

STARTFIELD JV: Startup Bootcamp for Juveniles

from Juveniles to Joint Ventures

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BACKGROUND: The United States locks up a larger share of its youth population than any other developed country, despite a 37% decline between 1997 and 2010. In Northern Virginia Counties, an unacceptable number of at-risk youth in underserved communities fail to develop the academic, social and economic skills necessary to succeed. Juvenile corrections facilities are extremely costly to operate, and have been proven largely ineffective in reducing recidivism. It costs approximately \$600 every night for each incarcerated youth, which averages \$200,000 for one year. There is a growing body of evidence that suggests that youth entrepreneurship programs can produce individual protective factors that increase successes and decrease problem behaviors. Entrepreneurs can be critical drivers of change and provide much needed innovative and game-changing solutions to address social and environmental challenges on local and regional scales. By identifying and pursuing new business opportunities, entrepreneurs generate economic value and create jobs.

PROPOSAL: In recognition of the critical role entrepreneurship can play in reforming formerly incarcerated juveniles and at-risk youth, Startfield proposes **Startfield JV**, a new startup bootcamp and acceleration program that targets juveniles and at-risk youth in Northern Virginia focusing on technology, entrepreneurial skills, and financial literacy.

The program will provide participants a clear pathway to channel their energy into creating productive venture while reducing recidivism. The program will also feature a community of peers, and guidance from experts-in-residence including strategic and operational support. Startfield will mobilize a robust team that is comprised of world-class technology and economic development experts with experience that includes developing top models in entrepreneurship education as well as talent development, recruitment, and retention of regional and national innovators and ICT professionals and entrepreneurs.

ABOUT STARTFIELD: [Startfield](http://startfield.org) is a 501(c)(3) local nonprofit organization focused on strengthening the local community by facilitating economic opportunities that create jobs through access to technology and innovation training to youth and young adults with the aim of lowering the socio-economic and gender barriers to technology careers and entrepreneurship. One of Startfield's notable programs is [CoderDojo NOVA](#), a weekend training program where young people learn how to code, develop websites, apps, programs, games and more. The program has been around since December 2013 and has served over 200 families in the region. Startfield also runs [Cool Code Awards](#), a regional coding competition called, which challenges elementary/middle school and high school students in the broader Northern Virginia region to create technology projects that impacts the local community. The aim of the competition is to celebrate creativity and diversity as well as to inspire and encourage kids to showcase their coding skills and these programs are made possible with the generous support of *Google, Neustar and Octo Consulting*.

ABOUT TEAM: Startfield JV will be led by Charles Britt and Thomas Debass.

Charles Britt is founder and principal consultant with Destined2Succeed, LLC, a minority-owned consulting firm which provides training and coaching focused on preparing youth and young adults for careers in the technology industry. Mr. Britt is also the Coordinator of STEM Education Outreach at Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA). In this role, he leads efforts to build collaborative

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programming with industry, community organizations, and the public-school system to develop and expand STEM enrichment programs for grade 4-12 students in Fairfax County (VA). Prior to joining NOVA, Charles spent over 12 years serving in both technical and executive support positions within the U.S. Intelligence Community. Charles continues his volunteerism and community service work as an active member of the Fairfax County Community Action Advisory Board, chair of the Fairfax County Public Schools Career & Technical Education Advisory Committee, and member of the Northern Virginia Workforce Investment Board Youth Committee.

Thomas Debass is the Founder of Startfield. Thomas is a trained Applied Economist with over 15 years of international experience in economic development, innovation/startups, and access to capital. Thomas is also the Founder and Dean of Awesome NOVA. Thomas is currently a senior career civil servant doing international development and finance work.

THE PROGRAM

Startfield JV represents a new career and technical education opportunity that introduces juvenile and at-risk youth to important workforce skills in the field of technology and entrepreneurship. Using open source processes and material developed through our CoderDojo NOVA programs, wherein participants encounter basic app development and entrepreneurship by doing it for real, Startfield JV participants will engage with a team of experienced trainers, consultants, and practitioners in an experience-based learning environment that combines the worlds of technology and entrepreneurship. The Startfield JV model will allow students to explore the world of apps and to develop business ideas, creating a pathway to potentially viable careers and businesses.

Startfield proposes a multi cohort four-weeks initiative that trains up to 60 juveniles (three groups of 20 participants). Each class will incorporate appropriate training, project preparation time, and breaks.

Startfield will work with juvenile justice centers, the Northern Virginia Workforce Investment Board, and local restorative justice organizations across Northern Virginia to recruit and identify participants for this program. Each candidate will be evaluated on their ability to pass a standardized basic adult education test, interest in technology and entrepreneurship, and commitment to the program.

All program activities will take place at the Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA) campuses. Participants will be expected to follow the generally accepted rules of classroom conduct related to being on time, side conversations, eating, leaving, and cell phone use. In addition, program staff insists that participants miss no more than one class and complete assignments in a timely manner or face program dismissal. Startfield JV is designed to expose disconnected youth between ages 18-24 to business skills in an intensive in-class and online program. Participants who successfully complete the program will obtain future employment, discipline, and will be less likely to alienate themselves from future employment and other self-gratifying decisions, based on prior behavior. Startfield will issue Certificates of Completion to all students finishing the training program.

THE CURRICULUM

Startfield JV will deploy Stanford University's open source *Lean Startup and Design Thinking* methodologies to provide an enabling environment that encourages rapid prototyping, iterative design, idea sharing, networking, community collaboration, and inclusive participation. The

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computer-oriented curriculum will allow students to learn the fundamentals of app development while the entrepreneurial training will address the essentials of successful business development, opening up entrepreneurship to students and enabling them to actually start new ventures. The pairing of a coding curriculum with entrepreneurial training offers an improved opportunity for participants to engage in group learning, focus on innovation and entrepreneurship, and possibly form a startup. The program will also offer guidance, encouragement, and access to a dedicated group of coaches as needed. The curriculum is designed to be fun and interactive, and will incorporate topics like the following into the daily training modules: *Coding Basics, Usability, Pitching, Market and Product Development, Pricing and Contracting, Sales and Distribution, Funding, Intellectual Property, Teams and Human Resources.*

Our methods are participatory, innovative and entrepreneurial. Startfield JV's lean startup guiding principles and pillars are: *ideate, code, and curate.*

Ideate | Inspiring Ideas

Startfield JV will feature a design thinking framework to help with the ideation process of the startups the participants will come up with. We plan to organize a series of startup gatherings to highlight key programs and initiatives in the entrepreneurship space. These events will showcase successful entrepreneurs and offer insights into entrepreneurship and technology enterprise building space.

Code | Writing Scripts

Startfield JV will utilize comprehensive coding toolsets that enable participants to share knowledge; collaborate and build innovative local ventures that address needs in the local and global marketplaces. Coding can open up many doors for young people and lead to promising careers in a diverse range of fields, such as computing, biosciences, medicine and more. The skills one learns from coding are fundamental to innovation and key to our region's economy. Thus, it's important for participants to be exposed to such growing field early in their young lives.

Curate | Increasing Chances

Startfield JV brings together the right people, best practices, and a checklist-oriented process to solve real world problems. Startfield JV will pair participants with mentors and/or investors in the community to provide guidance and support. We strive to increase the chances of our participants graduating with a viable, sustainable business, servicing real customers and generating actual revenue.

Some studies have indicated that entrepreneurial training among youth can change the psychological tendencies and propensities associated with business ownership. Youth receiving entrepreneurial training have been found to have significantly higher motivation to achieve, a higher sense of personal control, a higher self-esteem, are more innovative, have more personal control and higher achievement motivation. Studies have also show that actually starting a business as well as experiencing entrepreneurial education increases creativity in youth.

ACCESS TO CAPITAL

Northern Virginia has an enviable entrepreneurial culture and a track record of building new companies. Yet startups and small business owners often face particular challenges, including lack of

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access to capital, insufficient business networks for peer support, investment, and business opportunities, and the absence of the full range of essential skills necessary to lead a business to survive and grow. Previously incarcerated and juvenile entrepreneurs often face even greater obstacles to the inherent real and perceived risk that is associated with the formerly incarcerated and juveniles.

There is a high level of risk for investors, so finding the capital to start a business from scratch has been a barrier holding back many potential successes. Lack of capital—necessary for staffing, office space and service costs—is the biggest obstacle many entrepreneurs face, particularly since investors initially require a long track record and a viable product. The lack of trust which runs even more deeply for intangibles, such as internet based services, further adds to this hindrance of the tech sector. In order to bridge the financing gaps, Startfield JV will deploy three pronged strategies to facilitate access to capital: microlenders, philanthropies, and crowdfunding.

Startfield JV will seek partnership with **ECDC Enterprise Development Group**, the SBA-designated Microlender, to provide access to capital to our participants. This partnership will increase the availability of financial services to our participating enterprises. Above all it will allow participants to empower themselves by getting bank accounts and taking loans and thus rebuilding a better life for their families.

Startfield JV will also collaborate with [Awesome NOVA](#), the Northern Virginia chapter of the Awesome Foundation, a philanthropic organization dedicated to advancing local projects by awarding \$1,000 micro-grants each month. We will also explore other funding avenues from the philanthropy world.

Crowdfunding is an exciting concept for entrepreneurs who see it as an opportunity to overcome traditional access to finance challenges. Startfield JV will run workshops on how to run a successful crowdfunding campaign. We will endeavor to forge a formal partnership with **Indiegogo** or **GoFundMe** to setup a dedicated channel for our startups. In addition to capital, crowdfunding will help our participating startups increase credibility and market awareness, which could result in partnerships, sales or investment.

CALL FOR PARTNERSHIP

Since job creation for young people is an essential building block to achieving inclusive, sustainable growth, the project will pioneer an innovative approach to provide low-skilled juvenile youth with first time access to tech skills, business acumen, and financial literacy. By unlocking barriers to entrepreneurship, Startfield JV will contribute to employment generation and lowering recidivism, while also promoting young people's self-confidence and greater trust in institutions. Startfield is committed to inclusion, diversity and equity.

We invite local government agencies, private sector companies, civil society groups, and public institutions to join us in offering fresh starts for juveniles and at-risk youth in Northern Virginia through entrepreneurship and coding. Partners will form a collaborative network that fosters innovative partnership models to bring about meaningful engagement with local creatives and entrepreneurs.