AI House at Pier 70: Testing Seattle's "Boring Industries" Thesis Against the Washington AI Census

By Will Tygart · Independent profile of Seattle's AI House at Pier 70 tested against 100 verified Washington AI Census profiles · tygartmedia.com



On November 20, 2026, Jacob Colker — co-founder and managing director of Seattle's AI House — posted a blunt note on LinkedIn: *"I'm looking to write several $1M pre-seed checks, ideally before New Year's."* He followed with three lines running straight against Silicon Valley's trillion-dollar-TAM theater: *"I DON'T BELIEVE in most AI infrastructure startups. The hyperscalers will eat their lunch." "I DON'T BELIEVE every startup needs to be a $100B company." "I DON'T BELIEVE hype is a substitute for business fundamentals. I prefer founders who know how to sell to their customers over founders who know how to sell to VCs."* Then came his four-line bet: *"Here's what I DO believe in: Boring industries. Broken workflows. Real customers. AI that makes things 10x better. Give me founders who understand an antiquated industry better than anyone else."* His closing bar: *"A $1B market? Plenty big for me."*

We are not pitching AI House for a check, applying to a cohort, or asking for a meeting. We run a small lab in Tacoma out of property restoration — an original boring industry — and we just finished publishing the Washington AI Census, a verified directory of 100 independent Washington AI companies. That lets us test a LinkedIn thesis directly against Washington's live AI map.

What AI House Is — And Why Check Sizes Differ Online

AI House is twelve years old under a new sign. Founded in 2014 as the AI2 Incubator inside the Allen Institute for AI (Ai2) — the Seattle research nonprofit started by Paul Allen — it spun off independently in 2022, opened a 108,000-square-foot waterfront hub at Pier 70 (2801 Alaskan Way) in March 2025, and rebranded officially as AI House on June 18, 2026, per GeekWire's rebrand report and AI House's announcement. The Pier 70 launch paired the incubator with Ada Developers Academy, $400,000 from the Washington State Department of Commerce, and $210,000 from the City of Seattle Office of Economic Development (City of Seattle release, March 27, 2025). More than 20,000 attendees came through in year one.

AI House runs on three pillars — Community, Incubator, and Capital — under three managing directors listed on its team page: co-founder Jacob Colker, Yifan Zhang, and Sri Chandrasekar (formerly Point72 Ventures and In-Q-Tel), who wrote the first check into Fund III before joining full-time at the June 2026 rebrand. Former Ai2 CEO Oren Etzioni serves part-time as technical director, and longtime GeekWire editor Taylor Soper directs community and programming. Incubated founders are now expected to spend at least one month working daily at Pier 70.

Reading AI House's own pages also resolves an apparent check-size clash across startup directories, which often list $100,000–$600,000 while Colker's post cites $1M checks. Both come out of AI House's **$80 million Fund III** (GeekWire, October 2025; AI House June 2026 announcement), split across two tracks. On its Incubator FAQs, incubation (~15 companies/year) invests up to $600,000 on a $10M-cap SAFE ($100,000 solo or $200,000 co-founders to start), plus 7% common stock and up to $1.5 million in non-dilutive cloud credits. Separately, AI House Capital writes direct pre-seed checks — including into non-incubated founders — stating: *"We typically invest between $100,000 — $1 million."* Colker's $1M call sits at the top of that direct Capital track.

THE NOVEMBER 20, 2026 LINKEDIN POST · VERBATIM SPINE
Jacob Colker's Four Beliefs — And Three Refusals

1 · BORING INDUSTRIES: "Boring industries." *"Give me founders who understand an antiquated industry better than anyone else"* — backed inside AI House's own overlap by Friday Harbor, Moria, AZX, and CalmWave.

2 · BROKEN WORKFLOWS: "Broken workflows." Paper-heavy bottlenecks where compliance, billing, or admin stalls — seen in Aria, Casium, Decipher, and Caddi.

3 · REAL CUSTOMERS: "Real customers." *"I prefer founders who know how to sell to their customers over founders who know how to sell to VCs."* In The Quiet Door Into the Library, we saw the same rule hold inside county courthouses: earn trust on one concrete job first.

4 · 10X BETTER (AND NO INFRA HYPE): "AI that makes things 10x better." Paired with three refusals: *"I DON'T BELIEVE in most AI infrastructure startups. The hyperscalers will eat their lunch," "I DON'T BELIEVE every startup needs to be a $100B company,"* and *"A $1B market? Plenty big for me."*

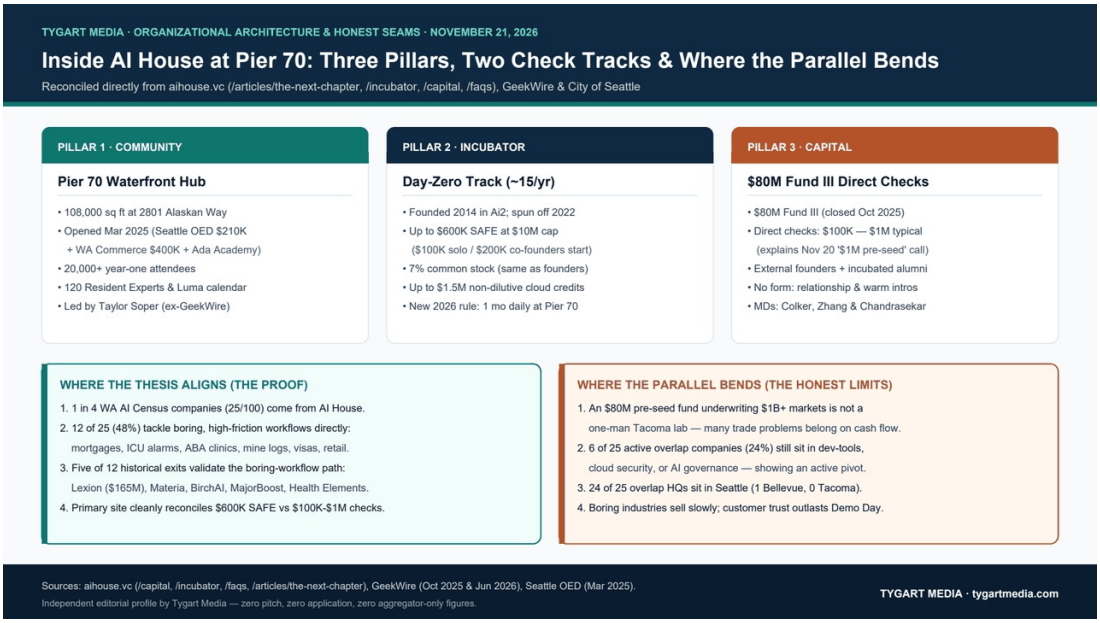


Figure 1: AI House's three pillars at Pier 70, the two-track check structure ($600K Incubator SAFE vs. $100K-$1M Direct Capital), and where the parallel bends.

The Census Overlap: 25 of 100 Independent WA AI Companies

We pulled every card on AI House's Incubator Companies page and joined it one-to-one against all 100 live profiles in our Washington AI Census. A company counted only if it held a live profile in our census **and** appeared on AI House's own roster, verified by company identity and canonical domain — never name match or aggregator listings.

AI House lists **47 portfolio companies**: **12 acquired** alumni (excluded from an independent-company census by definition) and **35 active independent companies**. Exactly **25 of those 35 (71.4%)** appear in our 100-company Washington AI Census — **1 in 4 (25%) of the entire independent WA AI Census**. Seven of AI House's other ten active companies were already evaluated during census scoping and excluded on geography or verification gates (Los Angeles, Brooklyn, San Diego, New York, Montreal, an unresolved St. Louis HQ conflict, or a blank site). Two additional census profiles — Synthesize Bio and Reflection Robotics —

pitched among 25 startups at AI House Demo Day 2026, but neither appears on `/incubator/companies`, so we keep the strict overlap at 25.

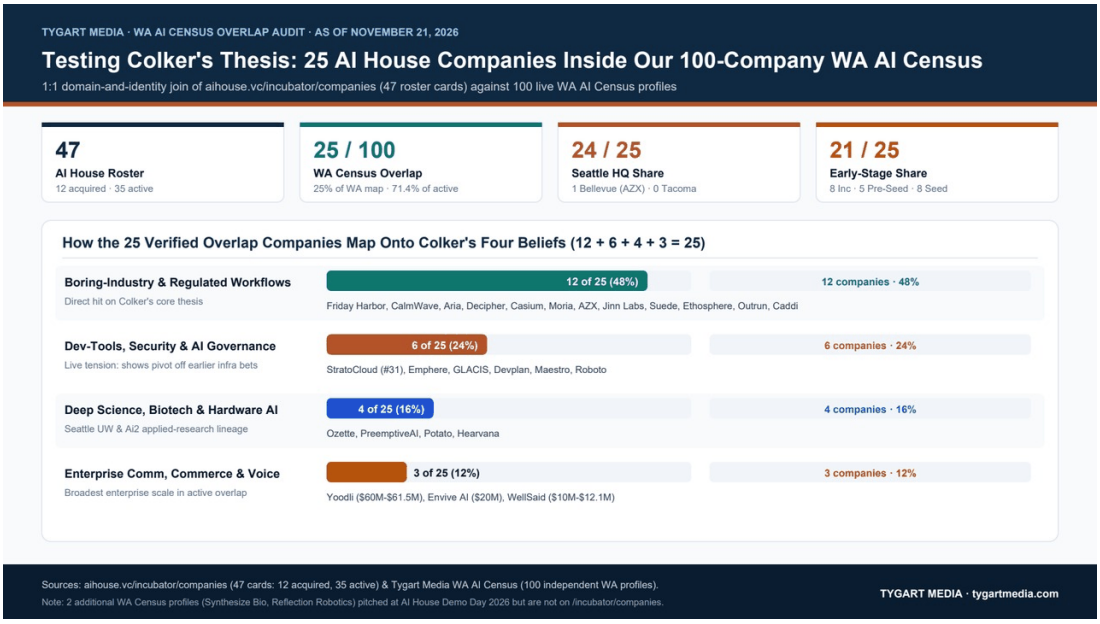


Figure 2: 1:1 overlap audit of AI House's 47-company incubator roster against 100 live Washington AI Census profiles (25 verified overlap companies; 12 + 6 + 4 + 3 = 25).

Testing the 25 Companies Against Colker's Four Beliefs

Almost half the active overlap — 12 of 25 (48%) — is pure boring-industry grit. Friday Harbor handles mortgage underwriting files; CalmWave cuts hospital ICU alarm fatigue; Aria automates behavioral-health and ABA clinics; Decipher untangles health benefits; Casium runs employer work visas; Moria parses mine-site drill logs; AZX builds custom AI for energy and utility ops; Jinn Labs tackles convenience-store shrink; Suede automates boutique buying; Caddi automates back-office workflows; Ethosphere analyzes retail floor conversations; and Outrun automates repetitive stationary industrial work. Five of AI House's 12 exits mirror that lane: Lexion (legal contracts, Docusign $165M), Materia (tax and audit, Thomson Reuters), BirchAI (healthcare call centers, Sagility Health), MajorBoost (medical billing calls, Superdial), and Health Elements (clinical abstraction, Medisolv), alongside early research exits like Xnor.ai (Apple) and Kitt.ai (Baidu).

Yet 6 of the 25 active companies (24%) sit squarely in dev-tools, cloud security, or AI governance — including StratoCloud (Census #31, confirmed on AI House's roster for cloud just-in-time access), Emphere (Dockerfile CVE remediation), GLACIS (verifiable AI compliance receipts), Devplan, Maestro, and Roboto. Four more (16%) are deep-science or hardware bets (Ozette, PreemptiveAI, Potato, Hearvana), and three (12%) are horizontal enterprise platforms (Yoodli, Envive AI, WellSaid). That mix matches Colker's candid October 2025 quote to GeekWire — *"We backed some developer tools and infrastructure plays... in hindsight, some of those companies plateaued"* — proving his November 2026 post is a live course correction, not hindsight polish.

Portfolio Bucket	Count (Share)	Verified AI House Companies in Our 100-Company WA AI Census	Fit Against Colker's Thesis
Boring-Industry & Regulated Workflows	12 of 25 (48%)	Friday Harbor, CalmWave, Aria, Decipher, Casium, Moria, AZX, Jinn Labs, Suede, Ethosphere, Outrun, Caddi	Direct hit: unglamorous workflows where domain depth beats demo polish.
Dev-Tools, Security & AI Governance	6 of 25 (24%)	StratoCloud (#31), Emphere, GLACIS, Devplan, Maestro, Roboto	Live tension: shows the incubator pivoting off earlier infra bets.
Deep Science, Biotech & Hardware AI	4 of 25 (16%)	Ozette, PreemptiveAI, Potato, Hearvana	Research-rooted applied AI from Seattle's UW and Ai2 lineage.
Enterprise Comm, Commerce & Voice	3 of 25 (12%)	Yoodli, Envive AI, WellSaid	Horizontal winners carrying the largest rounds in the active overlap.

Boring From Our Side of the Table — And Where the Parallel Bends

From Tacoma, the instinct tracks our own work. In Factory Phil: Why Google Is Factory Boring, we argued that "boring" is a compliment when parts have to work every Tuesday morning. In We Come From Water Damage, we noted that physical trades enforce honesty because a moisture meter ignores pitch decks. And in The Quiet Door Into the Library, we saw how antiquated county records offices buy from operators who understand the real paper workflow and solve one concrete job cleanly.

An honest profile also names where the parallel bends. **First, an $80 million pre-seed fund at Pier 70 and a one-man lab in Tacoma are not the same animal.** Even *"A $1B market? Plenty big for me"* is a venture power-law threshold. Twenty-one of 25 overlap firms are Incubator, Pre-Seed, or Seed stage, and 24 of 25 sit in Seattle (only AZX is in Bellevue; zero of our 100 census firms are in Tacoma, though AI House's rebrand welcomes Tacoma builders). Many broken trade workflows are durable $2M cash-flow businesses that never belonged on a SAFE.

Second, boring industries are boring partly because sales cycles crawl. Hospital ICUs, mortgage desks, mine operators, and ABA clinics have long memory and short patience for brittle software. Preferring founders who sell to customers over founders who sell to VCs is easy to applaud online and hard to survive through nine-month procurement. AI House has earned credibility on the thesis: its alumni account for a quarter of our independent Washington AI Census, and almost half are already working inside unglamorous verticals. Customer invoices — not Demo Day rooms — will grade the next wave of $1M checks.

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— Will Tygart, Tygart Media (tygartmedia.com).

PAGE 5 · PRINTABLE TEAR-OUT FIELD CARD · PIN ABOVE THE WORKBENCH

Jacob Colker's Four Beliefs — A One-Page Founder Field Test

Verbatim thesis lines attributed to Jacob Colker's November 20, 2026 LinkedIn post (Co-Founder & Managing Director, AI House, Seattle), paired with four practical diagnostic checks before writing code or raising capital.

Verbatim from Jacob Colker's November 20, 2026 LinkedIn Post: *"I'm looking to write several $1M pre-seed checks, ideally before New Year's. ... Here's what I DO believe in: Boring industries. Broken workflows. Real customers. AI that makes things 10x better. Give me founders who understand an antiquated industry better than anyone else. ... A $1B market? Plenty big for me."*

Colker Belief (Verbatim)	The Field Check Before You Build or Pitch	WA Census Proof Example
1. "Boring industries."	[ ] Can you name the exact unglamorous trade, regulation, or paper stack you know from inside — without buzzwords?	Moria (mine drill logs), Friday Harbor (mortgage files), AZX (utility ops)
2. "Broken workflows."	[ ] Have you watched a real operator lose hours to a concrete bottleneck this week, rather than inventing a clean demo problem?	CalmWave (ICU alarm fatigue), Aria (ABA clinic admin), Caddi (back-office)
3. "Real customers."	[ ] Would a buyer pay an invoice for this before you ever pitch a VC? ("sell to their customers over founders who know how to sell to VCs")	Casium (employer visas), Jinn Labs (retail shrink), Suede (boutique buying)
4. "AI that makes things 10x better."	[ ] Does your approach survive a hyperscaler shipping a generic feature next quarter — and does the problem truly need VC, or cash flow?	Honest check: 6/25 active overlap sit in dev-tools/security; check TAM vs cash flow

Colker's Three Verbatim Guardrails (Nov 20, 2026 LinkedIn Post):
[ ] **No thin infrastructure bets:** *"I DON'T BELIEVE in most AI infrastructure startups. The hyperscalers will eat their lunch."*
[ ] **No trillion-dollar TAM theater:** *"I DON'T BELIEVE every startup needs to be a $100B company."*
[ ] **No hype over fundamentals:** *"I DON'T BELIEVE hype is a substitute for business fundamentals. I prefer founders who know how to sell to their customers over founders who know how to sell to VCs."*

Connected Reading Map on tygartmedia.com

- Washington AI Census (100 Verified Independent Profiles) — full live state directory.
- Factory Phil: Why Google Is Factory Boring — boring predictability from the operator's bench.
- We Come From Water Damage & The Quiet Door Into the Library — unglamorous trades, broken workflows, and real customers.
- AI Citation Restoration & Pricing — Smokejumpers, Not Retainers.

Verified Primary Sources (Checked Live November 21, 2026)

1. AI House Official Site: aihouse.vc, Rebrand Essay (Jun 18, 2026), Incubator Companies Roster (47 cards), Capital ($100K-$1M), Incubator & FAQs ($600K SAFE / 7% common), Team, and Demo Day 2026.

2. Independent Regional Reporting & Civic Record: GeekWire Rebrand Report (Jun 18, 2026), GeekWire $80M Fund III Report (Oct 7, 2025), and City of Seattle Mayor's Office Pier 70 Launch (Mar 27, 2025).

3. Jacob Colker LinkedIn Post (Nov 20, 2026): verified verbatim against captured screenshot `colker-linkedin-post-2026-11-20.png`.