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# Accelerator Impact Report

2022



wgu **labs**



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# Message from the Executive Director

Dear Reader,

We are pleased to share our second annual Accelerator at WGU Labs Impact Report. The past 12 months have been a time of building, as we:

- Added three Senior Education Consultants with a broad range of expertise;
- Completed five research projects, including deep inquiries into experiential learning, virtual enrollment communities, emergency financial relief, and peer-to-peer teaching;
- And, best of all, welcomed eight new companies into our portfolio.

When we started the Accelerator at WGU Labs, we aimed to find entrepreneurs who shared our passion for creating intuitive, scalable education tools that increase students' access to skills and knowledge; decrease costs; and improve learner outcomes.

Over the past two years, we've tailored our services to address the needs of early-stage education companies and leverage WGU Labs' unique capabilities. As such, the Accelerator now offers two core services to education companies:

- 1. Research.** Too few companies in the education market have sufficient research into the efficacy of their products. While not every startup's success hinges on a rigorous study, education consumers deserve and increasingly demand evidence that a tool works as intended.
- 2. Market Development.** We strategically focus and amplify early-stage education companies' messaging. We do so by creating market development plans, facilitating introductions to strategic partners, and providing public relations and communications support.

This past year, we are thrilled to have partnered with eight education companies: eLumin, Red Flag Mania, Peerceptiv, Riff Analytics, GoCoach, Boost, GreenFig and Lloyd. These companies have mission-driven founders and teams that are committed to delivering lasting results for their customers. We have included a brief profile on each company in this report.

We hope that this annual Accelerator Impact Report conveys our mission, focus, and progress to date. Please get in touch with us. We would love to connect, learn, and collaborate.

Regards,  
Jason Levin  
Executive Director



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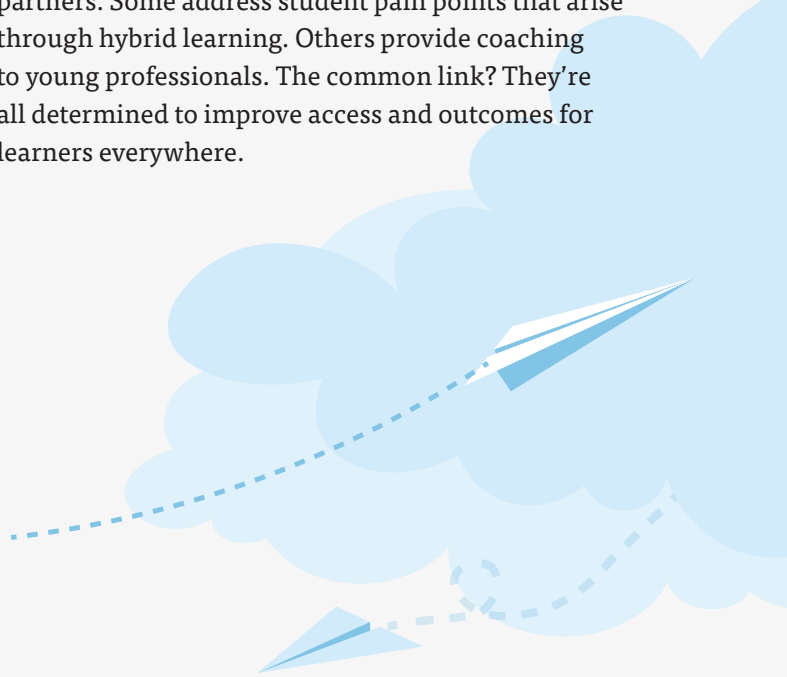
# Introduction

WGU Labs, a nonprofit affiliate of Western Governors University (“WGU”), was formed in 2018 to conduct grant-funded research and build new solutions to old education problems — namely, the twin ills of limited access and poor outcomes.

In 2019, after building and deploying new products at WGU, and conducting complex research projects, WGU Labs expanded its mission by creating an Accelerator to offer research and business development support to early-stage education technology (“Edtech”) companies.

In just two years, the Accelerator has served 12 Edtech startups, with products and services that range from providing experiential learning opportunities to creating virtual learner communities to offering career “test drives” for secondary students.

This year, the Accelerator welcomed eight new partners. Some address student pain points that arise through hybrid learning. Others provide coaching to young professionals. The common link? They’re all determined to improve access and outcomes for learners everywhere.



# Market Thesis

At WGU Labs, we see an Edtech landscape that is vibrant and growing. We also see colleges grappling with escalating costs, flat or decreasing public funding, and a pandemic that has unsettled traditional delivery systems. While technology is not the remedy for all that ails us, it has been, and will continue to, be a major driver of positive change.

Alas, despite the benefits they confer, many Edtech solutions tools remain mystifying to potential buyers. Which solutions really work? To what extent and with whom? Amid this uncertainty, rigorous research into the efficacy of Edtech tools is beneficial for companies and educators alike. For this reason, research serves as the fulcrum of our engagements.

When weighing potential partners, we look for companies who meet our [evaluation framework for social impact](#). Specifically, we’re looking for Edtech tools that expand access, improve quality, or enhance students’ return on their investments.

We also seek founders who believe that “social impact” is more than a convenient marketing strategy, but instead a goal that is core to their business. Education can be transformative in many ways — financial, interpersonal, psychological. We’re delighted to help our partners play a role in this transformation.

With regard to more specific attributes of companies that the Accelerator serves, the following are some characteristics that we look for in a partner company:

- Raised some capital
- Developed a functional product
- Demonstrated real customer value
- Built a revenue-generating solution

Our founders come from all walks of life, and they needn’t be seasoned veterans of the Edtech space. Rather, they must have a well-conceived solution to a non-imaginary problem. And they must display the same zeal for learning that permeates our hallways.



# Accelerator Team and Services

## Team

The Accelerator team leverages WGU Labs' talented team of professionals with backgrounds in research science, content development, product engineering, learning experience design, public relations, communications, teaching, and more.

The Labs team spans four different time zones, and represents decades of experience in private companies, public service, university life, and investing, among other worlds. Our environment fosters frequent collisions of different ideas and worldviews. That's by design.

## Accelerator Services

### Research-Driven Growth

The Accelerator helps companies discover the unique impact of their products. Our full-time research staff has expertise in quantitative analysis, data science, survey methodology, and assessment. And the outcomes we unearth don't stop at a research paper. We leverage positive results to further our partners' visibility and credibility among key markets.

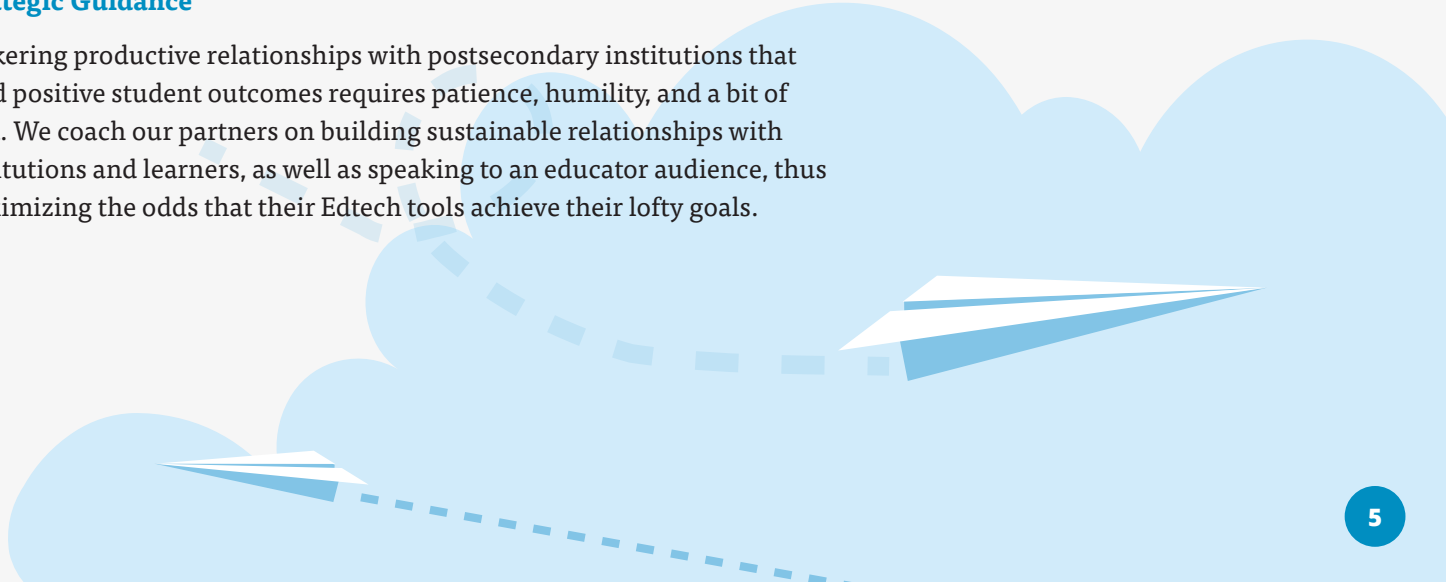
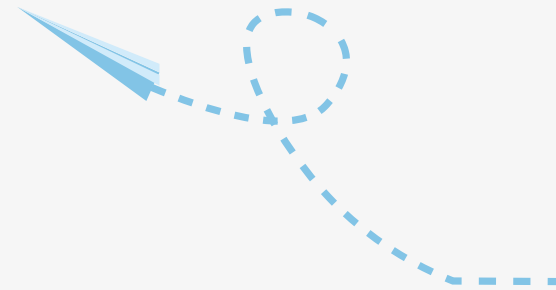
### Business Development for Scale

To help our partners grow, Accelerator also provides the following services that fall under the broad umbrella of "business development:"

- Target market research
- Robust market development plans
- Introductions to strategic partners and investors
- Public relations support
- Sales and marketing support (via op-eds, convenings, conference proposals, etc.)
- Development of sales processes that are efficient, productive, and repeatable

### Strategic Guidance

Brokering productive relationships with postsecondary institutions that yield positive student outcomes requires patience, humility, and a bit of luck. We coach our partners on building sustainable relationships with institutions and learners, as well as speaking to an educator audience, thus maximizing the odds that their Edtech tools achieve their lofty goals.



# Common Themes this Year

We're proud to note that six of our eight new companies

Red Flag Mania	Riff Analytics
Funding U	GreenFig
GoCoach	Lloyd

are **led by female founders or co-founders**. We aim to continue to diversify the ranks of founders in our portfolio.



**This year, we also discovered three key themes among our new partners:**

1

## Technical Skills Aren't Enough

The acquisition of technical skills is necessary, but not sufficient, to meet many learners' career goals. Motivation, mentorship, and the development of so-called "soft skills" are often just as important.

Two of our new portfolio companies fill this gap by: (1) Providing high-quality, personalized coaching for non-executive professionals ([GoCoach](#)); and (2) offering a career coach referred to as a "co-pilot" to hold young professionals accountable to their career goals ([Lloyd](#)).

Another partner, [Peerceptiv](#), helps learners build metacognitive skills through their peer assessment platform. Learning to write is one thing. Helping peers develop their own skills is quite another.

2

## The Power of Equity-Led Design

Three of our partners embody creative approaches to flattening imbalances in access and outcomes. [Funding U](#), for example, is solving one piece of the college completion puzzle by providing small, "last gap" loans for low-income families who have been excluded from this market.

And by capturing video data during meetings and classes, [Riff Analytics](#) is holding a mirror to professionals and learners, allowing them to gauge who is and is not engaging actively in group conversations.

Finally, our friends at [eLumin](#) are making education tools accessible to everyone through the smart deployment of cloud-based learning technology.

3

## Hyper-Responsive Learning Content

We've discovered that learning content can be "hyper-responsive" in two ways: (1) to engage learners in real time; and (2) to ensure that curriculum is timely, up-to-date, and relevant to learners at any phase of their professional journey.

[Red Flag Mania](#) tackles the first prong of "hyper-responsiveness" through its game-based, investigative learning adventures. And [GreenFig](#) addresses the second by providing detail-rich digital skill courses for "codeless" professionals.

# Client Updates

## Edquity

### Overview

[Edquity](#) created the first evidence-based technology platform for distributing emergency aid to college students. Edquity offers emergency aid underwriting, disbursement functionality, and a one-stop hub for social service resources.

### Impact

- Distributed \$55M in emergency aid last year — a 25x increase from the previous year
- Served more than 100,000 students
- Distributed \$2 million in emergency relief to WGU students after processing as many as 8,000 applicants a day

## MajorClarity

### Overview

[MajorClarity](#) provides career and college exploration, as well as academic-planning services. It offers the only academic planning platform with interactive career simulations (or “test drives”), in addition to its video content, to help students develop a plan for achieving their desired career outcome.

### Impact

- Worked with nearly 3,000 schools in 328 districts across 23 states
- Served 1.1 million students since its inception
- User sessions jumped by 110% during the 2020-21 school year

The logo for Edquity, featuring the word "edquity" in a bold, lowercase sans-serif font. A small blue square with a white corner bracket is positioned at the top right of the letter "y".

*Edquity and the funds allowed me to pay my mortgage on time. I have 3 children and the cost of food has gone up as well as my mortgage. I find myself struggling every month now to make payment on time to avoid late fees. The funds from Edquity were a blessing for my family!”*  
– Student

The logo for MajorClarity, featuring the word "Major" in a bold, blue sans-serif font above the word "Clarity" in a similar font. A small blue square with a white corner bracket is positioned at the top right of the letter "y" in "Clarity".

*“The Soft Skills Micro-Credential was really helpful and informative. When I first saw it listed as an option, I thought it would just be basic knowledge that I already had, but I learned a lot through the course. The course can also be used no matter what career field you want to go in, so anyone can benefit from taking it which I thought was great.”*

–Student

## InScribe

### Overview

[InScribe](#) leverages the power of community and artificial intelligence to connect students with the answers, resources, and individuals they need to succeed. InScribe's digital communities cut across the traditional support silos in higher education, giving students a single place to turn when they need help—no matter the topic or time of day.

### Impact

- Created the first virtual community for applicants at WGU
- Selected as a semifinalist for the GSV Cup Elite 200

## Student Opportunity Center

### Overview

[Student Opportunity Center](#) ("SOC") partners with colleges and employers to scale up experiential learning across their organizations. SOC's mission is for every student to participate in quality experiential learning so they are prepared for a great career and life in the 21st century.

### Impact

- Partnered with Emsi Burning Glass to create the nation's largest experiential learning database
- Worked with 150,000 student users (representing 100% YOY user growth) across 110 colleges and universities
- Created a new experiential learning program for online business students at WGU



*"Inscribe is a perfect middle ground between high- and low-frequency communication. It's transformed online teaching from a solo sport to a community-based activity."*

*–Campus Administrator*



*It's a great opportunity. I'm working with somebody who's a professional in their field. There's no more valuable experience in my mind than that."*

*–Student in WGU's pilot experiential learning course*

*"WGU Labs can be a game-changer for early stage education/ edtech companies. They have been a fantastic partner, providing valuable perspectives and meaningful access to their partners at WGU for researching product development and implementation best practices."*

*–Chris Freire, Founder and CEO  
Student Opportunity Center*



# Red Flag Mania

## Overview

[Red Flag Mania](#) creates innovative e-learning solutions that combine film, theory, and “whodunit” fun to empower learners to use data to solve complex problems. Their game-based investigative experience has been described as a mix of “escape room, corporate ‘Clue,’ and CSI.”

## Impact

- Launched new partnership with Surgent IQ
- Partnered with WGU Labs to create a new suite of high-value, accessible education experiences

# eLumin

## Overview

The [eLumin](#) solution improves student access to vital, course-required applications and data through its cloud-based virtual learning environment. eLumin is founded on the belief that technology should never get in the way of life, learning, or accomplishment, and that a student’s ability to work, learn, and interact should extend beyond the bounds of a traditional campus.

## Impact

- Featured in [Campus Technology](#)
- Collaborating with Saint Louis University on a December research project, following a fall implementation



*“Typically when someone is lecturing, you have the option of zoning out. Here, you can’t zone out. You have a problem to solve, and you have to get in there and do it.”*

–Professor



*“We were impressed with the fact that eLumin carefully listened to our virtual desktop requirements and then tailored a solution that fit our instructional and student learning needs.”*

–Campus Administrator

## Peerceptiv

### Overview

[Peerceptiv](#) empowers students to help fellow students by providing valid and reliable feedback on a range of assignment types. The product also enables instructors to create meaningful opportunities for students to engage with each other, which is especially important in remote learning environments.

### Impact

- Served 35,000 students this academic year
- Operated in 25 states in the U.S. and in eight countries
- Saw 30% growth in student users and new student sign-ups



*"Peerceptiv isn't just a tool to make grading easier. Instead, it's allowed me to assign things I wouldn't normally be able to assign, which greatly increases the critical thinking taking place in my courses."*

–Professor

*"The guidance and support we've received from WGU Labs has been great, but the real benefit has been in the connections we've been able to make. We're working closely with people now we'd have never had an opportunity to even meet without partnering with WGU Labs."*

–Mark Limbach, CEO  
Peerceptive

## Riff Analytics

### Overview

[Riff Analytics](#) builds tools that use AI to measure how individuals and teams interact during video calls and chats, while providing personalized feedback on opportunities for improving communication.

### Impact

- Served users across nine states and five countries
- Found that students who participated once a week were twice as likely to earn a certificate of completion
- Student users' odds of passing a course also increased by 35%



*"The Riff platform has been great in facilitating communication between team members and TAs. The best communication I've had so far in my online course-taking experience."*

–Student

## Funding U

### Overview

[Funding U](#) has upended the FICO-based lending model by focusing on students' academic performance, not the trappings of generational wealth. Through its groundbreaking SMaRT™ analysis, which focuses on non-credit factors within students' control, Funding U provides "last gap" microloans of \$3,000 to \$10,000 to low-income families.

### Impact

- Served 1,200 students from 1,345 eligible four-year institutions across 31 states
- Significantly expanded representation of eligible minority-serving institutions
- Brokered [partnership](#) with Dream.US and Social Finance to fund grad school for DACA students

## GoCoach

### Overview

[GoCoach](#) is an Edtech company focused on democratizing high-value coaching and e-learning to upskill the talent workforce of today and tomorrow. GoCoach delivers personalized expert career coaching and e-learning that reaches learners wherever they are on their unique career journey.

### Impact

- Coached 3,500 workforce learners across a broad range of industries
- Piloted coaching at three universities that will immediately impact 2,000 students
- Experienced 300% YOY user growth, with 100% customer retention

## FUNDING U

*"It has been impossible to find a company that doesn't require a co-signer or certain credit score. Because of Covid and our greatly reduced salary – we have been through a lot and our hands have literally been tied on finding the right loan to fit our needs. What a huge blessing Funding U has been to us."*

*–Parent of Current Borrower*



*"We've continued to invest in GoCoach for all our employees, allowing us all to drive a standard level of leadership skill across the entire company."*

*–GoCoach Client*

## Boost

### Overview

[Boost](#) is a research-backed, Canvas-integrated app that sends students personalized reminders and supportive messages. Early research at Indiana University revealed that the tool demonstrably improved course performance and completion rates.

### Impact

- Served 10,280 students in just a few months
- Saw 35% YoY student user growth in the spring term from active schools
- Sent more than 500,000 boosts (notifications) to students in the spring term

*“With WGU Labs stepping in to help us expand our research findings and scale our go-to-market operations, we know Boost will reach a bigger market and dramatically improve our ability to improve learning outcomes and completion rates for students.”*

*–Josh Owens, Co-Founder and CEO  
Boost*

# boost

*“Boost has actually helped me create a better schedule to do my work. Last week, my group and I were overwhelmed with schoolwork. If it wasn’t for Boost, we would have missed a quiz that was due at midnight.”*

*–Indiana University Student*

## Lloyd

### Overview

[Lloyd](#) helps its members figure out how to take the next step in their career, whether it be a job search, a side project, or answering the question, “What do I want to do with my life?” Members are assigned a “co-pilot”—a human career advisor—who provides feedback and accountability along the way.

### Impact

- Collaborated with WGU’s alumni affairs office to provide free Lloyd trials to select WGU alumni
- Launched discussions with higher education institutions about piloting Lloyd with students and alumni





## Our Impact Process

### How Do We Know That Meaningful Impact Has Occurred?

We collect impact data from many sources. Most of these data come directly from the companies we serve. With company founders we identify the most appropriate impact metrics both quantitative and qualitative. In order to inform and guide this process, we developed a social impact framework and corresponding rubric.

Our process for developing the social impact framework was iterative and collaborative. After initial development, we shared multiple drafts with social impact investors, education researchers, and measurement experts. While we've included the latest version in this report, we do not consider this a final version—we welcome additional suggestions and feedback.

### Social Impact Framework

The social impact framework guides WGU Labs in evaluating whether a company, platform, or service improves outcomes within the educational ecosystem. It helps us grow education innovations that expand access and affordability to quality education and improve student outcomes.




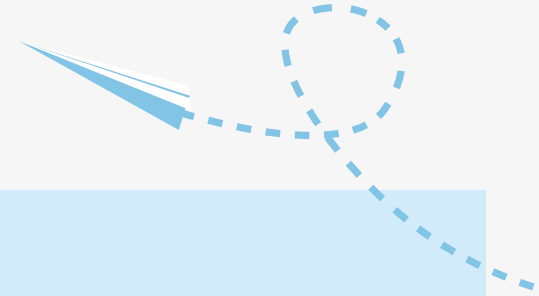
#### What's next?

Please contact us to learn more

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