



Starting a new business is difficult under ideal circumstances. Re-entrants face financial, social and societal challenges in addition to those faced by non-reentrant entrepreneurs. However, as is true for any business, the chances of success are increased by providing start-ups with access to high quality coaching, preferably from a range of individuals with particular education skills, expertise in business fundamentals, and experience in facilitating peer to peer support. Supply Chain Visions' experts fill these capabilities in southern Maine today within ScaleUp and will provide that same successful approach to our aspiring re-entrants.

The number of women incarcerated in Maine has grown six-fold from 2002 to 2015. While the drivers of this increase is under debate, there is a strong interest in reducing recidivism among the growing population of female re-entrants, even as Maine has built a new facility to house its expanding prison population. According to Southern Maine Re-entry Center, their focus is on giving "women the skills and experience they need to successfully live as positive citizens." After opening in 2012, the facility has grown its budget and reach to help the increasing number of female re-entrants, but still lacks a program that supports the entrepreneurs in that population.

Supply Chain Visions, Inc. (SCV) has demonstrated excellence in implementing SBA business support programs within the ScaleUp America program. Within this program, our approach and expert business staff is employed across three ScaleUp areas, Roanoke VA, Portland, ME, and North Central PA. The entrepreneurial ecosystem of the Greater Portland region will receive a dynamic and creative demonstration of success from the Aspire Program, creating awareness and positive support for SBA programs within the region. Our team will use the same proven curriculum used in our three ScaleUp programs as well as provide management assistance and support, deliver mentoring and expertise for access to capital, and create opportunities to build and strengthen business connections. If awarded to SCV, 100% of the services budget will be dedicated to small businesses; see our corporate call out below.

SCV's core competency is bringing expert business consulting to business executives ranging from startup entrepreneurs to the C-Suite of Lockheed Martin. Two members of our team, Gerry Brown and Michelle Neujahr will lead the work and serve as the conduit to the rest of SCV's business experts as required. Mr. Brown has led ScaleUp programming for the past three years within the Portland region during which time ScaleUp has helped over 70 entrepreneurs grow, and built strong relationships with many local small business organizations. Ms. Neujahr is a leading business consultant and coach in southern Maine, and teaches entrepreneurship and marketing at Southern Maine Community College, where her classes include re-entrant students. This proven team has worked together for more than three years with small businesses in the region and, combined with our proven curriculum and approach, help ensure measurable success of Aspire Maine.

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There is, currently, no broadly available program for entrepreneurs which combines training in business fundamentals, peer support and ongoing mentoring and coaching beyond ScaleUp which explains its broad community support. Thus, there is certainly no program in business training focused on the particular needs of re-entrant entrepreneurs. A re-entrant who took a business basics course offered by an organization focused on helping women entrepreneurs, for example, did not feel comfortable disclosing her status to the other participants. While this is understandable in terms of the stigma attached to re-entrants, it also has the effect of decreasing the re-entrant's potential benefit from the program. A program which uses peer support among re-entrants and links the participants to both Aspire and external resources is needed to increase the chances of successful reintegration and business success for its participants.

The instruction delivery methodology tailored for our female re-entrants involves providing businesses a tailored, proven curriculum that is directly connected to the business advisory services and peer-to-peer learning workshops and roundtable discussions that will drive understanding of key concepts and their rapid implementation. Rather than a lecture-based model, SCV approaches and structures cohort meetings to adult learners, not high school classes. Our cohorts will contain 5-8 entrepreneurs and will run in the early spring and fall. Our team relies on a standard curriculum to guide cohort meetings, but successful engagement with ScaleUp participants means much more than lecturing from a book. Through three years of ScaleUp, SCV has learned how to create development plans for each participant. SCV knows how to facilitate discussions, to drive connections within the Cohort, to coach and engage rather than lecture. Our instruction includes online engagement using social media and freeware to communicate and supplement the roundtable sessions. From room setup to catering, SCV has defined the mechanics and logistics for success. The Aspire Maine program will be based on these elements.

- 1) Recruiting. Aspire Maine will work with the Southern Maine Re-Entry Center, the female re-entrant center for Maine, (<http://www.maine.gov/corrections/facilities/wrc/index.htm>) to recruit two cohorts of five to eight participants each. The Center has pledged its support in identifying and supporting women interested in Aspire, and the Aspire team will go through re-entrant volunteer training and orientation to better understand re-entrant challenges and programs available to help with re-integration. As part of recruiting, a member of the Aspire team will meet with each applicant to better understand her needs and assets. As the lead instructor at the Center said, "The battle with crime and recidivism is a full-time job and then some, our numbers are increasing on a daily basis."
- 2) Core business skills. Using ScaleUp Portland's proven curriculum, the re-entrants will receive training in business fundamentals such as market positioning and communication, accounting and business planning, in an environment tailored to adult learners.
- 3) Hands on experience in an operating business run by Lisa Parker, a ScaleUp participant in the upcoming cohort and the owner of Cakes for All Seasons. Lisa has agreed to hire and train re-entrants as part of the company's projected business growth. This paid work will both be a source of funds for the re-entrants, and will complement the Aspire business training with operating skills.
- 4) Development and implementation of a simplified business plan facilitated by the Aspire team members and other community resources. Drawing on SCV's existing relationships with SCORE, the SBDC, CEI, the Maine Mentor Network, and the Food Finance Working Group, is a critical component of the Aspire Maine program. For example, SCV has identified lawyers who can help the re-entrants set up LLCs or other business entities, and ensure compliance with tax and regulatory requirements.
- 5) Ongoing mentoring and coaching provided by the Aspire team and/or the broader support network for which SCV has become a full member in Maine.
- 6) Integration with other programs and networking opportunities in the region. This will both provide the re-entrants with business opportunities and knowledge, begin to address the stigmatization of re-entrants, and further the re-integration of the Aspire participants.

SCV tailored a recruiting process for the Portland, Maine region. We have developed a working relationship with the Department of Corrections and their Reentry Programming to aid in stemming the continued growth in female offenders by reducing recidivism within the region.

Current Reentry Programming does not cover the aspiring entrepreneurs within or recently released from the system. Programs include Certified Treatment and Rehabilitative Programs, High school education/GED programs, and job skills training for primarily manual labor fields. While these programs are effective and cover



the needs of many offenders, they do not foster or grow the ability and business management skills of entrepreneurs. The Aspire program fills the current gap in that area and is a welcomed addition to the services provided our rehabilitated persons. This “fit” is driving the collaborative relationship between the current Reentry Program managers and our team, allowing access to the pipeline of recent (past year) and upcoming released offenders.

And, because SCV’s experts are consultants, businesspeople, practitioners, and entrepreneurs, we know enough to write it down; we do not reinvent the wheel. From roundtable discussions to workshops to one-on-one sessions, our team has defined and documented our best practices. With this strong foundation, SCV can recreate successful program for Aspire, because we do not have to begin from scratch. At award, SCV will already be significantly ahead in the Aspire implementing partner learning curve.

The curriculum selected and used effectively in North Central PA, Portland and Roanoke will be refined to focus on the aspects of business critical to phase 1 businesses. The curriculum is tailored on historical ScaleUp knowledge and covers the areas identified in published research as being critical to entrepreneurial success, including strategy, sales and marketing, financial literacy, financing, and operations (including negotiations, cost take-out and personnel management). Each session consists of two parts. The first part is a class discussion follow-up from the previous week’s topic, allowing the entrepreneurs to highlight their implementations of the lessons and any challenges faced. This is structured through required reading and documenting participants’ growth plan in the specific area. The second part is a peer-to-peer discussion of a new topic, building directly on the previous discussion(s), and adding additional detail to the entrepreneurs’ business plans.

SCV’s development approach is centered around direct entrepreneur coaching. This coaching begins during the recruiting phase, as the participant is interviewed and shares her business vision. From that point, our instructors design a development plan for the individual while the individual develops their business plan. These plans typically include readings, coaching sessions, mentor/contact development, etc. and are communicated with and tailored to the participant at the onset of every coaching session. These sessions begin with the entrepreneur’s vision and help them specify the tasks and approaches needed to achieve their vision. Our instructors and coaches are entrepreneurs, who have started businesses and who have taught and coached other entrepreneurs. One benefit each participant will receive is help in identifying mentors within their professional network to aid them in their personal and business development, after they leave the Aspire program and follow their business plan.

Integrating our entrepreneurs into the local business ecosystem is critical to Aspire’s success and requires strengthening the cohorts’ social capital throughout the regional customer/supplier base and beyond. Once the internal bond is created within the cohort, SCV will promote networking outside of the cohort within distinct communities and across the larger business ecosystem. Through the use of networking, matchmaking and roundtable events, the local community will be brought to the cohort. In some cases, the cohort will venture to industry in the form of “local trade missions,” to locations where there is a concentration of potential customers, distribution partners, and strategic allies. This concept is based on SCV’s previous and ongoing successful work in the global market as a highly cost effective method of connecting buyers with producers within and across ecosystems.

Access to capital is an aspect of the methodology that connects cohort members with external resources needed for growth. These resources include both funding resources (including grants and micro-loans) and strategic partners that can invest in the firm’s growth as a direct investor or as an ecosystem and/or value chain partner..



SCV's experts are familiar with every avenue of funding, from loan and micro loan applications to presenting and supporting analytics for equity financiers and crowd-funding options, as well as specific funding sources, including foundations, which are specific to Maine. Through the firm's extensive connections, the SBA 'Loans and Grants Search Tool,' the Aspire staff will work with each participant to identify and secure the external resources required to achieve their growth plan. In doing so, SCV's connections to the financing community are invaluable.

Access to capital for previously incarcerated individuals offers distinct challenges. "Traditional" funding for most in this community frequently originates from extended family loans and the sweat investment of relatives. This culture and its underrepresentation on financial statements (along with the incarceration record) presents challenges in communicating true value and potential to mainstream financial institutions. The knowledge that SCV's staff brings to this challenge stems from our firsthand experience in the region and supporting prior incarcerated persons. Combined with our broad knowledge of small business start-up/growth and our staff's experience as loan and credit officers, SCV tailors a nuanced approach to each cohort member's financial needs. We also build profiles of local, regional, and national financiers to best align specific culture and challenges to a set of potential capital partners. Finally, our team has developed, specifically for ScaleUp, a Guide Book called "Non-Traditional Funding for Small Businesses".

During its time in Maine, SCV has built strong working relationships with the two leading microlenders in the Greater Portland area. Coastal Enterprises, Inc (CEI) is widely recognized for its innovation as a CDFI, combining a variety of financing products with technical assistance to underserved borrowers across the State. The head of CEI's Women's Center sits on the Portland ScaleUp Advisory Board, and CEI lending officers have attended financing roundtables in all five ScaleUp cohorts held in Maine since inception. In addition, CEI business counselors have been a valued source of mutual referrals for assistance to ScaleUp participants. We plan to use our close relationship with CEI to develop a program tailored to re-entrants, in which, as we have done previously, group meetings and one on ones are used to move financing forward. CEI brings a range of creative financing and technical assistance packages to the table, and its background in the food industry will prove valuable as well.

In addition, the Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments (AVCOG) has been a ScaleUp partner as a referral source and lender to ScaleUp participants. For participants in the AVCOG catchment region, we will leverage out existing relationship with their lending program to help re-entrants through the loan process.

However, having facilitated many financing transactions of varying types and sizes, providing an introduction is a necessary but not sufficient requirement for success in obtaining financing. Particularly for re-entrants, who may have credit blemishes and limited assets, closing the deal requires careful preparation of how to present the business concept, practice in answering questions from the lender, and a lot of hand holding ("Why won't (the banker) call me back? Should I leave another message?"). SCV has shown the ability to convert the banking background of its leaders, their business experience and network of contacts into millions of dollars in conventional, alternative, grant and equity financing for the ScaleUp participants, and looks forward to doing the same with re-entrants. In some ways, the difference between a \$6,000 loan and a \$600,000 financing package is just zeros.

The Supply Chain Visions staff is integrated and poised within the community to produce a successful Aspire pilot. Included in the \$70,000 award, is the same level of detailed process and lessons learned reporting we make available in ScaleUp America. We will deliver a successful pilot, enable our female re-entrants to succeed as entrepreneurs, and provide the SBA with the information needed to recreate the success.