

## FOUNDER TESTIMONIALS ON REINVESTMENT

Entrepreneurs form the core of an ecosystem, and they have a major role to play in the community's development in addition to the growth of their own businesses. Endeavor Insight's research has found that successful entrepreneurs who have scaled up their businesses can have a positive impact through a variety of means, including **mentorship and angel investment**, but also by **serving as leaders and decision makers in support programs**. Local founders will likely know the most about the needs of their ecosystems, but expat entrepreneurs can also play a beneficial role by directing global resources to nascent ecosystems and building up local capacity.

Mature, self-propelling ecosystems are identifiable by their high prevalence of **founder-to-founder connections**, which facilitate the flow of knowledge and resources.

**Mentorship from successful founders is highly valuable, especially in emerging markets where there are few pre-existing models to follow.** For example, Adegoke Olubusi, the founder of Helium Health, an African healthtech company, says, "The best mentorship has come from angels who have founded other tech companies and have done private sector investment on the continent." The shortage of relevant mentors has inspired him to fill that gap. He explains, "There were no mentors when I started. I wish I had someone like me when I started, that's why I'm helping companies now. I have mentored or invested in something like 100 companies."

**There are also avenues for founders to influence investors by sharing knowledge and changing their perceptions.** As

Olubusi remarks, "We have a responsibility to educate a lot of these international investment partners. A lot of people who speak about and lead the conversation on our sector in Africa lack knowledge of the local context and the real world data. And that's why we're now so focused on educating the market because it will start to change the conversation."

**Giving back to the ecosystem can have a major impact on a country's economy.** According to the founder of a European software company that went on to spin-out dozens of other companies, "The road that we walked — we want to make it a highway for those that come after us. **We looked at how to promote our country as a destination, how to help other companies set up shop here, how to gain know-how from more developed ecosystems.**" He adds, "To me it is a matter of national interest to support all companies that are doing something meaningful. All we need is a few big successes to accelerate everything that has been built in the last 10 years." Founders can also contribute to their wider economies by engaging with policymakers to guide them on legislation that would improve growth conditions for their companies.

Ultimately, there are also advantages for founders themselves in giving back to the community. In the words of one entrepreneur, "There is value in being able to understand my own motivations, thinking, and approaches. If I formally teach them to other people, that makes me a better entrepreneur. **It helps to be part of the ecosystem, have a peer group and other networks, and broadly establish a presence and reputation that is wider than just the company.**"

## FOUNDER EXPERIENCES WITH SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Support programs can offer much-needed resources if they match the needs of entrepreneurs. Before spending time, and possibly money, on a program, **founders should make sure the type of support on offer aligns with their goals.**

In hundreds of interviews with Endeavor Insight, entrepreneurs noted both positive and negative aspects of participating in support programs. On the positive side, **tailored, sector-specific support** can help founders with product development and business model refinement.

Founders also noted that support programs are often useful for building connections with potential investors and customers, both **directly via networking and indirectly by serving as a “seal of approval.”**

Founders should identify if a program they are considering provides facilities and services that would benefit their company, given its sector or business model. In Endeavor Insight’s [study on the health sector](#), several founders had positive experiences with the assistance they received for going to market. It helped them navigate processes such as regulatory compliance and intellectual property rights.

Entrepreneurs also reported having experiences in which support programs were not helpful to them, especially when the curricula were too academic, theoretical, or generic. As one founder remarked: **“A lot of incubators themselves are trying to survive**

**and raise capital, so one has to be careful which incubator to choose to be a part of.**

Many incubators need you more than you need them.” If a support program does not provide relevant services, it can become a distraction from managing and scaling up one’s business. **In some cases, entrepreneurs believed that participating in a program could have been more useful for them at a different stage in their business’s growth**, which underscores the importance for support organizations and entrepreneurs to be in alignment about their goals prior to program participation.

Founders can consider the questions listed on the next page, both to ask themselves and the potential support program, before making a decision on whether or not to participate.



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## DECIDING TO PARTICIPATE IN A SUPPORT PROGRAM

### Questions for Self-Reflection

1. Am I able to clearly identify what this program has to offer for my business model and sector?
2. Am I paying for this? Will I be valued as a customer?
3. Is the organization running it reputable, according to my mentors and other leading entrepreneurs in the ecosystem?
4. Do I know any entrepreneurs who have been through this program?
5. How have prior participants performed? What have they said about the program?
6. Is my company currently at the right stage for this program?
7. Do the mentors and leaders of this support program have entrepreneurial experience themselves?

### Questions to Ask Support Organizations

1. How are the program's curricula and services different from other programs?
2. What kinds of companies (business model, customer type, sector) have previously participated in this program? Can I speak to alumni entrepreneurs?
3. Will I be connected to other entrepreneurs who have been on or are going through similar journeys?
4. How will the program help me to expand and use my network?
5. How will the program address the specific problems I am currently facing, and help me better identify my needs and opportunities?
6. To what extent are successful entrepreneurs involved in designing and running the program?



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