

February 04, 2015



**EDUCATION** - Santa Clara University's [Global Social Benefit Institute](#) (GSBI) Accelerator is applying the Silicon Valley start-up method toward a social justice mission, improving the lives of the poor around the world. Located in Santa Clara, California, the Accelerator is a 10-month program that pairs social enterprises with savvy executives to help them grow and reach more people.

The GSBI has incubated start-ups that provide affordable clean water in rural India, for example, or low-cost diabetes care to patients in Mexico where affordable options were scarce. This past year's class includes a Peruvian company that trains unskilled workers in data services, a renewable solar energy company in China and a mobile platform for farmers in Ghana.

Unlike other incubators that focus on leadership potential and ideas, GSBI focuses on enterprises that are past the conceptual phase and ready for investors. After months of online work with GSBI staff and mentors, entrepreneurs visit the Santa Clara campus for nine days of intensive training and an "Investor Showcase," where they present their ideas to investors and social good organizations. At the end of the program, start-ups must be ready to give a 10-minute pitch and have documentation and financial statements to convince investors that they've done their due diligence.

"We are business-model centric," says Thane Kreiner, executive director of the GSBI, who spent 17 years as an entrepreneur and started and ran several biotech companies in Silicon Valley. "Most of us come from the business world and started and ran companies, so we know what we're talking about."

Since its founding in 2003, GSBI has supported over 300 entrepreneurs, and 90 percent are still in business. The program has raised \$96 million in funding — much of it from Silicon Valley venture connections — and has impacted an estimated 107 million lives. The program brings in undergrad participation through fellowships, in which students are selected to travel abroad and work with GSBI social enterprises.

The university's location in Silicon Valley affords it the opportunity to call on alumni and neighbors as mentors, like execs from Netflix and Cisco. According to Kreiner, social enterprises need all the help they can get. Being a social entrepreneur is even harder than regular start-up work, he says, because they're dealing with broken systems and often, in developing countries, lack of infrastructure. Regardless of these challenges, Kreiner credits the program's success to a unique blend of high-tech innovation and a tradition of "Ignatian self-awareness" and sense of one's role in improving the world.

"We have two things going on," he says. "A Silicon Valley ethos of taking ideas and getting them to scale, and the Jesuit tradition of serving the poor."

To learn more about the GSBI, [click here](#) .

Source: jesuits.org, January 21, 2015