



The Steel Yard

Since 2001 The Steel Yard, with a 3.8 acre campus in Providence's Industrial Valley, has provided shared workspaces and training for welding, blacksmithing, jewelry, ceramics, and the foundry arts. In 2004, when the current Executive Director Howie Sneider was a staff member, he started a Public Projects program to produce site-specific public sculpture and street furniture. In that year Public Projects made \$75,000 in gross revenue. As they got more orders, this revenue became a huge portion of their operation income. The question was: how large should they get without compromising their other programs?

The SEG Network Effect

Crucial to finding the answer to this problem of scale was working with SEG Advisors to make Public Projects an earned-income initiative that would unite the educational and creative aspects of The Steel Yard's mission. In 2007 Howie started meeting with SEG Advisor Lorne Adrain "for months" until they produced a detailed business plan. "He helped us figure out the real value proposition and the elements the program couldn't do without," said Howie. "What were we really selling? That became the operational business plan for the next 5-6 years and helped stabilize us to become what we are now – a program with \$250,000 sales a year that is its own thing, but at a scale that is consistent with the rest of our operations."

Howie started working at the Steel Yard when he was 26 years old. Exposure to

high-level coaching provided crucial leadership development for him to become the Executive Director he is today. In April 2017, the new Public Projects Director, Tim Ferland, and Client Relations Manager, Jenny Sparks, graduated from the SEG Impact Accelerator. "This leadership development is what I was thinking of for Jenny and Tim," said Howie. "In so many ways they inherited that business plan that I wrote with Lorne. It went through some iterations, but SEG helped them to make that into their own."

Tim and Jenny, who are both artists, said their SEG Coach Colin Murphy taught them critical business skills. He helped them streamline internal operations, develop new systems of organization, understand the business vocabulary, set goals, create impact dashboards, improve market and sales, and track their jobs using Salesforce. According to Howie, participating in the Accelerator allowed them to establish new opportunities for profit within a mission-driven business, become completely familiar with their business plan, and consider the strategic implications of their day-to-day work.

Since working with SEG, Public Project sales grew from \$75,000 to \$150,000, contributing to The Steel Yard's overall annual budget of \$1,000,000. They now have a solid business plan including budgets, marketing, sales, and technology and business skill development for new staff.