



**SOCIAL IMPACT  
COMMONS**

# Supporting Start-ups

Managing Mission, Risk, and Opportunity as Fiscal Sponsors



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons  
Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike  
4.0 International Public License

This means you can adapt this work and share its contents  
freely for non-commercial purposes, provided you credit  
Social Impact Commons.



# What's at stake?

---

Fiscal sponsors have always been an essential, go-to resource for new nonprofit and social impact projects and initiatives.

It is an essential part of many fiscal sponsor missions, in particularly those serving grassroots and smaller organizations.

Any new start-up is resource intensive – on all fronts! – yet most start primarily with “sweat equity”, and it may be some time until funds start to flow that would support the fiscal sponsorship relationship.

Also, as with any new project, there is relationship testing needed between sponsor and project. This leads to a series of questions and challenges for sponsors...



# Strategic considerations

---

Not all fiscal sponsors support start-up projects, yet more are considering such support in the context of our social justice reckoning: there is great need for more culturally competent sponsors for *new*, equity-based, social and climate justice work.

- **How might supporting start-up or speculative projects fit into our mission/theory of change?**
- **If it does, how much of our capacity do we want to allocate to these supports?**
- **How does this work differ in both the kinds of support and manner of delivery?**
- **What's the resource model; how do we cover our *whole* costs-to-deliver?**
- **What staffing, cultural competency, operating systems, policies, and practices will be needed?**
- **How do we evaluate success over time: cut our losses or keep “investing”?**



# Considerations for scale and efficiency

---

In supporting start-ups, it's good to think about efficiencies and how structures and processes can be designed to delivery robust support and manage risk as the relationship develops.

>> Using “Model C” or “Model B” relationships, over limited time, to begin the relationship, before moving to “Model A”. Setting clear goals and expectations around milestones and assessment.

>> Multiplying staff time and attention through cohort-based incubator/accelerator programs that engage in structured, group learning and planning. Here, common business models/field focus may be essential.

>> Supporting leadership development and organizational building skills for social entrepreneurs. Providing a mix of direct advisory/technical support and (re)granted financial resources.

>> Engaging in “lead start-up”, iterative, processes to test services, revenue, and operating assumptions, while remaining nimble and responsive to inputs.





Thaddeus Squire, Chief Commons Steward  
[thaddeus@socialimpactcommons.org](mailto:thaddeus@socialimpactcommons.org)  
215 760 1634

Asta Petkeviciute, Chief Financial Steward  
[asta@socialimpactcommons.org](mailto:asta@socialimpactcommons.org)  
617 448 9559

Josh Sattely, Chief Legal Steward  
[josh@socialimpactcommons.org](mailto:josh@socialimpactcommons.org)  
603 731 7401

<http://socialimpactcommons.org>

Generous support for the development and work of Social Impact Commons has been provided by:



and Fidelity Charitable Trustees' Initiative

