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# Local incubator cultivates social entrepreneurs

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BY JENNIFER MARAGONI

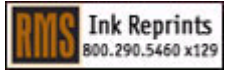
For-profit companies and nonprofit organizations can learn a lot from each other. That's why the Women's Technology Cluster is housing entrepreneurs from both worlds together under one roof.

San Francisco-based WTC was founded in 1999 as a community for women who were building technology companies. On June 26, the business incubator launched its newest program, Social Fusion, which is designed to help social entrepreneurs apply proven business principles to their nonprofit ventures.

Social entrepreneurs are those that focus on a "double bottom-line," explains Amber Nystrom, director of Social Fusion. That is, they are dedicated both to realizing a tangible return-on-investment and making a long-term impact on social problems, she says.

"You can have a nonprofit that's going to build a school to serve a community. That's exciting, but social entrepreneurs would look at how to change the process in order to get schools built in many communities," Nystrom says.

Social Fusion evolved from WTC's Social Entrepreneurship Incubator (SEI), which already has provided low-cost office space and support services -- including mentors and workshops -- to six social ventures.



For example, Resources for Indispensable Schools and Educators (RISE), which aims to keep quality teachers in low-income communities, joined SEI in February.

"Being a really young nonprofit, we didn't want to be isolated," explains Kristin Groos, vice president of programs and development at RISE. "One of the biggest advantages of WTC has been networking with other nonprofits, as well as for-profit companies [that share space at WTC]."

She adds that WTC's mentors -- experts in disciplines such as accounting, public relations and marketing, who provide free services to members -- are invaluable.

"We were able to access these folks at a critical stage of our launch," she says, adding that one mentor helped her develop a strategy to approach Target Corp., which now offers discounts to RISE teachers.

With Social Fusion, WTC is aiming to make an even bigger splash.

The organization plans to select up to 10 early- to mid-stage social ventures focused on women and girls, education and/or emerging leadership to participate in Social Fusion. The program emphasizes four building blocks: business evaluation, skills-building, coaching and networking.

Much like in the for-profit world, WTC will select companies with strong executive summaries, scalable models, unique ideas and good management teams.

And, as part of Social Fusion, WTC will host a Nonprofit Venture Forum in October, at which selected nonprofits will have an opportunity to pitch in front of a panel of funders.

Deonne Kahler, CEO of Oakland-based Right Brain Left, which teaches for-profit businesses how to become socially responsible, is on the planning committee for Social Fusion and also serves as a mentor.

"Social Fusion is sort of the other way around," she says, comparing the program to her company. "I don't see a lot of organizations teaching nonprofits how to use best business practices."

Nystrom acknowledges that there are other organizations in the Bay Area that provide consulting services to nonprofits, but says none focus specifically on incubating local social entrepreneurs.

On a global level, the Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurs, based in Geneva, Switzerland, helps social entrepreneurs develop a network and secure funding. And Santa Clara University's Center for Science Technology & Society runs an "intensive boot camp" for social entrepreneurs selected through a global competition, says center

director Jim Koch.

"Social entrepreneurship is an emerging development, because the needs are so great," explains Koch.

Nystrom believes the Bay Area is a perfect place to hatch Social Fusion.

"The Bay Area is it in terms of social entrepreneurship," she says. "We have a diverse group of entrepreneurs É and, politically, the Bay Area has always been on the cutting-edge of social change."

Jennifer Maragoni is Biz Ink's managing editor. You can reach her at [jmaragoni@svbizink.com](mailto:jmaragoni@svbizink.com).

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