



THE
ACCELERATOR
CENTRE

Leading Waterloo's Early- Stage Startup Scene

2025-2028 Strategic Plan

A Letter From The CEO

Dear founders, partners, and AC community,

At the Accelerator Centre (AC), everything we do begins and ends with founders. They are the problem-solvers, the builders, and the bold thinkers driving Canada's innovation economy forward. Their work creates new industries, brings life to local economies, and inspires the next generation of made-in-Ontario tech companies.

Supporting them is not just our mission — it's our passion.

Over the past year, we've spent countless hours talking to founders to deeply understand how the AC can help create a robust network of support that delivers real value and positions Waterloo as Canada's powerhouse entrepreneurial hub.

Our strategic plan for 2025-2028 represents a renewed commitment to early-stage entrepreneurs: those critical first-time founders, researchers, and serial innovators who are turning big ideas into real-world impact.

These early days are the moments where support matters most — and where the Accelerator Centre has always led.

As we look to the future, we're doubling down on what we do best: delivering high-impact, hands-on programming that helps Waterloo-based founders build, grow, and thrive.

Through our new strategy, we're continuing to create pathways to capital, expert support, and industry connections — and we're doing it within a community that believes deeply in the power of entrepreneurship to shape a better future.

But we also know this work can't happen in isolation. The success of our founders — and our Region — relies on deep collaboration across our innovation ecosystem.

From government and academic institutions to corporate partners, investors, and alumni, it is our shared investment in early-stage innovation that turns bold ideas into lasting impact.

To every founder who has walked through our doors, and to every partner who stands beside them: thank you. Together, we're building an extraordinary future.

With gratitude,



Ruth Casselman
Chief Executive Officer
Accelerator Centre

Rooted in Purpose, Driven by Community

At the Accelerator Centre, we believe that founders are the driving force behind innovation, economic growth, and the future of our communities.

Nearly two decades ago, the AC was born from a bold idea — that Waterloo Region needed a space where its best and brightest entrepreneurs could connect, get support, and thrive. A place that combined the strength of academic institutions, the insight of industry, and the energy of a fast-growing tech ecosystem. A place where early-stage founders could be mentored and be part of a community that truly understands the startup journey.

Since that time, the AC has helped over 1,000 companies grow from idea to impact — creating jobs, raising investment, and transforming industries along the way.

We've become known for our founder-first philosophy, our commitment to excellence, and our role as a trusted and globally recognized accelerator.

Now, as we look ahead to 2028, we're building on that legacy and doubling down on what we do best: focusing on what founders say they need most — **access to early-stage funding, real help to get things done fast, and connections to new networks** that will help them build quickly, generate revenue, and scale with confidence.



Designed Around What Founders Really Need

We believe the best ideas come from listening — really listening — to the people who live and breathe entrepreneurship every day. That's why we approached the creation of this plan with humility, curiosity, and a deep respect for the insights of our community.

Over the past year, we engaged in thoughtful and wide-ranging consultations with our ecosystem:

- Founders, whose lived experience informed every priority we set
- Partners and funders, who offered critical perspectives on where the AC creates the most impact
- Mentors, alumni, investors, and community leaders, who generously shared ideas and bold visions for the future of innovation in Waterloo and beyond

As we built this plan, we heard a clear message from the people who matter most: **our founders.**

They reminded us that what makes the AC truly special is our ability to deliver hands-on, tactical support that accelerates progress and unlocks potential.



The AC's VISION

Mobilizing visionary tech entrepreneurs in Canada to drive innovation, economic growth, and lasting global change.



The AC's MISSION

The AC empowers early-stage tech founders in the Waterloo Region with access to diversified capital, tactical mentorship, and valuable industry connections.

We are where the real business of entrepreneurship gets done, every day.



Built for Impact

The AC is more than an accelerator. More than a coworking space. And more than a source of mentorship and advice.

The AC is a community that serves as a launchpad for driven and ambitious entrepreneurs.

Our approach is structured, hands-on, and personal. We match founders with experienced mentors, equip them with critical tools, and walk beside them every step of the way.

With milestone-driven programming, one-to-one coaching, and a deep bench of tactical experts, we help founders focus, accelerate, and scale — faster and stronger than they could alone.





Strategic Pillars

Early-stage access to
diversified capital

Real support from
experienced experts

Industry connections
that open doors

Optimized operations

Early-Stage Access to Diversified Capital

Access to early-stage capital is consistently among founders' top requests.

And for good reason. It's essential to enabling high-potential startups to thrive. By creating diversified pathways to funding through targeted partnerships, new investment initiatives, and innovative financial models, the AC will ensure that our founders are empowered to build, grow, and scale their ventures with confidence.

Through our programs, we will lead the facilitation of pre-seed and seed funding for startups in the Waterloo Region and to reestablish a focus on sales and revenue generation for early-stage companies.

We will focus on:

1. Connecting startups to a curated network of angel investors and VC partners
2. Embedding investor readiness training across all programs
3. Exploring options to provide early-stage capital directly to top-performing startups
4. Supporting founders in building strong revenue models as a pathway to sustainability

Real Support From Experienced Experts

Founders consistently tell us they value great advice, but they need more than just guidance—they want hands-on, tactical support to accelerate their progress and help them execute faster and better. This need for “real help” has been a defining feature of the AC’s high-touch programming and remains at the heart of our mission.

We go beyond mentorship — surrounding founders with tactical experts who help execute, troubleshoot, and accelerate.

We will redefine our mentor model to include a diverse set of highly sought after mentors and include more hands-on tactical support as part of AC programming.

We will focus on:

1. Reimagining our mentor model to include hands-on, high-profile industry leaders
2. Launching a “tACtical support” marketplace offering affordable access to services like bookkeeping, content creation, and design
3. Doubling down on specialized coaching in critical areas like sales, IP strategy, and AI integration
4. Rebuilding and modernizing our flagship AC:Incubate program to deliver the most value

Industry Connections That Open Doors

Relationships are the currency of entrepreneurship. We're building a community where meaningful connections are part of the everyday experience.

To support founders, our focus is on creating bridges that help founders open doors and walk through them with confidence.

The right connections can accelerate growth and provide founders with resources, insights, and opportunities that are otherwise out of reach. By acting as a connector between founders and industry, we help startups build credibility, scale faster, and succeed in competitive markets.

We will focus on:

1. Leveraging our alumni network to offer warm intros and real-world advice
2. Hosting curated networking events, founder peer groups, and industry roundtables to build community
3. Deepening collaborations with corporate and academic partners to bring founders new opportunities. Building bridges across the ecosystem to ensure founders are always supported — even beyond the AC.

Optimized Operations

To deliver world-class programming and support, the AC must operate like the startups we serve—agile, efficient, and laser-focused on delivering value. Optimized operations allow us to spend less time on administrative processes and more time helping founders succeed.

Our internal systems need to match our external ambitions. By embracing technology and streamlining workflows, we ensure that our team has the resources they need to support founders effectively. This not only strengthens our ability to deliver on our mission but also improves the experience for founders, partners, and staff alike.

Our team will operate with efficiency and passion, leveraging modern tools and processes to deliver a seamless experience for founders, ensuring that the AC remains adaptable and innovative.

We will focus on:

1. Streamlining internal systems to reduce admin burden and improve the founder experience
2. Using AI and automation to deliver more efficient and responsive support
3. Nurturing a culture of agility, collaboration, and founder-first thinking across our team

What Success Looks Like

Our vision is rooted in outcomes:

- Startups that raise capital, create jobs, and launch innovative new products
- Founders who leave more confident, connected, and capable
- Alumni who give back to the community and strengthen the next generation
- An ecosystem that's known across Canada — and the world — for being the best place to start something new



Stronger Together

We know that bold goals require bold partnerships. With the support of our funding partners from government, academia, industry leaders, and our network of alumni, we're building a stronger innovation economy, one founder at a time.

Canada 



Region of Waterloo

Ontario



Women and Gender
Equality Canada

Femmes et Égalité
des genres Canada



UNIVERSITY OF
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