

TELLURIDE FOUNDATION CREATING AN ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM:

Telluride Venture Accelerator is an example of non-traditional philanthropy

The Telluride Foundation, a new member of Philanthropy Southwest, is a small community foundation in southwestern Colorado. The foundation is an example of a funder challenging the typical model of traditional philanthropy. Recently featured in a recent Stanford Social Innovation Review article “Challenging the orthodoxies of Philanthropy” (Gabriel Kasper & Jess Ausinheiler, June 17, 2015

http://www.ssireview.org/blog/entry/challenging_the_orthodoxies_of_philanthropy), the Foundation is countering the common belief that *foundations operate only in the nonprofit world*. The foundation manages Telluride Venture Accelerator (TVA), a venture accelerator for early-stage and startup businesses in areas such as tourism, energy, and education. Each year, it enrolls up to six entrepreneurs in a five-month accelerator camp that includes equity investment, mentorship, and networking. The program taps Telluride’s community of entrepreneurs and second homeowners as mentors, coordinates with small-business development centers for targeted training, and runs an online community forum for the entrepreneurs.

TVA was launched in the fall of 2012 as an initiative of the Telluride Foundation with the goal of making Telluride a great place to start and grow a business. “The goal of TVA is to find, start and grow new, high-growth businesses, ideally starting and staying Telluride,” said Paul Major, President & CEO of the Telluride Foundation. “Capitalizing on Telluride’s uniquely-inspired community and enormous human capital, TVA is proactive venture philanthropy, pioneering a sustainable and diversified Telluride economy.”

TVA plays to Telluride’s unique strengths, including access to a high concentration of successful investors and business executives that have a connection to Telluride, being the first accelerator funded and run by a community foundation, and the first accelerator to focus on outdoor recreation, tourism, natural products, health, energy, water and education. TVA prioritizes companies with technology solutions in its focus areas. The ten companies in the 2013 and 2014 cohorts have seen great success during the past two years since their accelerator experiences, collectively raising over \$8 million, with a combined company valuation of \$51 million, and creating about 57 jobs. In addition, six new companies have based in Telluride as a result of TVA.

On July 1 2015, TVA completed its third year, launching five companies into their next phases of business, seeking investors and implementing their business plans. The culmination of the TVA program each year is the much anticipated “Demo Day,” where the companies pitch their stories and business plans to angel and institutional investors, mentors, and interested parties. Following Demo Day, the companies are hitting the road to present their businesses to investors in Denver and San Francisco.

For its third round, TVA selected five companies out of more than 100 applicants from around the world to participate in its 2015 five-month business accelerator program. Leveraging TVA’s extensive network of more than 80 mentors, they created new products, refined business plans, generated financial models, finalized investment term sheets, secured customers, and evolved their marketing and branding strategies. “TVA provided *Travel Recon* with opportunities and access to mentors in the travel industry that otherwise would not have been available to us,” commented Toby Houchens, CEO of Travel Recon, who is considering headquartering in or near Telluride. “The location of TVA in Telluride provided a concentrated line-up of world class business mentors unparalleled in other parts of the U.S.”

Along with the Telluride Foundation, TVA is supported by individual donors and the following sponsors: Demo Day’s presenting sponsor - Blackstone Charitable Foundation; Johnson Family Foundation; High Meadows Foundation; Colorado Economic Development Commission; US Small Business Administration; Cooley LLP; Softlayer, an IBM company; Foley LLP; The Peaks Resort & Spa; ASAP Accounting and Payroll; Colorado Impact Fund; and Los Alamos National Laboratory. For more information on TVA, visit www.tellurideva.com or contact Paul Major at paul@telluridefoundation.org or Thea Chase at thea@tellurideva.com.

Having attended this event for the first time, Philanthropy Southwest’s Executive Director Lucille DiDomenico said, “The Telluride Foundation challenges traditional philanthropy! Telluride Venture Accelerator is nothing less than inspired and represents a big leap forward in future thinking.”

The Telluride Foundation exists to create a stronger Telluride community through the promotion and support of philanthropy. It is a nonprofit, apolitical community foundation that provides year-round support for local organizations involved in arts, education, athletics, charitable causes, land conservation and other community-based efforts through technical assistance, education and grant making. As a grant maker, the Foundation awards grants to qualified applicants



that serve the people living and working in the Telluride area for the purpose of enhancing the quality of life within the region. For more information on the Telluride Foundation, visit www.telluridefoundation.org.