



BACKSTAGE



ACCELERATOR

COHORT 1 REPORT 2019

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Introduction

Less than 10% of all venture capital deals go to women, people of color, and LGBTQ+ founders. Other venture capitalists see this as a pipeline problem. We see it as the biggest opportunity in investment.

From 2015 to 2018, our team met with more than 5,000 companies and invested \$5M in 100 led by people of color, women, and LGBTQ+ founders. We learned so much through the process of reviewing deal flow, investing, and supporting our founders post-investment. We identified a gap in the startup ecosystem around founder education, investment, networks, social capital, and mentorship for underrepresented founders.

We also learned about the strong startup communities that exist throughout the world. Our first 100 investments were focused on companies based in the US, and we saw that innovation, investment, company growth, and support existed in many cities. There were many supportive and diverse ecosystems that welcomed Backstage. We spent time researching startup ecosystems, listening to the community, and mapping our growth strategy.

With these learnings, we announced Backstage Accelerator in Los Angeles, London, and Philadelphia in September 2018, investing an additional \$2M in underestimated founders in the program that launched in March 2019. We opened the final city selection for popular vote – Detroit was the clear winner. With support from our launch partners Microsoft for Startups and Mailchimp, we were on our way!

This report shares our learnings and details about the impressive companies and founders we're proud to call Cohort 1.

Program Overview

Backstage Accelerator is a 3-month, in-person startup accelerator that includes a capital investment and a comprehensive program.

We invested \$100k each in a carefully selected batch of global cohort companies to help founders achieve their next critical milestone through a hands-on experience where they gain needed skills and education, develop deep mentor relationships, have investor introductions and prep for meeting investors, and grow a life-long network of peers across the world. Global Partners, including Microsoft for Startups and Google for Startups provided expert workshops, technical support, and assistance for the founders across the 4 cities.

The program was built from the ground up for underrepresented founders by a deeply experienced and diverse team of startup founders, investors, and founders of accelerators and other startup programs across the US and UK.

Applications + Selection

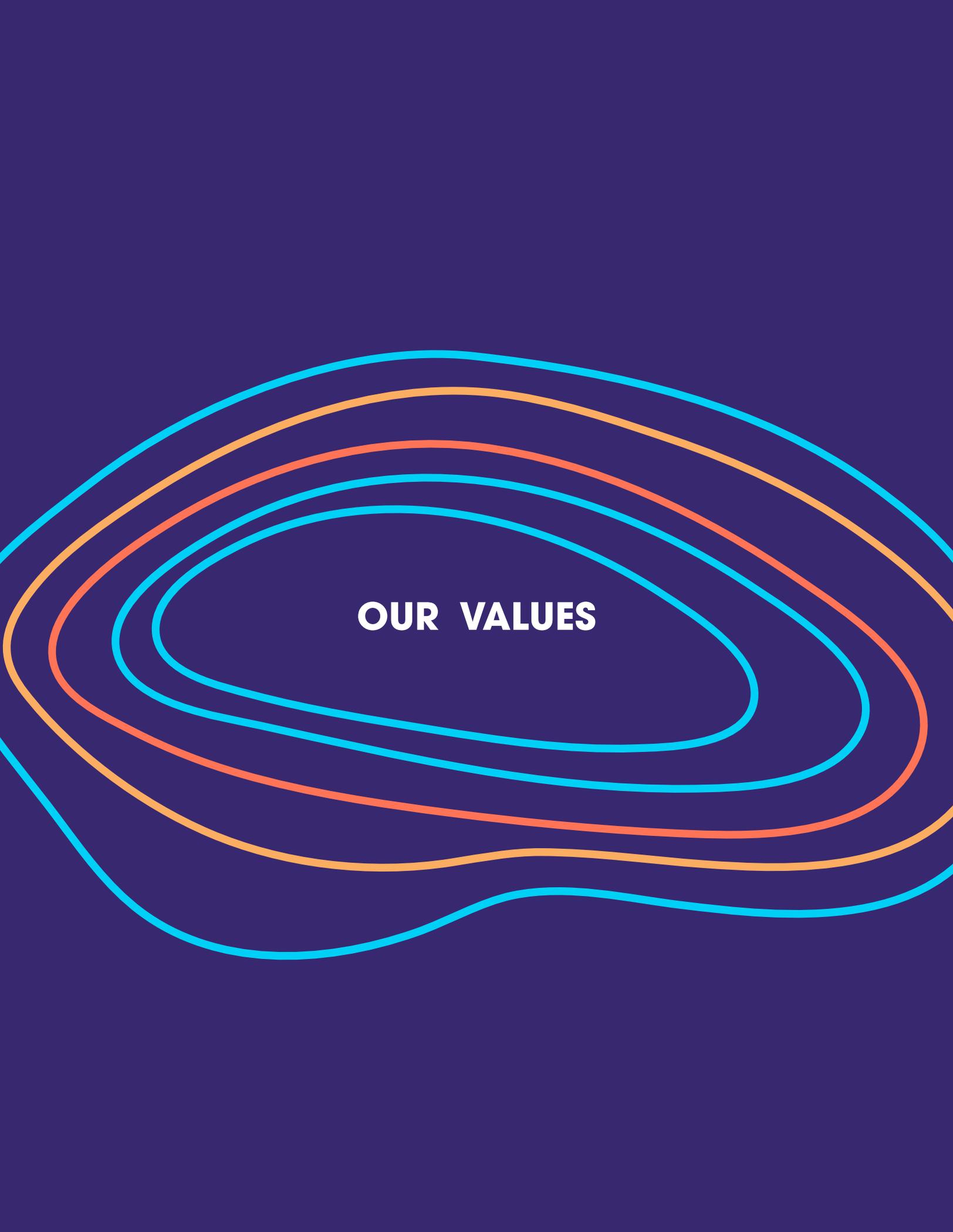
We received nearly 2000 applications for Accelerator Cohort 1. With a diverse team reviewing every application and conducting a series of remote interviews with promising applicants, we accepted 24 outstanding companies into the inaugural program.

Key Learnings

1. There is no pipeline problem. We received nearly 2,000 applications for Accelerator from across the world, all received organically through our 6-week open application process. Underrepresented founders are starting companies at a faster rate than ever before. In particular, Black women are the fastest-growing entrepreneurial demographic in the US. The majority of founders who applied to Accelerator are at a very early stage – two-thirds of the companies are in the private beta phase of development or earlier and have not raised money prior to applying. The pipeline is strong, and will continue to grow.

2. Access to capital remains a systemic challenge. We hosted local investor meetings and a global investor event which resulted in more than 100 virtual meetings with investors from all over the world. We learned our founders most valued meetings outside their network in other cities, making our global network hugely valuable for many. Several of those meetings are now leading to diligence for further investment consideration. We appreciate every investor who diversified their pipeline by meeting with our founders during the program. We know that there is more work to be done to ensure that the founders will continue to be able to access additional venture funding as well as alternative forms of funding to continue to grow their companies.

3. Community is essential. Our founders gained incredible value through meetings with mentors and expert workshop leaders. During the program, we hosted nearly 50 workshops and hundreds of mentor meetings. Our local and global partners proved to be invaluable resources in terms of knowledge and technology, and were an important part of our events that brought the wider startup community together. The founders benefited from being part of a small, diverse, in-person cohort who worked alongside each other and learned together as they grew their companies.

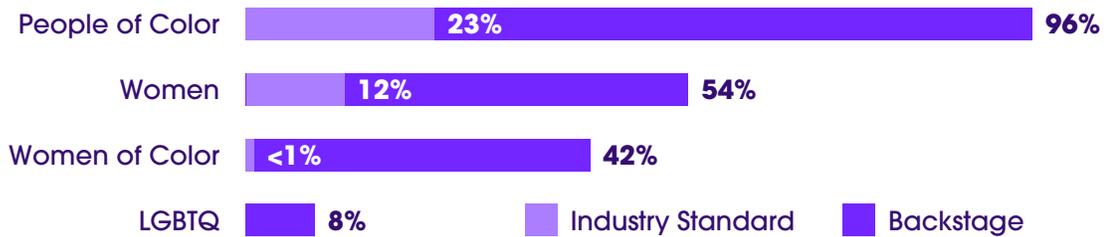


OUR VALUES

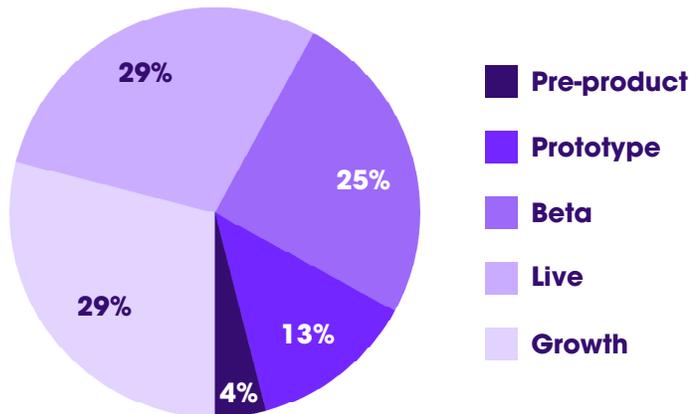
Diversity is Strength

It's not something you solve for, it's something you design for. Diverse investments minimize portfolio risk, diverse teams outperform, and diverse perspectives strengthen ideas.

Demographics



Company Stage



Sectors

			
Health	SaaS	Beauty	Real Estate
			
Education	Media	Cleantech	AI

It Takes a Village

We aim to be part of a movement that galvanizes successful entrepreneurial ecosystems around the world. In each city, Accelerator is connecting founders, investors, mentors, talent, supporting organizations, and customers.

Global Partners



A Few of Our Global Speakers



Jewel Burks Solomon
Amazon, Google,
Partpic



Rei Wang
First Round Capital,
Dorm Room Fund



Brian Brackeen
Lightship Capital, Kairos



Noga Tal
Microsoft for Startups



Holly Liu
Kabam, Y Combinator

Friends



Success for All

The founders who participate in Backstage Accelerator are writing new startup success stories about people who look like all of us. Their companies and the change they achieve will benefit them, their investors, their employees, and their local communities.

58% Companies local to Accelerator city



On a mission to...

help...

- curb addiction
- decrease stigma
- detect preventable diseases
- replace toxic haircare products
- close the orgasm gap
- end energy poverty
- combat inequality + misrepresentation

create...

- healthy eating habits
- access to manufacturing
- positive self-perception
- healthy, efficient beauty products
- better life quality for Black women

BACKSTAGE DETROIT



Detroit

Detroit is the original home of innovation. Our entrepreneurs hustle harder and gain national and international traction for it. Detroit won the global community vote to welcome Backstage Accelerator to our burgeoning tech ecosystem. The 7 companies in our inaugural cohort show our city's strengths in on-demand manufacturing, medtech, and ecommerce, and also reveal the talent we have is ripe for strategic investment and scale.

Local Partners

Detroit is a strongly connected ecosystem of dedicated corporate venture capital and programming partners. We were pleased to have had over 100 mentors available to aid our companies in growth and acceleration.

Quicken Loans was the Backstage Detroit Launch Partner continuing a long history of support and focus on Detroit entrepreneurial growth extending expertise, supplemental grants, and access to Cohort 1. 2 Backstage Detroit companies also became finalists in Quicken Loan's annual Detroit Demo Day, with Healthy Roots taking home both the 1st Prize and People's Choice awards, winning \$125K at one of the largest pitch competitions in the city.

We are values-aligned with our space partner, Bamboo Detroit, and our ecosystem development partners, Venture Catalysts. Our programming was directly enhanced and supported by Google Detroit, as well as Microsoft Detroit, which was also the gracious host of our final cohort celebration event.

Detroit Crew



Monica Wheat, Managing Director

Monica is a Strategist, Educator, and Venture Developer leading Backstage Detroit. She is the Founder + Partner at Venture Catalysts, a venture and ecosystem development group. Monica is the Lead for Techstars Startup Programs including Detroit Startup Week, and a Co-founder of Startup Boost Detroit, a global pre-accelerator. She's built accelerators and investor education programs for over 10 years.



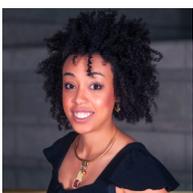
Tapan "Tops" Kataria, Director

Tops is a Venture Partner at Venture Catalysts, and former Chief of Staff of Detroit Startup Week. Previously, Tops was an Associate for ID Ventures. He played a key role in the Techstars Mobility Accelerator as a Business + Operation Associate. He's a DJ, Entrepreneur, and Investor, who's obsessed with rapid growth marketplace, under-utilized assets, and mobility startups.



Amanda Lewan, Program + Mentor Liaison

Amanda bootstrapped her real estate company Bamboo to operate a 25,000 sqft. co-working space, building a diverse and collaborative hub recognized nationally for impact. She has over a decade of startup operations and marketing experience. She loves to write, read, cycle, cook, and introduce people to Detroit.



Olivia Guterson, Program + Community Liaison

Olivia is a Venture Partner and Program Manager for Venture Catalysts, Olivia has taken the lead on strategic programming for Detroit Startup Week, which brings 11,000 entrepreneurs together in Detroit over a 5-day period of learning, sharing, and growing the community. She also championed bringing Blavity's AfroTech to Detroit in 2018, which was the first time the conference was held outside of Silicon Valley.



Alerje

A more convenient, modern allergy management platform, including a slim epinephrine auto-injector that fits in your smartphone case and an app that sends emergency alerts.

A growing epidemic, more than 220 million people suffer from severe food allergies worldwide. There's been a 377% increase in private insurance claims associated with severe food allergies. Founder + CEO Javier Evelyn is also a founding member of MedTech Color, a non-profit working to improve representation for people of color in the healthcare industry.

Mission: to improve the overall quality of life of people affected by food allergies.

HQ: Detroit, MI

Categories: Health, Hardware, Mobile

Website: <http://alerje.com>

Wins during Backstage Accelerator:

- Closed a Seed funding round
- Built a strong investor network for future collaboration
- Recruited a strong team to work on hardware and software

“The Backstage brand gave us a bump in social capital – my local and national network expanded tremendously. And my cohort was dope. I learned a ton from them. I consider them ‘family’.”

Family: friends as close as family.



Bippy

A tree-free, direct-to-consumer wellness brand providing a sustainable alternative to wipes and toilet paper.

Most eco-friendly toilet paper and wipes are just recycled paper, which is still trouble for plumbing. Bippy's bamboo paper alternative is 100% dissolvable and safe for all plumbing, including septic and RV. Co-founder Lisa Frame (Facebook, Brandless, Tastemade) started her last company as a viral comedy blog and grew it into a full-stack creative studio, and Co-founder Isidro Hurtado was a creative for Redbull, CAT Footwear, and Kawasaki.

Mission: to help save the 27,000 trees chopped down daily just to make toilet paper.

HQ: Chicago, IL

Categories: B2C, B2B, CPG, Manufacturing

Website: <https://heybippy.com>

Wins during Backstage Accelerator:

- Launched first product line
- Attracted celebrities, corporate partners, high-end hotels, retail chains, and influencers
- Secured manufacturing relationships and hundreds of happy customers
- Gained over 8,000 followers on social media

“We went into Accelerator with an MVP and graduated with 500 customers, growing revenue, funding in the bank, and a supportive network who continue to help and challenge us.”



CrowdFreak

A digital platform that makes performance opportunities direct and accessible for all artists at all stages of their career.

Up-and-coming artists don't have direct access to opening act performance opportunities for concerts and showcases. Detroit-native Founder + CEO Curtis Mckinnon holds an MBA from Ohio University and has been in artist management for over 8 years.

Mission: to help aspiring artists gain exposure by performing live.

HQ: Detroit, MI

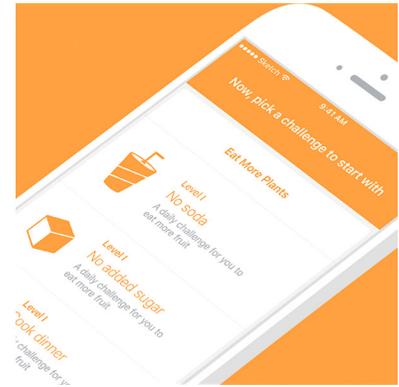
Categories: B2C, B2B, Music, Entertainment

Website: <https://crowdfreak.com>

Wins during Backstage Accelerator:

- Hit all-time high monthly revenue
- Identified and tested a scalable business model
- Grew output from one 1 to 4 digital showcases a month
- Expanded to multiple US states

“A year ago I didn't even know what Detroit Demo Day was. With the help of Backstage Accelerator, a year later I pitched on stage as a top finalist.”



Foodstand

A public health tech company that helps people at workplaces, schools, and cities turn healthy eating into everyday habits and curb the onset of diet-related disease.

Unhealthy eating habits are the number one cause of premature death and cost the US – and specifically employers – billions of dollars a year. And it's all preventable. Founder Rachna Govani has spoken widely on food systems issues, food waste, behavior change, and social entrepreneurship, and has been featured in Food & Wine, Forbes, Edible, Fast Company, and USA Today. She spent 5 years at American Express where she achieved award-winning recognition and a patent.

Mission: we believe in small steps each day, tackling one habit at a time.

HQ: Detroit, MI

Categories: Health

Website: <https://www.thefoodstand.com>, <https://dietid.com>

Wins during Backstage Accelerator:

- Acquired by Diet ID
- Launched with Sun Basket and added a solid pipeline of committed customers
- Hired a new CTO

“Unique to Backstage is its ability to catalyze founders on their own paths, powered by a skilled community of mentors and supporters.”



Gildform

An on-demand, 3D-printed jewelry manufacturer and global designer marketplace.

The US jewelry market is expected to be worth \$9.73B by 2025 as employment rates increase alongside growth in fashion trends, yet it remains limited-access with high barriers of entry. Founder Karissma Yve went from building jewelry for friends and family to building a line of products for global manufacturer Shinola and producing licensed products for the hit movie *Black Panther*.

Mission: to offer accessible and on-demand manufacturing + design services that are innovative, ethical, sustainable, and high-quality.

HQ: Detroit, MI

Categories: B2B, Manufacturing, Fashion

Website: <https://www.gildform.com>

Wins during Backstage Accelerator:

- Launched a new name and brand
- Hired a lead to assist building the tech platform
- Optimized manufacturing process and engaged in intensive customer development
- Semi-finalist for the \$400K CFDA/Vogue Fashion Fund

“Now we have a community where we can...reach out to any one of the founders at any given time.”



Healthy Roots

A toy company that creates dolls and storybooks that teach natural hair care to empower young girls of color.

Founder Yelitsa Jean-Charles grew an art project into a startup, raising \$50K on Kickstarter. The company has won numerous prizes including the People's Choice Award for Quicken Loans Detroit Demo Day and the New Voices Fund Pitch Competition. Yelitsa is a graduate of the RISD and was recognized on Essence's 2017 *50 Founders to Watch* list.

Mission: to reinforce the positive self-perception of the richly diverse, varying shades of complexion and natural hair textures among girls of color.

HQ: Cincinnati, OH

Categories: B2B, B2C, Toys

Website: <https://healthyrootsdolls.com>

Wins during Backstage Accelerator:

- Refined product + operations in preparation for this year's upcoming holiday season
- Hired marketing + brand talent
- Sold out at a national product show in Atlanta
- Sourced a new manufacturer and set to complete new toy line production for summer
- Won 1st place + People's Choice Award from Startup Stampede by America Underground

"Backstage was a sounding board and support network looking out for opportunities for my business and me."



Naturalicious

Time-saving beauty solutions for busy women who are frustrated with routinely wasting money and time on products that don't work.

Women with naturally curly hair historically spend a whopping 35 hours a month just dealing with their hair. Most haircare solutions are unsafe, use unhealthy ingredients, and deliver lack-luster results. Founder Gwen Jimmere started Naturalicious with only \$32 in the bank as a newly single mother who had limited time, but needed her hair to be healthy and beautiful. She bootstrapped to profitability in months, and now Naturalicious' patented products can be found in Sally Beauty stores, Ulta Beauty online, and Whole Foods.

Mission: to give women the strength and confidence to be their best from the inside out.

HQ: Detroit, MI

Categories: Beauty, CPG

Website: <https://naturalicious.net>

Wins during Backstage Accelerator:

- Landed partnership with Ulta
- Moved into new headquarters, tripling office and production space.
- Hired 5 new employees
- Expanded product line and launched new bestselling product

"I truly accelerated my business. What would have taken me a year or more took me 3 months."

BACKSTAGE LONDON



London

Diversity is one of London's greatest strengths. It is known as one of the most diverse cities in the world and a multicultural melting pot. Over 3 million people from London are born outside of the UK; approximately 300 languages are spoken; 52% of the population identify as women; and over half the population are people of colour. The UK accounts for almost a third of VC investment in Europe (\$7.7B).

Local Partners

We worked with some terrific local partners who were both value-aligned and showed what it means to be part of a village.

Microsoft for Startups were ever-present throughout the programme and led technical audits with all of our founders onsite, as well as providing Azure credits.

We collaborated with Deloitte at a number of events such as Women of Silicon Roundabout, and co-composed a whitepaper on wellness at work.

Founders across all 4 Accelerator cities enjoyed the global AMA hosted by Zendesk, and the London team loved crashing their office for a catch up and some sushi.

Both our launch and closing events were co-hosted alongside Silicon Valley Bank, along with other events such as office hours for the wider ecosystem.

We launched our partnership with Google for Startups on stage at Startup Grind Europe and have a series of events, workshops, and software deals in place for our startups to leverage as they grow.

London Crew



Andy Ayim, Managing Director

Andy is a product evangelist, consultant, investor, and former founder. He's held positions in leadership and product roles at Ernst & Young, Elixirr, WorldFirst, and Investec Bank. Having worked at startups, corporations, and VC firms, he's passionate about upskilling first-time founders with his experience to address the digital skills gap. He runs an online school teaching Product Management to founders and also curates a weekly newsletter for Minorities in Tech. He co-founded Mixtape Madness, a music discovery and distribution startup for emerging UK music. In 2018, Andy was named by The Financial Times as one of the top 10 most influential BAME tech leaders in the UK.



Anisah Osman Britton, Director

Anisah is the Founder + CEO of 23 Code Street, a coding school created to make technology more accessible to women and non-binary people. She was the first employee and Operations Director at The Bakery, a global accelerator bringing new products and services to market by connecting startups and brands. She also ran a Sirius Programme - an accelerator funded and run by the UK government to bring global startup talent to the UK. Having seen the lack of diversity and inclusion in tech and the effects this has on products and services, Anisah is determined to be a champion for the underrepresented.



Andy Davis, Director

Andy was previously an EIR at a health tech startup where he focused on people, product, and strategy. He's started companies, earned funding, corporate support, and industry adoption, and also leveraged his experience to work closely with startups. Andy leads an organically-grown, intimate, stage-agnostic community of Black tech entrepreneurs and investors in London called 10x10. He deeply understands the problems faced by underrepresented founders, both personally and professionally, and knows what it takes to get them and their business to the next level.



AfroCenchix

Natural products for Afro and curly hair, and is the first Afro hair brand to grace the shelves of Whole Foods UK.

The Afro hair market represents a \$500B global industry. Co-founders Rachael Corson and Joycelyn Mate are starting with vegan, allergen free, organic, and natural alternative hair products before expanding to other cosmetics to ensure that Black people are heard within the beauty industry – not as an afterthought but as mainstream consumers.

Mission: to provide every Black family with healthy and effective natural products.

HQ: London, UK

Categories: Beauty, B2C, D2C

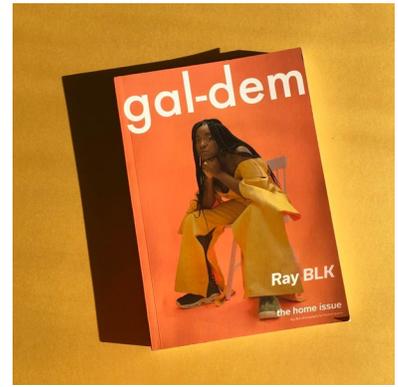
Website: <https://afrocenchix.com>

Wins:

- Designed a new company logo and rebranded all product packaging
- Launched a new subscription services
- Recruited 3 new hires
- Closed a £650K fundraising round

“It’s a breath of fresh air working with Backstage, they understand our business and strive to help us on our mission.”

gal—dem



gal-dem

A media company producing an online and print magazine committed to spotlighting the creative talents of women and non-binary people of colour.

Mainstream journalism is 94% White, 55% male. In university, Founder Liv Little was often asked to speak on behalf of all marginalised voices amidst a sea of white privilege. Working with brands, museums, galleries, and institutions, gal-dem provides opportunities for a previously underserved, young demographic to express themselves in an authentic and creative way.

Mission: to address inequality + misrepresentation through creative, editorial work.

HQ: London, UK

Categories: B2B, B2C, Digital Media, Media

Website: <https://gal-dem.com>

Wins:

- Transitioned team from freelancers + volunteers to full-time staff
- Launched partnerships with brands including Levi's and Nike
- Published a new book, *I Will Not Be Erased*
- Launched *The Chosen Family* documentary series

“The team at Backstage have been incredibly supportive and readily available for any troubleshooting and questions.”



Tambua Health

Turn any smartphone into a powerful, non-invasive screening tool for respiratory diseases using AI, Machine Learning, and Spectral Analysis.

Tuberculosis and lower respiratory tract infections cause 1.5M deaths in Africa each year, but are curable with early detection. Tambua has over 267 clinics and 3 Pharmaceutical clients using its software and hardware.

Mission: to revolutionize the diagnosis and treatment of cardiopulmonary diseases.

HQ: Nairobi, Kenya + Fremont, CA

Categories: B2B, B2C, Health, AI, ML

Website: <https://www.tambuahealth.com>

Wins:

- Improved evaluation accuracy from 76% to 96%
- Implemented an OKR process for priority and task management
- Received \$190K grant from USADF and WHO
- Redesigned their mobile app and launched a new website

“The experience was eye-opening for us. We have made tremendous progress in just 3 months, from business strategy, product development, and fundraising strategy.”



Trim-It

The first tech-enabled mobile barbershop and nail studio, delivering the highest quality haircuts and nails straight to your doorstep.

The UK Barber Industry is worth over £4.2 billion with over 240M haircuts a year. The space-as-a-service model holds untold opportunities to improve convenience and put customers at the heart of the experience. Founder + CEO, Darren, has been featured by Business Insider, BBC, and The Evening Standard.

Mission: to redesign the user experience of personal care.

HQ: London, UK

Categories: B2C, Hair + Beauty, Transportation

Website: <https://trimit.app>

Wins:

- Featured in Insider and BBC as "The Uber of haircuts"
- Grew revenue by 3x
- Grew from 2 to 5 mobile barbering vans
- Launched new mobile studio for nails
- Secured a partnership with Jameson Irish Whiskey

"I got support like no other from the Directors of Backstage London. I'll never forget the love they showed us."



Vitae London

The watch brand changing lives, owned by the likes of Richard Branson and Ava Duvernay, by supporting child education across Sub-Saharan Africa.

Founder + CEO William Adoasi grew up in London – the son of a man from a remote village in Ghana, who was the first in his family to learn to read and write. After graduating from The University of Greenwich, he worked in recruitment and business development before entrepreneurship.

Mission: to be the fashion brand changing lives – “vitae” is latin for “life”.

HQ: London, UK

Categories: B2C, D2C, Fashion, eCommerce

Website: <https://vitaelondon.com>

Wins:

- Launched an equity crowdfund with Seedrs
- Established a new business roadmap
- Launched the “Standing with Sudan” campaign to provide medical aid in Sudan
- Made progress on a new line of watches with a twist coming out later this year...

“It’s been a great honour to be a part of the programme and having the London Directors around as a sounding board. It’s been like having an experienced extension to our team.”

BACKSTAGE LOS ANGELES



Los Angeles

Los Angeles has the third largest GDP in the world, graduates more engineers than any other metro area in the US, and seed deals for early-stage startups are being funded at record amounts. It's uniquely positioned to support sectors like gaming, ecommerce, and media being the international home to the entertainment industry, and a hotspot for manufacturing, from rockets to fashion goods. The companies in the inaugural cohort of Backstage Los Angeles create solutions that disrupt the travel, beauty, pleasure, energy, business housing, and animation industries.

Local Partners

We partnered with The Riveter and Pledge LA for our office space, and with TriNet to support our weekly programs and events.

We were able to celebrate our launch and welcome our cohort on the rooftop of TenTen Wilshire in partnership with Plug and Play.

Brex and Fox Rothschild, both of which are deeply aligned with our values, partnered with us for our culmination event to conclude the 3-month program.

Los Angeles Crew



Anastasia Tarpeh-Ellis, Managing Director

Anastasia co-founded *bosa*, a wellness and productivity app that enables consultants to provide the highest level of service to their clients, and she's an emerging real estate and angel investor. She was the first Internal Program and Culture Fellow for GRID110, an LA-based organization focused on supporting early-stage entrepreneurs. Previously, Anastasia served as an Administrative Analyst for the City of Los Angeles and a Management Analyst for the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power. She's a graduate of the University of Cincinnati and University of Southern California Sol Price School of Public Policy.



Amiah Sheppard, Director

Amiah is an innovation curator. She spent years examining the myriad ways founders harness, strategize, and utilize their unique socio-cultural location to get to their desired successful outcome. A graduate of Columbia University, Amiah cultivated an academic and practical education leveraging sociology to explore gender and organizational leadership – specifically the experiences of women and women of color – human resources, non-profit and social impact consulting, entrepreneurship, and business development. Amiah is particularly bullish on investment opportunities in the beauty + wellness sector and the LA tech ecosystem.



Greer Engonga, Director

Greer joined the Backstage Crew as an Analyst on our Deal Flow Team, which played a key part in closing out our 100 investment milestone in 2018. Both for previous investments and Cohort 1 of Backstage Accelerator, she reviewed hundreds of founder applications, participated in due diligence, applicant interviews, and the company selection process.

Adventurely



Adventurely

An online community helping the 2 billion people traveling solo have more fun and feel more connected, with an easy way to plan meetups at bucket list tourist attractions around the world.

Founder Mita Carriman was working as an entertainment + IP attorney in New York when a business trip to Philadelphia changed her life. She experienced the pain points of solo travel first-hand and got inspired to solve them. With remote work and digital nomadism trends on the rise, Adventurely is creating experiences and solutions for solo travelers world-wide.

Mission: to help solo travelers find travel buddies easily and experience the world's greatest sights together.

HQ: Remote

Categories: B2C, Hospitality, Travel

Website: <https://getadventurely.com>

Wins during Backstage Accelerator:

- Restructured + redesigned the platform
- Relunched the website
- Refined the business model as a freemium subscription
- Planned and announced Playapreneurs, a nomad-centric event in Playa Del Carmen

“The totality of the program really polished and prepared us for what’s next. It was a great experience!”



Lacquerbar

Overhauling the antiquated \$20B nail industry to provide online education and career opportunities for nail technicians to run feminist-focused, experiential nail salons/schools.

CEO + Founder Heli Rodriguez Prilliman is a lifelong nail art enthusiast who encountered major issues in the nail technician industry, both as a customer and a nail tech student in beauty school. Previous to Lacquerbar, she was a founding team member at Y Combinator-backed startup, Fivestars, helping to scale to over 50M users. Lacquerbar's founding team members all attended beauty school and have worked as nail technicians.

Mission: to empower students, teammates, and clients from all cultures and backgrounds with education, beauty, and confidence.

HQ: San Francisco Bay Area, CA

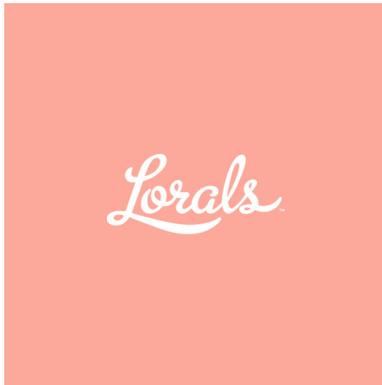
Categories: Beauty, B2C

Website: <https://www.lacquerbar.com>

Wins during Backstage Accelerator:

- Launched Lacquerbar U, a 6-week online manicuring certification program
- Solidified partnerships to launch an accredited nail certification program within the Aveda Institute and a pop-up salon in Re:Store Union Square SF

“The Backstage Los Angeles team really pushed me to new levels, and they were a great family to have around when things get hard.”



Lorals

A feminine care brand that helps women have more frequent — and more pleasurable — intimate experiences.

Research shows that 80% of women achieve orgasm through oral sex and over 90% of their partners love it, yet 80% of women turn it down for various reasons. Founder + CEO Melanie Cristol, a graduate of Columbia Law School and a healthcare lawyer, is working to close the “pleasure gap” starting with manufacturing silky, single-use panties for carefree oral sex, and by speaking out as an international expert on podcasts and press.

Mission: to empower more people to experience intimacy freely and fully.

HQ: Los Angeles, CA

Categories: B2C, D2C, CPG, Health, Sextech

Website: <https://mylorals.com>

Wins during Backstage Accelerator:

- Garnered amazing press coverage – podcasts, live event panels, and articles
- Recruited a full-time marketing lead
- Debuted a brand refresh, including gorgeous new product photos
- Doubled MRR

“Working with [the Backstage Crew] built my confidence as an entrepreneur and made me feel that I could absolutely, certainly do this.”



Optimal Solar

Maker of the most efficient solar technology which provides customers the lowest cost of electricity at the lowest possible footprint.

After developing the first African-American-owned, utility scaled solar farm and 24 other utility and commercial scaled solar facilities, CEO Dr. Reginald Parker discovered the need for high-efficiency solar photovoltaic systems and invented the solution. Parker is a three-time serial entrepreneur, a corporate strategist from the Boston Consulting Group, a commercialization engineer at Rohm and Haas, and professor at UND, FAMU, FSU, CAU, Morehouse, and Flagler. Parker is also a graduate of MIT, Ga Tech, and FSU.

Mission: to end energy poverty.

HQ: Durham, NC

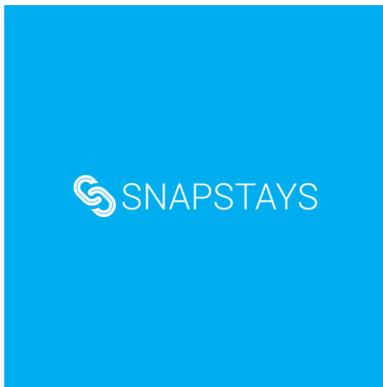
Categories: B2B, Energy, Cleantech, Hardware, Solar

Website: <http://www.optimalsolar.energy>

Wins during Backstage Accelerator:

- Won Clean & Smart Grid 2019 at the California Climate Cup
- Secured over 13 megawatts in global pre-sales (\$2.6 M in potential revenue)
- Earned admission to the Make in LA accelerator

“I greatly appreciated most parts, especially the care that the LA directors put into cultivating the curriculum. I also enjoyed the safe space.”



Snapstays

A marketplace of thousands of dynamically-priced, furnished homes for business professionals – professionally managed with great value and available coast-to-coast.

Co-founders Ed Hsieh (MIT BS, Harvard MBA) and Eric Dominguez (MIT BS, NYU Stern MBA), both with more than 10 years of experience in real estate, are serial entrepreneurs who experienced lack of affordable options for medium-term housing when working on a previous company. Their experience includes co-founding GoTime (raised \$1.3MM, acquired in 2012) and leading operations, sales, and strategy for Groupon, Match, and HomeAdvisor.

Mission: to create a better way to rent.

HQ: Remote

Categories: Hospitality, Real Estate, Travel, Marketplace

Website: <https://snapstays.com>

Wins during Backstage Accelerator:

- Expanded into new markets (Atlanta, Seattle, and Dallas)
- Hosted guests from top companies (Amazon, Oracle, Ernst & Young, UPS, Dallas Cowboys)
- Secured 6 new partnerships
- Reached 10,000 nights booked

“3 months go by fast, but the relationships will have an impact for a long time.”



Unomi

Software-as-a-Service for animators and video game developers.

Founder + CEO Obi Onyejekwe is an experienced entrepreneur, branding specialist, and UI/UX developer. His first startup, Nito, raised \$900K and was acquired by AOL. Obi gained entertainment industry experience as a successful Creative Director for Nickelodeon, BET, Dentsu America, and Tribal DDB. The talented Unomi team's first offering is software that automatically syncs character lip positions to voice over dialogue, saving animators countless hours of tedious work. Now they're developing Markerless Motion Tracking software that will revolutionize the entertainment industry.

Mission: to solve the greatest challenges facing animators today.

HQ: Los Angeles, CA

Categories: B2B, B2C, SaaS, AI, Gaming

Website: <https://getunomi.com>

Wins during Backstage Accelerator:

- Recruited a Lead Software Engineer as a co-founder
- Progressed with an enterprise sales deal with a top animation studio
- Released beta software

"The expert workshops and investor connections were the best resources for my company."

BACKSTAGE PHILADELPHIA



Philadelphia

Philadelphia is in the midst of a transformation. The city has seen steady growth for nearly a decade. As the nation's 5th largest city, with the 3rd densest city center, and 4th in walkability, with over 100+ colleges and universities generating over 13,000 STEM degrees annually, it has bounced back significantly after the 2010 recession. The region is one of the top 10 metropolitan regions for venture capital, with an average of nearly \$600M in annual funding. As a minority-majority city, Philadelphia has become intentional about its efforts to expand entrepreneurial support for people of color, women, and immigrants through increased access to capital, capacity-building, procurement opportunities, development, and growth created to ensure opportunity for inclusion in its tech startup community.

Local Partners

Philadelphia, as a big city with a small-town vibe, has a host of opportunities and networks for expanding businesses and supporting tech startups.

The team at Ben Franklin Tech Partners hosted us for a pitch and investor event, which was valuable to our founders.

We held our launch and wrap events in partnership with the University Science Center and the Cambridge Innovation Center.

Philadelphia Crew



Liz Brown, Managing Director

Liz co-founded Webjunto, a community and user experience-focused development company, and has been featured as Technologist of the Year from Rad Awards 2018, Best Tech Workplace for Diversity from Timmy Awards 2017, and Philly's 12 Young Leaders in "Who's Next in STEM". Her past work includes web and app development to researching motivation, cognitive learning, and design theory. She was an Urban Planner assisting communities in making human-centered design decisions for neighborhood revitalization projects in Western New York + Philadelphia. She earned a second Master's degree in Information Design + Technology while working as a Neighborhood Planner for the City of Philadelphia.



Allen "AK" King, Director

AK is the Founder of AI consulting company Allagi.ai, and past CMO + Principal of JetSense.AI. As an investor and serial entrepreneur, he understands the personal and professional issues surrounding the lack of diversity and inclusion in tech. Allen has a passion for innovation and education, building the artificial intelligence-driven chatbot used in a research study led by UCLA. Allen is always working on ways to improve user experience outcomes through digital communications, data analysis, and AI as he continues to create a roadmap to improve underrepresented founder success rates and bring value to the tech ecosystem as whole.



Thom Webster, Relationship Manager

Thom has over 35 years of experience with assisting organizations as a senior advisor in the planning and development of business strategy, the launching and expansion of new divisions, and the financing and capitalization of programs. He currently serves as a Management Advisor to BASE Architecture, Planning, & Engineering, and to The Alpha Enterprise Group, ranked by Black Enterprise Magazine as one of the top 100 largest African American-owned businesses in America.



Dressmate

Offering a retail presence to independent, women-led, and sustainable designers that have mastered their DTC presence.

The global apparel sustainable market is \$20B and expected to grow to \$41B by 2023, and sustainable fashion is growing 24x faster than traditional retail.

Founder + CEO Jen Simons is a Brooklyn-based Georgetown grad and Girlboss Grant winner. Her mother was a fashion designer for companies like Escada, Reebok, and Ralph Lauren. After college, she went to work for Glossier in retail planning, where she got keyed into emerging, fun brands like the Dressmate best-selling Seoul Import Hair Clips.

HQ: New York, NY

Categories: B2C, Fashion, Marketplace, Sustainability

Website: <https://www.dressmate.com>

Wins during Backstage Accelerator:

- Pivoted business model to focus on scaling the marketplace
- Launched an updated website
- Accepted into the Target Incubator

“Mentors were the best part of the program. My mentor was able to ask me pointed questions...”



Hale

A patent-pending designed vaporizer that automatically and gradually decreases nicotine intake to help improve outcomes for patients battling nicotine addiction.

People are increasingly trying to quit smoking or their addiction to nicotine, but current solutions either provide an “addiction alternative”, or have low success rates and don’t give smokers all they truly need to quit. Co-founders Josh Israel, CEO, and Devin Serago, COO, previously co-founded 2 startups.

Mission: to help people battling nicotine addiction.

HQ: Philadelphia, PA

Categories: B2C, Healthcare, Hardware

Website: <https://www.tryhale.com>

Wins during Backstage Accelerator:

- Closed their pre-seed funding round
- Moved hardware to a production-ready stage
- Brought on 2 key strategic advisors

“We’re proud to have been backed by Backstage. We were introduced to some great people during our time with Accelerator and hope to continue to leverage its incredible network to grow our business.”



Locus Mobility

A unique onsite, subscription-based car care amenities service for residents, tenants, and customers of real estate owners.

It's a new way for property owners to compete in the highly-competitive multi-family and commercial real estate market. Co-founders Harry Michel and Kelly Ireland met in college. Harry, CEO, a designer by trade, creates the brand and experience consumers love and easily connect with. Kelly, COO, is a Darden MBA and career business strategy consultant at Accenture.

HQ: Philadelphia, PA

Categories: Mobile, Transportation, Automotive

Website: <https://www.washlb.com>

Wins during Backstage Accelerator:

- Restructured their company story and elevator pitch
- Launched a new brand name
- Engaged with aligned investors and partners, including Volvo Tech fund

“During Accelerator, it was nice to be in an environment where people didn't just understand that it's hard being a founder, but a founder who looks like me.”

Please
Assist Me



Please Assist Me

Dedicated, vetted personal assistants that allow busy people to outsource all of their weekly chores.

At least 4.6 Million apartment units are needed by 2030 in the US. The rapid growth of multi-family developments have left property owners looking for ways to differentiate themselves from competitors. Founder + CEO Stephanie Cummings earned a Master's Degree in Business Administration from Middle Tennessee State University and worked with a healthcare IT startup that was acquired by a Fortune 500 company.

Mission: to help people find true work-life balance.

HQ: Nashville, TN + Washington, D.C.

Categories: B2B, B2C, Mobile, Real Estate, Services

Website: <https://www.pleaseassistme.com>

Wins during Backstage Accelerator:

- Made significant progress on the design and development of 2 apps
- Signed 2 contracts and received a proposal request for a major multi-site deal
- Redesigned and submitted a new client proposal template

"If you are looking for a program that focuses on bettering you and your company as a minority founder, this is the place to be."



TresseNoire

A virtual beauty coach for women of color that shares daily SMS messages with hairstyle + product recommendations, access to expert beauty professionals, and planning tools customized to your personal beauty attributes.

Women of color are fatigued by the product + service discovery process, and don't have an easy way to confidently purchase the beauty products that are best for their unique combination of hair, skin, and lifestyle needs. Founder + CEO, Regina Gwynn, earned an MBA from the Kellogg School of Management, launched brands at Federated Department Stores (now Macy's Inc.), and was a management consultant with the Monitor Group (now Monitor/Deloitte Consulting).

Mission: to give Black women the freedom to own a meaningful, powerful life on her terms.

HQ: Philadelphia, PA

Categories: B2C, Beauty

Website: <http://www.tressenoire.com>

Wins during Backstage Accelerator:

- Paired with high-profile mentors from Essence + Google
- Secured a Technical Advisor for ongoing product planning + strategy
- Completed corporate client work with BET Networks

“Two words: Powerful and Purposeful.”



WhoseYourLandlord

A software-as-a-service platform empowering and informing renters through landlord reviews and housing literacy content.

Social media has brought more transparency into the housing search process, yet developers, landlords, and property managers struggle to position their brands within this new, more informed landscape. Renter-generated data gives feedback to landlords, improve the tenant experience, and reduce turnover. Co-founder + CEO Ofo Ezeugwu was recognized as Young Professional of the Year by the African American Chamber of Commerce, he's a Techstars' Risingstar, one of BET's #30Under30, and a Black Enterprise Modern Man.

Mission: to empower and inform the rental community.

HQ: Philadelphia, PA + New York, NY

Categories: B2C, Real Estate, SaaS

Website: <https://www.whoseyourlandlord.com>

Wins during Backstage Accelerator:

- Partnered with Berkadia, a Warren Buffet company
- Secured several paying clients for real estate developer software beta

“I feel much more equipped to drive success at Whose Your Landlord as a result of participating in Backstage Accelerator.”



CREDITS

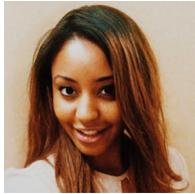
Cohort 1 brought to you by this amazing team.



Arlan Hamilton
Co-founder



Christie Pitts
Co-founder



Brittany Davis
Selection



Bryan Landers
COO



Melinda Epler
Dir. Program Dev.



Wayne Sutton
Dir. Program Dev.



Meighan Byron
Program Manager



Lolita Taub



Del Johnson



Chacho Valadez



Clair Samuel



Dianne Cherrez



Rebecca Altamirano



Antonio Altamirano



Tara Carter



Alex Marshall



Amrit Richmond



Lisa Atia



Jaimie Briggs



Sarah Smith



Jessica Porec



Rachel Nelson



Faye Hayes



Opeola Bukola

Learn more about the Backstage Crew: <https://backstagecapital.com/crew>

Limited Partners

These visionary organizations and individuals invested in Accelerator Fund I.

atomico^o

Bloomberg
BETA

BACKSTAGE



Josh Kopelman
Founder, First Round Capital



Keren Odeah Johnson
Consultant



Zach Halmstad
Co-founder, Pablo + JAMF



Debbie McLeod
Managing Partner,
McLeod Sears



James Murphy
Founding Partner,
Proton Enterprises



Arlan Hamilton
Founder + Managing Partner,
Backstage Capital



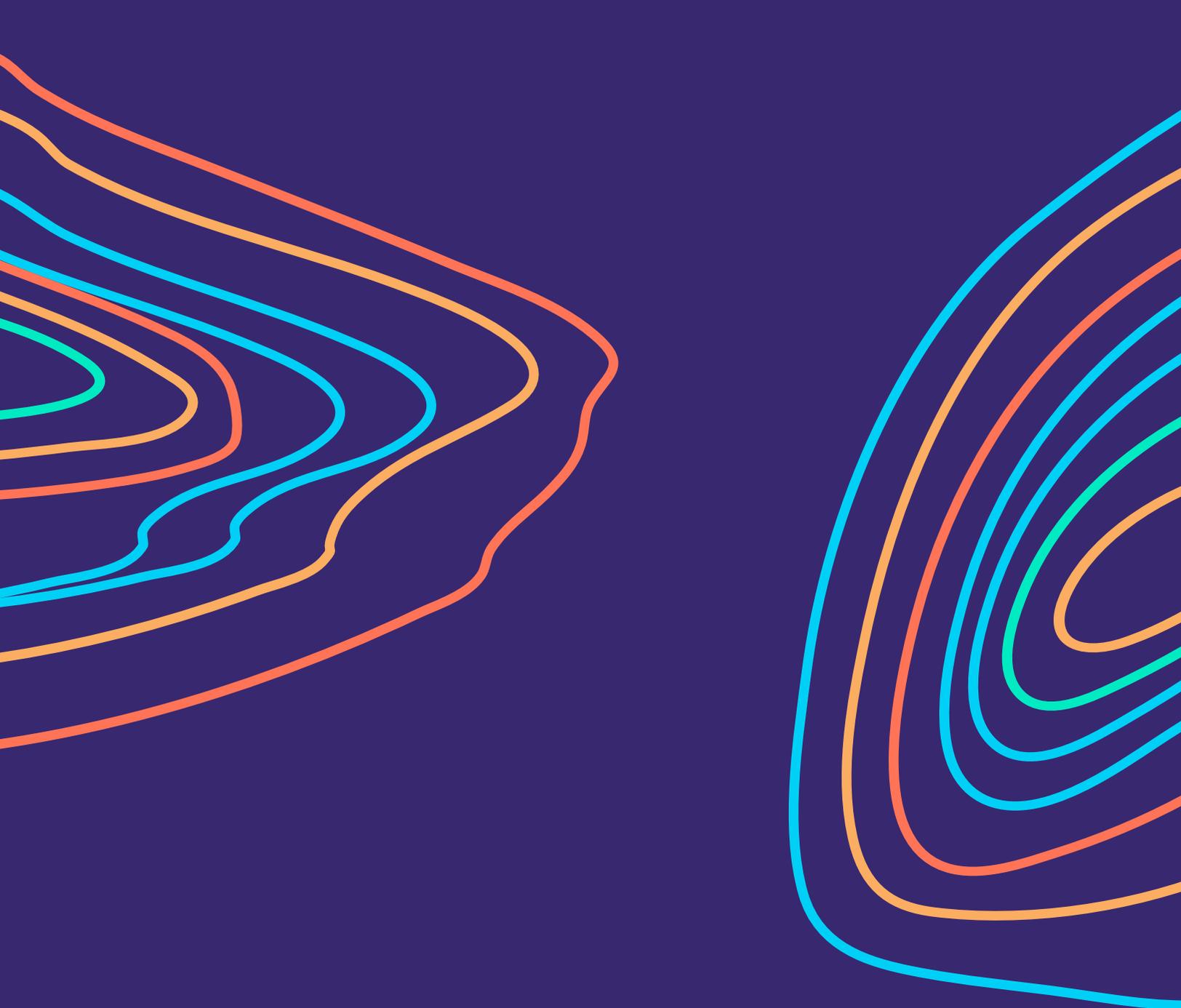
Miguel McKelvey
Co-founder, WeWork

Thank You

We appreciate your interest in Backstage and our mission to eliminate underrepresentation in tech. Please share this report and share your thoughts with us on social media. We are grateful to the investors, partners, mentors, expert workshop leaders, and global AMA speakers, and, most especially, the founders that participated in Cohort 1. We're excited to continue working with you all to build the future.

Get Involved

Corporations, investors, ecosystem thought leaders — are you interested in partnering with us to change the narrative around diversity? Let's talk. partners@backstagecapital.com



The background is a solid dark blue color. Overlaid on this are several thick, wavy, hand-drawn style lines. There are three main colors for these lines: a teal/cyan, a bright cyan, and an orange. The lines are abstract and do not form any recognizable shapes or text. They flow across the page, with some lines crossing each other.

MEET THE COMPANIES