

RISE PLAYBOOK

Making Waves to Strengthen Entrepreneurship Enablers
across Africa



Welcome!

Introduction

Entrepreneurship is thriving across the African continent—driving economic growth, creating jobs, and improving the lives of millions. Alongside the entrepreneurs themselves, there are many people and organizations working quietly to make it possible: those who provide training, mentorship, space, access to finance, and connections that help new ideas take root and grow.

Entrepreneurship Support Organizations are among these key enablers. Many are themselves young, dynamic, and led by passionate teams eager to grow, professionalize, and increase their impact.

At the Westerwelle Startup Haus Kigali (WSHK), we share this same commitment to continuous improvement. Over the past years, we have learned that strengthening our own internal capacities is key to supporting entrepreneurs more effectively. Through the RISE Program, we had the opportunity to work with external experts, assess our internal systems, and build new capabilities in key areas of our work.

This playbook captures that journey. It brings together the most useful tools, frameworks, and lessons we have gathered along the way. Our goal is to share what worked for us so that other Entrepreneurship Support Organizations in Rwanda and beyond can benefit, adapt, and build upon it—ultimately strengthening the entire entrepreneurship ecosystem.

We invite you to dive in, explore, and take what resonates. By lifting each other, we lift the entrepreneurs we serve—and RISE higher together.



These are the team members who brought the RISE program to life, and who co-created this playbook for you:



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Who This Playbook Is for

We wrote this playbook with you in mind if you...

...are part of an **Entrepreneurship Support Organization** in Rwanda, East Africa, or another emerging economy context;

...are eager to **strengthen the way your team and organization work**, learning and improving step by step;

...are looking for **structured tools, practical examples, and honest lessons** drawn from real experience.

While this playbook was created primarily for teams of Entrepreneurship Support Organizations, its insights reach beyond. **Entrepreneurship support associations, funders, and other ecosystem builders** may also find useful ideas and inspiration here—whether for designing support programs, facilitating collaboration, or strengthening the ecosystem as a whole.

How to Use This Playbook

You can read this playbook from start to finish— to take in the full story. But if you are short on time or looking for something specific, here are a few tips to help you find your way around:

Get an overview:

[Page 8](#) gives a snapshot of the five core topics of this playbook, and how they strengthen entrepreneurship support operations. Use that overview, or the table of contents on [page 6](#), to navigate quickly.

Start with the “Why”:

Each chapter begins with key reasons why the topic matters—perfect to spark interest and motivation in your team.

Get practical:

Find ready-to-use tools and templates in each chapter and in the Appendix. Copy, adapt, and apply them directly to your work.

Learn and share:

Explore short stories, examples and lessons from our RISE journey in the orange boxes. Read along, share and discuss with your team - learning from our real-life challenges, successes and insights!

This summary is interactive



Playbook Overview

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About The RISE Program

The **RISE Program**—which stands for Readiness, Innovation, Sustainability, and Evaluation—is an initiative by the **Westerwelle Startup Haus Kigali (WSHK)**, supported by the **Rwanda Information Society Authority (RISA)**. The program is part of a bigger effort to strengthen the capacity of Entrepreneurship Support Organizations in Rwanda and beyond, helping them deliver even more effective, inclusive, and impactful support to startups. At its core, the RISE Program aims to do three things. First, it helps WSHK and its team **strengthen**

their own internal systems through targeted training, expert consultancy, and organizational assessments in five key areas. Second, it seeks to **test the new skills, systems and processes** through a dedicated accelerator program, the “EP Catalyst Cohort”. Third, it **shares the resulting tools, approaches, and lessons** with the wider entrepreneurship support community—because many of us face similar challenges, use similar tools, and can grow faster when we learn together.

RISE stands for Readiness, Innovation, Sustainability, and Evaluation—four pillars that reflect what Entrepreneurship Support Organizations need to thrive and grow.

Readiness means building the capabilities, systems, and mindsets needed to effectively support high-growth ventures while staying agile and prepared in a fast-changing digital and economic landscape.

Innovation encourages creativity and experimentation, driving the development of new ideas, models, and partnerships that deliver scalable value and systemic impact.

Sustainability emphasizes long-term resilience by integrating responsible practices, sound governance, and viable business models that can be maintained beyond specific funding cycles.

Evaluation leverages data and evidence-based learning to foster reflection, continuous improvement, and accountability, strengthening decision-making and impact across programs and interventions.

The **Rwanda Information Society Authority (RISA)** serves as the lead implementing agency of the **Rwanda Digital Acceleration Project**, a flagship initiative jointly launched by the **Government of Rwanda (GoR)** and the **World Bank** under the leadership of the **Ministry of ICT and Innovation (MINICT)**. Within this framework, the project advances Rwanda’s vision of becoming a regional hub for digital innovation and entrepreneurship by strengthening the infrastructure, capabilities, and ecosystem linkages that enable Entrepreneur Support Organizations like WSHK to help startups innovate, scale, and contribute to a dynamic digital economy.

As part of the Westerwelle Foundation’s pan-African network, **Westerwelle Startup Haus Kigali (WSHK)** has supported hundreds of Rwandan and regional startups since 2018—many led by women—through training, mentorship, and a vibrant community space. With RISE, WSHK takes the next step: strengthening itself from within, while contributing to the collective growth of Rwanda’s entrepreneurship ecosystem.

How To RISE? Five Waves To Catch

The RISE Playbook builds on five key areas that have strengthened our capacity as an Entrepreneurship Support Organization. Each represents a wave worth catching—an entry point for us and others to grow stronger, more strategic, and more impactful. The following pages then outline more in detail why each area matters, which tools proved most useful, and what we achieved at WSHK along the way.

Why make a wave?

Digital Infrastructure

Efficient entrepreneurship support depends on digital systems that connect teams, streamline programs, and turn information into insight.

Leadership and Team Management

Impactful programs start with strong teams and effective partnerships that align purpose, people, and action.

Gender Inclusivity

Supporting entrepreneurs means supporting all entrepreneurs—and inclusion strengthens innovation, diversity, and impact.

Impact Tracking

Understanding program results helps improve support, learn what works, and demonstrate the value of entrepreneurship interventions.

Investment Readiness Support

Access to finance is a major bottleneck for startups—and well-targeted readiness support bridges the gap between ambition and investment.

Useful tools, skills, systems

Digital Infrastructure

Digital Workflow Analysis and Infrastructure Roadmap to centralize, integrate, and optimize operations.

Leadership and Team Management

OKR Tracking and Ecosystem Mapping to align internal goals and engage stakeholders more intentionally.

Gender Inclusivity

Gender Self-Assessment Checklist and Gender Action Plan Template to identify gaps and embed inclusion into daily practice.

Impact Tracking

Airtable Impact Tracking Tool and Programmatic Impact Assessment Creator for consistent data collection and analysis.

Investment Readiness Support

Investment Readiness Rubric to assess startup maturity and match support to real needs and contexts.

Our biggest wins at WSHK

Digital Infrastructure

Airtable became our all-in-one hub—reducing duplication, improving coordination, and enabling data-driven collaboration.

Leadership and Team Management

Shared objectives gave us focus, while clearer communication and stronger partnerships improved how we lead and collaborate.

Gender Inclusivity

We now approach gender more intentionally—enhancing outreach, participation, and inclusivity across our programs.

Impact Tracking

Standardized tracking now shows clear progress, helps tailor future programs, and strengthens our evidence base for partners and donors.

Investment Readiness Support

We moved from generic training to tailored, context-aware support that prepares startups for sustainable growth and investor engagement.

Digital Infrastructure

Why? Reasons to RISE

In many Entrepreneurship Support Organizations, digital infrastructure grows organically as needs arise and processes are defined - lacking a clear plan and strategic direction. Yet **strong digital infrastructure is the backbone of effective collaboration and support.** It helps teams work smarter, engage startups better, and track impact more easily. In today's fast-changing, connected world, **digital readiness is essential**—for both Entrepreneurship Support Organizations and the entrepreneurs they serve. The right tools enable innovation, data-driven decisions, and efficient teamwork. Strengthening digital infrastructure means **moving from ad-hoc tools to intentional, integrated systems** that make work more effective, transparent, and future-ready.

How? Tools and Guides

To improve internal operations and strengthen our digital capacity, we worked with Datagon Studio to assess our digital tools, systems, and workflows. The process revealed our strength as well as inefficiencies, redundancies, and opportunities for better integration. Two steps within the assessment and reflection process proved especially valuable: the **Digital Workflow Analysis**, which mapped how tasks and tools connect across our teams and activities, and the **Digital Infrastructure Roadmap**, which outlined quick wins and long-term improvements to our digital infrastructure, helped us define next steps and assign clear responsibilities. This created a practical path toward a more efficient, connected, and digitally mature organization.



Digital Workflow Analysis



Digital Infrastructure Roadmap

What? Practical Insights

We learned a number of important lessons throughout the digital infrastructure consultancy and while implementing the recommendations.

Here are some of the key takeaways from our experience:

Reducing duplication increases efficiency. We discovered that several of our tools overlapped or served similar purposes. By removing redundancies and focusing on what truly added value, our workflows became simpler, faster, and easier to manage.

Gradual implementation builds success. We started small, focusing first on our Programs team before expanding to other areas. This step-by-step approach allowed us to learn, adjust, and bring everyone along on the journey.

Digital champions help sustain progress. Appointing one person to coordinate and guide our digital transformation - or one aspect of it respectively - helped maintain momentum. This role ensured that new tools were used consistently and that learning continued beyond the consultancy.

Choosing one central platform enables collaboration and integration. We realized how much time we lost switching between systems. Identifying one tool that could connect workflows, store information, and integrate with others made a huge difference. For us, Airtable became that central hub—flexible, intuitive, and useful across departments.

Careful digital change management avoids hidden challenges. Even small digital changes required time, training, and attention to details like data management and tax implications. Being realistic about these needs helped us implement improvements smoothly.

Deepdive: Airtable as a central digital platform

When reviewing our digital infrastructure we identified Airtable as a strong solution to bring our digital operations together. We had already been using Airtable for some workflows, and its versatility made it a natural choice as our main digital platform: it allowed us to **centralize information, integrate easily with other tools, track data, and collaborate virtually across departments.**

Other platforms with similar features could serve the same purpose—the essential part is finding one that is user-friendly, connects different workflows, and supports multiple teams. At WSHK, we now use Airtable to:

- Manage our **CRM** and partner contacts
- Collect **surveys and feedback forms**
- Maintain a **global database** of experts and startups
- Handle **payment approvals** and **budget tracking**
- Track **fundraising leads** and **program implementation**
- Store and analyze **baseline and endline survey data**

Having one central digital hub—whatever tool is chosen—has made our work more connected, transparent, and efficient.



Get in touch: If you would like to run through a similar consulting process or would like more information on the digital infrastructure assessment approach, contact [Datagon Studio](#) directly.



Extra resource: Airtable introduction course
If you are new to Airtable or would like to learn more about how to use it for your organization, have a look at [Airtable's practical, free-of-charge online courses!](#)

Leadership and Collaboration

Why? Reasons to RISE

As Entrepreneurship Support Organizations grow in size and impact, **strong leadership and teamwork become vital**. Many teams are small and dynamic—driven by passion but facing big responsibilities. Clear direction, communication, and performance management help translate that energy into lasting results. At the same time, collaboration is at the heart of every Entrepreneurship Support Organization’s success. Whether working with donors, mentors, or ecosystem partners, thriving organizations build and sustain networks that extend their reach and strengthen their impact. Developing leadership and collaboration skills enables us all to **work more strategically, partner more effectively, and grow more sustainably**—together with the communities we serve.

How? Tools and Guides

We took part in a two-day training by The CEO focused on leadership, team management, collaboration, and stakeholder engagement. The sessions linked topics such as leadership styles, team dynamics, and innovation culture with external aspects like ecosystem mapping and partnership building. Two tools have proven especially useful: the **Objectives and Key Results (OKR) Tracking Tool**, helping us align the team around one annual goal and measurable results per department, and the **Ecosystem Mapping Tool**, which clarifies our stakeholder landscape and guides more intentional collaboration.

Year	2025
This Year's Objective	Increase the number of high-growth, investment-ready startups supported through our programs to 30% in 2025
Key Result	48 Owner-Departments Initiatives: how will we get there? OK Score
Identify and identify at least 60 high-potential startups	Marketing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Run targeted outreach in universities and other CEOs to attract strong candidates Host site visits and awareness campaigns to promote programs Develop clear messaging and FAQs to attract the right leading parties 75%
Support at least 30 startups to become investment-ready	Programs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct detailed assessments to understand each startup's needs, challenges, and market fit Facilitate introductions to customers, distributors, corporates, and partners Provide detailed legal consulting to help startups define their business models, pricing, and intellectual property Deliver targeted workshops and mentorships to strengthen strategic business, financial management, legal, compliance, and product development Support startups with qualified mentors and experts who offer ongoing guidance and strategic advice, operational, and product 20%

OKR Tracking Sheet

Name of Stakeholder	Category	Roles and Linkages	Needs and Interests
X Foundation	Foundation/Donor/ Organization	Facilitate programs/ Create working with the governments of Rwanda	Interest to increase programs and be involved on a strategic-operational level/ Approaches frequent data-driven reporting/ Strong focus on gender inclusion with
Y Agency	Government Institution	Provide leads/ important network and relationship contact	Network
Z University	Academic Institution	Provide for research/ Purchase A in our main point of contact	Need to build themselves as strong entrepreneurs/ Transition eager to collaborate
ABC Group	Corporate / Private Company		
DEF Group	Entrepreneurial Support Organization		
GHI Group			

Ecosystem Mappingairtable

What? Practical Insights

We took several valuable lessons from our leadership and collaboration journey—both from the training and from applying the new tools in practice. Here are some of the key insights that have shaped how we lead and work together.

A shared objective creates a sense of togetherness and increases focus. Setting one annual goal through the Objectives and Key Results process aligns the entire organization. Each department is aware of and aligns to this shared objective, creating clarity and connection across teams.

Objective setting helps phrase more strategic and consistent department indicators. Instead of program-driven indicators, we now link our Key Results to the overall organizational goal. This helps us track progress more consistently and see how every team contributes to long-term impact.

Ecosystem mapping is a prerequisite for intentional ecosystem building. By mapping our stakeholders, we better understand who we work with and where new partnerships can add value. Knowing the profiles, interests and needs of our stakeholders now enables us to proactively engage, exchange insights, and involve partners in shaping our work.

Transparent stakeholder communication builds trust. Using digital tools to share updates and collect feedback—from surveys to mentor forms—helps us stay accountable, meet donor expectations, and strengthen relationships within our ecosystem.

Deepdive: Building a Strong Mentoring Network

Mentors are key ecosystem stakeholders for Entrepreneurship Support Organizations: They connect entrepreneurs with experience, guidance, and new perspectives, and bring a much needed practitioner’s lens to entrepreneurship support programs. Yet, just as many others, we have been **struggling to identify and engage mentors with the right profiles** who combine expertise, availability, and commitment. Therefore, proactively building a strong mentoring network has become an important part of our work on stakeholder engagement.

In the scope of RISE, we launched an **open call for mentors** in Rwanda and across East Africa and selected candidates with relevant expertise, entrepreneurial experience, strong communication skills, and knowledge of the local context. All selected mentors joined a **six-week online course** by *The Human Edge* on mentoring mindset, active listening, feedback, and relationship-building.

In total, **48 mentors were trained**, including **19 from Rwanda**. This intentional, structured approach paid off: we now collaborate with 10 of them in the EP Catalyst Cohort, the accelerator we implement in the scope of the RISE Program. Having a well-prepared and committed mentoring network has made our stakeholder engagement stronger, more reliable, and more impactful.



Get in touch: If you would like to organize a similar training for your team, or would like more information on the approach to leadership and collaboration, contact [The CEO](#) directly.

03 Gender Inclusivity

Why? Reasons to RISE

Women make up half the population but remain underrepresented in entrepreneurship. This gap stems not only from social and cultural barriers, but also from the limited ability of the entrepreneurship support ecosystem to meet the specific needs of women entrepreneurs. While most Entrepreneurship Support Organizations set participation targets for women, **few have clear strategies to reach them—or to promote gender inclusion beyond program numbers.** Inclusion also means ensuring equal access to funding, visibility, mentorship, and leadership within support organizations themselves. **Gender inclusion is increasingly a shared priority**—for donors, investors, and ecosystem partners alike. By integrating inclusive practices across programs, partnerships, and organizational culture, Entrepreneurship Support Organizations can not only reach more women but also strengthen their relevance, credibility, and impact within the wider entrepreneurship ecosystem.

How? Tools and Guides

We conducted a two-day training facilitated by Common Good Company that focused on strengthening gender inclusion across all aspects of our work. A key element was a Gender Self-Assessment for Entrepreneurship Support Organizations, covering various central areas of our work. Together with the trainer, we identified two focus areas—participant outreach and recruitment, and our programmatic approach—and began selecting gender inclusion strategies and tactics to guide improvements. Two tools might be valuable for any Entrepreneurship Support Organization engaging in this important work: the **Gender Self-Assessment Checklist** provides a starting point to think about different aspects of gender inclusion within entrepreneurship support offerings. Once gaps are identified and strategies and tactics selected, the **Gender Action Plan Template** helps turn insights and ideas into concrete action.

What? Practical Insights

On our way to become a more gender aware and inclusive team and organization we had a couple of realizations that helped us move forward:

Gender self-assessment reveals blind spots. Reviewing all areas of our work helped us see where we were strong—and where we had overlooked aspects of gender inclusion. Taking a structured approach was key to identifying real gaps and setting gender inclusivity priorities.

Gender goals need practical pathways. Setting a gender participation target gives direction, but it's only the start. We learned that clear strategies and actions are needed to reach those goals meaningfully and sustainably.

Every gender gap is a call to action. Each area where we found room for improvement turned into a concrete step—strategic or operational, big or small. What matters most is staying consistent across programs and offerings.

Testing builds what works in gender inclusivity. There is no one-size-fits-all solution. Trying out different approaches and combining several strategies towards gender inclusion helped us discover what truly works in our context.

Deepdive: Gender Inclusive Social Media Outreach

Intentional design makes a difference for gender inclusivity - we could witness this first-hand in our outreach for the EP Catalyst Cohort. By applying a **gender-inclusive social media strategy** and actively engaging our networks to reach more women, we saw a clear shift in who applied: **41% of applicants were women, and 40% of selected participants** were female—significantly higher than in previous programs. In our outreach, we focused on three simple but powerful practices:

- **Featuring women in visuals** to reflect diversity and representation
- **Using gender-inclusive language** in all calls and materials
- **Encouraging women explicitly** to apply and share opportunities within their networks

These small, intentional adjustments helped us reach a broader audience and make our program more accessible and relatable to women entrepreneurs.

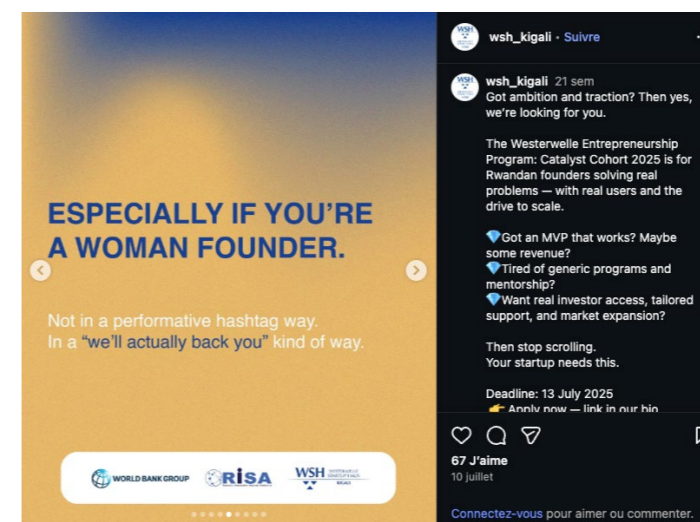
Here is one **example of a social media post** for the EP Catalyst Cohort, the accelerator we implement in the scope of the RISE program:



Gender Self-Assessment Checklist



Gender Action Plan



Get in touch: If you would like to run through a full gender self-assessment or receive bespoke training for your organization, contact [Common Good Company](#) directly.

Extra resource: The Hub Collective hosts a [useful list of gender inclusion strategies, tactics and resources](#) for Entrepreneurship Support Organizations, categorized across 5 areas: Organizational strategy, outreach, programs, ecosystems and access to finance.

04 Impact Tracking

Why? Reasons to RISE

Understanding impact is essential for learning, accountability, and growth. Most Entrepreneurship Support Organizations recognize this—yet tracking impact of their programs often remains limited to counting participants or conducting one-off surveys. Without structured and ongoing data collection, it is hard to see what truly works, where to adapt, and how to tell a convincing story of change. Consistent, strategic, and digitally enabled impact tracking helps Entrepreneurship Support Organizations **move beyond numbers**—to capture outcomes, learn from experience, and demonstrate value to entrepreneurs, partners, and donors alike. When embedded in everyday work, impact tracking becomes a **driver of innovation and improvement**, not just a reporting requirement. It turns evidence into insight—and insight into better support for startups.

How? Tools and Guides

With support from Common Good Company, we co-created a custom Airtable tool to standardize impact tracking across our programs. The tool includes baseline and endline surveys that measure startup progress across key organizational areas. Startups assess themselves on five levels of maturity before and after each program, allowing us to see where growth happens. After several co-creation and training sessions, we are now applying the tool in our new accelerator, the EP Catalyst Cohort, and will use it across all programs going forward. For Entrepreneurship Support Organizations with aspirations to standardize and professionalize this area of their work, the **Programmatic Impact Assessment Creator** provides guidance to design a similar, tailored approach to measure program results.



Programmatic Impact Assessment Creator

Get in touch: If you would like to run through a full gender self-assessment or receive bespoke training for your organization, contact [Common Good Company](#) directly.

What? Practical Insights

As we pivoted our approach from fragmented surveys toward a more structured, consistent and insightful approach, we learned a couple of important lessons:

Survey quality determines learning value. Baseline and endline surveys are common, but their usefulness depends on design quality. We realized that unclear wording, missing topic areas, or inconsistent formats can limit insights and make results hard to compare across programs.

Consistency and integration strengthen data. Using Airtable as our central digital tool helped us standardize surveys, manage documentation in one place, and streamline data collection and analysis. Having one integrated system has made our Monitoring and Evaluation work more coherent and reliable.

Startup maturity levels change how we see impact. Introducing the idea of organizational maturity levels was a real game changer. It requires some abstract thinking and knowledge of the entrepreneurship space, but it helps us better understand startup development stages, measure progress meaningfully, and adapt our support accordingly.

Deepdive: Leveraging Impact Insights

Our new impact tracking system allows us to **go far beyond counting participants**. Using a standardized, data-driven tool, we can now analyze and compare results across programs, themes, and countries—**turning data into insight and action**.

We see these effects in the work of our colleagues from other Westerwelle Foundation teams who already use these new insights to:

- **Identify** key challenges and gaps
- **Understand** the real impact of specific interventions
- **Compare** program performance across regions and target groups
- **Tailor** future programs to needs revealed by baseline and endline data
- **Report** measurable results with confidence and consistency

In this, our new approach to programmatic impact tracking strengthens our evidence base and enables us to demonstrate the true value and effectiveness of our work—both to entrepreneurs and to our partners and donors.

05 Investment Readiness Support

Why? Reasons to RISE

Access to finance remains one of the biggest challenges for startups, and investment readiness support is key to overcoming it. Many entrepreneurship support programmes include such training, but it often follows a one-size-fits-all approach or depends heavily on external experts. Startups vary widely in their stage, context, and funding needs—**standardized approaches risk creating unrealistic expectations and mismatches with investors**. High fall-out rates after investor connections often reveal these gaps. When tailored to real needs, investment readiness support can be **one of the most effective ways to ensure startup growth and sustainability**. Building internal capacity within Entrepreneurship Support Organizations, and providing clear orientation on what kind of support to offer—and when—makes this work more strategic, consistent, and impactful.

How? Tools and Guides

At WSHK, we have long provided investment readiness training and technical support, often through trusted expert partners. A two-day training by Renew Capital helped us deepen our own capacity—enhancing our understanding of what truly drives investment readiness for startups in our region. By working through a number of case studies, we unpacked the key factors that influence investment readiness—how they interrelate, and how they vary with each startup’s maturity and context. This learning led us to create an **Investment Readiness Rubric**, a practical framework that helps Entrepreneurship Support Organizations assess readiness levels of the startups they serve, to then determine type and level of support suited best to support them.

The Investment Readiness Rubric helps Entrepreneurship Support Organizations assess and categorize the startups they work with. By reviewing a set of clear indicators and rating each startup, it becomes easier to see how prepared they are for investment. This helps design support that matches their current investment readiness stage and specific needs. The indicators and rating levels are adapted to the Rwandan and East African context, making the tool practical and locally relevant.

Criteria	Level 1 (1 point)	Level 2 (2 points)	Level 3 (3 points)
Founders & Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Team size: 1 founder only or no clearly defined team Experience: No clear evidence of previous startup experience Roles: unclear/unambiguously no written agreements/contracts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Team size: 1-3 active founders or core team members Experience: Some relevant sector experience or previous startup experience Roles: clear responsibilities defined, some written agreements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Team size: 4+ active founders or core team members Experience: Some relevant sector experience or previous startup experience Roles: clear responsibilities defined, some written agreements
Market size & Scalability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Target customer segments not clearly defined Market research not conducted based on general assumptions Clear size of market or time to reach target customers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Target customer segments clearly defined, customer profiles established Market research conducted Identified practical ways to reach target customers but not on the market 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear, validated business model (pricing, payment, customer feedback, etc.) Clear size of market size Already generating revenue from paying customers
Business Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Business model is not clearly defined or is based on assumptions Unclear understanding of how the model fits the target market (pricing, willingness to pay, alternatives) No evidence yet that the chosen model can generate realistic revenue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identified a viable business model and has tested elements of it (pricing, channels, value delivery) The model shows viability through early traction (strong and clear) or the model is well-researched, but not consistently yet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear, validated business model (pricing, payment, customer feedback, etc.) The model generates revenue and shows predictable, repeatable results The model has been validated in the market and shows clear potential to scale
Traction & Momentum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No paying customers (they have sign-ups, letters, or other users only) Low or no relevant customer relationships (no relationships yet) No evidence of validation (customer conversations or initial revenue) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early paying customers Some relevant customer use or they agree occasionally, but not clear next steps to continue Early evidence of validation (e.g., 100K+ repeat inquiries, or a small active customer) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recurring revenue generating steadily over time Strong customer relationships (repeat buying)
Technology & Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Product is a basic MVP or prototype Core features incomplete or unstable Unclear differentiation from existing alternatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Product is functional and used by real customers Core features are functional and work reliably through user experience Clear differentiation in workflow, approach, or customer experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The product is stable and ready to support more customers without major issues Clear features and benefits, unique, and consistently deliver value Clear differentiation and distinct value that sets it apart from existing alternatives
Financial Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little or no revenue, or revenue is irregular and entirely dependent on one client/segment Financial records unclear (no structure in the books) or very few regular receipts No clear financial records (no books, no cash receipts) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of revenue from customers, but revenue is not predictable or not yet profitable Financial records clearer (some structure, early signs of recurring revenue) Some financial records (books, receipts) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revenue is recurring, growing, or diversified across multiple customer or product lines Margin, cost structure, and operating expenses are clear and consistent Company financial reporting (cash flow, revenue, and operating)
Legal Compliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal status is incomplete or unclear, with gaps in how the company is legally registered or governed Key agreements are not formalized, and important agreements remain verbal or informal Regulatory requirements are not understood, and compliance data has not been assessed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal structure is in place with the essential elements of company formation and operating context Some key agreements are formalized, covering important staff, customer, partner, or customer relationships Regulatory requirements are identified, and steps toward compliance are being taken 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Company structure is clear, registered and up to date, with necessary governance, and financial reporting well-established Key agreements are well understood, with comprehensive contracts and safeguards across staff, partner, and customer relationships Regulatory compliance is understood, with required requirements are fully managed, and data clearly documented
Exit Potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No clear path for how the business could grow into a larger trade Ownership structure unclear or difficult for future investors to work with 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some clear path for how the business could grow into a larger trade Ownership structure clearer (more formalized, or market-ready) Ownership fairly clear, with no major red flags for future investors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear, credible path to scale, having the business plan, financial records, and operating context Ownership structure and legal structure are clear and performance-ready Clear ownership structure that enables future investment and exit strategy

Investment Readiness Rubric

Get in touch: If you would like to organize training for your team to improve your internal expertise on investment readiness support, contact [Renew Capital](#) directly.

What? Practical Insights

Here is what we learned and realized while strengthening our approach to investment readiness support:

Generic approaches rarely create real impact. Investment readiness support is commonly offered by Entrepreneurship Support Organizations, but often designed as standardized, broad training. Tailoring content to local realities and specific gaps of participating startups makes support far more effective.

Understanding investment readiness levels is essential. Assessing a startup’s current stage helps us match the right type and intensity of support—making our interventions more focused and meaningful.

Context defines readiness. In Rwanda and across East Africa, market structures, growth patterns, and access to finance differ from those in the industrialized world. Recognizing these realities helps set realistic expectations—for both startups and investors—and ensures that support and investment decisions are grounded in context.

Deepdive: Investment Readiness Support in the RISE Program

Preparing startups for investment today requires more than perfecting a pitch—it demands a clear understanding of how investors assess potential and risk. Within the EP Catalyst Accelerator under the RISE Program, our investment readiness support has evolved into a more structured and insight-driven process that helps founders align their strategies, teams, and financials with real market expectations.

Within the accelerator program, founders are increasingly applying new tools and receiving expert guidance to:

- Understand the expectations and decision frameworks of different types of investors
- Strengthen internal governance, team alignment, and financial discipline
- Build realistic, evidence-based growth projections and valuation models
- Develop data rooms and dashboards that demonstrate transparency and readiness

In this, our investment readiness support is evolving from one-off training to a continuous learning process—where every founder gains a deeper understanding of how investment decisions are made, what investors value most, and how to communicate their business story with confidence and credibility.

CONCLUSION

Our Key Lessons Learnt

This journey has been a true ride—full of learning, growth, with a few ups and downs along the way. Through RISE, we strengthened our readiness, innovation, sustainability, and evaluation practices—and discovered lessons that already shape how we work and support entrepreneurs.

We learned that one central digital system increases efficiency, transparency, and collaboration. A shared annual goal aligns and motivates our team. Proactive, transparent engagement with mentors, funders, and partners builds strong, lasting relationships.

We realized that gender inclusion goes far beyond participation rates—it starts within our own structures and extends to how we design programs and provide access to opportunities. Consistent impact tracking helps us understand what truly works, while context-specific investment readiness support ensures that startups receive the help they actually need.

And above all, we learned that change begins with small steps—quick wins that build confidence and keep the momentum going. The hardest part is catching the first wave!

Are You Catching the Wave?

As you reach the end of this playbook—what is your first wave to catch? We hope it encourages you, as an Entrepreneurship Support Organization, to look beyond what already works and to reflect honestly on areas where there is room to grow. Real progress begins when we have the courage to examine our gaps, learn from them, and take intentional steps to improve.

Choose one area from this playbook—digital systems, leadership, gender inclusion, impact tracking, or investment readiness—and start there. Try one new tool, hold a team reflection, or test a small improvement in how you work.

Change happens when we move, experiment, and share what we learn. That's how we RISE higher than we thought possible. We're excited to keep riding these waves together—with you, and with the many Entrepreneurship Support Organizations across Rwanda and beyond.

Get in Touch

We would love to hear from you! Share your stories, setbacks, and successes—and add to our growing body of lessons learned. Every experience helps strengthen the collective knowledge of Entrepreneurship Support Organizations working across Rwanda and beyond.

We also welcome your additions, improvement suggestions and questions about this playbook. Your feedback will help us keep it practical, relevant, and alive. Please get in touch: info@westerwelle.haus

Thank You!

We extend our sincere appreciation to our partners: the World Bank Group, and the Government of Rwanda through Rwanda Information Society Authority (RISA) for their continued leadership and collaboration throughout this programme. Their guidance and commitment have been instrumental in strengthening our work and advancing the broader innovation ecosystem.

We also wish to thank our wider WSHK community of entrepreneurs, mentors, advisors, and trainers. Your dedication, and active engagement remain the driving force behind our programmes and the reason this work continues to be meaningful and impactful.

This Playbook has been created with support of Common Good Company.

Appendix: Tools

▶ Tool 1:

Digital Workflow Analysis

Type of Tool: Template

Supports the RISE of: Digital Infrastructure

The Digital Workflow Analysis helps assess how effectively our digital tools support daily operations. Instead of looking at digital tools directly, we first list our key organizational workflows and then note which digital systems support each one. By adding observations and opportunities for improvement, we can easily spot gaps, redundancies, and ways to optimize each workflow digitally.

Workflow / Process	Digital Tools Used	Observations/ Opportunities to Improve
Member Onboarding	Nexodus, WhatsApp, Excel	There is no automated CRM or onboarding flow; WhatsApp is used for updates
Program Management	Airtable, Excel	Airtable dashboards are in place but only used by the Programs team; Excel files with different formats and spread over various locations
Financial Tracking and Invoicing		
Community Engagement		
Task and Project Management		
Asset Management		
Staff Communication and Documents		
Impact Tracking		
Add More		

Tool 2:

Digital Infrastructure Roadmap

Type of Tool: Template

Supports the RISE of: Digital Infrastructure

The Digital Infrastructure Roadmap helps plan both large and small steps toward a stronger digital setup. It distinguishes between strategic changes, tactical improvements, and quick wins—each linked to its resource needs and priorities. By assigning deadlines and a digital champion, the roadmap turns intentions into concrete, actionable steps.

Action / Milestone	Level of Difficulty	Resources and Prerequisites	Until when?	Department/ Internal Champion
Train all staff on Airtable basics and assign champions	Short-term/ Quick win	None, free Airtable version used	End of Q1 2025	Country Director
Launch a complete Airtable dashboard for cross- department reporting	Mid-term/tactical	All staff members trained on Airtable basics All current reporting templates need to be consolidated first	End of Q3 2025	Finance & Operations Manager
Conduct financial audit and renegotiate tool subscriptions	Long-term/ strategic	Accounting cycle completed Old tool subscriptions expired Consider tax implications	End of 2026	Finance & Operations Manager
Add More				
Add More				
Add More				

Tool 3:

OKR Tracking Sheet

Type of Tool: Template

Supports the RISE of: Leadership and Collaboration

The OKR Tracking Sheet helps align the team around one shared yearly objective and measurable key results. Each key result has a clear owner and supporting initiatives that drive progress. A simple scoring system shows how far we've come toward achieving each goal, ensuring focus, accountability, and transparency across the team.

Year	2025		
This Year's Objective:	Increase the number of high-growth, investment-ready startups supported through our programs by 30% in 2025		
Key Result	KR Owner/ Department	Initiatives - how will we get there?	KR Score
Identify and shortlist at least 60 high-potential startups	Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Run targeted outreach in universities, and other organizations to attract strong applicants Host info sessions and awareness campaigns to promote programs Develop clear messaging and FAQs to attract the right startup profiles 	75%
Support at least 30 startups to become investment ready	Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct baseline assessments to understand each startup's needs, challenges, and maturity level. Facilitate introductions to customers, distributors, corporates, and partners. Provide tailored 1-on-1 coaching to help startups refine their business models, pricing, and unit economics. Deliver targeted workshops and masterclasses to strengthen startups' traction, financial management, legal compliance, and product development. Match startups with qualified mentors and experts who offer ongoing guidance across strategy, sales, operations, and product. 	25%
Add More			

Tool 4:

Ecosystem Mapping

Type of Tool: Template

Supports the RISE of: Leadership and Collaboration

The Ecosystem Mapping tool helps analyze who is already part of our network—and who could be. By mapping partners by category, such as donors, public and private actors, other Entrepreneurship Support Organization, and practitioners, we gain a clearer picture of our current connections and future opportunities. Defining each stakeholder’s role, linkages, and interests supports more intentional, proactive, and mutually beneficial engagement.

Name of Stakeholder	Category	Roles and Linkages	Needs and Interests
X Foundation	Foundation / Donor Organization	Funder of programs Closely working with the government of Rwanda	Interest to co-create programs and be involved on a strategic-operational level Appreciates frequent data-driven reporting Strong focus on gender inclusion work
Y Agency	Government Institution	Potential funder, important network and institutional contact	Unknown
Z University	Academic institution	Partner for outreach Professor A is our main point of contact	Need to market themselves as (more) entrepreneurial, therefore eager to collaborate
Add More	Corporate / Private Company		
Add More	Entrepreneurship Support Organization		
Add More			

Tool 5:

Gender Self-Assessment Checklist

Type of Tool: Assessment

Supports the RISE of: Gender Inclusion

The Gender Self-Assessment Checklist is a simple starting point for organizations beginning their gender inclusion journey. It highlights key factors that shape gender-inclusive entrepreneurship support and helps identify where gaps may exist. While a full self-assessment offers deeper analysis and examples, this checklist provides a practical first step to build awareness and spark action.

Gender Inclusive Outreach

- Our marketing tactics and channels are safe and accessible for women.
- Our communication materials avoid showing gender stereotypes, and portray relatable female role models.
- We have a target for the number of female applications we would like to receive, and actively work towards it.
- We have a target of 50% for women participants in each of our programs and design our selection process accordingly.

Gender Inclusive Programming

- Program content, materials, topics and methods consider women’s needs and perspectives.
- The program logistics have been designed to be inclusive of women, considering e.g. availability and safety of female participants.
- Our coaches and trainers have the skill to recognize gender bias as it happens and to act on it.
- We disaggregate data by gender, and go beyond the entrepreneur. We are for example looking at the gender breakdown of employees, value chain partners, and customers.

Gender Inclusive Ecosystem Engagement

- We take deliberate steps to connect women to initiatives and partners that actively support women’s entrepreneurship.
- We want our entrepreneurs to run gender-inclusive businesses, and provide training to get them there.
- We understand the systemic and regulatory issues that exist within our ecosystem, which disadvantage women, and work to disrupt negative power dynamics and affect positive change - e.g. towards investors, government, and financial institutions.
- When directly funding entrepreneurs, we consider the power dynamics within investment committees and judging panels, and take measures to mitigate those.

Next Step: Once you have identified which gender inclusion gaps you would like to work on, refer to the Hub Collective’s [list of gender inclusion strategies, tactics and resources](#) for Entrepreneurship Support Organizations. You can filter the list for resources across 5 areas: Organizational strategy, outreach, programs, ecosystems and access to finance.

Tool 6:

Gender Action Plan

Type of Tool: Template

Supports the RISE of: Gender Inclusion

The Gender Action Plan helps turn identified gaps into concrete actions. It starts with defining the problem, setting a clear objective, and selecting strategies or tactics to reach it. By linking each action to its underlying issue and goal, the plan makes it easier to adjust course, refine strategies, and build on what works as gender inclusion efforts evolve.

Problem	Objective	Strategy / Tactic	Responsibility	Deadline
Not enough women in tech entrepreneurship	Get more qualified women to apply to our tech programs	Set up 3 new outreach partnerships with STEM universities	Community and Partnerships Manager	End of Q3
High drop out rate of female participants	Adapt program logistics to women's needs to keep them in the program	Reschedule all evening sessions to mornings, and offer childcare	Programs Manager	End of Q2
Add More				
Add More				
Add More				
Add More				

Tool 7:

Programmatic Impact Assessment Creator

Type of Tool: Step-by-Step Guide

Supports the RISE of: Impact Tracking

The Programmatic Impact Assessment Creator provides guidance in building a structured tool to measure change across entrepreneurship support programs. By asking participants to self-assess across five levels of maturity in key business areas, program teams can track growth, adjust program design in real time, and compare results across interventions. This step-by-step guide offers practical instructions and examples from our own experience to help create an assessment that fits your context.



Tool 8:

Investment Readiness Rubric

Type of Tool: Assessment

Supports the RISE of: Investment Readiness Support

The Investment Readiness Rubric helps Entrepreneurship Support Organizations assess and categorize the startups they work with. By reviewing a set of clear indicators and rating each startup, it becomes easier to see how prepared they are for investment. This helps design support that matches their current investment readiness stage and specific needs. The indicators and rating levels are adapted to the Rwandan and East African context, making the tool practical and locally relevant.

Criteria	Level 1 (1 point)	Level 2 (2 points)	Level 3 (3 points)
Founder & Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Team size: 1 founder only or no clearly active team Experience: No prior sector experience or previous startup experience Roles: unclear/ undocumented roles; no written agreements/contracts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Team size: >1 active founders or core team members Experience: Some relevant sector experience or previous startup experience Roles: Basic roles/responsibilities defined; some written agreements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Team size: >1 active founders or core team members Experience: Some relevant sector experience or previous startup experience Roles: Basic roles/responsibilities defined; some written agreements
Market Size & Scalability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Target customer segments not clearly defined Market research not conducted beyond general assumptions No clear idea of where or how to find more customers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Target customer segments clearly defined, customer profiles established Basic market research conducted Identified practical ways to reach target customers but not yet on the market 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Customer segments clearly defined and quantified Clear idea of market size Actively generating revenue from paying customers
Business Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Business model is not clearly defined or is based on assumptions Limited understanding of how the model fits the target market (pricing, willingness to pay, channels) No evidence yet that the chosen model can generate reliable revenue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identified a workable business model and has tested elements of it (pricing, channels, value delivery) The model shows viability through early traction Some proof that the model can earn revenue, but not consistently yet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear, validated business model (pricing proven, customers understand the value) The model generates revenue and shows predictable earning ability. The model has been validated in the market and shows clear potential to scale
Traction & Momentum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No paying customers (may have sign-ups, testers, or pilot users only) Low or inconsistent retention: users/customers do not return after first interaction. No real market validation beyond conversations or initial interest. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early paying customers Some retention: customers use or buy again occasionally, or show clear intent to continue Early demand signals (e.g. LOIs, repeat inquiries, or a small active pipeline) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recurring revenue growing steadily over time Strong retention: customers keep buying
Technology & Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Product is a basic MVP or prototype Core features incomplete or unreliable Shows little differentiation a from existing alternatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The product is functional and used by real customers. Core features are functional and work reliably, though still improving Shows some differentiation in workflow, approach, or customer experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The product is stable and ready to support more customers without major issues. Core features are complete, reliable, and consistently deliver value. Demonstrates innovation and distinct value that sets it apart from existing alternatives
Financial Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little or no revenue, or revenue is irregular and entirely dependent on one client/project Founder cannot explain cost structure or the startup has very thin/negative margins No basic financial controls (no books, no cash tracking). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Earning revenue from customers, but revenue is still inconsistent or not yet predictable. Founders understand major cost drivers; early signs of improving unit economics. Some financial discipline (basic bookkeeping). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revenue is recurring, growing, or diversified across multiple customers or product line Margins are positive and improving Consistent financial reporting, cash-flow management, and planning.
Legal Compliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal setup is incomplete or unclear, with gaps in how the company is formally organized or governed. Few or no written agreements with staff, customers, or suppliers Key working relationships are not formalized, and important agreements remain verbal or informal. Regulatory requirements are not understood, and compliance risks have not been assessed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal structure is in place with the essential elements of company formation and ownership clarified. Some key agreements are formalized, covering important staff, suppliers, partners, or customers. Regulatory requirements are identified, and steps toward meeting them have begun. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Company structure is clear, organized, and up to date, with ownership, governance, and formal setup well established. Working relationships are well protected, with comprehensive contracts and safeguards across staff, partners, and customers Regulatory compliance is addressed, with required approvals obtained or actively managed, and risks clearly understood.
Exit Potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No clear path for how the business could grow to a larger scale. Unrealistic valuation expectations not linked to performance. Ownership structure unclear or difficult for future investors to work with. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some idea of how the business could grow into a more attractive opportunity over time Valuation loosely grounded in revenue, traction, or market comparisons Ownership fairly clear, with no major red flags for future investors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear, credible path to scale, making the business attractive to future investors or strategic partners Valuation realistic and tied to performance Clear ownership structure that enables future investment and eventual exit

Interpretation of Assessment Rubric Results:



Between 8-11 points – Early Stage

The startup is at a very early level of maturity, with significant gaps in core areas such as team, business model, traction, financial clarity, and legal readiness.

Needs foundational support to refine the business model, validate the market, build traction, and put basic structures in place before any investor outreach.



Between 12–17 points – Developing

The startup demonstrates some strength and early traction but remains inconsistent or incomplete across several investment readiness dimensions.

Needs targeted technical assistance focused on strengthening traction, refining the model, improving financial discipline, and addressing compliance gaps to move toward investor readiness.



Between 18–24 points – Growing

The startup shows solid maturity across most criteria, with credible traction, a validated model, growing financial stability, and organized structures.

Ready for structured investment preparation, including pitch refinement, data room setup, and introductions to investors through demo days and deal rooms.