

The Business Hypothesis Guide

Sharpen the foundation of your pitch. One page that names who you are, who you serve, and how you deliver it — with a real case study up front and plenty of room to actually write.

WHO WE
ARE



WHO WE
SERVE



OUR
APPROACH



WHY
US



Why a one-page hypothesis?

A business hypothesis isn't a business plan. It's a short, honest statement of what you believe about who you serve and how you'll help them — written to be tested, not set aside to collect dust.

Get this page really clear, and many of your pitches, grant applications, and sales conversations will get easier to write — because they all trace back to this.

And it's not a one-time exercise. Treat it as a living, breathing document — one worth actively revising as you're in real conversation with your community and your clients, and as you refine your own products, tools, and offers.

1

Who We Are

One or two sentences: what you do, and for whom.

2

Who We Serve

Your ideal customer or client — their world, their pain points, where you come in.

3

Our Approach

The products, services, or offers that turn that into revenue.

4

Why Us

The track record, credibility, and beliefs that set you apart.

BEST FOR

A nonprofit naming an earned revenue line, a founder sharpening a pitch, or a solopreneur clarifying an offer before the next sales call.

Who this is for, and why



ANDREW'S TAKE

Founder, Studio Groovy

I've watched this one page do very different jobs depending on who's holding it — a nonprofit leader, a founder, or a solopreneur. For a nonprofit, it's how you stay anchored to mission and values while telling a distinct story to funders, donors, and the community you serve — then right-size that same story for an audience that's paying, not donating. For a founder, it's the differentiation and the pitch-ready building blocks you need before angel meetings, pitch competitions, or your first paying customer. And as a solopreneur myself, several times over, it's the exercise I come back to whenever I need to regroup in the story I'm telling right now. I've been on all sides of this — nonprofit leader, founder, and solopreneur — and a clear hypothesis has made a real difference, every time.

WHY THIS REALLY MATTERS

NONPROFITS

How you tell your story is the throughline. It stays anchored to mission and values, it positions you well with funders, donors, and the community you serve, and it captures impact along the way. An earned revenue pitch can draw on that same story — just right-sized. Not everything your organization does needs to be in it. Just the piece you're building a paying model around. In my own experience, slicing out that one earned revenue piece is what lets the story actually land — specific to that one opportunity, instead of getting lost inside the bigger story of your mission, vision, and values.

STARTUPS

A finished pitch deck matters, and you'll get there. This exercise helps you find the building blocks first — the cohesive story a great deck gets built around, not just the slides themselves. Pitching was one of the first things I had to do as a founder, and even as someone who loves telling stories, it was overwhelming to know what to prioritize. This is what helped me clarify the building blocks that actually belong in an effective pitch — and they're usually the exact things I'm listening for when I hear founders pitch today, and what I coach them to sharpen first.

SOLOPRENEURS

You deserve the same rigor and reflection that leaders at established nonprofits or funded startups get — even on your own. It's easy to let this slip when you're focused on standing out or moving from contract to contract. Staying visible and building a real pipeline starts with being clear about who you are, what you offer, and what sets you apart, with a genuine pulse on the market. To build a pipeline, position myself, and brand myself, I've had to get clear on what I'm actually offering, who my customer is (and isn't), and what work I actually want to take on — and that clarity comes down to these same building blocks.

What is a core business hypothesis?

Before you dive in, it helps to know where this fits among the other planning tools you might already have.

MISSION

Your organization's central purpose — the guiding North Star behind every decision, program, and product you put into the world.

VISION

How you see the future once that mission is fulfilled. Together, mission and vision are your grounding compass.

STRATEGIC PLAN

A more granular 1-year or 3-to-5-year plan with measurable priorities and goals — covering programs and services, but also operations, finances, culture, and talent.

PITCH

The story you tell a specific audience — funders, donors, board members, investors, customers, first hires — to describe who you are, who you serve, what you do, and what makes you different. It gets tailored every time you tell it.

A core business hypothesis distills the building blocks — who you are, who you serve, what you do, what makes you distinct — that show up again and again in your pitch, however it gets tailored. Get those building blocks clear, and it gets a lot easier to keep every version of your pitch sharp and integrated with your mission, vision, and strategic plan.

FOR NONPROFITS

Mission, vision, and your strategic plan are usually org-wide. A core business hypothesis is different — it's tied directly to earned revenue, often just the one slice of your work you're building a paying model around.

FOR STARTUPS & SOLOPRENEURS

Startups often pitch this to investors or VCs, alongside customers and early hires. Solopreneurs may not be raising capital the same way — but you still need total clarity on where you sit in the market, who your customer is, and what makes you different from every other provider out there.

A feminist music industry nonprofit

A REAL WORLD EXAMPLE

I coached this nonprofit myself — an organization with a strong individual giving history that took on a lot of connected issues, and galvanized truly intersectional advocacy across its many programs and campaigns. In trying to round out their sustainability, an earned revenue opportunity emerged that could expand their footprint beyond music fans and much deeper into the music industry itself.

This nonprofit uses the reach of the music industry — artists, touring crews, fans, and everyone in between — to accelerate feminist movements: reproductive equity, gender justice, women's rights, and civic engagement. They run a wide range of programs, keep programming free and accessible, and stay closely engaged with donors and individual givers to keep that work funded.

Much like the organizational ikigai work touched on, they do a lot — and none of that changed. They kept their programs, their values, their donor relationships, their fan engagement. What they wanted was a new pathway to financial sustainability alongside all of it.

One program had already shown real traction: reducing gender-based violence and sexual harassment in live shows and music industry spaces. Sitting down with a core business hypothesis became the way to carve that one piece out, build the business case for it, and turn it into an earned revenue line — sitting alongside their existing programs, individual giving, and grants, not replacing them.

Working with artists, touring crews, festivals, and venues who cared about safety, they kept bumping into the same gap: real skill and policy gaps, and real appetite for customized support. That gap became the three-part approach on the next page.

The earned revenue slice

Here's how the hypothesis broke that one piece down:

WHO THEY ARE

A team of touring-industry veterans, using that inside experience to build safer, more inclusive live-music spaces.

WHO THEY SERVE

Artists, touring crews, festivals, and venues who care about safety but keep hitting the same wall — real skill and policy gaps, and no one offering genuinely customized support.

THEIR APPROACH

Training — Hands-on workshops on harm reduction and bystander intervention, built for touring life.

Policy & Systems — Codes of conduct and reporting systems that hold up on the road, not just on paper.

Coaching — One-on-one support for the leaders responsible for keeping a team or crew safe.

WHY THEM

Years of hands-on experience inside the touring industry itself — not an outside firm parachuting in — paired with a trauma-informed, evidence-based approach and real proof points: workshops delivered, policies adopted, seasons survived. Their belief that the industry itself has to lead this work, not get regulated into it, is what earns them a seat generic consultants don't get.

Remember: they do a lot. This hypothesis isn't their whole story — it's the one earned revenue slice, and the story that needs to be told to sell it.

Clarify who you are and who you serve

Write these the way you'd say them out loud to someone new.

Use the sub-questions if you get stuck. Nonprofit or startup, some will land more than others – that's fine. Follow what's true for you.

WHO WE ARE

1. What's your core mission or the purpose of your venture?
2. In one or two sentences, what do you actually do?



WHO WE SERVE

1. Who is your ideal customer, client, or most important stakeholder?
2. What are they going through – their pain points, their challenges?
3. Where exactly do you step in to help?



Name your approach

Name the products, services, or offers that turn what you do into revenue — and what makes them yours.

Three or four are usually enough. The stronger your “why us,” the more the rest of this page holds together.

1	PRODUCT / SERVICE / TOOL 	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE
2	PRODUCT / SERVICE / TOOL 	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE
3	PRODUCT / SERVICE / TOOL 	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE
4	PRODUCT / SERVICE / TOOL 	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

WHY US

1. What's our track record — who have we worked with, and what did we deliver?
2. How do we compare to others in the market, or to direct competitors?
3. What's a belief we hold, maybe a spicy one, about how this work should be done?
4. What makes us different, or how do we see things differently than others?
5. What lends us credibility or appeal?

Turn these into your story

You've got four solid building blocks. Putting them into one page — or one pitch — usually isn't as simple as stacking them in order.



Start by translating these into slides or a single narrative. You might tell the story in a different order than you answered these questions — rearrange the blocks until the flow feels right for your audience.

Two more things worth adding: a personal story that connects you to what you're building (it reinforces credibility), and a client or impact story that makes the case concrete.

One thing that's helped founders, leaders, and solopreneurs I've worked with: come up with a couple of different versions of your personal story and your client or impact story. Depending on who's in the room, pulling out the right one is often what makes the whole pitch click.

You have a lot of the building blocks here — not everything that goes into a formal pitch. How you order it all will depend on your audience, the opportunity in front of you, and, to some extent, your own preference.

You've clarified the pitch. Now share and refine it.

A business hypothesis is a living page, not a plaque — the kind of thing your pitch deck, grant applications, and sales calls can all trace back to.



SURFACE

- Read your Who We Are and Who We Serve back to back. Do they actually connect or just sit next to each other?
- Try telling the story two or three different ways, out loud, to yourself — notice which version feels most clear and natural.



SHARE

- Pitch it to a few different people and watch for the pattern: what sticks, what's clear, what piques their interest.
- Based on what you hear, decide what to change — and what to keep.



SHIP

- Turn it into the first draft of a pitch deck or adapt it for your website.
- Drop this page into your next proposal or grant application, word-for-word, and see what sticks.

Studio Groovy helps founders, leaders, and mission-driven teams turn stalled ideas into shipped, revenue-generating work — without burning out the people doing it. Together, we build the systems, culture, and revenue that let good work last.



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