



**ASPIRE CHALLENGE – Finding Solutions to Empower Formerly Incarcerated Individuals with Entrepreneurship Training and Access to Microloans:** Career Resources, Inc., in partnership with Re-Entry Survivors, LLC, is pleased to submit this solution to the Aspire Challenge, for a scalable program that will give returning citizens the skills and access to capital needed to support their entry into the entrepreneurial field.

## CAPACITY

**Reentry Survivors' P.R.I.D.E. Program** (People Reentering Into Doing Entrepreneurship) was conceived, developed, and delivered by **Barry Diamond**, himself a released prisoner. Prior to his conviction, Barry operated a successful small business management consulting firm that taught companies how to work smarter, not harder. Following his release, Barry developed a curriculum for returning citizens built on solid business principles similar to ones he taught to his own small business consulting clients. One of the core values of his model is "pay it forward," and his students are expected to hire other ex-offenders in their new ventures. Barry Diamond was the founder and owner of a successful 30 year old business consulting company. He started the Chamber of Commerce in his home town and was on the board of the town's Economic Development Commission, Vice-President of the Tax Abatement Commission, and the President-Elect of the Better Business Bureau of the State of Connecticut. All that ended when Barry was convicted of a white-collar crime and was sentenced to 6 years in prison. While in prison, he listened and learned a lot about the hopes and dreams of other incarcerated people. Barry was determined to put his experience and what he learned from other inmates in prison to good use. Upon release Barry founded the [www.reentrysurvivors.com](http://www.reentrysurvivors.com) website and developed the **P.R.I.D.E.** curriculum teaching formerly incarcerated individuals the fundamentals of entrepreneurship.

Supporting Barry in his curriculum is **Lucy Baney**, CEO of Access Technologies Group, (<http://www.atghome.com>), whose company's expertise is providing curriculums for classroom and online training for the soft skills necessary for people with employment barriers, including people with criminal histories, to get and keep jobs. She has done research at two Federal Correctional Institutions on the effectiveness of technology-based training, which informs her development work. Lucy's background includes 19 years with IBM, before she decided to follow the entrepreneur path of technology-based training. Among her various board positions, she serves as board chair of BATEC, the National Center of Excellence for Computing and Information Technologies, headquartered at the University of Massachusetts Boston and sponsored by the National Science Foundation ATE Program.

**Career Resources, Inc. (CRI)** is pleased to partner with Reentry Survivors to support P.R.I.D.E.'s expansion. CRI has been at the forefront of engagement efforts with the local business community to advocate on behalf of returning citizen job applicants. CRI currently provides job-readiness training for jobseekers with barriers to employment, including criminal histories, through its STRIVE programs in Bridgeport and New Haven. Also in New Haven, the STRIVE for the Future program targets unemployed, juvenile-justice-involved youth. In Hartford, the STRIVE model is used in partnership with Governor Malloy's I-Best Second Chance program, which brings a network of training providers together to serve individuals with criminal histories. All of the STRIVE programs involve case management for participants and outreach to local employers. CRI also advocates at the state level for policies that increase access to the job market for formerly incarcerated persons.

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## ENTREPRENEURIAL EDUCATION DELIVERY SOLUTION

**1. Recruitment** for the program will build on the current P.R.I.D.E. model. There are Reentry Roundtable organizations in each Connecticut city where the program has training sites; these are towns that receive a disproportionately large number of released inmates (Bridgeport, Hartford, Waterbury, and New Haven). The social service organizations that are members of the five Connecticut Roundtables refer their clients, as do parole and probation officers working for the state Department of Corrections, to the P.R.I.D.E. Program. As a partner in the program, Career Resources will have the ability to refer potential clients through its operation of the American Jobs Center in Bridgeport. CRI also manages a yearly Job Fair, with support from Housatonic Community College and corporate partners such as People's Bank, which recruits jobseekers from the ex-offender community. P.R.I.D.E. will be able to use this event for recruitment, as well. CRI is currently working with York Correctional Institution to provide job training to incarcerated women eligible for parole, and they will be able to present the P.R.I.D.E. program as a resource available to them upon their release. As part of the application process, Barry formally interviews each applicant to assess their readiness to be an entrepreneur. Part of the funds will be used to develop an online readiness assessment tool that will lead to online financial literacy assessments and training as prerequisites to the P.R.I.D.E. classroom training. We believe this will greatly enhance the readiness of each learner and increase their chances for success.

**2. Classroom Instruction** is the basis of the program. The P.R.I.D.E. program is conducted weekly for ten weeks, and concludes with a graduation ceremony. The current curriculum includes the following topics:

- Know Yourself – Are you ready to be an entrepreneur? Lose the institutional mentality; goal setting
  - Mental Preparation – Defining success, R2A2 (Recognize, Relate, Assimilate, Action), Believe & Achieve
  - The Art of Effective Decision Making
  - Business Plan – Will my business make money? Business plan components are covered; business plans are delivered and judged at this stage.
  - Legal – The state and federal forms, licenses, contracts, and documents required.
  - Human Resources – State and federal regulations; best practices for small companies; successful recruitment and retention; pay scales and payroll options.
  - Accounting – Local, state, and federal filing requirements; paying employee and company taxes.
  - Banking – Establishing a banking relationship with your local banker; company bank accounts, credit cards, establishing a Line of Credit; business loans.
  - Access to Capital – Local banks, Small Business Association (SBA), angel investors.
  - Computer Literacy – Organizing and keeping accurate and thorough records; resources for effective computer training if needed; establishing email addresses, a domain name and a website.
  - Marketing and Sales – Identify your target buyers; how to get and keep customers/clients; sales techniques; using technology for marketing and sales; social media; website maintenance; email marketing; strategies for Facebook, LinkedIn, and other social media sites for marketing your business.
  - Soft Skills – Why they are especially important for entrepreneurs; communication – written and verbal, body language, active listening, networking strategies, email tips, social media, resolving conflicts.
- Online resources and simulated interactions are available to each student as part of this module.

So far, all the product development and classroom delivery for the P.R.I.D.E. Program has been self-funded and done on a volunteer basis. The award would give Barry the ability to pay for further development, including formalization of the current curriculum; development of online resources such as readiness assessments, financial literacy eLearning courses, and business competence assessments; pay for materials distributed during the classes; and creation of a "Teach-the-Teachers" curriculum to train additional instructors who will be recruited from program graduates and others that have a criminal history. Once completed, it would enable Barry and the P.R.I.D.E. Program to scale inside the state of Connecticut as well as outside of Connecticut.

**3. Mentoring** is handled in two ways. Barry provides individual mentoring outside of the classroom and makes himself available to all graduates once they have started their businesses. In addition, students are introduced to SCORE, whose members provide free business mentoring services to entrepreneurs. Furthermore, many of the professional volunteer lecturers offer mentoring outside of the P.R.I.D.E. Program. In addition, during his many speaking engagements to acquaint P.R.I.D.E. to the business community, Barry has found several organizations that have volunteered mentoring assistance. Although many of these mentoring relationships have not been formalized, it is the goal of the organization to continue recruiting mentors and formalizing agreements for their participation in the P.R.I.D.E. Program. Successful graduates will also be recruited as mentors and trainers as the program scales.

**4. Community Connections:** Rotary Clubs and Chambers of Commerce are becoming involved in helping P.R.I.D.E. integrate the students' businesses into their respective communities. CRI's extensive community connections will enable P.R.I.D.E. to expand its reach significantly. CRI's outreach to employers has led to the development of a trust-based relationship with its connections, which has then given them an opportunity to advocate on behalf of program graduates who have criminal records. Positive experiences with these hires have caused many local businesses to revisit their policies around hiring people with criminal records, and have given CRI an opening to engage in further advocacy, such as for Connecticut's "Ban the Box" law, which took effect January 1 of this year.

CRI was a founder of Connecticut's first Re-entry Roundtable, established in Bridgeport, CT in 2007. This network has grown to include community and faith-based non-profit organizations serving people with criminal histories, state and local government representatives, educational institutions, and local employers. This roundtable was used by the Connecticut Department of Corrections during the last decade as an informal advisory board on re-entry issues. Over the course of ten years, the roundtable model has been replicated in other cities throughout Connecticut and has led to the creation of a state-level roundtable. These networks have been a valuable resource statewide for the development of best practices and the dissemination of research on the benefits of employing people with criminal histories. Reentry Survivors is a regular participant in the roundtable, and will use its network there and its partnership with Career Resources to leverage further community support.

## ACCESS TO CAPITAL

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Finding start-up capital is daunting to all entrepreneurs, but especially to those who have so little in terms of their own personal assets. The program will focus on making entrepreneurs with criminal convictions aware of the many service-based businesses that can be started with small investments, and guiding them appropriately in their choice of business sector as they develop a business model. In every case, they need to know the capital sources and the best strategies to access that capital.

**Access to micro-lending:** During the current curriculum, bankers and other sources of financing are invited to discuss loan programs. Two regional banks have an established relationship with the program as volunteer presenters as well as sources of private investment. Reentry Survivors is also in discussion with The Hartford Economic Development Corporation (HEDCO) to provide P.R.I.D.E. with a micro-loan program exclusively for released inmates and people with criminal backgrounds who graduate from the program. The program also plans to apply for small grants that can be used as matching funds for start-up loans.

**Connection to capital and funding opportunities:** The P.R.I.D.E. model trains and assists budding entrepreneurs with creating a Business Plan, which includes a Shark Tank style Business Plan presentation session. Banks as well as private investors are invited to participate in the evaluation. The program includes a networking module, teaching students how to go to Chamber of Commerce business mixers and talk to people about their business to secure contacts and funding. Reentry Survivors has developed a working relationship with a crowdfunding organization that will assist released inmates to secure funding via social media. It also partners with CRI as its fiduciary to apply for private grants that can be used to match startup funding secured by graduates.

In addition to introducing the class participants to local bankers, P.R.I.D.E. intends to formalize relationships with Connecticut Innovations, Connecticut's leading source of financing and ongoing support for Connecticut's innovative, growing companies. Presentations to solicit support and participation for funding will be made to angel investor organizations, and other investor groups in Connecticut.

P.R.I.D.E. looks forward to establishing funding opportunities with the SBA, especially if programs are available in Connecticut to people with a criminal background and minimal assets that can be used as loan collateral. This is possibly the single biggest inhibitor for this population, and if addressed can be a major boost in the ability of returning citizens to become successful entrepreneurs.