

“Drones as a Service” Entrepreneurship Program for Flying Labs

Why a specific entrepreneurship program is needed.

Civil drones allow for a wide range of commercial and non-commercial applications. They offer an affordable, timely and easy-to-use solution to acquire data, ranging from high-resolution data with a multitude of sensors to videos and aerial imagery. And they open new ways for supply chain management in hard-to-reach areas.

Over the past seven years, the market for civil drones has led to the creation of a large number of companies and start-ups around the world. While much focus is given to the start-ups that create drone technology, most value and jobs are created by the users of the technology. The introduction of drone technologies has allowed existing service companies to expand their offering all the while creating thousands of new small businesses that propose their services to clients ranging from wedding parties to health ministries. In addition, this new sector has seen the growth of a number of supporting services, such as rental and repair of equipment, or highly specialized data processing and analysis services.

There is one element that the entrepreneurs of these new companies have in common: the majority of them have an engineering background. A fitting background that allows them to easily adopt drone technologies. However, also a hurdle for many newcomers who lack the entrepreneurial knowledge to grow their idea into a viable, sustainable business.

To address this hurdle, we have created our “Drones as a Service” entrepreneurship program in collaboration with the Flying Labs network. Our program is targeted specifically towards engineers in Africa, Latin America, Asia and beyond who want to set up their own service company using drones or offering supporting services. Our program addresses SDGs #8 (Decent work and economic growth) and #9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure), focusing on growing local markets and creating high-value jobs locally.

How our entrepreneurship program works.

Our “Drones as a Service” program counts following 5 specific phases and lasts 5 - 6 months.

Phase	Description	Duration
1. Ideation	A call for ideas from teams of 3-5 people on how they want/will leverage drone technology as a service company. At the end of this phase, four finalist teams are chosen amongst the submitted ideas by a local jury	2 - 3 months
2. Strategy	A Strategy seminar allows the 4 finalist teams to learn all they need to know on how to turn their idea into a PoC and create a strong value proposition, business model and financial plan. This seminar addresses the specific needs of engineers and their ideas related to the drone sector.	1 week
3. Iteration	With a clearly defined strategy in hand, the 4 finalist teams iterate with potential clients on their business model and	2 months

	create their business and financial plan. They are supported by local mentors based on their specific needs.	
4. Competition	The 4 finalist teams pitch their business and financial plan to a jury of technical and entrepreneurial experts. Based on predefined criteria, the jury will elect the winning team who will receive a fund to kick-start their business.	1 day
5. Ecosystem integration	While one team is declared the official winner of the competition, all 4 teams are now ready to incubate their business. While doing so, they are supported by the organizing Flying Labs and will become integral part of the local drone ecosystem the Flying Labs is facilitating. This ongoing support allows the businesses to have all the right connections and grow together with the ecosystem, supporting the long-term sustainability of these new ventures.	ongoing

How our program is different from the other start-up challenges and competitions.

- **Industry-specific:** The program targets the growing drone industry and is led by industry experts. This allows participating teams to grow their expertise in both entrepreneurship and drone applications.
- **Team focus:** The program focuses on teams, not individuals, following one of our favourite mantras “Alone you go fast, together you go far”. The 5-6 month duration of the program allows the team to find out if they are a good fit for the future and if they are missing specific expertises. This will allow them to tackle one of the most important success factors of their business, the team behind it, early on.
- **All finalists are winners:** While there will be one winning team elected during the Final Pitch event, the program equips all finalist teams to take their venture forward and incubate their business. Through the program, all finalists have the needed knowledge and ecosystem connections to do so successfully, making all of them winners.
- **Led locally / supported globally:** The program is led by local entrepreneurs who make up the Flying Labs. They have first-hand experience in how to build up a successful and sustainable venture and know the local drone market inside out. They also will give the needed local flavour to the program, including finding a fitting program name (recent examples: [Empredron](#) in Panama and [SandagaDrone](#) in Senegal). The program is based on a tested and proven framework developed by WeRobotics’ experts on entrepreneurship and drone applications.
- **Long-term support:** Most programs stop after electing the winners, leaving it up to them to now take their idea and business forward. We know from first-hand experience that this is not a sustainable path, neither for the ROI of the program nor the winning and finalist teams. Reason why we have added an extra step to our program (Ecosystem Integration) as we know that the real work starts once the finalist teams and the winning team are ready to launch their business. To launch and grow their business into a successful and sustainable venture, they

need ongoing mentorship and technical support, as well as an enabling environment that allows them to grow. Becoming part of an existing ecosystem from the very beginning will allow them to thrive together with others.

- **Proven methods:** We make use of proven methods such as the [Business Model and Value Proposition Canvas](#) and [Design Thinking](#) methodologies. WeRobotics' program designers and strategy workshop leaders have an in-depth understanding and 20+ years of experience as entrepreneurs, including in the start-up as well as the drone sectors. And as all program organizers and implementers are entrepreneurs themselves in their daily lives, our program is based on continuously lived experience, hence deeply rooted in action, not theory.

Program options

Various program options are available. From a generic "Drones as a Service" focus to specific application or industry focus (for example: Cargo Drones, Drones for Infrastructure, Drones for Agriculture, etc.) or audience.

Additional options include fully in-person, semi-virtual or fully virtually organized program.

Contact us to discuss your ideas.

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