



CATALYST

Frequently Asked Questions

A practical guide to eligibility, program structure, funding, and participation.

WHAT

What is Catalyst?

[This.](#)

Who is Catalyst for?

Teams must be building scalable tech solutions, already have developed an MVP with traction, with an alignment to low-income New Yorkers and Americans. Whether you're focusing on health, housing, hunger & jobs, education, or financial access, we want to hear from you. You can apply as a solo founder or as part of a small team. Companies must not have earned more than \$150k in total revenue within any given 12-month period or raised more than \$500k (excluding grants).

SHOULD I APPLY

Why should I apply to Catalyst?

An entire generation has come of age believing that the surest path to wealth is extraction rather than creation. Over the past decade, cheap capital, rapid financialization, and the arbitrage of nearly everything have reinforced that belief, often overshadowing the harder, slower, and more consequential work of building products and institutions that create lasting value.

Catalyst is for founders choosing that harder path. If you're building a venture that expands economic mobility for low-income New Yorkers and Americans, we want to help you succeed.

As a Catalyst founder, you'll gain access to Robin Hood's program officers, experienced mentors, community-based organizations, [DIG](#) members (a network of 3,600+ New Yorkers with lived experience), and the collective intelligence of fellow portfolio founders. You'll also receive a dedicated workspace at Robin Hood's headquarters in Union Square, NYC, and may be considered for follow-on funding.

Apply to join a community committed not merely to capturing value, but to creating it and ensuring that more people can share in it.

Do you focus on specific impact areas?

We're interested in health, housing, hunger & jobs, workforce development, education, and financial access.

What stage of development should my startup be in?

You're a pre-seed venture or early-stage tech nonprofit, with no more than ~\$150K in total revenue within any given 12-month period and under ~\$500K raised (excluding grants). The majority of companies have demonstrated evidence of creating pathways out of poverty. Idea stage: see the [Founder Fellowship](#).

Can I apply as a solo founder?

Yes, Catalyst welcomes solo founders with technical backgrounds or domain expertise.

I've raised money at a higher valuation than is implied by the Catalyst investment? Am I too far along to do Catalyst?

Nope! Some founders have already raised money at higher valuations than what Catalyst's investment implies. Don't think about Robin Hood's investment as setting your "valuation." Instead, just ask yourself: Will joining Robin Hood's network improve my startup's chances of success. If yes, it's worth it.

I'm not technical. Will you still invest?

You need to be able to build your product yourselves or hire code. For most startups, that means you need a technical cofounder on your team.

Robin Hood has already invested in a company similar to mine. Will that affect my chance of being accepted?

No. We believe there are strong synergies between companies in the impact space.

Do we need to know someone at Robin Hood to get in?

No. We consider all applications equally and have a diverse judging panel comprising civic-minded leaders, investors, Robin Hood leadership, and [DIG](#) members.

If we did another accelerator, can we still do Catalyst?

Yes. We've had companies join Catalyst after doing another accelerator.

How is Catalyst different from other accelerators?

Catalyst is committed to creating economic opportunity for low-income New Yorkers and Americans. You'll join a tight-knit community of changemakers, mission-aligned, who are as passionate as you are about change.

Do you give feedback on applications?

We don't because of the volume of applications; however, if you're invited to interview with us, we'll do our best to give you timely feedback.

TERMS & LOGISTICS

What is the funding amount?

A \$100K investment per company (SAFE) or a grant for nonprofits. The key difference is the funding structure: equity investment for for-profits, grant for non-profits.

What is the Simple Agreement for Future Equity (SAFE)?

For-profit companies participating in Catalyst receive their investment through a Simple Agreement for Future Equity, or SAFE. A SAFE provides funding now in exchange for the right to receive shares later, typically when the company completes its next priced equity financing.

Catalyst uses a customized, fixed-percentage post-money SAFE based on Y Combinator's standard form. Unlike a conventional valuation-cap or MFN SAFE, it does not specify a valuation cap or depend on the terms offered to a future investor.

Key terms:

- **Investment:** \$100,000
- **Conversion entitlement:** Shares equal to 5.5% of the company's capitalization, as calculated under the SAFE
- **Valuation cap:** None
- **MFN provision:** None

What is the Catalyst Program Agreement?

The Catalyst Program Agreement is a binding program agreement that confirms acceptance into Catalyst, establishes participation requirements and relationship expectations, and provides for a separate, conditional investment. All participants in Catalyst must sign to receive funding.

What can I use the funding for?

You can spend the money on whatever will help your business!

What is the program like?

Catalyst is a small batch 4-month accelerator for early-stage organizations building solutions that advance economic mobility. Through peer-to-peer mentorship, targeted funding, expert guidance, and access to Robin Hood's network, participants strengthen their products, organizations, partnerships, and strategies for growth.

The program is designed to help founders turn promising solutions into sustainable, scalable ventures in NYC that can create meaningful, lasting change for underserved communities nationwide.

Where does Catalyst take place? Do I need to move to New York City?

The 2-day a week in-person component is compulsory. Work from Blue Ridge Labs at Robin Hood's HQ in Union Square, NYC with access to our desks, conference rooms, and more. After the program, you can go wherever you want.

How many startups are accepted?

Each year, we choose a small group of changemakers from across the U.S. We will be accepting 6-8 organizations.

How do we select?

We have an application process that's open to any team in the U.S. You can apply [here](#).

What's the time commitment of Catalyst?

Catalyst is a 4-month program, 2-days in-person featuring coaching, founder lunch & learns, workshops, and socials. All programming is required during the in-person sessions. As a founder we expect you to maximize your time to build relations.

What are the dates?

Catalyst is accepting applications for the 2027 Catalyst Cohort. The program will take place from February to June in NYC.

The deadline to apply on-time is November 13 at 11:59 PM ET.

Can I apply if I've already received some funding or have existing traction?

Yes. Whether you're bootstrapping or already have some funding up to \$500k (excluding grants), we welcome applications that align with our mission.

Will I receive ongoing support after the program?

Yes! Catalyst is committed to your long-term success. After the program ends, we'll continue to offer introductions to investors, mentors, and partners, as well as invitations to bespoke events. Additionally, there's potential for follow-on funding.

INCORPORATING

Do we need to incorporate before applying?

No. However, the receipt of Robin Hood funding is contingent upon incorporating.