

Pandemic Pivot Reveals Networking Advantage

Building a network - virtually

Guelph, ON July 15, 2020 – For Immediate Release – Innovation Guelph discovers surprising outcome of pivoting program delivery in response to COVID; online environment fosters effective relationship building.

In response to the pandemic, Innovation Guelph pivoted programming from in-person delivery to an online environment to reduce risk for staff and clients. Rhyze Ventures program manager, Katherine Laycock, quickly shifted in-class sessions to virtual delivery. The program, which received an investment of over \$1.8 million through the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario's Women Entrepreneur Strategy, was well underway when COVID-19 hit.

"It is important to not lose any of the value when transitioning the program to online delivery," Laycock said, "We have always valued and responded to participant feedback but were somewhat surprised when we started to hear that clients were doing more networking and building stronger relationships outside of the classroom in the online environment."

Because networking and mentorship are strong components of the Rhyze Ventures programming for women entrepreneurs, biweekly check-in meetings were added to provide opportunity for clients to share and connect. This importance is documented in studies such as Ryerson University's report: [Strengthening Ecosystem Supports For Women Entrepreneurs](#) (page 30) that states: "Women-only and feminist programs were viewed as innovative, safe spaces, a place for women to build self-confidence, to mentor or be mentored, and to network with peers and like-minded others."

Innovation Guelph client, Charlene Nadalin, President and CEO of Amintro and Rhyze Ventures participant said online biweekly update meetings really helped with engagement. "The online check-ins helped nurture relationship-building more via zoom than I'd experience in the classroom setting before COVID," said Nadalin. "There was trust, respect and understanding that can't happen in classrooms."

"Innovation and collaboration arise from crisis and it seems, empowering relationships do too," said Laycock.

"The Government of Canada is proud to support organizations that provide the right conditions for ideas to thrive, for creativity to flourish and for Canadian entrepreneurs to grow. With the pivot to online program delivery, Innovation Guelph's virtual classes will be a great learning tool for young entrepreneurs," said the Honourable Mélanie Joly, Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario.



For more information or to arrange interviews contact:

Janet Wakutz, senior communications officer, Innovation Guelph

janet.wakutz@innovationguelph.ca

Innovation Guelph is building prosperity for community well-being by providing mentorship and business support programs and services to help innovative enterprises start, grow and thrive. Innovation Guelph's business acceleration programs are designed for high-potential start-ups, small- to medium-sized enterprises and women-led businesses across southern Ontario. Innovation Guelph also serves as a one-stop point of access to business support programs and services across the province. www.innovationguelph.ca

FedDev Ontario has actively worked to advance and diversify the southern Ontario economy through funding opportunities and business services that support innovation and growth in Canada's most populous region. The Agency has delivered impressive results, which can be seen in southern Ontario businesses that are creating innovative technologies, improving their productivity, growing their revenues, and in the economic advancement of communities across the region. Read more about the impacts the Agency is having in southern Ontario. <http://www.feddevontario.gc.ca>

This project is funded in part by the Government of Canada through the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario.

Canada