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Do More Good: How Flywheel Helps Local Social Enterprises Grow

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Courtesy photo.

By Courtney Gabrielson

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[Flywheel](#) pulls no punches when explaining its mission.

"We are a social enterprise hub," its website proclaims. "We empower entrepreneurs to do more good by creating successful social enterprises."

But what is a social enterprise?

"[They're] designed around some sort of social impact," Flywheel Executive Director Bill Tucker told Cincy Inno. "These businesses accomplish that through the people they employ or the goods or services they offer."

And Flywheel wants to be there so that these social enterprises have the tools they need to succeed.

One of the many ways it does this is via its [SECincy Elevator](#), the only in-region accelerator of its kind that looks to galvanize and equip social enterprises as they scale; so far, it's graduated seven nonprofits, like [La Soupe](#), an entity that looks to use food waste to help better feed the food insecure.

Then, there's the entity's one-on-one consulting services, workshops, a newsletter and other resources, often provided at low costs for area nonprofits so that they can get their foot in the door. So far, Flywheel has logged [more than 400 pro bono consulting hours](#).

"Social enterprise and our work in this community is about multiplying the impact."

Flywheel was established in 2010, when the concept of social enterprise entities had only begun to catch on. This surge in popularity began not long after the economic collapse in 2008, Tucker said, when venture firms' portfolios decreased rapidly and other grants to nonprofits and similar groups were cut drastically. It was then that a team of local entrepreneurs, including Tucker, came together to draft a letter of intent to form Flywheel. The goal? To help those nonprofits who were trying to do good but couldn't access funding or other resources like they could in the past.

"When Flywheel was born, it was born with the idea of supporting nonprofits, and creating strategic change," Tucker said. "We started aligning ourselves with the startups ... [whose] primary purpose for existing is to the make the world a better place or make the community a better place; those are the people you want to serve."

Flywheel is just one part of a bigger opportunity to help people.

"I believe that the face of philanthropy is changing and believe it needs to change," Tucker said. "If I have a dollar and I chose to give that to someone, I get a dollar's worth of impact."

However, investing the dollar into a technology that maximizes social good? It packs a bigger punch, Tucker explained.

And that's the point.

"Social enterprise and our work in this community is about multiplying the impact," he said.

The Cincinnati startup ecosystem has helped Flywheel do just that.

"I say this frequently: I can't express how much gratitude [we have] for how we have been accepted into the startup community," Tucker said. "It was a game changer ... [all this] would not have been possible for us if we didn't have this place and Union Hall to call home. Our community has been huge. We feel legitimate. That's something I've been working towards for a long time."

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