



Contestant Capacity

1. Organizational Background:

Name: SOAR-C, Inc. **Address:** 7600 Veterans Parkway, Columbus, Georgia 31909

We are a minority and veteran-owned small business.

Official contact persons: Luke Ledger, President & CEO of SOAR-C

E-mail: luke.ledger@soar-cinc.com Phone: 706-992-3509

Gregory Newer, Vice President & CFO of SOAR-C

E-mail: Gregory.newer@soar-cinc.com Phone: 706-289-3916

Subject: Submission for consideration of our solution to the: “Aspire Challenge to Empower Formerly Incarcerated Individuals with Entrepreneurship Training and Access to Microloans.”

Geographical area of focus: Our geographic focus for the education of the formerly incarcerated is known locally as the Chattahoochee River Valley. This area includes the Georgia counties of Muscogee, Harris, and Chattahoochee; as well as the Alabama counties of Lee and Russell. The two major cities in this area are Columbus, GA and Phenix City, AL.

SOAR-C was founded in 2016 by Luke Ledger and Gregory Newer, two retired senior U.S. Army noncommissioned officers. Their goal was simple: Provide training to businesses, government agencies, schools and churches, to improve the performance of those organizations. Our strengths (core competencies) are training and business analysis. Immediately upon establishing the company, Luke and Greg assembled an employee team of experienced trainers from the military, firefighting, and law enforcement communities. Each member of the team possesses a strong background in leadership, training, and training development. Most of the team has worked closely with the two founders at one of several successful small businesses over the past 20 years. The emphasis of all those companies was training. The two founders, besides helping others start and nurture businesses, have gained significant entrepreneurial expertise by building their own company.

Our company office possesses inherent classroom space to accommodate 8 – 10 students. Should we require larger, however, we intend to work with local churches and/or outreach groups to utilize classroom space of sufficient size. However, we believe a class (cohort) size not exceeding 10 will be optimum.

2. Background of Management Team: Key managers and hands-on trainers involved with our execution of the Aspire Challenge are:

- Luke Ledger: President & CEO of SOAR-C; retired U.S. Army Master Sergeant, certified trainer; Bachelor’s degree, former Army Recruiter; 16 years in small businesses (training companies).
- Greg Newer: Vice President & CFO of SOAR-C; retired U.S. Army Master Sergeant; certified trainer; former Army Recruiter; More than 10 years conducting small group and classroom instruction; 15 years in small businesses (training companies); BA & MA in Computer Science; IT expert and former Director of IT services for a major division of a large corporation.
- Thomas Ray: Manager, Training Development; Retired U.S. Army Sergeant Major; certified trainer; Training Developer; AA in Marketing, BA in Business Administration (Management); 19 years in small businesses (training companies).
- Kevin Kelly: Manager, Business Systems Consulting; retired U.S. Navy Commander; certified trainer and training developer; BA in math, MA in education (teaching); three years teaching in public schools; adult education teacher; 14 years in small businesses (training companies).
- John Garzone: Manager, Computer and online training; Interactive Multimedia Expert (IMI); Former Air Force NCO, MBA & PhD in Business Administration; extensive experience in computer and online training; 35 years in training companies.



Entrepreneurial Education Delivery Solution

1. Participant Recruitment Plan

SOAR-C already possesses existing relationships within the five counties comprising the Chattahoochee River Valley area. Taking advantage of those relationships, we have already contacted representatives from local law enforcement organizations (sheriff, police, & marshal) to acquire access to former inmates regarding their potential candidacy for Aspire-Challenge training.

Our plan to recruit candidates begins with our law enforcement and correctional facilities contacts, and ends with convincing each individual potential candidate. From the larger group of formerly incarcerated, we will identify those who want more than just a job. We will seek and find those who desire to expand their horizons by becoming entrepreneurs, and demonstrate the motivation and commitment to achieve it. We don't want them merely to accept training, we will convince the candidates that they can raise the bar of their future by joining us in a journey toward entrepreneurial success. The staff of SOAR-C is comprised of experienced military and law enforcement trainers. Soldiers, Marines, Sailors, and Airmen, when raw recruits, have no idea what they can achieve. The staff of SOAR-C understands self-doubt, and how to overcome it. Our goal is to employ successful training techniques we learned while serving on active duty to develop self-confidence in our students as well as educate them. We will persuade candidates for this program that they have a very positive future; and we will help put them on the road to success by providing the training, education, and self-confidence they need. Men and women who have paid their debt to society deserve opportunities to succeed.

We have made contact with officials in local jails and prisons. Examples include the Muscogee County Jail, Muscogee County Prison, JT Rutledge State Prison, Harris County Jail, and the Georgia and Alabama Departments of Corrections. Our research indicates that no program similar to Aspire Challenge exists in the Chattahoochee River Valley. Local law enforcement and prison officials have indicated a willingness to link us with formerly incarcerated individuals. Our program will reduce the recidivism rate, a win-win for all concerned. Our contacts in the law enforcement and penal system communities provide us with a strong capability to recruit, assess, winnow, and ultimately select viable applicants/candidates for entrepreneurial training.

2. Classroom Instruction

Our approach to classroom instruction mirrors what our staff has accomplished while training hundreds of military and civilian students. Specifically, our goals are to:

- Task organize to teach at least three cohorts per year. We hope to expand to four by the final year.
 - Each cohort (class) will meet for two hours, once per week, for approximately 10-12 weeks. We will determine the exact number of classes when we fully develop the curriculum.
- Explain the goals of the course.
 - In Aspire Challenge, the goal is to prepare the motivated but formerly incarcerated. To provide them with the knowledge and tools to successfully launch their own businesses- and succeed.
 - When SOAR-C does this, we'll partner with our students, to provide them a confidence and detailed understanding of what level their entrepreneurial skills will be upon successful completion of our training program.
- Develop a realistic curriculum for our students.
 - Since all of SOAR-C's instructors have been employed by small businesses, we know firsthand what techniques actually work and have a probability of success, as well as where the pitfalls lie.
 - As experience instructors, we know how to develop and effective curriculum.
- Help our students identify the areas of business they will ultimately focus on.
 - Our experience in steering personnel, specifically military recruits, toward the best career field for them, enables us to help our Aspire Challenge students identify the entrepreneurial field, from shoe sales to animal training, most appropriate for them.
- Assign our students to work and succeed in teams of two or three.
 - The military term "battle buddy" has been a successful training tool for decades, and with good reason. By having our Aspire Challenge students use this proven technique of learning, we enhance their probability of long-term success.

- Develop and provide online resources for our students.
 - By having worked in and started small businesses, we know how to successfully do it. Therefore, we will populate our SOAR-C website with a “Resources Section” accessible only by our students. This website will include optional learning activities, as well as references and directories of websites applicable to their entrepreneurial objectives.
- Guide participants and provide models.
 - With strong connections across the Chattahoochee Valley, throughout the course, we will bring in guest-speakers for presentations and “Q&A” during our classroom instruction. These speakers are successful small business entrepreneurs in their own right.
 - Tapping the experience of our guest speakers, as well as our own, we will help our students narrow the focus of what specific area of business they wish to embark upon. Our goal is to match their inherent interest with specific paths.
 - Using our own, as well as several other successes, as models, our students will merge their interest/vision with the tasks and challenges of kick-starting a small business.
- Incorporation of the nuts and bolts of business (process, strategy, financing, marketing, human resources, leadership, effective business communications, contracting, and market/product development) is key. Over the duration of the course, we will engage the students to master the fundamentals of these essential topics.
 - Our staff has significant successful experience in each of these topics. We will leverage that experience to create a curriculum and learning environment designed to maximize our students’ probability of success.
- We know how to create viable business plans. We’ve done it for our own business as well as those we’ve worked for. A successful business plan is succinct, realistic in scope, and expandable upon realization of success. During the latter phase of instruction, our students will craft their business plans. By the end of the course, they will possess a fully developed and vetted plan.

3. Mentoring

Launching a small business is analogous to a swimmer diving off a board. If properly prepared, trained, and disciplined, the dive will, in all probability, be successful. SOAR-C possesses the knowledge and skills to prepare our students for success. They will know how and be prepared to dive. Once off the board and in the pool, however, they will still require advice and/or assistance. Upon graduation, we will assign each student one of our key employees as a “lifeline.” The student will know and have a relationship with that staff member prior to competing our course. That staff member will serve as the student’s conduit for questions, support, and advice as they embark on their road to entrepreneurial success.

4. Community Connections

As mentioned earlier, we have established a strong network of contacts within the Chattahoochee Valley. We have worked with local public schools, religious outreach programs, technical schools, locally owned small businesses, and charitable organizations. Hence, we will exploit those connections to enhance our students’ probability of success. Site visits, discussions, and advice/mentoring are only some examples of what these connections provide. We will also partner with organizations such as “SCORE” who provide business mentoring for startup small businesses.

5. Summary

SOAR-C and its team of disciplined and experienced instructors is prepared and qualified to train and coach formerly incarcerated students. We are committed to help those who desire to change their lives, and will work to improve their skills to the point where they can compete as entrepreneurs in the marketplace.

We have the qualified personnel, and we know how to develop and deliver effective training. SOAR-C possesses formidable and firsthand entrepreneurial expertise we are prepared to share with our students. We can and will coach and mentor our successful graduates, and will bring community members in to assist throughout the entire process.

Access to Capital

1. Access to micro-lending

In many cases, our students will face a challenge qualifying for traditional funding. Therefore, micro-lending may well be a viable alternative. Micro-lenders typically offer loans ranging from \$5,000 - \$70,000 to startups. The fact that micro-lenders often provide no-cost consulting aimed toward improving the credit of the startup business. Many micro-lenders use and accept non-complex online applications, make funding approval decisions in days, and have simple, fixed monthly repayment plans.

Examples of micro-lenders we will educate our students about and link them with include:

- LiftFund (San Antonio-based) offers micro-loans in the southern U.S., including Georgia.
- Lending Club
- Prosper
- Justine Petersen (St. Louis based)
- Excelsior Growth Fund. This lender deals with borrowers who typically wouldn't qualify for traditional financing due to being a startup or having poor credit.

2. Connection to capital and funding opportunities

Capital is the life-blood of a small business and access to it often determines success or failure. SOAR-C's curriculum will delve deeply into the acquisition and management of capital. Ranging from the micro-lending organizations discussed previously, to more traditional sources, we will prepare our students for the fiscal realities they will face as they inaugurate their small businesses.

Within the Chattahoochee River Valley area, we will introduce our students to institutions such as those listed below, and the programs they offer. Please bear in mind that these are examples, there are additional financial organizations we will address in our curriculum.

- Kinetic Credit Union: Offers lines of credit such as the "Now Account" where the business can receive 90% of invoice amounts and be charged only 2.5% for 30 day invoices, 2.75% for 60 days, and 3% for 90 days.
- Columbus Bank and Trust (CB&T): Is a preferred SBA lender for seven types of SBA loan programs.
- Branch banking & Trust (BB&T) and Wells Fargo are also preferred SBA lenders.

We will assist our students by providing clear information, including firsthand experience, regarding acquisition of capital. We will introduce them to the types of applications they will need to be prepared for, and how to interact with financial institution personnel. At least one of our guest speakers will be from a local financial institution.