



2025 Cohort

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Application Deadlines: *(More information [here](#))*

- **Open application:** March 19 - April 7 at 11:59 PM ET: Round 1 open application window
- **Semifinalist Round:** April 18 - May 13 at 11:59 PM ET: Round 2 semifinalist application window (by invitation only)
- **Finalist Round:** June 5 - June 18: Round 3 virtual interview window for all finalists (by invitation only)

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

What is UpStart's UpSpring program?

- UpSpring is a 10-month venture development and cohort learning program that supports social impact ventures in the Growth Stage ready to scale their offerings and deepen their impact.
- The program offers tools, skills, and funding to help ventures grow and scale and provides continued support for organizational development, funding, and capacity building.
- There are spaces for up to 10 ventures per cohort.

What will the Venture leaders learn and do?

- The core purpose of UpSpring is to identify, refine, and posit solutions to the primary challenge getting in the way of your venture's growth and scale.
- To do this, venture leaders will work over the course of 10 months individually, in small groups, and with their full cohort through the following five curricular units:
 - Unit 1: IMPACT AND RELATIONSHIPS
 - Unit 2: OPERATIONAL AND FINANCIAL FOUNDATIONS
 - Unit 3: COMMUNICATIONS AND FUNDRAISING
 - Unit 4: TEAM AND BOARD
 - Unit 5: GROWTH PLAN - INTEGRATE AND LAUNCH

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- By the end of the program, you will have:
 - A clear, actionable **plan for scaling** sustainably.
 - An **ecosystem map** showing your key supporters and **target audiences**.
 - A **clarified mission, vision, and value proposition** to better meet the needs of all stakeholders.
 - A refined **pitch deck and case for giving**.
 - A **validated business model** (social impact canvas) that matches your plan for scale.
 - A **clear and measurable theory of change** aligned with your organizational outcomes.
 - A **proactive hiring and board plan** to support the organization's growth.
 - A **multi-year budget** and fundraising plan.
 - All the components needed to begin a multi-year strategic plan and referrals for recommended consultants to build the plan.
- As part of the program, you will gain access to funding, tools, resources, and experts, including:
 - A dedicated **advisor** to identify what you can test to unblock their path to growth and scale.
 - Group office hours with **subject matter experts** who can provide specific and tailored support on topics related to venture development.
 - **UpStart will invest up to \$100,000** to support experimentation for further growth and scaling of your venture.
 - Opportunities to build relationships and **connect with funders**.
 - Admission to the [UpStarter Network](#), filled with a diverse group of fellow entrepreneurs.

What does the program cost?

- Each venture will be charged a \$3,500 participation fee upon admission to the cohort.
- A standard travel stipend will be issued for each venture requiring travel for in-person gatherings.

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- For the primary program participant (usually the executive leader), lodging, meals, and activity costs for the in-person gatherings are covered by UpStart.

PARTICIPATION DETAILS

What is the time commitment? How and when do we meet?

- **General:**
 - UpSpring is a hybrid program with both synchronous and asynchronous components.
 - The program kicks off with a multi-day in-person orientation in September 2024 and a multi-day in-person graduation in October '24.
 - In total, you will invest approximately 150-200 hours of solo, cohort, and peer learning over the program's ten months (15-20 hours per month).
- **Asynchronous learning:**
 - You will spend an average of 5-8 hours each month working individually.
 - We will provide guardrails for when asynchronous learning components need to be completed. Still, we encourage you to find a rhythm that suits you best, whether it's breaking learning down into smaller daily sessions, spreading it over a few days a week, or dedicating longer periods when it fits your schedule - plan for the rhythm that best fits your needs.
- **Synchronous learning:**
 - You will spend an average of 5-8 hours each month working synchronously with your cohort through full-cohort virtual gatherings, small group learning pods, and optional office hours.
 - **Key Program Dates for Cohort '25** - Participation is required unless otherwise noted. Note that some dates may change. Communications about any changes will be made directly to participants:

Date	Time	Event <i>(virtual, unless denoted otherwise)</i>
Thursday, August 1	12:00 PM - 2:00 PM ET	Cohort Orientation

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Monday, September 9 - Thursday, September 12		In-Person Gathering <i>(in-person, Chicago)</i>
Thursday, September 26	12:00 PM - 3:00 PM ET	Unit 1 Gathering
Thursday, October 10	12:00 PM - 1:30 PM ET	Unit 1 Critical Colleagues
Tuesday, November 19	12:00 PM - 3:00 PM ET	Unit 2 Gathering
Thursday, December 5	12:00 PM - 1:30 PM ET	Unit 2 Critical Colleagues
Tuesday, December 17	12:00 PM - 2:00 PM ET	Funder Connection #1
Wednesday, January 22	12:00 PM - 3:00 PM ET	Unit 3 Gathering
Thursday, January 30	12:00 PM - 1:30 PM ET	Unit 3 Critical Colleagues
Tuesday, February 11	12:00 PM - 2:00 PM ET	Funder Connection #2
Tuesday, March 11	12:00 PM - 3:00 PM ET	Unit 4 Gathering
Thursday, March 20	12:00 PM - 1:30 PM ET	Unit 4 Critical Colleagues
Tuesday, April 29	12:00 PM - 3:00 PM ET	Unit 5 Gathering
Thursday, May 8	12:00 PM - 1:30 PM ET	Unit 5 Critical Colleagues
Thursday, May 15	12:00 PM - 2:00 PM ET	Funder Connection #3
Monday, May 19 - Thursday, May 22		Graduation <i>(in-person, TBD)</i>
Ongoing- Thursdays	12 PM ET	Office Hours + Open Space

- **Program components**

- **Small group meetings**

- **Learning pods** - These groups of 3-4 ventures are curated by UpStart staff based on growth areas, current strengths, sectors, and personality types. You will meet with your learning pod twice every unit to unpack and apply your learning.
- **Critical colleagues** – These groups of 5 ventures meet once per unit to present a challenge and receive peer feedback. The group will be a

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different mix than your learning pods to allow for more cohort connections.

- **One-to-one meetings**
 - **Advisors** – Your advisor has general expertise in social entrepreneurship and a deep understanding of the Jewish ecosystem. You will meet twice per unit to ensure your design challenge is on track and to address any blockers that have popped up as you move through the program.
- **Full cohort moments**
 - **Content specialist office hours** – Content specialists are subject matter experts who can provide specific support on a variety of business needs/topics. Each month, there will be two optional office hour sessions on rotating topics where you can get questions on that topic answered and hear the questions of your peers. If you need deeper support, you can allocate some of your investment funding from the program to hire a consultant.
 - **Live gatherings** – Each unit features a full cohort gathering. Here, you can connect socially, deep dive into specific content, unpack sticky challenges together, and bring the learning to life as a full group. Orientation and Graduation will be in person. Unit 1-5 will be virtual live gatherings on Zoom.
 - **Funder + Venture Connections** – These moments provide opportunities for venture leaders to engage effectively with funders and expand their network of supporters and ambassadors. There will be five funder touch points throughout the program that begin informally and work towards opportunities for pitching and curated introductions.

What are the technical requirements?

- The UpSpring program is primarily virtual.
- Participants will need access to a computer or tablet with a camera and a reliable internet connection.

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- Participants must be able to navigate the Google suite of tools (Google Docs, Slides, and Sheets), Mural, and an online learning platform.

How will UpStart address accessibility needs?

- UpStart can support accessibility needs and provide training on navigating the tools and learning platform to support participation in the program. Accommodation requests can be sent to accessibility@upstartlab.org.

UpStart's Commitment to Diversity

UpStart's vision is that Jewish communities will be thriving hubs of innovation, building a more just, vibrant, and inclusive future.

As such, we aspire to build an entrepreneurial ecosystem that models this future, embodying and driving toward greater diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice. To achieve this, we commit to developing entrepreneurial leaders and ventures that can acknowledge, account for, and disrupt systemic inequities as they build new Jewish initiatives while removing barriers and increasing opportunities for historically marginalized communities to access entrepreneurial and philanthropic resources. Should you have any questions or concerns related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice, please email [Whitney Weathers](#), Managing Director of People Culture & Equity, [UpStart](#).

Who should participate from each venture? Can I bring a colleague?

- The content is structured for one primary participant – the venture's executive leader – to participate in all aspects of synchronous and asynchronous programming. If your venture has a co-leadership model, or there is a second leader you want to participate consistently, we welcome both parties.
- For asynchronous learning – We encourage you to create access to this program for your staff and key stakeholders. Share the virtual learning on the platform with them and engage them in the activities.
- For synchronous learning – There may be times when you opt to bring an additional participant to a gathering – for example, there is a workshop where you will dive into financial content, and you want to bring your CFO or your board chair—we welcome them to come.

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- For in-person gatherings – We offer one travel stipend for the venture. Some ventures opt to bring up to two leaders; some only have the primary participant (the ED or CEO) participate.

ELIGIBILITY AND SELECTION

What is the 2024 cohort selection process?

- The application and selection process will take place from March to June 2024.
 - **Open Call – due Sunday, April 7 at 11:59 PM ET**
 - March 19 - April 7 at 11:59 PM ET: Application Round #1 open. All interested applicants must apply by April 7 at 11:59 PM ET. No extensions will be granted.
 - April 18: Applicants notified of progression to the semifinalist round.
 - **Semifinalist Round – due Monday, May 13 at 11:59 PM ET**
 - April 18 - May 13 at 11:59 PM ET: Semifinalist Round #2 open. Semifinalist applicants must submit their application by Monday, May 13 at 11:59 PM ET. No extensions will be granted.
 - May 29: Applicants notified of progression to finalist round
 - **Finalist Round – assigned interview times**
 - June 5 - June 18: Finalist Round #3 virtual interview window
 - **Selected finalists** will be informed of their admission to the cohort in early July 2024
- Up to 10 ventures will be selected for the UpSpring program.

Your venture and leadership are a great fit for this program if:

- The venture is impact first – it boldly and uniquely responds to community needs that create or contribute to a thriving Jewish community in North America.
- The venture's leadership exhibits a growth mindset, curiosity, passion, and determination.
- The venture's leader displays professional readiness by having at least one year with their current venture and at least five years in their field or recognition for their work within the field.
- The venture's leader has a vision for growth and scale.

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How do I know if I'm a growth-stage venture?

- Please take our [What Stage Are You quiz](#).
- Please see the UpSpring eligibility criteria [HERE](#).

What if I am interested in the program but am not a growth-stage venture? Can I still participate?

- UpSpring is designed specifically for growth-stage ventures. UpStart program offerings also include:
 - [UpSpark: Idea Stage Generation](#) | Everything starts with the spark of imagination. That spark produces the ideas that become innovations. UpSpark ignites that process.
 - [UpLift: an Early Stage Sprint](#) | UpLift brings entrepreneurs the next-level resources, expertise, and funding required to lift ventures to the next stage as they work to prove their concept.

What if I applied to the UpSpring (formerly Venture Accelerator) cohort in the past? Should I apply for this program?

You should consider reapplying to the program if:

- You can more clearly explain how your program helps to create a stronger Jewish community.
- You have more evidence of impact and proof that the work you are doing is working.
- Your organization has grown and now better fits UpStart's definition of a growth-stage venture.
- Your organization serves a small or mid-sized Jewish community, and even if your idea has been done before in larger cities by other organizations, it's still innovative in your local community.
- Your venture is structured as a social-first, for-profit entity impacting Jewish life.

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What if I'm already in the UpStarter Network or participated in UpStart's growth-stage work in the past (formerly the Venture Accelerator)?

- We welcome participants from the UpStarter Network to this program who are growth-stage and have not participated in a previous version of UpSpring (formerly known as the Venture Accelerator).

How does our venture fiscal status impact participation?

- We care more about the impact you seek to make in the world than your tax status. 501c3, 501c4, LLC, B-corporation, fiscally sponsored...all are welcome.
- Our program has traditionally been geared toward nonprofit entities, but we have begun experimenting with opening it up to for-profit entities with a social impact.
- If your business model contributes to a thriving Jewish community or if you have a business model that will generate more revenue for Jewish life, consider applying. For example:
 - You are a company that manufactures Matzo. The product alone does not impact Jewish life. However, if something about how you produce it or your financial model specifically contributes to a thriving Jewish community, we welcome you to apply!
 - You are a publishing company focusing on underrepresented voices, with a line focusing on BIPOC and LGBTQIA authors. If you are interested in building out a line that focuses on Jewish authors, you are welcome to apply!
- If you meet the above criteria and decide to apply, please know that this program has only recently been offered to for-profit businesses, and as such, we will look to you as our partners in refining our content to meet your needs.