

Winchester-Clark County, KY

Entrepreneurial Academy

COHORT HANDBOOK

Program Year [Year] | Winchester, Clark County, Kentucky

This handbook belongs to:

Program Year

Business Name

Business Type

My Mentor's Name

The one sentence that describes my business:

Why I joined the Academy:

What I want to build by Demo Day:

Welcome to the Academy

You are not here to learn about building a business. You are here to build one.

That distinction matters. A lot of programs teach you the words — entrepreneur, pitch, revenue, scale. They give you worksheets and case studies and maybe a

competition at the end. Then you leave with a certificate and nothing you actually built.

This is not that program.

Over the next 10–12 months, you will go from your first idea to your first real customer. You will charge real money. You will handle real problems — some of them problems you never anticipated. You will stand up in front of a room full of judges and business leaders in Winchester and tell them what you built, what you learned, and where you are going next.

Some things will work exactly as planned. Many things will not. Both outcomes are education. The difference between an entrepreneur and someone who thought about starting a business is that the entrepreneur kept going when things did not work.

You were accepted into this program because someone believed you would keep going. We are going to build on that.

[Founder Name]

Founder & Executive Director, Winchester-Clark County, KY Entrepreneurial Academy

What This Program Is — and What It Isn't

What It Is

The Winchester-Clark County, KY Entrepreneurial Academy is a year-round business accelerator. That means:

- **It is year-round:** We meet weekly for 10–12 months. This is not a summer camp or a semester elective. It is a full-year commitment, and it is designed that way because building a real business takes time.
- **It is a business accelerator:** An accelerator takes someone who is already motivated and provides structure, mentorship, tools, and community to help them move faster and smarter. We are the structure. You are the motivation.
- **Any business is welcome:** You can build a product business, a service business, a digital business, a creative business — anything legal. Nobody will tell you your idea is the wrong kind. The Academy teaches the process of building a business, and that process applies to all of them.
- **It is free:** There is no tuition, no materials fee, and no pay-to-play. Every Clark County teen who gets in gets the full program at no cost.

What It Isn't

This program is NOT...	It IS...
A class where you sit and take notes	A working session where you build things and solve problems
Easy — it is designed to challenge you	Worth it — every graduate says it
A guarantee that your business will succeed	A structure that gives your business the best possible chance
Something you can do halfway	Something that rewards full commitment with real results
About impressing the facilitator	About building something real for real people
A replacement for school	A complement to it — everything you learn here you can use there

Your Year — The Four Phases

Every Academy student moves through the same four phases in the same order. Every business is different, but the process of building one follows a pattern. Here is the pattern — and what you will experience in each phase.

PHASE 1

Discover

Months 1–3

You are going to do something counterintuitive: before you build anything, you are going to research, interview, and question. You will talk to potential customers, study your competition, and honestly evaluate whether your idea has real demand behind it. This is the phase where good ideas get stronger and bad ideas get fixed — before you waste months building the wrong thing. Phase 1 ends with your Market Discovery Report: a written analysis of your business concept, presented to the full cohort.

PHASE 2

Build

Months 4–6

Now you build. Your brand. Your website. Your pricing. Your payment system. Your prototype or first version of your product or service. You will be supported by a cohort mentor who has real experience in the business world. Phase 2 ends with the Soft Launch Event — a real community gathering where you present your business to mentors and invited guests for the first time. This is your first public moment. You will be ready.

PHASE 3

Launch

Months 7–9

You are open for business. Real customers. Real revenue. Real problems you did not see coming. This is the phase where the program gets hard and the learning gets deep. Every week you report your sales and your struggles to the cohort. When something goes wrong, the group helps you figure out why and what to do next. Phase 3 ends with your Revenue Report: documented sales, customer feedback, financial analysis, and the most important thing you learned from the market.

PHASE 4

Pitch & Scale

Months 10–12

You have built a business. Now you have to tell its story to a room full of judges and community members. Phase 4 is pitch preparation — not memorizing a script, but developing the ability to talk clearly, honestly, and compellingly about what you built, what you learned, and where you are taking it. Phase 4 ends at Demo Day: the Academy's annual public pitch event. Five minutes on stage. Real panel. Real stakes. Real community watching.

Your Mentor

One of the most valuable things the Academy gives you is not a curriculum, a tool, or a workshop. It is a person.

Every Academy student is supported by Clark County business mentors who are present at Academy sessions and work with you and your cohort throughout the program. There is no contact between mentors and students outside of supervised sessions. Your mentor is not a teacher, and the relationship is not a class. It is a professional partnership. Your mentor brings real experience in the business world. You bring a real business concept and the drive to build it. Together, you go further than either of you would alone.

What Your Mentor Does

- **Meets with you in-session:** At least at every session, for as long as the conversation needs. In person during Academy sessions — whatever works for both of you.
- **Reviews your work:** Your business model, your pricing, your brand decisions. Not to tell you what to do — to ask questions that help you think more clearly.
- **Is available at session dates:** When something comes up in your business and you need advice, your mentor is there. This is not a once-a-month check-in — it is an ongoing relationship.
- **Comes to your events:** Soft Launch, mid-phase check-ins, Demo Day. Your mentor is present for the moments that matter.
- **Writes you a reference letter:** Any Academy graduate who requests a letter of recommendation from their mentor receives one. This is real professional credibility.

What You Owe Your Mentor

Mentorship is not a service you receive. It is a relationship you show up for. Here is what that looks like:

- **Show up on time:** If you scheduled a meeting, you are there. If something comes up, you reach out before — not after — the meeting time.
- **Come prepared:** Know what you want to discuss. Bring your questions, your latest business data, and the thing you are stuck on.
- **Do the work:** Your mentor can advise you. Only you can build the business. When your mentor gives you a challenge, you complete it.
- **Communicate through Academy channels:** All mentor-student communication goes through the platforms the Academy establishes — not personal social media or personal phone numbers. This protects both of you.
- **Be honest:** Your mentor cannot help you solve a problem they do not know about. Be honest about what is working and what is not.

Demo Day — The Culminating Event

Demo Day is not a school presentation. It is a real pitch event in your hometown, in front of real business leaders, with a real prize on the line.

Every Academy program year ends with Demo Day — the Academy's annual public community event in Winchester. Every student who completes Phase 4 pitches their business to a panel of local judges, business owners, and community leaders. The audience includes your family, your mentors, community members, and the press.

The Format

Pitch length	5 minutes — strict. A visible timer counts down. When time is up, you finish your sentence and stop.
Q&A	3 minutes of questions from the judging panel immediately following your pitch. You answer honestly, including when you do not know the answer.
Audience	Open to the public — community members, family, press, Academy supporters.
Panel	5–7 judges: business owners, Chamber of Commerce representatives, economic development professionals, and community leaders. They score independently using the Academy's published rubric.
Demo Day Seed Prize	The strongest pitch at Demo Day is awarded a \$500 seed prize, decided by the judging panel. It is a fixed amount, not an investment with any ongoing stake in your business.
Feedback	Every student receives written feedback from every panel member within 3 days of Demo Day.
What to wear	Professional attire — treat this like a job interview, because in a sense it is.

What the Panel Is Looking For

Your Demo Day pitch is scored on five things. Here they are in plain language so you are never surprised:

What Judges Score	What That Means for You
The Business Concept	Is your idea specific and real? Could this actually work as a business?
Traction — Your Phase 3 Evidence	Did you get real customers? Did you make real sales? Did you learn something real from the market? This is your most powerful section.
Business Model	Do you understand how your business makes money — your pricing, your costs, your margin?
Presentation	Can the judges follow your pitch? Are you confident without being fake? Do you answer Q&A honestly?
Vision	Where is this going? What is your Year 2 plan? Do you believe in it?

IMPORTANT: The panel rewards honest traction over polished claims. '\$300 in real sales over 3 months while attending school' is more impressive to a judge than '\$50,000 first-year revenue projections' with no evidence. Be honest about what you built. That is what earns respect.

The Commitment — What This Program Requires

This is not the section where we make the program sound easy. This is the section where we tell you what you are actually signing up for so there are no surprises at Month 4.

Attendance

Sessions are weekly. Every session matters. The cohort is a team — when you are absent, the team loses a voice.

Expected attendance	Every weekly session — 48 sessions over the program year
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If you cannot attend	Notify the Program Director before the session, not after. Same-day notice is better than no notice. No-shows without communication reflect on your commitment.
If you miss more than 2 sessions in a phase	You will have a in-session conversation with the Program Director to assess whether you can continue on pace. We want you to succeed — but we also need to be honest when the gap is too large.
Mandatory events	Market Discovery Presentations, Soft Launch Event, Revenue Report Presentations, Demo Day. These are non-negotiable. Missing one of these requires an extraordinary circumstance and a conversation with the Program Director.

Weekly Commitments

Every session ends with each student making one specific, actionable commitment for the week ahead. Next session begins by checking those commitments. This is the most important structure in the program.

A commitment is not 'I'm going to work on my business.' A commitment is 'I'm going to contact 3 potential customers by Thursday and report back on what they said.' **Specific. Actionable. Accountable.**

THE RULE: Make the commitment only if you intend to keep it. If something prevents you from keeping a commitment, reach out to the Program Director before the next session — don't wait until you're in the room being asked about it.

The Work Between Sessions

You will spend roughly 2 hours per week in the session room. You will spend considerably more time actually building your business outside of program sessions. There is no worksheet that substitutes for talking to real customers. There is no workshop that substitutes for actually making a sale. The sessions give you direction and support. The hours outside of program sessions are where the business gets built.

Respect — For Your Cohort, Your Mentor, and Your Business

You are spending a year in close company with people who are doing something hard and vulnerable. They are going to share their ideas, their failures, and their fears with you. Treat those things with respect.

- **What you hear in this program stays in this program:** Other students' business concepts, personal situations, and struggles are not yours to share outside the cohort.

- **Feedback is a gift:** When you give feedback to a peer, give it like you want to receive it — specific, honest, kind. When you receive it, take it seriously.
- **Your business reflects on you:** How you treat customers, how you handle problems, how you show up professionally — this is your reputation in Winchester, and reputations are built one interaction at a time.

Your Rights as an Academy Student

Rights are not something most student handbooks talk about. We do.

You have the right to...	What that means
Build any legal business	No adult in this program will tell you that your business idea is the wrong kind. Food, fashion, tech, services, creative work, agriculture — all of it is welcome.
Be treated with respect	Every adult in this program — the Program Director, facilitators, mentors, and volunteers — is required to treat you with courtesy, professional respect, and age-appropriate boundaries. If this is not happening, report it.
Safe and supervised sessions	You will never be alone with a single adult in a private space during Academy activities. Two unrelated adults must be present whenever students are present. This is a requirement, not a preference.
Keep your business idea	Your business concept belongs to you. The Academy has no claim on your intellectual property. We do not take equity in your business in exchange for participation.
Honest feedback	You will receive honest, specific feedback on your work. Not cruelty — honest. There is a difference, and the program takes that difference seriously.
Privacy	Your personal information, family situation, and anything you share in the context of the program is confidential. It is not shared outside the program without your consent.

Report concerns	If anything happens during an Academy activity that concerns you — regarding your safety, another student's safety, or the conduct of any adult — you can report it to the Program Director, any board member, or directly to law enforcement. You will not be penalized for making a good-faith report.
Withdraw without penalty	If you need to leave the program, you may. We will be sorry to see you go and will support your transition. Your partial participation does not entitle the Academy to anything from you.

Safety, Wellbeing & Your Mentor Relationship

Two Adults, Always

At every Academy session and event, at least two unrelated adults are present whenever students are there. No adult in this program should ever be alone with you in a private space. If that happens accidentally, the adult will immediately move to a visible location or bring another adult into the space. If this rule is ever violated, tell the Program Director or any board member immediately.

Reporting Abuse or Concerning Conduct

Every adult associated with the Academy — including the Program Director, facilitators, mentors, and volunteers — is a mandatory reporter under Kentucky law. That means if any adult in this program has reasonable cause to believe a student is being abused, neglected, or harmed, they are legally required to report it to the Kentucky Child Abuse Hotline (1-877-597-2331) or law enforcement.

If you are experiencing harm — at home, at school, or anywhere else — and you share it with an Academy adult, they will take it seriously and they will take action. You will not be in trouble for telling the truth.

Your Mentor Relationship — Professional Boundaries

Your mentor is a professional partner, not a social contact. That means:

- **All interaction happens at supervised Academy sessions. There is no outside contact of any kind. There is no contact between mentors and students outside of sessions:** No phone, text, email, social media, or any contact of any kind outside of Academy sessions. The Program Director will ensure all interaction occurs at supervised Academy sessions only.
- **Your mentor will not ask for your personal accounts:** If a mentor asks to follow you on personal social media or exchange personal phone numbers, that is a boundary violation — tell the Program Director.
- **Meetings include appropriate settings:** In-person meetings happen at Academy sessions only. No meetings anywhere else.
- **Your mentor will not transport you:** Mentors never transport students under any circumstances. transport students.

If You're Struggling

Building a business is hard. The program is demanding. Life outside the program does not stop while you are in it. If you are struggling — with the program, with your business, with anything else — talk to the Program Director. We would rather know than not know. We will help you figure out a path forward.

Tools & Communication

The Digital Tools You Will Use

The Academy integrates a digital tools curriculum into every phase. You will learn and use these tools in the context of your actual business — not in a classroom exercise. By the end of the year, you will be fluent in the tools that every modern small business needs.

Phase	Tool	What You'll Use It For
1	Google Workspace	Research, Market Discovery Report, presentations
2	Canva	Logo, brand assets, social media graphics
2	Wix / Squarespace / Google Sites	Your business website
2	Square / Stripe	Accepting payments from customers
2	Wave Accounting	Tracking your revenue and expenses
2	Mailchimp	Building and emailing your customer list

2	Etsy / Shopify (if applicable)	Online store for product businesses
3	Instagram / Facebook Business	Marketing and customer acquisition
3	Google Business Profile	Local business discoverability
4	Google Slides / Canva Presentation	Demo Day pitch deck

How We Communicate

Program-wide announcements	Email to your registered address — keep this current. Check it at least twice a week.
Cohort communication	Cohort group discussion happens at sessions
Your mentor	At sessions only. No outside contact of any kind.
Urgent matters	Call or text the Program Director directly at [Phone] — for genuine emergencies only
Your parent/guardian	The Program Director communicates with your parent/guardian about program logistics, attendance, and any safety concerns

SOCIAL MEDIA: Please tag the Academy when you post about your business or your Academy experience. We are @[AcademyHandle] on Instagram. Positive, authentic content about what you are building is the best marketing the Academy has — and we will share it.

What You Earn — Milestones & Graduation

Phase Milestones

Each phase ends with a specific deliverable that demonstrates your real progress. These are not graded assignments — they are professional deliverables, assessed against real standards, in front of a real audience.

Phase	Milestone	What It Is
1	Market Discovery Report	Written analysis of your business concept — problem, customer, market, value proposition — presented to the full cohort. 5 minutes, structured feedback from peers and facilitator.
2	Soft Launch Event	Your business, presented to a real audience for the first time. Mentors, family members, and invited community guests attend. 5-minute presentation. This is your first public moment as a business owner.
3	Revenue Report	Documented Phase 3 performance: sales, customers, financials, key learnings. Presented to the cohort. The most honest document you will produce this year.
4	Demo Day Pitch + Growth Plan	5-minute pitch at Demo Day + written Year 2 Growth Plan. The culmination of the full program year. \$500 Demo Day seed prize awarded by the judging panel to the strongest pitch.

What Academy Graduation Means

Every student who completes all four phases and presents at Demo Day is an Academy graduate. Graduation is not a ceremony with a cap and gown — it is a moment at the end of Demo Day when the Academy publicly acknowledges what every student accomplished. Here is what you walk away with:

- **A functioning business:** With real customers, real revenue history, and a year's worth of operational learning
- **A Year 2 Growth Plan:** A documented roadmap for where the business goes next
- **Digital business infrastructure:** A website, payment system, social media presence, and bookkeeping system — all yours
- **A mentor relationship:** A Clark County professional who knows your business and has invested a year in your growth. This relationship does not expire at graduation.
- **A Demo Day presentation on your record:** You stood up in front of a judging panel and pitched a real business. Most adults never do that.
- **A letter of recommendation:** Any Academy graduate who requests a letter of recommendation from their mentor or the Program Director receives one.
- **Alumni status:** As an Academy alum, you have access to the Academy's growing network of graduates, mentors, and supporters — and the opportunity to mentor the next cohort if you choose.

Frequently Asked Questions

Question	Answer
I don't know what business I want to build. Can I still apply?	Yes. You do not need a fully formed idea to be accepted. Phase 1 – Discover – is specifically designed to help you identify and validate a business concept. You need curiosity and motivation. The idea develops from there.
What if my business idea changes after I start?	It might. That is normal. Phase 1 exists partly because some ideas look different after real customer research. An early pivot based on good data is better than late commitment to the wrong thing. Tell the Program Director when you are considering a significant change.
Do I need money to participate?	No. The program is free. Your business may require some startup investment – most student businesses can start for under \$100, and many for even less. If startup costs are a barrier, talk to the Program Director.
Can I build a business with a partner?	Yes – maximum two students per business concept. Co-founders share all program requirements equally. Both attend every session. Both present at milestones. The business is built together.
What if I miss a session?	Notify the Program Director before the session whenever possible. Missing one session is manageable. Missing multiple sessions in a phase creates gaps that are hard to recover from. Attendance is a commitment.
Is my business idea protected? What if another student copies my concept?	The Academy takes cohort confidentiality seriously and all students sign a confidentiality commitment. However, the Academy cannot legally protect your intellectual property – that requires trademark, copyright, or patent registration, which the legal basics session covers. The best protection for most student businesses is executing better than anyone else.
Will I make money during this program?	Probably in Phase 3 – that is the point of the Launch phase. How much depends entirely on your business, your execution, and your market. Some students earn hundreds of dollars;

	others earn modest amounts but learn enormous amounts. Both are valid outcomes.
What happens to my business after I graduate?	It is yours. Completely. The Academy has no claim on it. Your Year 2 Growth Plan is your roadmap for continuing to build it after the program ends. The Academy's alumni network and your mentor relationship continue to be resources available to you.
What if Demo Day goes badly?	Define 'badly.' If you show up, present honestly, and answer questions to the best of your ability – that is not going badly. The panel has seen polished pitches from adults that were worse than nervous pitches from teens who had actually built something. You have built something real. That is your material.
Can my family come to Academy events?	Yes – to milestone events. Families are invited to the Soft Launch Event, Demo Day, and any public community gatherings the Academy holds. Regular weekly sessions are for students only.

Student Acknowledgment

Please read each statement below, initial to confirm your understanding, and sign at the bottom. Return this page to the Program Director at Session 1. Keep the rest of the handbook.

	I confirm that I have read and understand the following:	Init.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I have read the complete Cohort Handbook and understand what the Academy program requires.	_____ —
<input type="checkbox"/>	I understand that the Academy program is year-round and meets weekly for 10–12 months, and I commit to attending every session.	_____ —

<input type="checkbox"/>	I understand the four-phase structure (Discover, Build, Launch, Pitch & Scale) and the milestone deliverable at the end of each phase.	_____ —
<input type="checkbox"/>	I understand that Demo Day is a mandatory event — not optional — and I commit to preparing and presenting.	_____ —
<input type="checkbox"/>	I understand the weekly commitment structure: I will make one specific, actionable commitment each session and follow through on it.	_____ —
<input type="checkbox"/>	I understand that all mentor interaction with students occurs at supervised Academy sessions only. There is zero contact of any kind between mentors and students outside of sessions.	_____ —
<input type="checkbox"/>	I understand the Two-Adult Rule and the Academy's youth protection policies, and I know how to report a concern.	_____ —
<input type="checkbox"/>	I understand that my business concept and intellectual property belong to me — the Academy has no ownership interest.	_____ —
<input type="checkbox"/>	I commit to treating my cohort peers' business ideas and personal situations with confidentiality and respect.	_____ —
<input type="checkbox"/>	I understand that if I need to withdraw from the program, I may do so by notifying the Program Director.	_____ —

Student Full Name (print)	Date
Student Signature	Age / Grade / School

Parent / Guardian Signature (required for students under 18):

Parent / Guardian Name (print)	Relationship to Student
Parent / Guardian Signature	Date
Best phone number to reach parent / guardian:	

Winchester-Clark County, KY Entrepreneurial Academy

Transforming Clark County's next generation into its next generation of economic drivers.

[Program Director Name] | [Phone] | [Email] | Winchester, Kentucky