

The Accelerator Maturity Matrix:

Complete Answer Keys

Persona: Accelerator / Incubator / Program Manager

Scope: Levels 0–8 (Dimensions & Risks) | Perspective: First Person ("We are...", "I am...")

Level 0: Conception (The Spark)

Focus: Resilience | **Core Question:** Are we building a safe harbor or a trap?

L0 Dimensions (Program Readiness)

Dimension	Grade 1 (The Trap)	Grade 2 (The Hobby)	Grade 3 (The Sandbox)	Grade 4 (The Launchpad)	Grade 5 (The Sanctuary)
D1: Safe Sandbox <i>Can you offer a safe sandbox for dreamers?</i>	We offer no safety; high risk for founders.	We offer a space, but it lacks structure.	We provide a sandbox where learning happens.	We provide a structured, safe environment.	We provide a legendary safe space where founders thrive.
D2: Psych Safety <i>Is environment psychologically safe?</i>	High stakes; we punish failure.	Some safety, but fear of failure remains.	Safe to experiment; failures normalized.	Deep psychological safety; courage visible.	Legendary enabling of vulnerability; culture shift.
D3: Alignment <i>Are programs aligned with resilience?</i>	Programs misaligned; we stress founders.	Some resilience focus; incomplete curriculum.	Clear resilience curriculum offered.	Deep resilience program; mentor-supported.	Legendary resilience program; transforms lives.

D4: Track Record <i>Have you successfully launched programs?</i>	Programs failed; alumni struggled.	Limited success; unclear model.	Several successful cohorts; learning pattern.	Proven model; alumni thriving.	Legendary program; top-tier alumni performance.
D5: Resources <i>Do you have resources for early-stage?</i>	No resources; cannot support effectively.	Limited resources; insufficient runway.	Resources available; can help significantly.	Well-resourced; real financial support.	Legendary resources; founder-supported fully.
D6: Mental Health <i>Do you offer mental health support?</i>	No mental health support; missing.	Basic mental health resources listed.	Dedicated resilience program included.	Deep mental health; therapy-integrated.	Legendary for wellbeing; we transform founders.
D7: Community <i>Can you create community?</i>	Isolated founders; competitive atmosphere.	Some networking; limited bonding.	Real community; founders help each other.	Strong community; lifelong alumni bonds.	Legendary community; the gold standard of network.
D8: Sustainability <i>Is your model</i>	Short-term grant/hype dependent.	Unclear longevity; burnout risks.	Sustainable for 2-3 years.	Sustainable for 5-10 years; robust.	Lifelong commitment; crisis-resistant institution.

sustainable ?					
D9: Founder Focus <i>Are you founder-fir st?</i>	We exploit founders for our brand.	We try to help, but our needs come first.	We balance founder needs with ours.	We are deeply committed to founder success.	We are radically founder-fir st; legendary loyalty.

LO Risks (The Programmatic Antibodies)

Risk Factor	Grade 1 (High Risk)	Grade 2 (Risk)	Grade 3 (Managed)	Grade 4 (Secure)	Grade 5 (Antifragil e)
EiR1: Hype <i>Chasing hype or substance?</i>	We chase hype; quality suffers.	Mix of hype and substance.	Balanced coverage of hype/real.	Substance- focused; hype-resist ant.	Legend for substance; authentic focus.
EiR2: Conflict <i>Interperson al conflict in cohorts?</i>	Conflicts tear apart cohort.	Some conflict; navigates poorly.	Addresses proactively; mediation.	Excellent cohort dynamics manageme nt.	Legend for healthy communitie s.
EiR3: Favoritism <i>Prevent unfair support allocation?</i>	Cronies get preferential treatment.	Some favoritism exists.	Mostly fair allocation.	Rigorous fairness mechanism s.	Legendary integrity; blind to bias.
EiR4: Bias <i>Criteria</i>	Criteria highly biased;	Some unconsciou s bias	Relatively unbiased criteria.	Carefully unbiased selection.	Legend for fair inclusion;

<i>inadvertently biased?</i>	exclusionary.	exists.			diversity native.
EiR5: Expectations <i>Creating unfair expectations?</i>	Inflates expectations wildly.	Occasional inflation of results.	Realistic expectations set.	Carefully manages expectations.	Legend for accuracy and trust.
EiR6: Barriers <i>Barriers for underrepresented?</i>	Multiple critical barriers exist.	Some barriers unaddressed.	Trying to remove barriers.	Active barrier removal program.	Legend for inclusion; zero barriers.
EiR7: Criticism <i>Handle criticism well?</i>	Breaks down easily; defensive.	Gets defensive often.	Can take criticism constructively.	Welcomes criticism for growth.	Thrives on criticism; antifragile.
EiR8: Staff Burnout <i>Staff inspired not frustrated?</i>	Staff frustrated/cynical.	Some staff frustration.	Mostly inspired staff.	Well-inspired, energetic staff.	Legendary staff culture; mission-driven.
EiR9: Motives <i>Right reasons for running?</i>	Pure ego/power/profit.	Mostly power/status.	Mixed motives (mission + sustain).	Mostly mission; some sustain.	Pure mission-driven; ecosystem stewardship.

Level 1: Initiation (The Hunt)

Focus: Validation | **Core Question:** *Can we find and validate the right talent?*

L1 Dimensions (Scouting & Selection)

Dimension	Grade 1 (Novice)	Grade 2 (Amateur)	Grade 3 (Practitioner)	Grade 4 (Professional)	Grade 5 (Legend)
D1: Deal Flow <i>Can you attract applicants?</i>	No applicants; we beg founders.	Low quality/volume application s.	Good volume; mixed quality.	High volume; high quality.	We turn away unicorns; legendary demand.
D2: Selection <i>Can you pick winners?</i>	Random selection; no criteria.	Vague criteria; gut feel.	Structured selection process.	Data-driven predictive selection.	Legendary eye for talent; unmatched hit rate.
D3: Validation Support <i>Do you help validate ideas?</i>	We don't help; assume validation.	Basic advice on validation.	Structured validation curriculum.	Hands-on validation sprints.	Legendary validation methodology.
D4: Mentor Network <i>Do you have mentors?</i>	No mentors; just staff.	Friends and family network.	Relevant industry mentors.	High-profile , active mentors.	Legendary mentor network; global icons.
D5: Diversity <i>Is the</i>	Homogeneous; echo chamber.	Token diversity.	Representative diversity.	Intentional, tracked diversity.	Radically diverse; cognitive powerhous

<i>cohort diverse?</i>					e.
D6: Problem Focus <i>Do you target real problems?</i>	We accept "solutions looking for problems."	We prefer trendy problems.	We filter for problem-market fit.	We target systemic/hard problems.	We define the problems of the future.
D7: Transparency <i>Are terms clear?</i>	Hidden fees/equity grabs.	Vague terms; confusing.	Clear terms; standard deal.	Founder-friendly, transparent terms.	The "Standard" deal; universally trusted.
D8: Onboarding <i>Is onboarding effective?</i>	Chaos; founders lost.	Disorganized; slow start.	Structured onboarding week.	High-velocity induction.	Life-changing welcome experience.
D9: Brand <i>Do founders know you?</i>	Unknown brand.	Local awareness only.	Regional reputation.	National brand recognition.	Global category king of accelerators.

L1 Risks (Selection Traps)

Risk Factor	Grade 1 (High Risk)	Grade 2 (Risk)	Grade 3 (Managed)	Grade 4 (Secure)	Grade 5 (Antifragile)
EiR1: Signaling	Acceptance signals "desperation"	Neutral/No signal.	Positive local signal.	Strong quality signal to	Acceptance guarantees VC interest.

<i>Does your brand hurt founders?</i>	n."			investors.	
EiR2: Predatory Terms <i>Are you taking too much?</i>	>10% equity for little value.	High fees + equity.	Standard fair equity (5-7%).	Founder-favorable terms.	Value far exceeds equity cost.
EiR3: False Promises <i>Do you overpromise?</i>	We promise funding we can't give.	We imply guarantees.	We are realistic about outcomes.	We under-promise and over-deliver.	Our reputation precedes us; trust is absolute.
EiR4: Mentor Quality <i>Are mentors helpful?</i>	Mentors give bad/conflicting advice.	Mentors are disengaged.	Mentors are vetted/trained.	Mentors are accountable/rated.	Mentors are world-class operators.
EiR5: Bias Selection bias?	We select people "like us."	Unconscious bias unchecked.	Bias training implemented.	Blind screening processes.	Radical cognitive diversity.
EiR6: Cost of Ops <i>Is running this expensive?</i>	High burn; unsustainable.	Inefficient operations.	Lean program management.	Optimized operational stack.	Highly efficient; automated workflows.
EiR7: Feedback	We ghost applicants.	Form letter rejections.	Actionable feedback provided.	Personalized coaching for rejects.	Rejection is a valuable learning

<i>Do you reject kindly?</i>					moment.
EiR8: Scout Incentives <i>Are scouts aligned?</i>	Scouts paid for volume (spam).	Scouts purely volunteer.	Scouts incentivized by quality.	Scouts share in upside/carry.	Global network of incentivized scouts.
EiR9: Market Timing <i>Are you timing markets?</i>	We launch in dying markets.	We chase yesterday's trends.	We are on-trend.	We anticipate market shifts.	We create the market trends.

Level 2: Formulation (The Build)

Focus: Feasibility | **Core Question:** *Can we help them build a product that works?*

L2 Dimensions (Product Support)

Dimension	Grade 1 (Novice)	Grade 2 (Amateur)	Grade 3 (Practitioner)	Grade 4 (Professional)	Grade 5 (Legend)
D1: Tech Partners <i>Do you offer tech perks?</i>	No perks/credits.	Some AWS/Cloud credits.	Comprehensive tech stack perks.	Strategic tech partnerships/integrations.	Exclusive access to beta/proprietary tech.
D2: Product Coaching <i>Do you</i>	No product help.	Generic "build it" advice.	Product management curriculum.	Expert CPO-in-residence.	Legendary product feedback loops.

<i>teach product?</i>					
D3: Design Support <i>Do you help with UX/UI?</i>	No design help.	Critique only.	Design workshops.	Designers-in-residence.	Award-winning design transformation.
D4: Legal/IP <i>Do you support legal setup?</i>	No legal support.	Templates only.	Partner law firms (discounted).	In-house legal counsel support.	Automated, bulletproof IP/Legal stack.
D5: Talent Access <i>Can they find co-founders?</i>	No talent help.	Ad-hoc introductions.	Co-founder matching events.	Talent database access.	Pipeline of vetted co-founders/CTOs.
D6: Beta Testing <i>Can you get them users?</i>	No user access.	Peers test each other.	Community beta testers.	Corporate partner pilots.	Massive ready-made beta audience.
D7: No-Code <i>Do you teach rapid build?</i>	Ignore no-code.	Mention no-code tools.	No-code workshops.	Expert no-code implementation.	Build MVPs in days, not months.
D8: Vendor Network <i>Are dev shops</i>	We recommend friends (biased).	Unvetted list.	Vetted dev shop partners.	Pre-negotiated dev rates/quality.	Exclusive dev teams for portfolio.

vetted?					
D9: Roadmap <i>Do you help prioritize?</i>	No roadmap help.	Basic project management.	Roadmap strategy sessions.	Data-driven prioritization coaching.	Masterclass in product strategy.

Level 3: Market Entry (The Launch)

Focus: Traction | **Core Question:** Can we get them to revenue/investment?

L3 Dimensions (Go-To-Market)

Dimension	Grade 1 (Novice)	Grade 2 (Amateur)	Grade 3 (Practitioner)	Grade 4 (Professional)	Grade 5 (Legend)
D1: Demo Day <i>Is Demo Day effective?</i>	Empty room; no investors.	Friends/family audience.	Regional investors attend.	Top-tier VCs attend.	Global event; oversubscribed rounds.
D2: Investor Access <i>Do you connect to capital?</i>	No investor network.	Cold emails to investors.	Warm intros to angels.	Curated VC matchmaking.	Investors fight for access to cohort.
D3: Sales Coaching <i>Do you teach sales?</i>	No sales training.	"Just hustle" advice.	Sales playbook workshops.	Expert CRO-in-residence.	Transformation into sales machines.
D4: Corp	No	Logos on	Occasional	Structured	Guaranteed

Partners <i>Do you have corporate pilots?</i>	corporate links.	website only.	pilot opportunities.	corporate innovation pilots.	pilot pipeline.
D5: PR/Comms <i>Do you get them press?</i>	No PR support.	Press release template.	Local media coverage.	National tech press relationships.	Global media launches.
D6: Fundraising <i>Do you verify metrics?</i>	No diligence help.	Pitch deck review.	Financial modeling support.	Investment memo preparation .	Full diligence pack creation.
D7: Alumni Network <i>Do alumni help?</i>	No alumni interaction.	Ad-hoc alumni chats.	Alumni mentor current cohort.	Structured alumni investing/buying.	The "Mafia" effect; powerful network.
D8: Follow-on <i>Do you invest follow-on?</i>	No follow-on capital.	Ad-hoc follow-on.	Programmatic follow-on rights.	Dedicated follow-on fund.	We lead the next round.
D9: Geography <i>Is the market local?</i>	Hyper-local only.	Regional focus.	National reach.	Multi-market entry support.	Global launchpad.

L3 Risks (Traction Traps)

Risk Factor	Grade 1 (High Risk)	Grade 2 (Risk)	Grade 3 (Managed)	Grade 4 (Secure)	Grade 5 (Antifragile)
EiR1: Vanity Metrics <i>Do you hype vanity metrics?</i>	We celebrate vanity metrics.	We ignore metrics.	We track revenue/users.	We focus on unit economics.	We demand truth in metrics.
EiR2: Demo Day Flop <i>Does Demo Day fail?</i>	Founders embarrassed.	Low energy/turn out.	Professional production.	High-stakes, high-return event.	Cultural phenomenon.
EiR3: Valuation <i>Do you inflate valuations?</i>	We encourage over-valuation.	We ignore valuation cap risks.	We teach realistic valuation.	We ensure market-rate terms.	We optimize for long-term cap table health.
EiR4: Investor Quality <i>Are investors predatory?</i>	We let sharks in.	We don't vet investors.	We vet for accreditation.	We vet for helpfulness/reputation.	We curate only value-add investors.
EiR5: Pilot Purgatory <i>Do corporate</i>	Pilots never scale.	Pilots linger endlessly.	We track pilot conversion.	We structure pilots for scale.	We guarantee path to production.

<i>pilots die?</i>					
EiR6: Fundraising Distraction <i>Is fundraising the only goal?</i>	Program is only about fundraising.	Product suffers for pitch prep.	Balanced product/pitch focus.	Business-first, funding-second.	Fundraising is a byproduct of excellence.
EiR7: Legal Clean-up <i>Is the cap table messy?</i>	We create cap table mess.	We ignore prior messes.	We help clean up cap tables.	We ensure clean investable entity.	Pristine legal structures.
EiR8: Post-Demo Drop <i>Do you ghost after Demo Day?</i>	Contact ends at Demo Day.	Minimal follow-up.	Monthly check-ins.	Structured post-program support.	Lifelong partnership .
EiR9: Revenue vs. Inv <i>Do you prioritize revenue?</i>	Investment is the only success metric.	Revenue is secondary.	Revenue is tracked.	Customer revenue is the north star.	Profitability/ Independence is celebrated.

Level 4: Scaling (Grow)

Focus: Growth | **Core Question:** *Can we help them scale without breaking?*

L4 Dimensions (Growth & Operations)

Dimension	Grade 1 (Novice)	Grade 2 (Amateur)	Grade 3 (Practitioner)	Grade 4 (Professional)	Grade 5 (Legend)
D1: HR/Recruiting <i>Do you help them hire?</i>	No hiring help.	Job board posting.	Recruiter discounts.	Talent pipeline/Head of Talent.	We built their executive team.
D2: Culture Scaling <i>Do you teach culture?</i>	Ignore culture.	"Culture is perks."	Values/Culture workshops.	Organizational design coaching.	Scaling culture frameworks .
D3: International <i>Do you enable soft landings?</i>	No international help.	Ad-hoc intros abroad.	Partner accelerators abroad.	Dedicated soft-landing programs.	Global office network access.
D4: Growth Hacking <i>Do you teach growth?</i>	No growth support.	Basic marketing tactics.	Growth hacking curriculum.	Expert Growth-in-Residence.	Viral loop mastery.
D5: Supply Chain <i>Do you help operations?</i>	No ops support.	General advice.	Manufacturing partners.	Supply chain optimization experts.	Global logistics leverage.
D6: Series	No Series A	Basic	Series A	Deep	We

A Prep <i>Are they ready for A?</i>	prep.	metrics review.	bootcamp.	metrics/narrative prep.	syndicate the Series A.
D7: Regulatory <i>Can you handle regulation?</i>	No reg support.	"Be careful" advice.	Legal partner workshops.	Regulatory strategy lobbying.	We shape policy for them.
D8: Board Prep <i>Do you teach governance?</i>	No governance help.	Basic board deck template.	Board meeting simulations.	Independent director matching.	Best-in-class governance standards.
D9: M&A <i>Do you support exits?</i>	No exit support.	We push for early exit.	M&A advisory partners.	Strategic acquirer relationships.	We orchestrate bidding wars.

Level 5: Efficiency (Profit)

Focus: Profit | **Core Question:** *Is the accelerator itself a viable business?*

L5 Dimensions (Accelerator Economics)

Dimension	Grade 1 (Novice)	Grade 2 (Amateur)	Grade 3 (Practitioner)	Grade 4 (Professional)	Grade 5 (Legend)
D1: Fund Model <i>Is the fund</i>	Losing money; grant dependent.	Breakeven on fees.	Profitable on exits (paper).	Consistent cash-on-cash returns.	Top-decile fund performance.

<i>working?</i>					
D2: Operational Eff <i>Are you efficient?</i>	High overhead; chaotic.	Manual processes.	Documented playbooks.	Automated platform stack.	AI-driven accelerator ops.
D3: LPs <i>Who are your LPs?</i>	No LPs (self/grant).	Friends/Family/Local Gov.	HNWIs/Family Offices.	Institutional Investors.	Tier 1 Sovereigns/Endowments.
D4: Portfolio Mgt <i>Do you manage the portfolio?</i>	Spreadsheets/Chaos.	Basic reporting.	Portfolio software.	Active platform team support.	Predictive portfolio intelligence.
D5: Revenue Divers <i>Do you have other revenue?</i>	100% Equity dependent.	Sponsorships/Events.	Corporate innovation services.	Diversified revenue streams.	Self-sustaining ecosystem.
D6: Staff Retention <i>Do you keep your team?</i>	High turnover; burnout.	Junior staff only.	Experienced program managers.	Partners have carry/equity .	Team is industry legends.
D7: Data Strategy <i>Do you use data?</i>	No data tracking.	Basic alumni database.	Performance benchmarking.	Predictive success modeling.	Proprietary market intelligence.

D8: Cost of Acq <i>Cost to acquire startup?</i>	High marketing spend.	Moderate spend.	Organic referrals (low cost).	Negative CAC (startups pay).	We select the best; they find us.
D9: Brand Equity <i>Is brand an asset?</i>	Brand is liability.	Brand is neutral.	Brand adds value.	Brand increases valuation.	Brand guarantees premium valuation.

Level 6: Leadership (Lead)

Focus: Innovation | **Core Question:** Are we shaping the future of acceleration?

L6 Dimensions (Ecosystem Leadership)

Dimension	Grade 1 (Novice)	Grade 2 (Amateur)	Grade 3 (Practitioner)	Grade 4 (Professional)	Grade 5 (Legend)
D1: Thought Leadership <i>Do you lead the convo?</i>	Silent; no voice.	Blog posts/Socials.	Industry reports/Whitepapers.	Keynote speaker status.	We define the industry narrative.
D2: Policy <i>Do you shape policy?</i>	Ignore government.	Complain about policy.	Advise local government.	Draft national startup policy.	We set global innovation standards.
D3: Ecosystem <i>Are you a hub?</i>	Isolated player.	Participant in events.	Convener of events.	The center of gravity.	The heartbeat of the ecosystem.

D4: Inclusion <i>Do you drive equity?</i>	Passive exclusion.	Diversity statement.	Active inclusion programs.	Systemic change driver.	Benchmark for global equity.
D5: Innovation <i>Do you innovate the model?</i>	Copycat model.	Tweaked standard model.	New program formats.	Disruptive investment models.	We reinvented acceleration.
D6: Alumni Power <i>Is the alumni net powerful?</i>	Disengaged alumni.	Alumni newsletter.	Active alumni slack.	Alumni trade/hire internally.	Alumni network runs the industry.
D7: Vertical Deep <i>Do you own a vertical?</i>	Generalist only.	Slight vertical focus.	Deep vertical expertise.	Vertical category king.	We built the vertical (e.g., Space).
D8: Corporate Sway <i>Do corps listen?</i>	Corps ignore us.	Corps sponsor us.	Corps partner deeply.	We guide corporate strategy.	We are the C-suite whisperers.
D9: Vision <i>What is the vision?</i>	Survival.	Next cohort.	3-year plan.	Decade-long ecosystem change.	Multi-generational impact.

Level 7: Unicorn (Icon)

Focus: Legacy | **Core Question:** *Have we produced icons?*

L7 Dimensions (The Hall of Fame)

Dimension	Grade 1 (Novice)	Grade 2 (Amateur)	Grade 3 (Practitioner)	Grade 4 (Professional)	Grade 5 (Legend)
D1: Unicorns <i>Have you backed unicorns?</i>	No exits.	Small exits.	\$100M+ exits.	Multiple Unicorns.	Decacorns/Industry Titans.
D2: Returns <i>Are returns legendary?</i>	Lost capital.	Returned capital (1x).	3-5x Fund Return.	10x+ Fund Return.	"Fund maker" returns (50x+).
D3: Global Brand <i>Are you famous globally?</i>	Unknown.	Known locally.	Known nationally.	Known in tech circles globally.	Household name (e.g., YC).
D4: Influence <i>Do you influence markets?</i>	No influence.	Minor influence.	Market maker.	Market mover.	Market definer.
D5: Talent Magnet <i>Do you attract the best?</i>	Struggle to fill cohorts.	Good founders apply.	Great founders apply.	Best founders prioritize us.	We reject the top 1% (Selection).

D6: Alumni Wealth <i>Did you create wealth?</i>	No wealth created.	Founders made salary.	Founders made millions.	Founders made generational wealth.	We created a new class of philanthropists.
D7: Methodology <i>Is your method copied?</i>	No method.	Standard method.	Respected method.	Copied method.	The Global Standard method.
D8: Network Effect <i>Is the network compounding?</i>	Linear network.	Weak network effects.	Strong network effects.	Flywheel in motion.	Unstoppable network dominance.
D9: Legacy <i>What is the legacy?</i>	Forgotten.	Footnote.	Chapter in history.	History maker.	Institution.

Level 8: Steward (Sustain)

Focus: Stewardship | **Core Question:** Are we good ancestors to the future?

L8 Dimensions (Ethics & Future)

Dimension	Grade 1 (Novice)	Grade 2 (Amateur)	Grade 3 (Practitioner)	Grade 4 (Professional)	Grade 5 (Legend)
D1: Ethics	Profit at all costs.	Compliance based.	Ethical guidelines.	Ethics by design.	Moral compass of

<i>Are you ethically driven?</i>					the industry.
D2: Sustainability <i>Do you back green?</i>	Ignore climate.	Greenwashing.	Sustainable tracks.	Climate-first thesis.	Healing the planet.
D3: Inequality <i>Do you address gaps?</i>	We widen gaps.	Neutral.	Awareness of gaps.	Active gap closing.	Systemic wealth redistribution.
D4: Long-termism <i>How long is your view?</i>	Fund lifecycle (10y).	Cohort cycle (3m).	Founder lifecycle (20y).	Ecosystem lifecycle (50y).	100-year stewardship.
D5: Stakeholders <i>Who do you serve?</i>	LPs only.	Founders and LPs.	Community included.	All stakeholders.	Humanity.
D6: Governance <i>Is governance clean?</i>	Opaque.	Basic compliance.	Transparent.	Accountable to community.	Radical transparency.
D7: Education	Exclusive	Paid	Open	Open source	Universal access to

<i>Do you democratize access?</i>	knowledge.	courses.	content.	curriculum.	entrepreneurship.
D8: Community Give <i>Do you give back?</i>	We extract.	We sponsor.	We volunteer.	We build infrastructure.	We endow the future.
D9: Purpose <i>Why do you exist?</i>	Fees/Carry.	Prestige.	Economic Development.	Innovation progress.	Advancing human potential.