CIRCE

Germany – Creative Impact Fund

PAM, Pitch AI Mentor

Helping women of colour and other marginalised entrepreneurs overcome systemic barriers through practicing and enhancing their pitch skills

Empowering Women of Color Founders: Project PAM's innovation Journey

By Sophie Webber, Stephanie von Behr, Britt Davis

In the Realm of Entrepreneurship: Empowering Marginalised Voices Project PAM spearheaded by Founderland: Stephanie von Behr, Sophie Webber, and Britt Davis and with the support of R/GA. This project operates within the entrepreneurial ecosystem with a mission to empower and level the playing field for women of colour and marginalised founders.

The issue at the heart of our project is glaring – women-led companies, especially those led by women of colour, receive only a fraction of the venture capital they deserve. Despite concerted efforts to promote diversity, the numbers remain disheartening. It's a systemic problem, deeply entrenched in biases and structural barriers. To put it simply, as Kamal Hassan, Monisha Varadan, and Claudia Zeisberger (2020, January 13) poignantly noted, "Women who venture into entrepreneurship are not poised to get a fair deal."

But PAM is not just a response to a problem; it's a testament to innovation and empowerment. It's where social and technological innovation converge. On one front, it strives to break down the long-standing barriers that hinder equal opportunities in entrepreneurship. On the other, it revolves around the development of PAM, an ingenious AI-powered tool crafted to refine and elevate entrepreneurs' pitching skills, a fundamental requirement to attract investment.

Our project encompasses the ideation and prototyping of PAM, and stems from a comprehensive evaluation of how we could scale Compass, Founderland's flagship investor-readiness program. Compass supports founders with the knowledge, skills, and resources they need to prepare for and engage with potential investors and secure funding. This highly personalised real-time cohort setting fosters collaboration, learning, and growth.

We sought to find an aspect of Compass that we could automate in an authentic and human way. Our approach is rooted in iteration and a strong user-centric focus, with validation, definition, and refinement serving as the foundational principles. This methodology ensures that PAM is custom-tailored to effectively address the distinctive challenges and requirements of its target audience.

Our innovative approach addresses the broader issues of bias and the lack of access to resources. PAM was conceptualised to be more than just a tool for pitch development; it's a solution to systemic challenges. Through a series of design sprints, extensive focus group feedback, desk research, user interviews, and iterative development, PAM evolved into a sophisticated tool capable of offering personalised guidance to entrepreneurs.

A notable milestone in our journey was the creation of diverse investor personas. These personas, meticulously crafted through extensive research and community feedback, represent a range of investors - from angels to venture capitalists. They play a pivotal role in simulating realistic pitch scenarios for the demographic we are targeting. Our unwavering commitment to inclusivity shone through as we made deliberate efforts to address and mitigate bias in these personas, ensuring they accurately represented a fair cross-section of the investment community.

At the heart of our process is a strong emphasis on user research and adaptability. Medium-fidelity prototypes of PAM, created using Figma, allowed for early testing and refinement. Regular interactions with the Founderland community and stakeholders ensured that the tool continuously evolved to meet the real-world needs of entrepreneurs.

The process of naming our tool, resulting in PAM which stands for Pitch AI Mentor, and the development of a distinctive logo were instrumental as it was designed with the intention to establish PAM strongly in the market. This branding strategy went beyond aesthetics; it embedded the core values and mission of the project into its very identity.

Throughout its lifecycle, the project thrived on feedback-driven development. Insights gleaned from focus groups, combined with the expertise of the Founderland and R/GA teams, contributed to the refinement of PAM. A comprehensive roadmap for PAM's development laid out the project's future direction, including plans for scaling and the potential addition of new features. The future of PAM involves scaling to a wider audience, continuous improvement based on user feedback, and potential integration with other entrepreneurial support tools and platforms.

B. Journey

Our journey began with a resolute mission – to empower underrepresented founders with the essential tools and knowledge required to excel in the fiercely competitive landscape of startup funding. In this section, we present the chronicle of our innovation journey, marked by significant milestones, insights, and a commitment to drive meaningful change.

Our initial concept was to develop a gamified learning platform to scale part of our "Compass" investor readiness program. This platform aimed to provide essential knowledge and skills in fundraising, negotiation, and pitching in a user-friendly, engaging format. We kicked off this project with a design sprint and invited 10 diverse women entrepreneurs and consultants within the Founderland community to gather insights which led to the discovery that a more focused approach was needed. We also surveyed founders within our community to understand which element of the fundraising journey was the most challenging. Our goal for the initial concept was clear – create an accessible and engaging platform that would democratise access to critical knowledge for founders from underrepresented backgrounds.

The Innovation Design Sprint: Exploring Possibilities

During the design sprint, we immersed ourselves in a world of possibilities. A diverse group of (self-identifying) women consultants and founders from various domains joined forces to brainstorm and spar ideas. The sprint was structured to encourage free thinking, collaboration, and innovation with a primary objective to harness the collective expertise of the participants to shape the development of a gamified Compass-investor-readiness program. Participants began the workshop by sharing their "pre-work" findings, which included research on gamified tools they enjoy using and finding captivating. Examples such as Duolingo, Candy Crush, and others, were discussed to understand the elements that make them engaging and sticky products. The group delved into the challenges faced by founders, providing valuable context for the development of the gamified program.

Through deep-dive discussions and brainstorming sessions, we identified the pain points faced by underrepresented founders on their entrepreneurial journey. We also used creative magical thinking to play out magic wand scenarios and think outside the box about what could be the best solution for the challenge.

As we progressed, we explored the gamification of learning materials, engaging storytelling, and interactive modules. Our aim was to make the learning experience not only educational but enjoyable. The design sprint was a crucible of creativity, where ideas flourished, were challenged, and evolved.

Pivoting Towards Pitch Excellence

The insights we gained pointed us towards a new direction. We honed in on one of the most critical aspects of one's entrepreneurial journey: the pitch. We recognised that founders, especially women of colour, often faced unique challenges during pitch presentations.

In response to this insight, we made a decision. We narrowed our focus of scaling Compass to developing a specialised AI tool, PAM. We envisioned PAM as an innovative solution to assist entrepreneurs in refining their pitches. It would provide targeted guidance, address bias in investor questions, and equip founders with the skills and confidence needed to excel in the high-stakes world of pitching to investors.

Crafting a Hypothesis: The Foundation of Validation

As we ventured into the validation phase of our innovation journey, it became evident that formulating a well-defined hypothesis was paramount. The hypothesis would serve as the cornerstone of our efforts, guiding our exploration and experimentation. Our aim was to uncover the most effective strategies to empower founders, particularly women of colour, in their investor pitch presentations.

The Hypothesis We Landed On: Content, Slideware, and Delivery

After conducting research within our community and having discussions within our team, we arrived at a hypothesis that encompassed three vital dimensions: content, slideware, and delivery. Our hypothesis posited that an effective pitch is a strategic blend of compelling content, visually engaging slideware, and confident, persuasive delivery. We believed that addressing these aspects would not only enhance the impact of pitches but also mitigate the challenges faced by our target demographic of founders.

Hypothesis Methodology and Synthesis

To rigorously test our hypothesis, we embarked on a multifaceted approach. Our methodology involved a combination of user interviews, desk research, and a survey of the founders within our community. Each component played a pivotal role in validating and refining our hypothesis.

OVERVIEW

During this process, we will combine the insights from desk research, technical analysis, interviews and project objective to validate and estimate the impact of each feature.

1	2	3	4
Asking investors to prioritise and validate the features of a winning pitch.	Asking founders to validate and rate the most challenging features of a winning pitch.	Gathering insights regarding the ongoing support of each feature.	Looking at the technical implementation of each feature in the list.
Desirability	Desirability	Viability	Feasibility

An Overview of our Hypothesis Methodology

User Interviews

User interviews formed a crucial part of our validation process. Through these conversations, we aimed to unearth not only the desirability of our envisioned tool but also to gain valuable insights from the very individuals it was designed to empower.

Our founder community became our primary source of understanding. Through in-depth interviews, founders provided candid perspectives on their struggles and aspirations within the entrepreneurial landscape. They unveiled the intricacies of their pitch preparation processes, highlighting the pain points they encountered at various stages. Their willingness to share their experiences and challenges was instrumental in identifying the precise areas where our tool, PAM, could make a meaningful impact.

Furthermore, we extended our interviews to include investors who play a critical role in the startup ecosystem. These interactions provided a unique vantage point, enabling us to understand the expectations and criteria that investors considered when evaluating pitches. We dug into how investors scrutinize certain aspects of the pitch such as team, market size, problem, and solution.

The investors' insights were invaluable, as they offered a perspective that allowed us to align PAM with the investor community's expectations, ultimately increasing its effectiveness in bridging the gap between founders and investors.

Through user interviews, we not only confirmed the desirability of our tool but also harnessed a wealth of qualitative data that guided us in fine-tuning PAM to cater to the specific needs and challenges that founders and investors faced within the realm of pitch presentations.

Desk Research on Bias

Concurrently, we conducted extensive desk research to delve into the biases faced by women of color in the entrepreneurial landscape. This research illuminated the prevalence of prevention-oriented questions that women of colour often encountered from investors, questions that emphasised safety, responsibility, and security. It became clear that addressing these biases was paramount in our quest to empower founders.

Informing a Subtle yet Impactful Feature

The synthesis of our research and insights led to a pivotal moment in our journey. We recognised the need to address the promotion vs. prevention challenge head-on, but we aimed to do so in a way that was subtle yet impactful. This realisation gave birth to a unique feature within our tool.

Rather than overtly categorising questions as "promotion" or "prevention", we framed them as "supportive" or "challenging". This subtle shift allowed us to provide guidance to founders on navigating different question orientations without drawing attention to the biases they might face. It became an integral part of our AI tool, fostering confidence and resilience in founders while ensuring they were well-prepared for a variety of investor interactions.
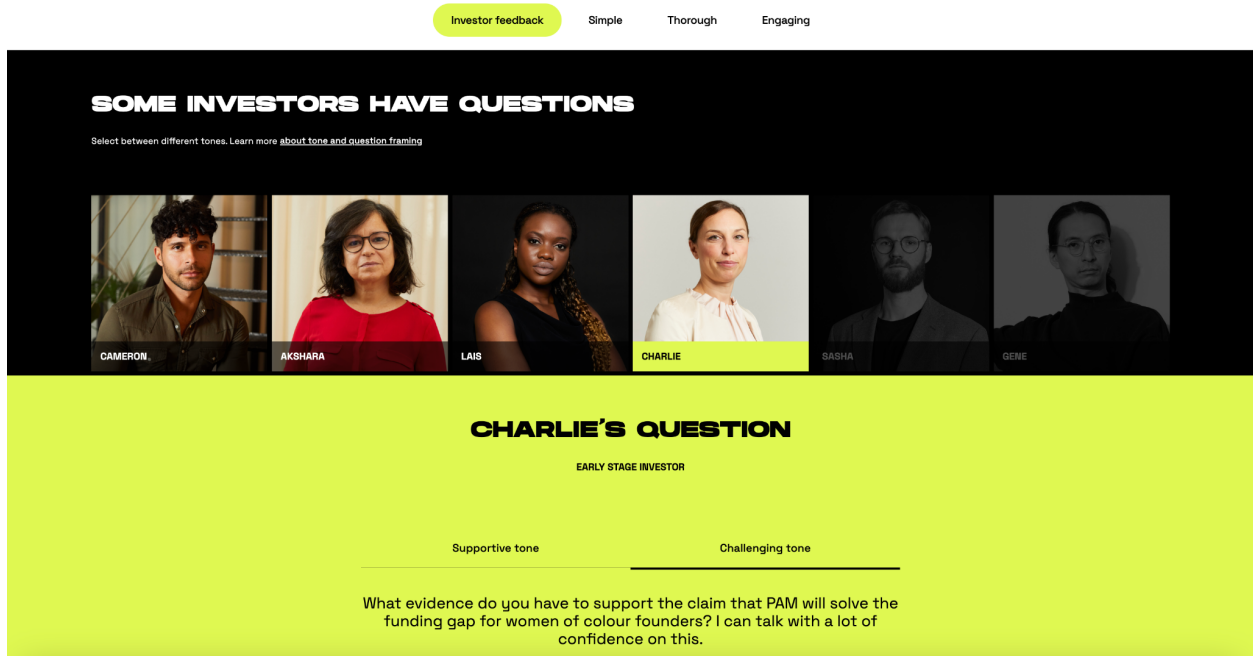
A snapshot of the investor questions created by PAM

In the validation phase, we had not only validated our hypothesis but also refined our approach to empower founders effectively, setting the stage for the development of our specialised AI tool, PAM. With a deep understanding of the challenges faced by underrepresented founders and a strategic hypothesis, we were ready to embark on the next phase of our journey – building PAM to make a meaningful impact in the world of investor pitch presentations.

Our journey was focused on addressing economic disparities in venture capital funding, especially for women of color and marginalized entrepreneurs. Our core mission was to empower underrepresented entrepreneurs, and we consistently based our decisions on the needs and experiences of our community.

C. Innovation

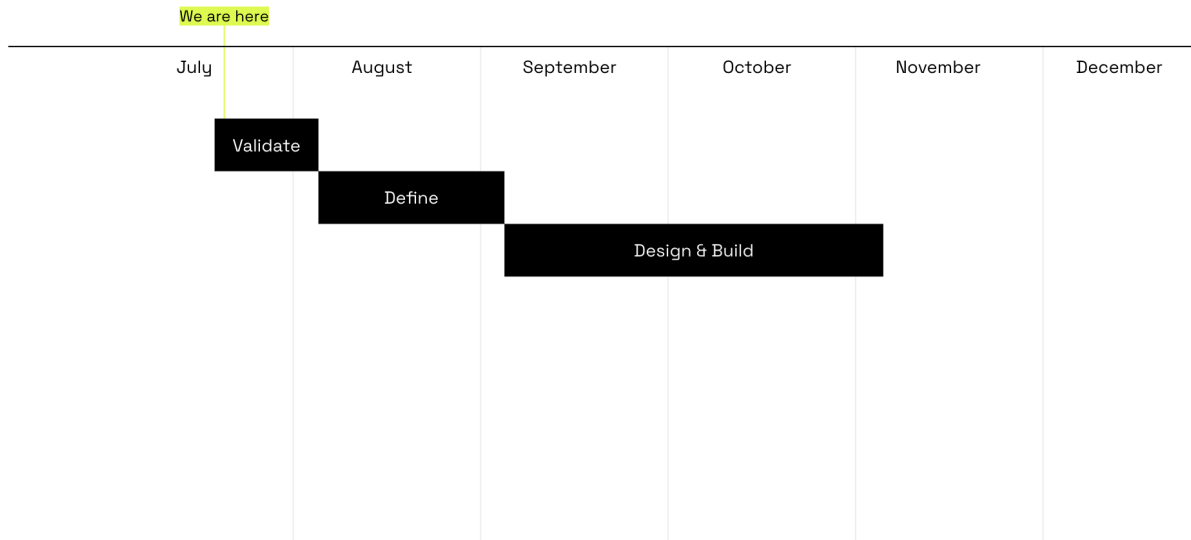**Embarking on the Innovation Journey: Validate, Define, Design & Build**

Our journey with PAM was an exploration of innovation, characterised by four distinct phases: Validate, Define, Design, and Build which were iterative sprints. These stages collectively played a pivotal role in shaping PAM, our ambitious AI tool designed to revolutionise the pitching process for underrepresented and often overlooked founders.

To bring PAM to life we partnered with our strategic partners [R/GA](#) who have supported Founderland since its inception with brand development and strategy. Their involvement in PAM centered around co-production, tech, design, and user experience. Our collaboration ensured that the product caters to the needs of our community and resonates with the Founderland experience. Working in partnership with R/GA has been a pivotal part of our journey.

Founderland was privileged to have been part of their "Make Good for Business" program, an initiative aimed at closing the racial wealth gap by providing pro-bono services to BIPOC businesses and organizations to support their growth. Through this collaboration, we were able to partner with R/GA at a discounted rate to develop PAM, which was an incredible opportunity. The synergy between our teams allowed us to harness their expertise and creativity, resulting in a transformative project. We are immensely grateful to R/GA for their unwavering support and involvement in Project PAM, as their contribution has played a significant role in bringing our vision to life. You can learn more about R/GA's Make Good program [here](#).

Sprint 1, Validation phase, July 2023

WHERE WE ARE

We are here					
July	August	September	October	November	December

Validate

Define

Design & Build

An insight into our sprint plan

During our first sprint In the Validation Phase, our primary objective was to lay a solid foundation for our project by gaining a profound understanding of the needs of our target audience. This phase went beyond affirmation of our ideas; it involved being highly receptive to adapting our direction based on valuable user feedback.

Community Engagement and Feedback Gathering were the initial steps in this phase. We actively engaged with the Founderland community through surveys and in-depth interviews, seeking candid feedback. Our outreach extended to founders within our community, allowing us to gain insights into the challenges they faced in securing venture capital funding.

Simultaneously, we initiated discussions with investors, recognising the significance of understanding their perspective. These interactions provided invaluable insights into what investors typically look for in pitches and common pitfalls entrepreneurs should avoid.
The Data Analysis and Insights stage was pivotal. We meticulously examined the data gathered, aiming to extract actionable insights to guide the development of PAM. This process involved

sifting through feedback, identifying patterns, and gaining a deep understanding of user preferences and expectations.

We drafted our hypothesis to get validated by founders and investors. In our approach, we looked at what makes a winning pitch and how it can get translated into actionable features. Our hypothesis focused on assessing founders' content, delivery, and slideware measuring it against three different criteria: Simplicity, Thoroughness, and Engagement. We would train the language model to analyse founder's pitches against this criteria and give them feedback after each pitch.
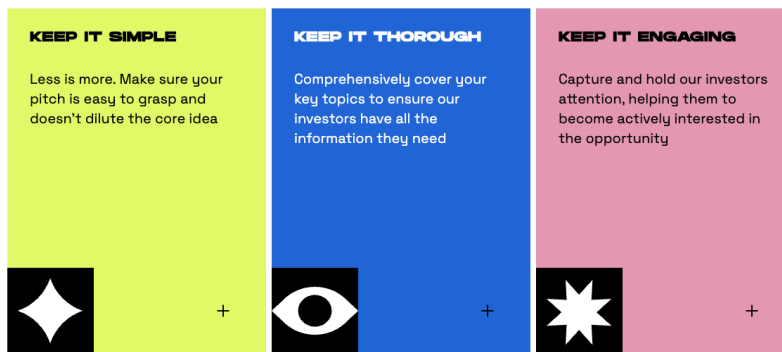

A snapshot of post pitch feedback created by PAM

Additionally, we conducted extensive desk research focusing on bias experienced by women of colour. These two elements informed our approach and hypothesis validation, enriching our insights into the challenges faced by underrepresented founders in the entrepreneurial landscape.

The insights garnered from this phase played a crucial role in validating our assumptions about PAM. They enabled us to refine our concept and ensure that the planned features aligned with our users' actual needs and would be genuinely valuable.

Sprint 2, Validation Phase, August 2023

In Sprint 2 for PAM we focused on validating our approach and refining our tools. We conducted interviews and surveys, and engaged in desk research to gather insights. Our goal was to prioritise features for a winning pitch, addressing both founder and investor perspectives. We emphasised the need to be aware of biases in technology and AI, striving to mitigate them throughout the project.

We were particularly mindful of biases inherent in technology and AI. We recognised that these biases could inadvertently shape our tools and analyses, potentially leading to skewed outcomes. To address this, we integrated checks and balances in our methodology, ensuring a more balanced and fair representation of diverse founder and investor needs. This proactive approach was critical in maintaining the integrity of our project and ensuring that our tools were equitable and inclusive for all users.

Our approach was flexible, tailoring services to unique partner needs, and we emphasised collaboration, respect, and positivity in our team dynamics. This phase was crucial in preparing for the subsequent Define phase.

Sprint 3, Validation, July 2023

❝
"We need to understand the business model, the market that they're addressing and their solution in a couple of minutes"
Pre-Seed Investor

❝
"We have limited capacity so the pitch needs to be on point"
Pre-Seed Investor

An excerpt from our user research

In Sprint 3 of the Validation phase we concentrated on validating our tool's features from both founder and investor perspectives. We achieved a deeper understanding of the pitching process and its challenges, identifying unique elements to make our tool beneficial for the Founderland community, especially women of colour founders. We identified challenges unique to this group, such as access to networks and bias in funding. Our focus was on tailoring the tool to address these specific hurdles, creating a more inclusive and supportive environment. By acknowledging and addressing these unique challenges, our tool aimed to empower these founders, level the playing field and foster greater diversity and equity in the startup ecosystem. This phase was critical in fine-tuning our approach, ensuring it was tailored to the specific needs and experiences of our users.

The Define Phase: Strategizing and Planning

In the Define Phase, our objective was to solidify the vision for PAM and create a well-defined strategic roadmap for its development. This phase served as a crucible for ideas, fostering a dynamic exchange of thoughts, discussions, and debates. Our primary focus during this part of the innovation journey was to craft a user experience for PAM that would not only be functional but also captivating, intuitive, and profoundly impactful.

To achieve this, we leveraged a range of strategies and tools, with a particular emphasis on utilising medium-fidelity wireframes designed through the platform Figma. These wireframes served as a visual blueprint, facilitating continuous iterations of the platform's layout and functionality while ensuring a clear understanding of the user journey.

An integral part of our design process was the adoption of sprint-based work cycles. Through organised, time-bound sprints, each with specific objectives and outcomes, we ensured the rapid prototyping, collection of feedback, and refinement of our designs in a dynamic and efficient manner.

Vision Refinement and Roadmap Development took centre stage during this phase. Insights garnered from the validate phase played a pivotal role in fine-tuning our vision for PAM. Through extensive brainstorming sessions, we delved into various aspects of PAM, encompassing core functionalities and user interface design, among others.

The culmination of this phase was the creation of a comprehensive product roadmap, outlining the developmental trajectory of PAM. This roadmap meticulously charted specific milestones and timelines, providing our project with a clear sense of direction and attainable objectives.
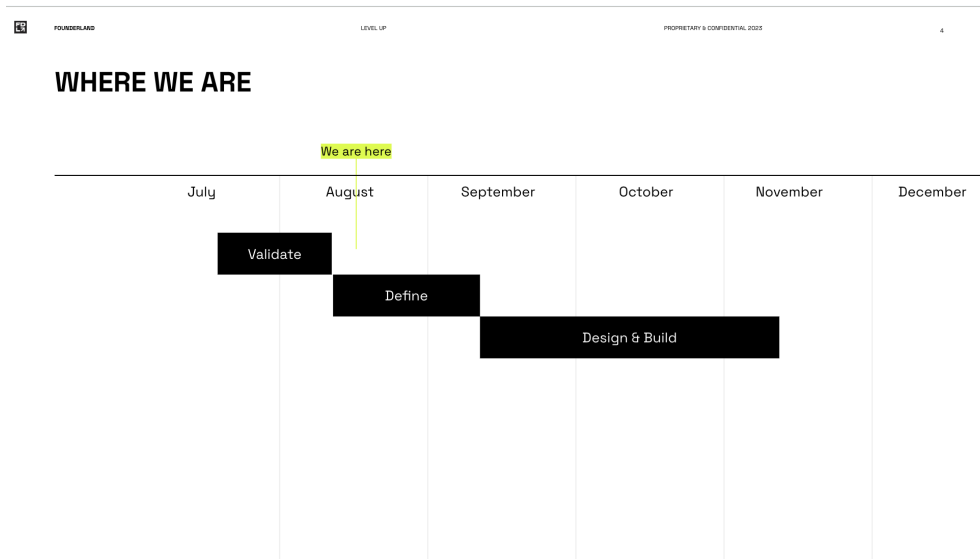
Technical Exploration and Feasibility Studies formed another critical facet of the define phase. Our team embarked on a journey of exploration into the realm of AI technologies, seeking to understand how these innovations could be seamlessly integrated to enhance the pitching process.

Concurrently, feasibility studies were conducted to ensure that our ambitious plans for PAM were not merely visionary but also executable within the confines of our resource constraints and technological capabilities.

The predominant challenge encountered during this phase revolved around striking the right balance between feature development and creating a Minimum Viable Product (MVP), all while adhering to budget constraints. Balancing these priorities required careful consideration. On one hand, we aimed to develop a feature-rich solution that added substantial value. On the other hand, we recognized the importance of delivering an MVP within our budget and timeline, allowing us to gather real-world feedback and iterate effectively. Our adaptation strategy involved meticulous planning and a focus on prioritisation to navigate these competing demands successfully.

Our solution to this challenge was the cultivation of a collaborative environment where technology experts, designers, and subject matter specialists worked harmoniously. This collaborative approach ensured that every facet of PAM's development was driven by a symbiotic relationship between technical feasibility and user-centric design principles.

Sprint 4 - Define phase, August 2023

WHERE WE ARE

We are here

July	August	September	October	November	December

Validate

Define

Design & Build

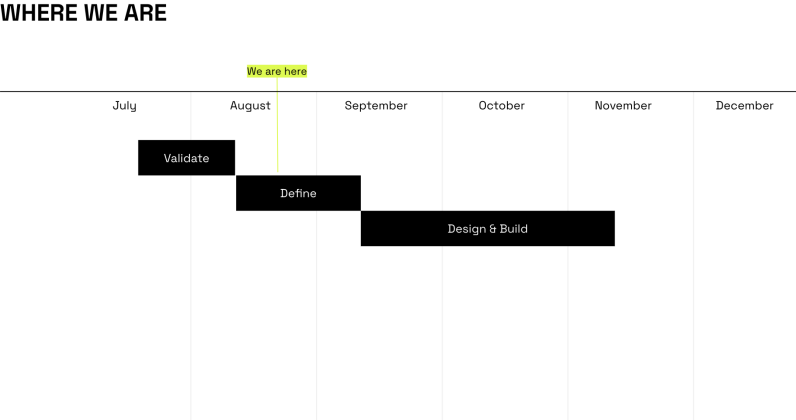**An insight into our sprint plan**

In Sprint 4, the "Define" phase of PAM, our team focused on developing a prioritisation framework to streamline our content, slideware, and delivery strategies. We meticulously assessed each feature, considering the founder and investor perspectives to ensure viability and effectiveness. This phase involved creating low-fidelity wireframes and interactive click-dummies to bring our journey experience to life. Our efforts were geared towards defining the steps of the process, ensuring clarity, simplicity, and engagement in our approach. This foundational work set the stage for the upcoming design and build phases.

The prioritisation framework developed in Sprint 4 focused on evaluating and ranking features based on their impact and feasibility. This involved considering how each feature would resonate with both founders and investors, ensuring they address key needs and preferences. The framework guided the development of low-fidelity wireframes and interactive prototypes, ensuring that the most impactful and viable features were incorporated into the design. This rigorous process was critical in refining our strategy and ensuring that our solutions were both effective and practical.

We developed low-fidelity wireframes and interactive click-dummies to visualise and test our ideas. The wireframes presented a basic structure of our web interface, focusing on layout and user flow without detailed design elements. This allowed us to iterate quickly and incorporate

feedback effectively. The click-dummies, essentially interactive prototypes, simulated the user experience, providing a more tangible sense of how users would navigate and interact with our platform. These tools were instrumental in refining our ideas and moving towards a more user-centred design.

Sprint 5, Define Phase, August 2023

An insight into our sprint plan

In Sprint 5, we advanced to the "Define" phase. We focused on refining our approach to investor personas, delving deeper into their characteristics and preferences. Our team also updated our medium-fidelity wireframes and interactive prototypes, honing in on the 'Results' page and refining other screens in the journey. This sprint was pivotal in shaping our understanding of the investor landscape and refining our platform to better meet the needs of both founders and investors.

Investor Personas
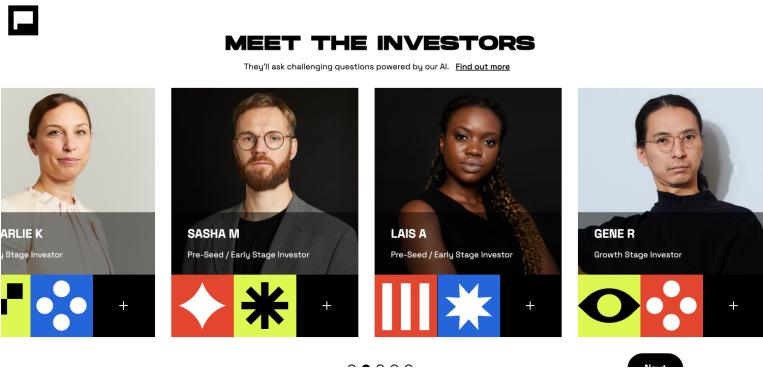
A snapshot of the investor personas within PAM

The development of detailed investor personas was a critical step in understanding our target audience. These personas represented archetypical investors, each with unique characteristics, investment preferences, and decision-making criteria. By delving into these personas, we gained insights into their motivations and priorities, enabling us to tailor our platform's features and content to better align with their expectations. This detailed characterisation was instrumental in refining our approach and ensuring that our solutions resonated effectively with the investor community.

CAMERON Q
Pre-Seed / Early Stage Investor

Meet Cameron, a Partner at a Swedish VC powerhouse. Once a tech startup founder himself Cameron now steers investments in diverse sectors like food, e-commerce, and retail.

INTERESTS

FOOD INDUSTRY   E-COMMERCE   COMMUNITY

A snapshot of one of PAM's investors

The Results Page

In Sprint 5, the 'Results' page was a key focus. We aimed to create a user-friendly interface that clearly presented the outcomes of our platform's analysis. This page was designed to offer both founders and investors concise, actionable insights. Attention was given to the layout, ensuring that information was easy to navigate and understand. We prioritised the clarity and relevance of the data presented, ensuring that it aligned with the needs and expectations of our target audience. This refinement was crucial in enhancing the overall user experience.

Investor feedback   Simple   Thorough   Engaging

HERE'S WHERE TO IMPROVE

YOUR PRESENTATION

The presentation provides a clear overview of the problem, solution, business model, and go-to-market strategy. However, it lacks specific numbers and data to support the market potential and financial projections.

HOW TO IMPROVE FURTHER

Consider adding more detailed market research, financial projections, and key performance indicators to strengthen the presentation. Additionally, including testimonials or early feedback from potential users or partners could enhance the credibility of the solution.

A snapshot of post pitch feedback created by PAM

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Validate

Define

Design & Build
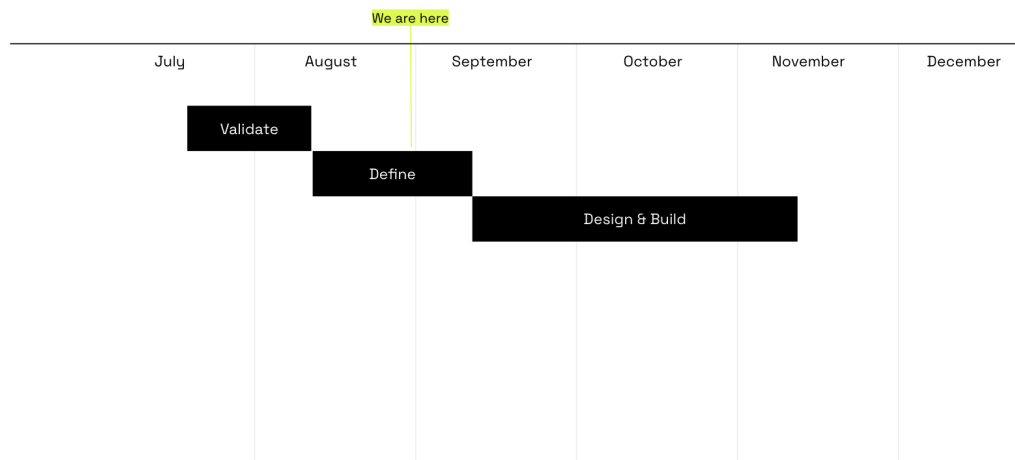
An insight into our sprint plan

In Sprint 6, the "Define" phase of PAM, we refined the MVP features and enhanced the pitch tool's functionality. The emphasis was on achieving a balance between user experience and technical feasibility, ensuring our tool effectively met the needs of both founders and investors. We carefully evaluated each feature's complexity and its value to the user journey, prioritizing those that offered the highest benefits with manageable technical requirements. This approach allowed us to develop a tool that was both effective and feasible to implement, meeting the needs of our users

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without overextending our technical capabilities and was was crucial in transitioning from conceptual design to a more concrete, actionable roadmap for development.

Sprint 7, Define Phase, August 2023

In Sprint 7 we focused on enhancing our MVP features and refining the tone of voice for our platform. This sprint involved crucial updates to the design prototypes and the development of a cohesive and effective communication style. Our approach aimed to balance confidence and approachability, creating a user experience that is both engaging and credible. This phase was instrumental in setting the stage for the upcoming Design & Build phases.

We prioritised creating a communication style that was both professional and engaging. We aimed for a tone that conveyed confidence and expertise, yet remained approachable and user-friendly. This effort was pivotal in ensuring that our platform's messaging resonated effectively with our diverse audience, comprising both founders and investors. The refined tone of voice was integrated into our design prototypes, aligning with our overall brand identity and user experience goals.

We also started focusing on the resources page for PAM. We designed content, tools, and resources to make founders pitch-ready, providing holistic support and key frameworks for a successful pitch. These resources were tailored to differentiate our tool from others and bring a unique Founderland perspective. Key elements included pre-pitch onboarding, reinforcing the purpose of our tool, and setting a motivational tone. We incorporated bitesize content, limited quantities for simplicity, and integrated Founderland community voices. This aspect will be pivotal in preparing founders for the pitching process and providing them with valuable resources as they move through the tool.
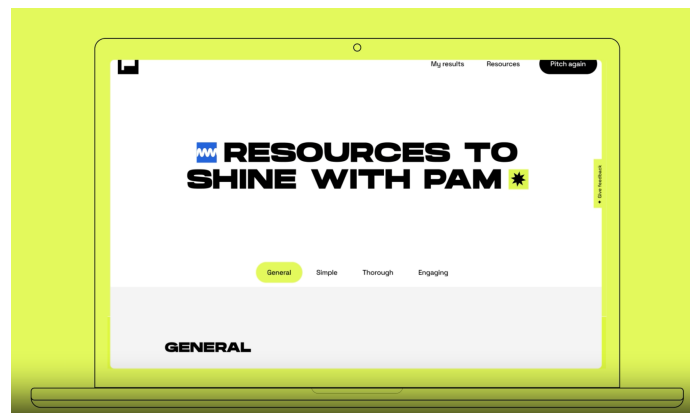
A snapshot of the resources page that founders can utilise within PAM

The Design & Build Phase: Bringing the Vision to Life

The design and build phase marked a pivotal moment in our journey, where the plans and ideas for PAM began to materialise. This phase was characterised by intense collaboration, creativity, and training our LLM (large language model).

Designing the User Experience: Crafting Engagement and Impact

During this phase, our primary focus was on sculpting a user experience for PAM that would be engaging, intuitive, and impactful. Our dedicated design and user experience teams worked tirelessly to shape a platform that went beyond mere functionality.

Special attention was dedicated to the user experience. The goal was to create a platform that was functional but also captivated users with its visual appeal and ease of navigation. Our team employed feedback loops and meticulously planned user journeys within the tool, ensuring that PAM delivered a seamless and enriching experience to its users.

Prototyping and Iterative Development: Evolving Toward Excellence

Prototyping played a pivotal role during this phase. Multiple iterations of PAM were developed, each guided by user feedback and technical evaluations. This iterative development process was instrumental in refining and enhancing PAM to meet our exacting standards and fulfil its intended purpose.

Technical Implementation and Rigorous Testing: Ensuring Reliability

The technical implementation of PAM was a complex undertaking. Our skilled development team at R/GA undertook the integration of training our LLM with data and prompts to ensure the tool's functionalities were robust and reliable. Rigorous testing procedures were put in place, including beta testing and usability studies. These tests aimed not only to identify and rectify technical glitches but also to gauge the effectiveness of PAM and the satisfaction of our users.

Challenges and Overcoming Them: Balancing Innovation and Practicality

A significant challenge in this phase revolved around striking the right balance between innovation and practicality. It was crucial to ensure that the features being implemented in PAM were not only cutting-edge but also genuinely useful for our users.

To overcome this challenge, we maintained a close and continuous feedback loop with our users throughout the development process. Regular feedback and testing sessions played a vital role in keeping us grounded and focused on our ultimate goal: creating a user-friendly and effective tool that would empower founders on their entrepreneurial journey.

Conclusion: A Reflection on Our Path to Innovation

Each stage of the innovation journey brought us closer to realising our vision for PAM, a tool that we believe will revolutionise the way entrepreneurs approach pitching and, in turn, democratise access to funding.

As we look back on this journey, we are filled with a sense of pride and accomplishment. From validating our initial ideas to defining our strategy, and from designing to building the MVP, every step was taken with a singular focus: to create a tool that empowers, supports, and uplifts. PAM, in its essence, is not just a technological solution but a beacon of hope and empowerment for the entrepreneurs we serve.

D. Impact

Our project, PAM, is in the early stages, with the MVP set to launch publicly on January 12th for a small group of beta testers. While we are yet to fully measure the quantitative impact, we have already witnessed significant qualitative impact for the founders who have tested the tool.

External Impact:

PAM's potential to make a positive impact on underrepresented founders is already evident. In our conversations with the Founderland community, we've received positive feedback on the idea and early wireframes of PAM. Founders have shown excitement about a tool that can help them

refine their pitch presentations, handle investor questions, and improve their chances of securing funding through repeated practice. While we're awaiting the launch and beta testing to gather concrete data, these early signs of interest and enthusiasm emphasize PAM's relevance in addressing the challenges faced by women of color and marginalized entrepreneurs.

Supporting Narratives:

During our interactions with founders, we've received insightful narratives that underscore the need for a tool like PAM. The majority of founders who apply to be a part of the Founderland community have shared their personal experiences of facing unique challenges and bias in investor pitch presentations. These stories highlight the importance of addressing biases and providing targeted guidance. While these are anecdotal accounts, they offer valuable qualitative insights into the potential impact of PAM.

Internal Impact:

Internally, our experience with PAM has driven meaningful changes within our team and organisation. It has nurtured a culture of innovation, collaboration, and teamwork. Our partnership with R/GA has underscored the idea that cross-disciplinary collaboration and diverse perspectives are the keys to fostering innovation and creativity.

Innovation Culture:

The development of PAM has cultivated an innovation-focused mindset within our team. The iterative design and development process have encouraged brave, creative problem-solving and a willingness to adapt based on user feedback. This culture of continuous improvement and innovation has permeated our organisation and is reflected in our approach to other projects and initiatives.

Cross-functional Collaboration:

The complexity of developing PAM has necessitated close collaboration among cross functional teams. Designers, developers, subject matter experts, and user experience specialists have worked collaboratively, breaking down silos and enhancing our ability to tackle multifaceted challenges effectively. This cross-functional collaboration has become a model for future projects, emphasising the importance of diverse perspectives and skills coming together.

Commitment to Social Impact:

The development of PAM has reinforced our commitment to social impact and ethical AI development. It has inspired our team to consider the broader societal implications of technology and entrepreneurship. This commitment is reflected in our ongoing efforts to ensure that PAM adheres to ethical standards and serves as a force for positive change.

While we are in the early stages of measuring the quantitative impact of PAM, the project has already sparked enthusiasm among founders and has laid the groundwork for transformative change. It has also led to internal shifts in our organisation, fostering innovation, collaboration, and a deepened commitment to social impact. We eagerly anticipate the beta testing phase, where we will collect founder success stories and quantitative data to further substantiate the project's impact.

E. Learnings:

Throughout our journey in the CIRCE program, we've gained invaluable insights and lessons that have not only shaped the course of our project but will also inform our future endeavours. These learnings encompass various aspects of innovation, project management, collaboration, and social impact, and we believe they can provide valuable guidance to teams working in similar fields or innovation processes.

The Power of Iteration

One of the fundamental principles that underpinned our project's success was the power of iteration. In the iterative innovation process, we found that revisiting and refining our ideas, prototypes, and strategies was essential. This structured approach allowed us to be unstructured in our activities around each sprint and to respond effectively to user feedback, changing market dynamics, and evolving project goals.

In the early stages of our project, we had a vision, but it was through iterative cycles of validation, definition, design, and build that we honed our concept into a tangible MVP (Minimum Viable Product). We realised that each iteration was an opportunity to make incremental improvements and that no idea was set in stone. This flexibility allowed us to remain agile and responsive to emerging opportunities and challenges.

User-Centred Design as a North Star

User-centred design emerged as a guiding principle throughout our project. We learned that by placing the needs, preferences, and feedback of our target users at the centre of our decision-making process, we could create a more valuable and impactful solution.

From the validation phase, where we conducted extensive research to understand the pain points and aspirations of underestimated founders, to the design phase, where we iteratively refined our product based on user testing, the user remained our North Star. We realised that building something that users truly need and want is the key to successful innovation.

Effective Collaboration and Diverse Perspectives

Collaboration was not just a buzzword but a cornerstone of our project. Our team consisted of individuals with diverse skills, backgrounds, and expertise, and we quickly learned that harnessing these differences was a source of strength.

Through open communication and the integration of diverse perspectives, we were able to tackle complex challenges more effectively. This extended beyond our core team to encompass mentors, experts, and stakeholders who provided valuable insights and support. We discovered that fostering an environment where diverse voices are heard and respected can lead to more innovative solutions.

The Value of Feedback

Feedback became a recurring theme in our project. Whether it was feedback from users during testing, guidance from mentors, or suggestions from our fellow CIRCE participants, we learned to embrace feedback as a catalyst for improvement.

Initially, receiving feedback could be challenging, as it sometimes highlighted flaws or areas that needed refinement. However, we soon realised that constructive feedback was a gift—it helped us spot blind spots, refine our strategies, and make our project stronger. This lesson has encouraged us to actively seek out feedback in all our future endeavours.

Adaptability and Resilience

The journey through the CIRCE program was not without its share of unexpected twists and turns. From technical challenges to various other hurdles, we encountered numerous obstacles along the way. However, these challenges taught us the importance of adaptability and resilience. However, these challenges taught us the importance of adaptability and resilience.

We learned that the ability to pivot, adapt, and find solutions in the face of adversity is a critical skill for any innovative project. The pandemic, in particular, forced us to reevaluate our plans and find creative ways to continue our work. It was a lesson in turning adversity into opportunity.

Purpose-Driven Innovation

As we progressed in our project, we recognised the profound impact that purpose-driven innovation can have. Our commitment to empowering underestimated founders and addressing the funding gap in entrepreneurship became a driving force.

We learned that having a clear and meaningful purpose not only motivates the team but also resonates with stakeholders and partners. It was this purpose that fueled our determination, attracted support, and guided our decisions.

Balancing Creativity with Pragmatism

Innovation often involves pushing boundaries and thinking outside the box. However, we also learned the importance of balancing creativity with pragmatism. While bold ideas are essential, they need to be grounded in practicality.

Throughout the project, we faced the challenge of finding innovative solutions that were feasible within our resources and timeline. Striking this balance required careful consideration and sometimes difficult decisions. We discovered that combining visionary thinking with a realistic outlook is the key to sustainable innovation.

For instance when defining the features for our Minimum Viable Product (MVP), we had numerous innovative ideas. However, we needed to prioritise features that were both innovative and achievable within our resources and timeline. We conducted thorough discussions and

evaluations to select features that would provide the most value to our users while being realistic to implement.

Additionally throughout the project, we remained flexible in our approach. We recognised that creativity could lead us in unexpected directions, and we were willing to adapt our plans when necessary. This allowed us to harness creative opportunities that emerged during the project.

Documentation and Knowledge Management

Effective documentation and knowledge management played a pivotal role in the success of our project within CIRCE. As a team committed to iterative innovation, we recognized that clear communication, organised documentation, and efficient knowledge sharing were essential. Here's how we approached this aspect of our project:

Project Documentation: We maintained a comprehensive project documentation system that covered every phase of our project, from ideation to the MVP development. This documentation included project plans, timelines, meeting notes, and progress reports. It served as a reference point for the team and external stakeholders to understand the project's evolution.

Weekly Sprint Presentations: To ensure alignment among team members and stakeholders, we conducted weekly sprint presentations. These presentations followed an agile methodology and highlighted the goals, achievements, and challenges of the week. They provided a forum for open discussions and feedback, fostering a collaborative atmosphere.

Meeting Minutes: Detailed meeting minutes were consistently recorded during all project-related meetings. These minutes served as a historical record of decisions, action items, and discussions. They were crucial in preventing miscommunication and ensuring that everyone was on the same page.

Shared Drive: We utilised a shared drive to store all project-related documents, presentations, and resources. This organised repository allowed team members to access the latest information and resources easily. It also facilitated version control and prevented data silos.

Knowledge Transfer: Knowledge transfer was an ongoing process in our project. When team members transitioned or new members joined, we ensured that they received proper onboarding

and access to relevant documentation. This minimised disruptions and maintained project continuity.

Feedback Loop: We established a feedback loop within the team to continuously improve our documentation and knowledge management processes. Team members were encouraged to provide input on how to make documentation more effective and accessible.

Project Tracking Tools: We leveraged Notion for our primary project management tool and collaboration tools to streamline documentation and knowledge sharing. These tools facilitated task assignments, progress tracking, and real-time updates.

9. Ethical Considerations

Throughout our journey in the CIRCE project, we were acutely aware of the ethical considerations that underpin every aspect of our work. We recognised that responsible innovation is not just a goal but a fundamental principle that guides our actions. Here are some key ethical considerations that have shaped our project:

Privacy and Data Security: As we developed our AI-powered tool, privacy and data security were paramount. We collected user data to improve our recommendation system but ensured that all data was anonymised and protected. We also crafted a robust privacy policy that clearly communicated our commitment to safeguarding user information.

Fair and Inclusive Design: Our commitment to inclusivity extended to the design of our tool. We took great care to ensure that our product was accessible to users of diverse backgrounds and abilities. This meant considering factors such as accessibility standards, language inclusivity, and user-friendliness.

Transparency: Transparency was a cornerstone of our project. We believed that users should have a clear understanding of how our AI works and how recommendations are generated. We provided explanations wherever possible and made an effort to demystify AI technology.

Mitigation: Addressing bias in AI (Artificial Intelligence) was a top priority. AI systems, like the one we developed, learn from data, and sometimes this data can contain unfair or discriminatory patterns. To ensure fairness and equity, we regularly examined our recommendation algorithms

to find and fix any biases that might appear. Additionally, we made sure to use a wide variety of data during the AI's training process to reduce these biases in the system.

Inclusivity in Testing: When conducting user testing and feedback collection, we made a conscious effort to include individuals from underrepresented groups. This approach ensured that our tool was not biased towards any particular demographic.

Feedback and Continuous Improvement: We encouraged open feedback from users and stakeholders. This not only helped us improve our tool but also demonstrated our commitment to user-centric design and ethical practices.

Responsible AI Development: One of the key challenges we faced was dealing with bias in our AI algorithms. AI systems can unintentionally repeat biases that exist in the data they learn from. To overcome this challenge, we put in place strict testing and validation processes to recognize and reduce bias. In simpler terms, we worked hard to make sure our AI treated everyone fairly and didn't favour any particular group.

As we draw the curtains on our CIRCE program journey, our focus naturally shifts to the promising horizon of the next phase of our project. The invaluable learnings we've garnered throughout this program are not the end; instead, they serve as the sturdy foundation upon which we'll build our future steps.

F. Linking back to CIRCE

Our journey within CIRCE's program has been a valuable opportunity for experimentation, learning, and growth. As innovators at Founderland, we embarked on a mission to empower and level the playing field for women of colour and marginalised founders. This mission led to the creation of Project PAM, an AI-powered tool designed to refine and elevate entrepreneurs' pitching skills, a fundamental requirement to attract investment. What makes our journey unique is its inception within the months at CIRCE, a program that fosters creativity, collaboration, and transformative impact.

Interactions with fellow innovators and researchers at CIRCE expanded our perspectives. The collaborative spirit of CIRCE felt during the Symposium events reinforced our belief in the collective strength of diverse minds coming together to tackle complex challenges. It is within this

vibrant ecosystem that Project PAM took shape and evolved into a powerful solution to systemic challenges.

Our insights have the potential to resonate with other CIF-projects, offering a glimpse into the iterative innovation process and the dynamic interplay between creativity and pragmatism. We believe that our experiences can serve as a source of inspiration and practical wisdom for fellow innovators within the CIF community. Whether it's the significance of user-centred design, the art of collaboration, or the delicate balance between visionary thinking and practical execution, our journey has uncovered valuable lessons that transcend project boundaries.

Within the broader landscape of Creative Impact, our project exemplifies the transformative potential of purpose-driven innovation. It underscores the role of entrepreneurship and creative solutions in addressing real-world challenges. Our commitment to ethical AI development aligns with the ethical imperatives of responsible innovation advocated by Creative Impact. The journey of PAM speaks to the power of technology harnessed for social good and inclusive entrepreneurship, reflecting the core values of CIRCE.

In conclusion, our insights are a testament to the symbiotic relationship between our project and CIRCE. They are a bridge that connects our journey with the wider Creative Impact community and the ethos of innovation and creativity. As we move forward, we are eager to continue our engagement with CIRCE, sharing our learnings, and drawing inspiration from the collective wisdom of this dynamic ecosystem. Our story is just one thread in the rich tapestry of Creative Impact, and we are excited to see how it weaves into the broader narrative of positive change and creative transformation.

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