

Q & A: [Abhishek Iyer](#) and Team

Q: How did you prepare for the training and how would you suggest other teams prepare now looking back?

A: I would recommend NSF I-Corps Sites local with the HORN Program in Entrepreneurship to start off. The mini-version of the NSF I-Corps helped prepare us for the I-teams process. We learned a lot from the NSF I-Corps Sites and also other entrepreneurial competitions like UD's Hen Hatch pitch competition and [LaunchR](#).

Q: Why did you decide to participate in NSF I-Corps? What did you hope to gain from the program?

A: A large motivation behind doing I-Corps had to do with the positive results from local NSF I-Corps Sites program and belief in our research/unique value propositions. We realized that doing I-Corps would help us discover and solve further blocks on our path to commercialization. I-corps was like a SWOT analysis for us.

Q: What was the most surprising thing about the program?

A: To see our hypotheses being challenged so much during the early stages of the program was the biggest surprise. The way we had to pivot and move forward was really challenging but worth it.

Q: How many hours per week did you spend time on the program during the seven-week course? What did those activities entail?

A: Almost all my time was spent on I-Corps. I was lucky to have Jimmy as a co-entrepreneurial lead to assist in the workload. We often shared responsibilities on various issues. Personally, a one-man EL job is really tough, but it's equally rewarding. During the program, we dropped all lab work to work exclusively on I-Corps. The majority of the time was spent scheduling interviews, then conducting interviews, researching companies and making travel arrangements. The program was very fast-paced.

Q: How did your team work together effectively? What tips would you have for others?

A: Effective communication with team members is essential. This includes networking and planning as well. The mentor and PI are really busy people and cannot afford much time on this process given their schedule. I-Corps is an EL's journey more than anybody else, but it is very important to ensure all were on the same page before the beginning and end of every week. If there was something I did right, it would be reporting my progress, plan and seeking constant advising and mentoring from them whenever they had time.

Q: How many interviews did you do and what approach did you find the most effective in getting a lot of quality interviews?

A: We finished 107 interviews in total. The three best and effective ways of getting more interviews would be:

1. Trade shows and conferences
2. LinkedIn Premium
3. End every customer discovery with, “Thanks a lot for your time. Could you recommend somebody you know who could help us in this process?” We often targeted additional interviews at the same office to get different perspectives.

There can be a lot of logistics in scheduling a major breakthrough interview. It’s important to find more people nearby to talk to for each interview. Setting up multiple interviews at each company is one thing that we could have improved on that would have saved us a lot of time as we often only spoke to one or two people per company.

Q: Why do you think you won the best Entrepreneurial Lead award?

A: For one, I had a great team. Presentation skills mattered, too. I was aware what was expected out of me at the final presentation, from the coaching the day before final presentation. I told a story; I didn’t present. Lastly, effective communication: I always reported and consulted my PI, co-EL and mentor and ensured I got the best out of them.

Q: What was your biggest takeaway from the NSF I-Corps training?

A: The world outside the lab is really different. We were a NO-GO at the end but we have figured out a path forward for our enterprise, and would like to investigate this further. To see where we stand from what we were two months back is overwhelming. Testing and killing hypotheses in the early stages of our venture helped us save millions of dollars and years of time. Not to mention we now understand the basic building blocks for doing a successful and importantly a sustainable startup.

Q: Looking back, is there anything you would have done differently?

A: More background work and planning. We were planning on traveling overseas for really good conferences and trade shows, but we couldn’t because there was not much time (visa approval). Had we planned this well beforehand, we could have learned more. Also scheduling more interviews before the beginning of the program could also have reduced our load, as we were always scrambling to get the quota for the week. It would be better to have a city planned for each week well in advance.

Q: What advice do you have for others who are thinking of applying?

A: Be prepared. NSF I-Corps is really demanding but rewarding at the same time. I would highly recommend this program to those who are working towards launching a startup company with their research. It’s an eye-opener. Have the right team. Finally, find a time to reflect on the

| journey along the way. We were so busy, often we did not have time to reflect, and mine the data for information.