



CSI: Failed Startups Division

Digital Project Guide for Facilitators

* Note to manage waste please print this document in greyscale or black and white rather than in color. Please print on both sides of the paper (duplex) and if you can print multiple slides or pages on one page.

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CSI: Failed Startups Division

Facilitator's Guide

Overview

Welcome to **CSI: Failed Startups Division**, where participants become entrepreneurial detectives investigating the sudden and mysterious demise of real startups. Their assignment: identify the cause of death, expose the red flags, and write the final report. They start with only a name and must piece together the rest. This is not a lecture...it's **entrepreneurial forensics**.

This facilitator guide equips you to run startup failure investigations in a variety of environments and not just the classroom. Whether you're leading a university seminar, a startup bootcamp, a pre-incubator program, or a career readiness workshop, this case-based format invites participants to think like entrepreneurial detectives. With only a startup name and a source article, learners analyze what went wrong and uncover valuable lessons.

Your mission: *guide the inquiry, provoke thought, and help participants crack the case wherever your investigation takes place.*

Mission Objectives

Learners will:

- Assume the role of post-failure startup investigators.
- Conduct independent research using online sources.
- Diagnose the “*cause of death*” in real startup shutdowns.
- Present findings as investigative case reports.
- Extract key startup lessons from real-life failures.

Tools of the Trade

- Cold Case List
- Participant Investigation Template (*printable/digital*)
- Research Rubric (*assessment and feedback*)
- *Additional Startup Failures Sources:*
<https://www.kaggle.com/datasets/dagloxxkankwanda/startup-failures>
<https://www.failory.com/blog>

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Investigation Duration: 1–2 periods + independent research

Phase 1: Briefing – Assign startup names, explain objectives

Phase 2–4: Field Work – Students research independently

Phase 5: Case Reports – Presentations + Reflections

Field Manual for Instructors

1. Issue the Brief

Announce the premise: "You are assigned a cold startup case. Your job is to determine what went wrong."

- Assign one startup name per participant/team.
- Provide the Investigation Template.

2. Guide the Field Work

- Check progress during lab time or assign as homework.
- Encourage use of diverse sources:
 - Articles (TechCrunch, Failory)
 - Founders' blogs and interviews
 - Funding platforms (Crunchbase, AngelList)
 - User reviews, customer feedback

3. Debrief the Investigations

- Each team or participant submits/presents their Cold Case Report.
- Host a debriefing discussion:
 - What patterns emerged?
 - What clues were missed?
 - Could the failure have been prevented?

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Evaluation

Use the rubric to assess:

- Research depth
- Diagnostic reasoning
- Creativity of insights
- Clarity and professionalism of the report

Open Discussion

Use the Open Discussion File to:

Encourage open-ended inquiry by prompting students to explore assumptions, question decisions, and connect the dots between business choices and their consequences.

- ***Utilize the provided articles*** as starting points to begin the conversation.
- ***Utilize the Open Discussion File as your roadmap*** to provide structure without limiting the conversation, helping you draw out thoughtful observations and entrepreneurial lessons through curiosity-driven dialogue.

Final Words from HQ

This project brings the reality of startup failure to life. By turning participants into investigators, you help them build the habits of founders: curiosity, analysis, and reflection. Treat each report not as a paper, but as a forensic file contributing to the living science of entrepreneurship.

Startup success may be inspiring, but startup failure is where the deepest learning lives.