed to help everyone thrive. However, these services inadvertently create barriers. Over the last five years, Manaaki Tairāwhiti – an Iwi-led place based initiative – has spearheaded systemic change in the social services sector. The current tool used for collecting whānau needs is not fit for purpose and does not provide real-time data.

How We Did It

The GovTech accelerator helped the Manaaki Tairāwhiti team by addressing threemain areas:

- 1. Cross-agency and community collaboration**
This was a joint project between the Ministry of Social Development and Manaaki Tairāwhiti who worked closely with their front-line navigators, iwi, government officials and community providers to successfully create a solution that works across the system.
- 2. Testing, iterating and validating a solution with users**
The team utilised low-cost, effective methods of testing prototypes with front-line navigators. This allowed them to ensure Urungi is user-centric and fit-for-purpose.
- 3. Cost-saving**
By experimenting, testing and validating a tool that does not require complex or expensive development, the team is able to significantly reduce costs incurred by creating a bespoke tool.



Manaaki Tairāwhiti team winning sponsor prize, GovTech Accelerator 2021.

The Result

With the support of the GovTech Accelerator, the Manaaki Tairāwhiti team has developed Urungi. Urungi is a platform that captures whānau needs, as described by whānau and system barriers from a whanau perspective. Urungi will make the task of gathering information quick and easy for those on the front line.

“Urungi is a tool that communicates the experiences of whānau to social sector decision-makers in real-time, highlighting gaps and barriers put in place by the system as well as what whānau needs aren’t being met.”

Leslynne Jackson, Manaaki Tairāwhiti Programme lead

It uses a simple messaging application that aggregates this information into a dashboard, in real-time, to inform leaders of areas requiring action/change for system improvement.

The project team also secured funding from the The Digital Government Partnership Innovation Fund and was awarded the \$50,000 sponsor prize from the Westpac NZ Government Innovation Fund.

Co-designing Education

Government Innovation Stories

In 2018, we worked with the Ministry of Education and our partner Openfield to run a series of summits with the intent of co-designing the future of education. The programme, called Kōrero Mātauranga, was an enormous undertaking that tested and honed our facilitation skills. This is a great illustration of the power of being bold to create positive change. Here is the story of Kōrero Mātauranga.

Background

To create transformational change in the education sector, Creative HQ and partner Openfield created Kōrero Mātauranga – the most inclusive and diverse education conversation ever to be held in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

In late 2017, the New Zealand Labour Party formed a coalition government and quickly set about the planning and implementation of transformational change across multiple portfolios. Education was one of these target portfolios, led by incoming Minister Chris Hipkins.

The Labour-led government wasn't going to be satisfied by a small, minor update. They wanted a transformational, thirty-year strategy that would impact multiple generations and create an inclusive modern learning environment – an environment with engaged learners whose learning experience met their individual needs.



Summit participants.

How We Did It

Kōrero Mātauranga was born to help the government bring together everyone to solve a challenge. The Ministry hosted two summits: one in Christchurch, one in Auckland. 1600 people attended. Students, teachers, parents, employers, Māori, Pasifika, children and young people, people with disabilities and learning support needs, junior teachers in small rural schools, young people on probation and small employers were all invited to have their voices heard.

To get the best possible results, we relied on three core principles that informed every aspect of the summit design process.

Co-design at All Levels

The future of education needed to involve all citizens. For that level of co-design to happen, the summits themselves required a high-level of co-design from a diverse group of people that represented multiple perspectives across the education sector.

1. Design Council

A Design Council, made up of twelve representatives from across the sector, was formed to create a shared sense of ownership over the process. Over six co-design workshops, the Council developed a baseline of shared understanding of the context and challenges and a shared vision for outcomes.

2. Bespoke Engagement Pathways

We developed engagement pathways with multiple touchpoints to enable engagement with stakeholder groups. The groups we focused on for this work were Māori, disability groups, businesses, parents and students.

3. A balance of content and experience

The summits had to create a holistic experience that enabled authentic, inclusive and enjoyable conversations while also producing a tangible outcome that would inform the education reform.

4. Content

Over 40 local and international speakers contributed to each summit. We framed the thinking through videos and articles and had a group of 50 representatives that contributed to our thinking during the co-design process. Finally, we deployed a digital solution that allowed us to manage the inputs and outputs of the conversations taking place and ensure full traceability of an idea surfaced at any time.

5. Experience

Creating a space where people felt safe to express their views and emotions was vital to fostering authentic dialogue. Making the physical space and collaborative journey work for the energy and movement of people, as well as the rhythm and pace of the mahi was a top consideration.



Former Prime Minister Jacinda Adern speaking at Kōrero Mātauranga, 2018.

Participant Centricity

The scale and importance of the Summits required robust pre-planning and impeccable execution – all delivered within a seven-week time frame. However, we needed to preserve a high degree of situational awareness and operational flexibility, before and during the events, to ensure that participant feedback was heard, analysed and used in real-time – this meant we could course-correct as the process unfolded.

A robust operational backbone was designed to deliver a seamless experience throughout the two days. Our process was designed to enrich the main programme with multiple possibilities for participants to engage and contribute in meaningful, bespoke ways.

Results

Since the summits, the Ministry of Education has engaged Creative HQ to embed co-design into several projects. This summit:

- Was one of the most significant co-design projects ever undertaken by the New Zealand government.
- Resulted in over 1,000 documented possibilities, ideas and principles synthesised into directional priorities to form the foundation of the future system.
- Created a set of core shared values to frame the next steps of the conversation.

Around 25,000 New Zealanders participated in the Kōrero Mātauranga Education Conversation in some way and took the opportunity to let the Ministry of Education know what they thought either by attending the Summits, or other meetings, and completing surveys about the future of education.

RDTI CX Redesign

Government Innovation Stories

In 2022, we worked with Callaghan Innovation and their government partners to reimagine, design, and test a new customer experience for the Research and Development Tax Incentive Scheme (RDTI). It was a very important project for all of the agencies involved and for the entire research community in New Zealand. This project illustrates the power of collaboration and focus when it comes to solving challenging problems. Here is the story of the RDTI customer experience redesign project.

Overview

The RDTI scheme is New Zealand's largest government financial support mechanism for research and development. Offering a 15% tax rebate on eligible activities, its goal is to support and incentivise innovative companies across New Zealand with their new and existing R&D projects.

A cross agency group between Callaghan Innovation and their government partners worked in collaboration with Creative HQ to to reimagine, design, and test a new customer experience for the RDTI. The goal was to ultimately make the scheme easier for customers and advisors to understand and engage with the RDTI to support more New Zealand businesses with their R&D.

The multi-agency group wanted a different approach to tackling this problem, one that was able to deliver value quickly, and involve customers and stakeholders throughout the process to quickly validate options and address the identified pain points.



Creative HQ workshop 2022.

Our Approach

Creative HQ used its depth of experience to develop and facilitate a programme of six sprints that were designed to go beyond generating great ideas, to create tangible outputs that could be implemented during the sprint programme. The sprints focussed on three key stages of problem discovery, design, and a build-measure-learn phase to rapidly generate and test outputs.

A team of nine, representing Callaghan Innovation and members of the partner agencies was put together to participate in the programme. All participants had demanding day jobs, so the programme was designed to span four months with time between the 3-5 day sprints to develop and implement outputs. This approach to working built a collaborative and supportive team that was able to work effectively across agencies.

The RDTI is a complex piece of legislation that first required a discovery phase to ensure that the team had a clear understanding of the current customer journey, processes, and constraints to enable them to make effective decisions throughout the design process. Building on previous work, this was achieved in the first four day sprint, paving the way for the remaining sprints to focus on designing, testing, and creating the future state RDTI experience for customers.

Creative HQ were able to bring their expertise in human-centred design and testing to help the team to iteratively develop their solutions based on validated insights from customers. The sprints also included innovative processes to develop and test the internal workflows required to implement the proposed changes.

As specialist practitioners of innovative processes, Creative HQ's facilitation built a platform from which the cross agency team could collaborate effectively and develop solutions that ultimately transform the way that customers experience RDTI.

"That's the difference with Creative HQ. They understand the process in an applied way, not just a theoretical way. They are expert innovation practitioners who have the intellectual capability to keep up with the content of complex conversations whilst keeping everything moving, it's really important for projects like this."

Brett Calton

Acting Chief Product Officer, Callaghan Innovation

The Result

The programme resulted in the development of new customer-facing content, which included a redesigned RDTI website going live at the end of the sprint series. The sprints allowed for this content to be tested with real customers before going into production to ensure that it helped them to understand the RDTI process and how to engage with it.

Customer facing processes have been refined to provide all RDTI customers with an experience that is focussed on providing them with tailored support to help with the particular needs of their business and R&D activities. Internal workflows have also been adjusted to enable the delivery model, including re-examining how the agencies work together and exchange information within the constraints of the legislation.

The sprint programme model has been successful in bringing the agencies together to work collectively on delivering a better product experience for their collective RDTI customers.

It has instilled an agile and iterative approach to their work which will continue into the future as new improvements are tested and implemented. This project has proven how a programme of sprints can quickly deliver major transformation for a cross agency government programme that has a big impact for New Zealand businesses.



Jenny Douché of the RDTI team at the GovTech Accelerator Showcase 2022.

GovTech in the Philippines: Innovative Social Welfare Programme

Government Innovation Stories

In 2022, a four-person team of social workers from the Valenzuela City Social Welfare and Development Office (CSWDO) participated in our GovTech Accelerator programme in the Philippines. During the programme, they learned to apply human-centric innovation tools and processes to create better support systems to constituents who sought Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situations (AICS). Their work illustrates the power of open-mindedness and the willingness to try new ways of working when it comes to delivering solutions that are highly impactful and timely. Here is the story of that programme and team.

Overview

The accelerator programme was facilitated remotely by a New Zealand-based team from Creative HQ. The team identified two key challenges to tackle: how could they improve the experience of the citizens visiting their office, and how could they promote continuous learning for their already time-poor social workers?

Every year, approximately 30,000 people go to the main office and five satellite offices of the Valenzuela CSWDO seeking social service assistance. During the accelerator programme, the CSWDO project team discovered that almost 42% of the clients who went into the CSWDO seeking AICS financial assistance were turned away as they did not bring all the required documents with them.

The team also found that social workers did not have much time to do formal learning about changes to policies or guidelines. This sometimes led to inconsistencies in advice and services.

Through research, stakeholder engagement, process mapping and ideation, the Valenzuela CSWDO project team developed two potential solutions.

“

Innovation has an important role in how nations navigate challenges and prepare for the future. I am pleased to see Valenzuela City and ARTA steer this course for the Philippines and I look forward to seeing other government agencies join us in our journey towards a culture of innovation.

Ambassador Peter Kell
New Zealand Ambassador to the Philippines

”

Improving the Clients' Experience

The team developed an information chatbot that helped the clients better prepare for the AICS application process, by providing comprehensive information on the requirements.

Feedback during the prototype testing phase showed that clients found the chatbot to be very helpful, accessible, time-saving, and informative for both the new and old clients. As a result, the CSWDO is planning to integrate the chatbot with the Valenzuela City website.

Promoting Continuous Learning

In order to help staff with the challenge of keeping up to date with new policies and guidelines the project team developed prototype e-learning modules for CSWDO staff. The e-learning modules provided the information in short, fun and digestible formats. Feedback from fellow social workers in the department showed that the e-learning modules made a positive difference:

“What you are doing is working. We have fewer staff asking questions about AICS because now they know”.

Philippines-New Zealand Government Innovation Showcase

The Valenzuela CSWDO team gave a presentation on their journey through the accelerator programme at the Philippines-New Zealand Government Innovation Exchange Showcase event on 13 September 2022 in Valenzuela City.

“I am proud to see Valenzuela City embracing human-centred innovation as we progress our goals on behalf of all our citizens. Excellent quality services are a norm at the City Hall, but we have long been wanting to have them delivered to our constituents in a timely and a more convenient way for them. With this programme, we hope to eliminate whatever perception they have that availing our services is taxing and difficult.”

Mayor Wes Gatchalian
Mayor of Valenzuela City, Philippines



AICS team and NZ Ambassador Peter Kell at the showcase event in Valenzuela City, Philippines.

Spotlight Sprints

At Creative HQ, we are big fans of Sprints. Sprints are time-boxed periods, typically one week long, during which a sprint team works in a facilitated process to complete a set amount of work.

All of our sprints are themed - discovery sprints, design sprints, sales sprints, etc. - and all are well planned out, have a well defined goal, and end with specific outputs and outcomes. But the beauty of sprints is that you don't know at the start what the outputs will look like at the end and even if the outcomes can be achieved. It wouldn't be creative otherwise.

Sprints are an essential part of the innovation process, offering a structured yet flexible approach to problem-solving and solution development. We use sprints with startups in our accelerator programmes. We use sprints with enterprise clients to get to outputs quicker and more effectively. Our School of Innovation uses sprints in our capability development programmes.

Sprints are and will continue to be a key tool and our innovation toolbox.



Creative HQ Design Sprint.

Here are some key reasons why we love sprints:

- 1. Focused Effort**
The focus on a specific goal in a fixed time helps to minimise distractions, which can lead to more innovative solutions.
- 2. The Power of the Team**
The makeup of the sprint team is important. Roles and skills should be balanced in the team. If you do this well, you can bring together diverse perspectives and expertise, and encourage the exchange of ideas that can lead to more creative and effective solutions.
- 3. Flexibility and Adaptability**
The sprint framework is inherently adaptable, allowing teams to change direction based on feedback and new learnings. This flexibility is essential for innovation.
- 4. Time-to-Value**
Sprints almost always accelerate the process for getting to value. And speed matters. It enables organisations to make key decisions when they are best informed and can learn from the decision results. It also builds the momentum required to do new things.
- 5. Risk Management**
Many think that high-speed, high intensity sprints that don't have clear outputs at the start increase risk. But the opposite is true. By breaking down the innovation process into smaller, manageable chunks, and by learning and adjusting as you go, sprints help to reduce risk. Teams can test assumptions and validate ideas early in the process, which can prevent significant time and resource investment in unviable solutions.

Key Supporters

We thank all of those organisations who have supported our programmes and our founders over the years.

We could not have done it without you.



We Love Our Village

We are so happy to call Wellington home and be a part of a truly great entrepreneurial and innovation ecosystem. We thank all of you who have worked for us, worked with us, or come through our doors and spent time with us over the years.

We literally could not have done it without you.



Looking to the Future

Our Vision for Wellington 2030 requires 400 active startups contributing to the national goal of 5,000.

Wellington has all the right ingredients to enable ambitious founders and early-stage ventures that will drive significant value to the region and provide a meaningful contribution to the national target of 5,000 startups by 2030.

Leveraging the power of its universities, private sector expertise, CRI's and place as the centre of Government, along with its creative soul, rich startup legacy, and track record in leading early stage startup programmes, Wellington can create significant impact as the 'Startup Capital' of New Zealand.

Creative HQ will continue to fill the early-stage gap in our national ecosystem, as we believe this will deliver the greatest impact. We will also seek to collaborate with all of the players in our national ecosystem so that, together, we can reduce fragmentation, amplify impact through partnerships that compliment each other, and aspire to fulfil the 2023 UpStart Nation report vision of a world-leading UpStart ecosystem grounded in empathy for people and planet. A vibrant ecosystem in which New Zealand is recognised as a global leader in generating sustainable value creation.



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