

The YSI program explained



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MAIN GOAL

In today's world, we find many initiatives that do incredible work, with everything from teaching youth, to initiate social movements, press politicians, or create a new breed of social entrepreneurs. Our approach differs from a lot you see, and our only goal is to **create a measurable impact through breakthrough solutions, for sustainability.**

This is the outcome we want of the program, and we consider everything else intangible bonuses, such as igniting a new fire and direction for youth. It's not that we don't consider this valuable, but we believe that the focus should lay on helping youth to do quality work, and become true leaders by taking real action, and making progressive change in a way that benefits the world.

MAIN CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES



**Being
young**



**Working
remotely**



**Breakthrough
innovation**

Most entrepreneurship programs focus on having teams or individuals apply with ideas. We only look for individuals that are great at something, and passionate about some area in the world. We group together individuals from different countries, based on similarity in interest, vision, and passion. We also look at the diversity in skills and background, to ensure that they have the capability of building something real. To top this off, we allow the team to bring in a fourth team member during the program if they need a programmer, designer, engineer, and so forth.

The teams are usually spread out in different countries and have to work remotely for 4,5 months before arriving Oslo for our 2-week accelerator. By logic, having teams work remotely is a bad idea, and it's very hard. We embrace this by thinking of the opportunity that lay with teams that are able to operate remotely, and by that create an unfair advantage. If you get it to work, you can suddenly go network in three to four cities, gather network from several continents, and launch tests and get customers from quite diverse backgrounds – that enables a robust testing of your product or service.

Being young is the third challenge, as well as an opportunity. Being young means less experience, smaller networks, and less capital. Being young also means less shaped, usually more openness, and when they have been trained for several years in some craft before the program, they are able to operate in creative, different, and novel ways. Young, smart, and talented people are also equipped in a program like YSI to explore with fresh eyes, build and test quickly, and adapt different strategies that are not shaped by how things are. This gives an edge, which coupled with the network and partners of YSI, training and mentoring, and resources can help them achieve great things.

The last challenge that we want to put forth, is the breakthrough innovation. Breakthrough innovation can be both a form of radical and disruptive innovation but have in common that it tackles the core of a systematic problem, and creates a new path. Doing this usually takes years of research and practice, and is a major challenge. Incremental innovation (small changes), is when multiplied what leads to breakthroughs. It's most common to end up with incremental changes, but you need this to end up with a systematic change in the first place, and while we push our teams to go for the breakthroughs, it is by a natural law of innovation that they end up with something that changes things in smaller ways. We also are focused on what we in YSI call breakthrough solutions for sustainability, which we have defined as:

“Creating a solution that restores and regenerates nature or removes negative impact compared to the existing solution. At the same time, it should be scalable on a mass scale preferably be so convenient that it can replace existing habits. Finally, the solution should be profitable.

OUR RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Our program mixes together what we consider to be the best approaches in the world when it comes to innovation process and startup management. We use parts of design thinking, lean startup methodology, agile principles, and scrum, as well as jobs to be done framework. We are also using leadership theories

and methods, creativity methods, and marketing approaches to startup success. There are many great and tested methods out there, but when it all comes down to it – you have to continue innovating these processes.

To do this we have researched not only the methods, research, and knowledge that is out there but done a fair share of research and experiments ourselves. Having programs run in Bangladesh, Southeast Asia, and China allows us to do extensive research in diverse conditions. In 2018 alone we ran 35 depth interviews, did a survey of the 75 participants, made iterative changes in all programs as we went along, and took notes and insights in journals and notebooks over several months.

All these insights are either put into rapid changes during the program or put to the side for further research in the months after the program (September - February). While we start getting the first insights we start creating new thoughts, structures, and create new tools and ideas, and quickly get feedback from experts, previous participants, and internally in YSI. Using our own methods in developing the program ensures that we grow to become many times better from year to year. The most important attitude is this: We do not claim to know innovation, but we intend with all our heart to find out.

OUR APPLICATION PROCESS

The global program of YSI gets around 10.000 applicants per year, and we only accept 24 people. The reason for this is that we believe in focusing on a few startups, as it would drain our resources to take in many more. This is why we intend to expand our program to other regions, led by people from those regions, but more on this another time.

The applicants have to go through 4 rounds to get into the program, and we do a lot of work to ensure that we pick the right people. It's not about picking the best people, but rather set teams that we believe is best together. We will not go deep into the application process and criteria as this defeat the purpose of having it in the first place (as people will start answering what they think we want to hear, which we not always know), but we can tell you this:

We look for people who are extremely driven and passionate about making the world better, and more sustainable. The motivation for being in the program is by far the most important part. We further look for people who have done projects and work that shows their skill and knowledge in concrete ways. Thirdly, we are looking for people who are reflected, open-minded, and have something special about them, be it the drive, background, or visions.

As mentioned above, we are looking to set the best possible teams together, and we are not only looking at the individuals.

What's new this year is that we have YARA international who is sponsoring two teams working on core-aspects of their business: Digital farming and food value chain. These two teams will work in one of these areas, and have to explicitly say that they want to work on this during the application process. The main difference for these teams is that you will benefit from the depth of knowledge and access that YARA has. They will be there throughout the program, with the intention of building a fruitful relationship for both parties.

THE PROGRAM MODULES



We aim to take your team to a ready product so that you can further take it to your first customers, get investment, try crowdfunding, or join an accelerator. Our job is to help your team make a service or product that is market validated in size and demand, and that is a solution tested in real life, as well as helping you to become a great team that is able to operate remotely (until you perhaps start working from the same place). Our models look like this:

1. Team & Individual

Many in the YSI team have a background in leadership and team development. With partners such as Future Leaders Global and Emergence school of leadership, we have ensured that our program has a great focus on leadership and team building. You will learn and use methods and tools to ensure that trust, understanding, and relationships with the teammates are built quickly. We also make sure that all teams have structures in place that allows for continuous improvement in the way you communicate, work, and collaborate.

2. Understand

The goal of the module is to end up with a well-defined focus area/problem, rather than a vague and intangible statement with loads of assumptions. Most important are the needs and pain points of the ones you want to help, but other aspects that affect these might be political situations, market movements, geographical location, social movements, education & science level, and technological possibilities. Many methods and frames exist to help people understand things better, and this module will showcase all of them so that our participants can choose their preferred way of working to gain insight.

It is important to mention that we are not looking for random ideas to some minor problem, to achieve the 2030 SDGs we need to look at breakthrough solutions. For this, deep understanding of big problems are needed, and this requires everyone to position themselves correctly from the start. Your work and understanding within some system (area) will be heavily influenced by politics, social systems, technical advancement, and science. Working to understand a bigger picture of the area or problem is vital to attack the problem from an angle that actually enables you to provide value with a solution.

3. Solution

When you observe a problem and system you could potentially see the issues so clearly that you know how to solve it. For example, let's take the case that you work for the government - and you are assigned to solve a problem. At a very specific area of the street downtown, people keep falling. You observe this problem, and getting there you see that it's icy. It is not difficult to conclude that the solution is to remove the ice. Now how to remove it could be the differentiating part - to solve it while considering other aspects such as cost, time, and other resources. Then you could finish the operation with pace and quality.

Sometimes the problem is more complex, such as with forest fires. Solving this requires a much more in-depth understanding. Variables like wind, ground-level temperature, dryness VS humidity, etc. will affect whatever solution you choose. If you only observe the fire superficially, you might think “let’s just throw water at it like any other fire”. This solution would actually make it worse because of the heated ground beneath the trees. It takes more effort to understand this problem, and even more effort to develop a solution that considers all the variables. You need to come up with many potential solutions, test assumptions, and create minimum viable products, or use another of the many strategies to test your solution. This module is about coming up with solutions, and testing in a rapid way.

4. Build

Getting the prototype into an actual product, creating a brand, a social media presence, a website, defining ownership structure, developing the business model and getting the first customers and partners can be an incredibly hard, sometimes seemingly impossible road. The most important thing we do through our YSI program is to help them make this progress quick, smooth and logical so they don’t spend unnecessary time, get potential conflict areas and lack of productivity due to thinking about stuff like this too early and in the wrong way.

STRUCTURE

1. Work

Happens online using www.appear.in as an example to communicate with video. We also use Novoed as a learning platform. In 2019 we will incorporate Slack as the YSI participants community-platform. The teams will start by using scrum-principles and methods to ensure an agile approach from the beginning.

2. Checkpoints

Instead of having a specific time schedule for deliveries on a module or objective, there will be times for follow-ups, checkpoints in the form of pitches and large co op-sessions with the other participants. **The teams will also set their own deadlines.** The purpose of this structure is to give us an opportunity to understand their progress, their thoughts and issues and how we can cater to their needs most effectively throughout the entire program.

- **Checkpoints once a month (Report and presentation to core/follow-up team)**

This evolved delivery gets the teams to deliver a report in writing before the checkpoint, followed by a presentation of their progress since last time when we meet them. The structure is thought to progress per module so that they in a way “check themselves” towards the different module areas they work on. In the beginning, this might mean going all in on team and understanding (module 1 & 2), and later it might mean showing their progress on building the business as a whole (module 4).

- **Two follow-ups before each checkpoint per team.**

In-depth talks about everything with different people in our team. Instead of having only one concierge, we have a main contact/follow-up person plus meetups with others as well. For example, if the first follow-up for one team is one by Amund, their main contact person, while the next two are done respectively by Didrik and Christoffer. This way, they get different perspectives.

- **Cross-team coop sessions x times during the program.**

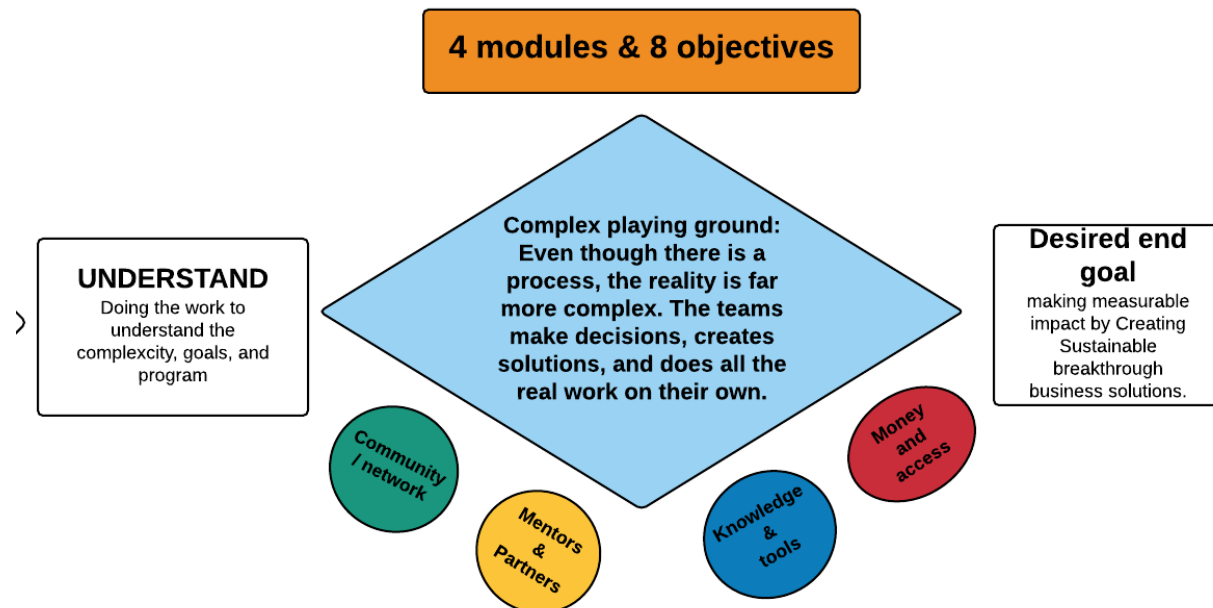
(Still open for improvements) Being very clear that we help each other succeed in this program more than we compete, as we are working towards the same vision, we want to run

coop-sessions so that every team can get to use the enormous resources present in the other chosen participants.

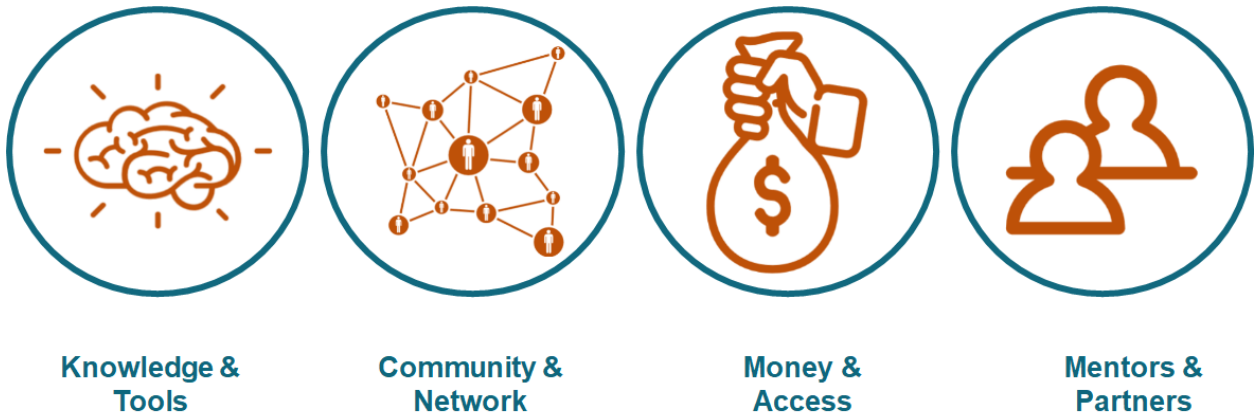
At these events, every team pitches their progress, issues and successes alike, to the others. Before the meeting, they are asked to list the expertise they would like to hear more about from some of the other participants (both technical, but also experiences - especially on-ground problem experiences - to help teams find someone who knows more about an issue quickly). Then we match people after the pitching. This makes us both get our 21+ participants to really help each other, while also seeing the standards of the other teams. Without us needing to do anything, this will trigger the competition instinct of competitive souls indirectly, so they do better next time.

FREEDOM MODEL

The model we operate with is as much freedom as possible, in a structure. Each endeavor in business should be approached with an understanding of what you want to tackle (problem/opportunity), what an outcome should be (vision/mission). The world is a complex, adaptive system which is controlled by none. It's therefore vital that you recognize this, and not trying to create a rigid system of innovation or creation. We believe that allowing smart people to create while giving them a push, guide them, and provide the necessary resources is the key. Below, you can see how this model looks like:



WHAT YOU GET



Resources: Learning platform with chosen content in an interactive manner, libraries filled with easy to find tools, methods, and knowledge. You also get tools that we make ourselves and tips and knowledge on the road.

Mentors: We provide mentors who are experts in entrepreneurship, innovation, sustainability, leadership, and technology.

Network: Our growing network of partners and businesses, will help you to find the right people to talk to when it is needed.

Money: Our job is to help take you to a product or service that can be taken further, and we offer MVP and prototyping money. You can apply for money internally in YSI, and within 24 hours we will answer you: Either you get it, or we give you some pointers to work on.

Community: As YSI has had many applicants over the years, we started a grass root community movement, named Earthpreneur. Here you will find driven and talented youth from around 170 countries, that are helping each other.

LEARNING RESOURCES AVAILABLE

Let's take you a bit further into our educational and guiding system:

Novoed: We create an engaging learning experience with clear educational goals to help you in the process of creating a startup. Both curated and created content is to be found, specifically designed for the innovation program.

Libraries: We have created libraries filled with the best, free content online with methods, tools, and knowledge about innovation, exponential technology, leadership and more.

Tools: We have tools such as Check yourself which enables rapid feedback on different phases of building a startup. Besides having mentors and the YSI team to guide and help, you can use this tool to remember and find out areas to work on yourself. More tools are underway to create a better process.

On-demand: Making a website, doing marketing, creating a concept, or setting up tests. All these things can be quite hard, and with our on-demand crash courses, you can ask for a meeting where we take you through how to things.

Webinars: In each phase (module) we have different experts making the world seem a bit easier to tackle, by providing great minds explaining how to go about how to create the startup from scratch.

WHAT YOU GIVE

Your time: We expect people to use around 15-35 hours a week on this program, and that you do all you can to continue your efforts to make the startup after the program. More info [here](#)

5% equity: Young Sustainable Impact continues to support your team after the program, and if you join the program - you agree to give a 5% equity stake to YSI. We want to partner up with our participants.

Your best: We expect you to come into the program with a mindset that you are here to collaborate with your team, be at your best, and grow in the best way possible.

DOES IT WORK?

*"21st century education system done right.
Fun fact; I have learnt the same content as my
friend who is paying 50grand in a fancy ass
business school."*



Alex Artiach

Mass Metrics

Now, does anything really happen with the startups created? YSI has only operated since 2016, and by creating a program filled with challenges like remote work, breakthrough innovation, and being young – we have a long way to go.

Our global program has every year since 2016 had an increase of about 25% of the startups continuing after 3 months after the end of the program. When this is written, 3 months later we have 7 out of 8 startups continuing their work. 2 of our startups have sold their product, 1 has gotten into an accelerator, while the others are still working on their development. It's indeed possible to create a working startup, remotely while being young.

From the 9 startups from the previous 2 years, three of them are still working. YSI gets many times better every year, and stronger in terms of resources. YSI is created by youth in Oslo, Norway, and is only now starting to get resources needed to run an operation like this.

Read more about our startups here: www.ysiglobal.com/startups