

## Nonprofit Bunker Labs Officially Launches Boston Chapter

By Rowan Walrath - July 25, 2019

---

When Phaly Pichota first set out to launch her business in 2018, she wanted to connect with other veterans in the entrepreneur community. There is, she said, something about having a commonality with other veterans, and as a startup leader, she wanted to bring the two together. But there wasn't a space like that here.

"I had to fly out to Austin to really connect with veterans," Pichota said. "There was nothing really in Boston."

Pichota is CEO and co-founder of Cibus Health, a technology platform focused on utilizing food as medicine. She is also a veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

While Pichota was in Texas at another program, another business leader told her that she should reach out to Chris Irving. He was back in Boston, working on creating exactly what she was looking for: a local chapter of a national, veteran-focused program designed to boost up entrepreneurs. It was called Bunker Labs.

Thursday evening will mark the official opening of Bunker Labs' 26th chapter with a ribbon-cutting ceremony at Venture Café in Cambridge. It's among Boston's first veteran-focused entrepreneurship programs. The nonprofit accomplishes its goal through four channels: Bunker Brews, a monthly networking event; an online launch lab with modules geared toward early-stage founders; CEO Circle, a "mastermind group" that gives CEOs monthly benchmarks to hit; and Veterans in Residence, a venture accelerator.

[Veterans in Residence](#) has actually been operating in Boston since April through a partnership between Bunker Labs and WeWork. The [10-member inaugural cohort](#), which is currently working out of WeWork South Station, will graduate next month.

For Pichota, the community is everything. She's now a Bunker Labs Boston city leader in addition to leading her own startup.

"It's a community connection," Pichota said. "From a veteran's perspective, having come from the military or being a spouse of a military member, I think there's already this camaraderie that exists. Being able to connect with that same community in a civilian environment, in a startup environment,

it's so invaluable. We come from those same leadership principles, the same discipline. It's really refreshing."

Irving agrees. Leadership, he noted, is built into Bunker Labs' curriculum, just as it is in military training.

"There's this bias toward action, which is so important in entrepreneurship," Irving said. "In the military, you're not often given a lot of time to think too much. You're given a task, and you get after it. I think that really helps in startups and small businesses."

Along with Pichota, Irving is a city leader at Bunker Labs Boston. He is a veteran of the U.S. Navy.

Irving wants to bring Bunker Labs to cities across New England, to make the program the go-to destination for veteran entrepreneurs. Currently, his team is looking at opening chapters in New Hampshire and potentially Stamford, Connecticut.

"As Americans, startup founders and small businesses owners—those are the lifeblood of American entrepreneurship," Pichota said. "We want to cultivate that. We want to foster that within the veteran community."

*Image courtesy Bunker Labs*

---

---

#### **Rowan Walrath**

Rowan Walrath is a staff writer at BostInno. She curates and writes the Beat. Rowan was previously at WIRED and Mother Jones in San Francisco. Reach her at [rwalrath@americaninno.com](mailto:rwalrath@americaninno.com) or on Twitter at [@rowanwalrath](https://twitter.com/rowanwalrath).