

Program Experience / Curriculum Summary

Start Micro-Entrepreneur Accelerator Program (Start:ME) is an intensive **14 week accelerator program** that leverages the *Village Capital Model* to provide the most promising micro-entrepreneurs (those starting businesses with 1-4 employees) in marginalized metro Atlanta communities business training, mentorship support and early-stage financing needed to develop their businesses. When successful, these businesses generate income for entrepreneurs and their families while at the same time build neighborhood vitality.



Knowledge: We deliver 14 weeks of hands-on learning in community that injects needed business acumen into participating ventures



Networks: We connect participating entrepreneurs to one another, and to a range of local business professionals and other support organizations through a tailored mentorship program, regular community events, and virtual tools



Capital: We provide guaranteed, low cost loans through our dedicated loan fund to the most-promising ventures as selected by the entrepreneurs themselves

Curriculum:

Session # / Title		Focus Areas
Pre-Program Sessions	Goals	Introductions (entrepreneurs, program managers and mentors) Team building among cohort / ALL IN Expectation Setting Communication skill building
	Activity	<i>(Distribute and discuss examples of strategic and financial plans)</i> <i>(Distribute and discuss loan applications)</i> <i>(IMPROV communication / thinking)</i>
Session 1: Focusing Business Ideas and Business Planning	Goals	Understand feasibility of business ideas Introduce basic planning structure and business vocabulary Importance of YOU as an entrepreneur (bigger than a business idea) Defining your market
	Activity	<i>(Explore SBA 20 Questions)</i> <i>(Personal Brand – Strengths and opportunities identification)</i> <i>(Walk through basic finance: Revenue minus costs= profits)</i>
Session 2: Demystifying Lending and Understanding Credit	Goals	Demystify business lending Outline how you and your business are one in the same regarding credit Financial planning / needs in short term and long term
	Activity	<i>(Panel presentation and discussion with lending professionals)</i> <i>(Sign up for One on One Credit Counseling Sessions)</i>
Session 3: Running a Business Trade Show	Goals	Overview of local political, economic, commercial and regulatory issues Seed critical business connections for entrepreneurs (support organization, business services, banks and more)
	Activity	<i>(Networking session with variety of local business individuals/organizations)</i>
Session 4: Developing Coherent Financial Plans	Goals	The mechanics of simple financial plans Answer questions like “What is my revenue model?” and “What are my COGS?” Budgeting / projections Setting up systems to track financial results
	Activity	<i>(Walk through profit and loss statement template)</i> <i>(Review first attempts at simple financial models)</i>

Session # / Title		Focus Areas
Session 5: Understanding Customers / Focus Group Sessions	Goals Activity	Building your customer base (target customer value proposition) Communicating the value of your product / service Receive and process customer feedback <hr/> <i>(Focus groups with representative customers from local community)</i>
Session 6: Developing Effective Business Plans	Goals Activity	Structuring business thinking – business model 101 Do's and do not's of business plans and planning <hr/> <i>(Work with mentors to develop business model canvas)</i> <i>(Revisit financials to reflect business model changes / evolution)</i>
Session 7: Promoting Yourself and Your Product / Service	Goals Activity	Etiquette and professional standards Learning about self-presentation and self-promotion Developing formal and informal presentation skills <hr/> <i>(Two presentations – formal and informal – with feedback from mentors / peers)</i> <i>(Review and assess videotaped presentations)</i>
Session 8: Practice with Lenders / Mock Loan Interview	Goals Activity	Prepare for the process of asking for loans Strengthen ability to make effective cases to potential lenders <hr/> <i>(Practice "loan application" interview with lender)</i>
Session 9: Building Entrepreneurial Networks	Goals Activity	Introduce importance of social capital Understand how to develop strategic relationships and partnerships <hr/> <i>(Who, what, how exercise – reflect on how social capital led to a past triumph)</i> <i>(Networking targets and plan – next 60 days)</i>
Session 10: Negotiating Moments	Goals Activity	Introduce importance of (formal and informal) negotiating with confidence Tactics and tools to leverage during negotiations (BATNA, etc.) Key application of negotiations in your personal life along with business venture <hr/> <i>(Practice negotiations with peers and mentors- simulations)</i>
Session 11: Navigating Legal Issues	Goals Activity	Introduction to basic legal issues that start-ups face How to go about addressing legal issues / mitigating risk (personal and business) <hr/> <i>(Working sessions / Q&A with lawyers and advanced law school students)</i>
Session 12: Applying for Loans / Final Mock Loan Interview	Goals Activity	Fine tuning lender interview / pitch (business plan, financials, loan ask) Determine which entrepreneurs receive what shares of the guaranteed loan pool <hr/> <i>(Second "loan application" meeting with lender)</i>

Typical Session Agenda

All sessions are held weekly from 6-9pm at defined location in the community and are structured as follows:

- 6:00-6:15 – Arrival and table assignments (mentors / entrepreneurs pairings rotate weeks 1 through 6)
- 6:15-6:30 – Big Board Business Updates and introductions to session speakers / content
- 6:30-7:30 – Delivery of session content (plus exercises)
- 7:30-7:45 – Break
- 7:45-8:30 – Work with mentors
- 8:30-9:00 – Review lessons, insights, plans and instructions for next week

Peer Rating / Loan Decisions

A critical feature of any Village Capital inspired program is that the entrepreneurs participating in the program make the final decisions about which ventures receive investments. As part of the process, the entrepreneurs give and receive feedback from their peers about various aspects of their plans and progress (informally on an ongoing basis and formally through a structured ranking process conducted 2-3 times during the program). At the end of the program, entrepreneurs meet for a final time and rank the other ventures in order to determine the loan recipients.