

Contestant Capacity

Initiating Change In Our Neighborhoods, Community Development Corporation (ICON CDC) was established in June 2002 with the mission to empower residents and businesses in the City of Los Angeles area to promote social, civic, and economic development. ICON CDC has been providing business development programs since 2006 and has been subcontracted by the Economic and Workforce Development Department to operate the Los Angeles BusinessSource Center (LABSC) South Valley Region in Panorama City since 2011.

As a service provider for the LABSC program, ICON CDC has provided business development through individual support, skill-building workshops, entrepreneur training programs and technical assistance to 478 pre-startups, 357 startups (5 or less employees), and 95 operating businesses (5 or more employees). ICON CDC's BusinessSource Center program has resulted in:

- An amount of \$17,032,985 and 67 loans
- A total of 491 workshop attendees
- A total 430 full-time jobs created and 105 full-time jobs retained in Los Angeles

Although this region provides limited services to formerly incarcerated individuals, the services are limited in scope and effectiveness since services revolve around providing general resources and services. Our program aims to provide holistic skill-based services using entrepreneurship as its base. Entrepreneurship is key to formerly incarcerated individuals' success since most have the additional and usually overwhelming challenge of acquiring a job while having a criminal record. Our program through entrepreneurship would empower these individuals to independence and therefore not having to rely solely on obtaining a job and instead on creating their own job/s via a business. Additionally most services provided in the San Fernando Valley work independently and do not collaborate with other organizations.

Our program would work with other strategic organizations to be more effective: John Jay College Criminal Justice network, the Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti's Office, and LA's Economic & Workforce Development Department, to deliver a custom program to empower individuals who are formerly incarcerated and/or carry non-violent offenses to start businesses.

ICON CDC Project Lead Bios

Joshua Gonzales obtained his BA in Sociology Emphasis in Criminology from California State University, Northridge in 2011. Joshua is currently ICON CDC's Program Director and the Los Angeles South Valley BusinessSource manager. In 2009, Joshua started his career as a youth advocate for Immaculate Heart Community-Casa Esperanza where he coordinated community events, facilitated a youth leadership program for Blythe Street residents in a gang-infested neighborhood. Joshua has specialized training in transformational leadership and multicultural wellness giving ICON the capacity to serve low-income and disadvantaged communities.

Eric Lara obtained a Bachelor's Degree in Criminology and a Master's Degree in Counseling with a specialization in Career Development. Eric Lara is currently an ICON LABSC business consultant and manages ICON's internship program. He has worked at the Prisoner Re-entry Institute at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York, specifically the Prisoner Re-entry Institute, and the College to Prison Pipeline program where he assessed, participated in, researched, and coordinated several holistic programs for formerly incarcerated individuals. Eric has also worked with providing re-entry, rehabilitation services, career development, mentoring and counseling to formerly incarcerated individuals at Non-Profit Organization, UCLA Career Center, CSUN Career Center, and L.A. Pierce College.

Entrepreneurial Education Delivery Solution

The education delivery includes collaborating with nonprofit organizations, law enforcement agencies, city resources, and John Jay College of Criminal Justice's network to identify and recruit formerly incarcerated participants for the Entrepreneur Training Program, our outreach plan includes the following avenues:

- (1) L.A. County's Probation Dept. which oversees formerly incarcerated individuals
- (2) Homeboy Industries which provides rehabilitation services to formerly incarcerated individuals
- (3) Community College Partners who serve formerly incarcerated students
- (4) Non-profit organizations who service formerly incarcerated individuals will provide referrals and support City, State, and Federal public offices who work with their respective constituents which include relatives or formerly incarcerated individuals
- (5) Neighborhood councils who work directly with residents in their respective areas where formerly incarcerated individuals reside
- (6) Employment/job service providers who come in contact with formerly incarcerated individuals

Working with all these partners will enhance our outreach and recruitment exponentially by promoting and gaining support throughout the community who are in direct contact with formerly incarcerated individuals.. Additionally the recruitment plan includes a marketing campaign via mass emails, social media posts, and community speaking engagements to outreach to individuals who don't self-disclose as formerly incarcerated or non-violent offenders.

Classroom Instruction

The classroom instruction will be delivered in an entrepreneur training program (ETP) format organized in two cohorts of 15-20 participants (Spring and Fall) providing a peer to peer learning atmosphere through activity-based exercises, information sessions, and Q & A. The ETP addresses entrepreneur topics such as vision, career and professional development, effective communication, personal finance, access to capital, marketing/product development, and organizational management. Additional course elements include:

- One-on-one mentoring (Weekly office hours)
- Technical assistance support to complete a personalized business plan
- Preparing participants to create, practice and refine a "business pitch" to present at graduation

Cohort Outline: 8-Weeks Period (Spring and Fall)

Orientation: Defining entrepreneurship, Vision Clarity and Leadership lead by ICON CDC-Joshua Gonzales (Program Director/Community Development and Eric Lara (John Jay College/Higher Learning for Formerly Incarcerated). Setting expectations for entrepreneurship, leadership definition, building blocks of starting a business, vision-based activities, time management, and goal setting.

Career and Professional Development: Strength-Based, Interviewing, Resumes and Employment led by Eric Lara (Master's Degree in Career Development) + LACCD College Career Counselors. Discovering the strength-based approach, how to conduct an informational interview, self-education, and employment strategies.

Effective Communication: Diversity, Influence and Authenticity led by Eric Lara (John Jay College/Higher Learning for Formerly Incarcerated). In this session, participants learn about the diversity of the market, active listening, networking, public speaking, and the power of authenticity.

Finance 101: Credit 101, Money Management, and Personal Finance led by Ali Akhtar CEO of Imax Credit and Maria Flores ICON CDC Credit Counselor. Thorough understanding of personal credit, budgeting, and how to eliminate consumer debt.

Access to Capital: Commercial Loans, Microloans, and Crowd-funding led by Saul Ramos SBA Representative and Francisco De Vivo CEO/President of FAJ Consulting, and Ana Galvan Founder of List Ventures. Understanding access to capital: how to qualify, the difference between personal and business credit, types of loans (Conventional, Amended SBA microloan, working capital, etc.), and where to go (Big Banks, Community Banks, & responsible alternative lenders).

Marketing/Product Development: Marketing 101, Social Media, and Product Development led by Jose Cornejo CEO/President of Cornejo Strategies, Luis Luna Website Marketing & Development /Computer Engineering Degree, TBA - Head Marketing Director (Major Corporate Business). The session will focus on product development, process of ideation, build, learn, and adjust. Identifying target customers, creating content online, and effective calls to action.

Organizational Management: Effective Management, Human Resources, and Team building led by Entrepreneur or CEO. In this session we will focus on the keys to effective management including processes & systems, strategy, leadership, team-building, adaptability and human resources.

Graduation: Startup Business Pitch led by Successful Formerly Incarcerated Entrepreneur/CEO. The graduation is a celebration and a matchmaking event where the participants will be giving a “business pitch” to a diverse expert panel of successful entrepreneurs, local lenders and potential funders.

Mentoring

Participants will be mentored individually by both a business consultant and actual business owner who owns a business relating to the participant's entrepreneurial interest. Mentoring will consist of one-on-one meetings at Business Source offices between participant and his/her business consultant and one-on-one meeting between participant and business owner at actual business location. Mentoring will be developmental in approach, while at same time providing skill-based and real-world applications, strategies and methods. All business consultants and business owners will be briefed on best practices in regards to mentoring and the needs of formerly incarcerated individuals. Individualized mentoring will also be consistently provided during skill-based and strategy workshops throughout the 8 week program.

Additionally our organization has built a community of hundreds of entrepreneurs, consultants, professionals and service providers to support the participants based on individual need. The program includes a networking portion in each class and a culminating “business pitch” during graduation to gain additional support and mentoring from the BusinessSource’s entrepreneur community.

The “business pitch” will be made up of an entrepreneur panel to judge based on viability of the business plan and participant presentation delivery. The top three winners receive a marketing design package and \$1,000 seed fund to start their venture. Terms and conditions apply such as working with the BusinessSource to obtain a business tax registration certificate, applying for additional funding (as needed) and executing the business plan.

Community Connections

Participants will also be individually mentored by existing business owners, service providers, business consultants and professionals, LACC college career counselors, and civic leaders in the community. In addition to the skills participants will get they will also be able to connect with each community and build long-term relationships with the supportive community. Upon completion of program participants will be placed in internships and/or entry-level jobs with community small business owners, volunteer at non-profit organizations, enroll in LACC courses, and/or start their own business in their community.

Access to Capital

The Los Angeles regional partnership in place has enormous capability and opportunity to leverage “Access to Capital” (AC) as a key part of economic empowerment for formerly incarcerated individuals or those who are non-violent ex-offenders. The ultimate goal is to create a long-term “Access to Capital” strategy for individuals who are formerly incarcerated by utilizing microlending options (including the SBA Micro Loans) available for equipment, vehicles or working capital to achieve profitability and setting up participants to become bankable for low-interest commercial loans.

Micro-Lending Access

The city of Los Angeles and the Los Angeles region has one of the most robust and diverse access to capital eco-systems in the country. The opportunity in this agenda is in the partnerships with government and elected official offices such as the Mayor’s Office’s and SBA because they have the ability to connect these resources in a manner that is effective and efficient. For example, the Mayor’s Office will serve as the umbrella and guiding force in setting and implementing an AC agenda. The programs and organizations that operate in the space of AC tend to operate in silos and consider each other as overlapping and as a result they often fail to create equity and access to other available resources outside of their individual programs. Our access to capital agenda will bring together large banks, community banks, non-profit lenders, micro-crowd funding and other responsible alternative community based lenders, coupled with financial education to maximize access to capital in Los Angeles and the region.

Accessing capital will be introduced as a key part of the curriculum of the ETP outlined in Finance 101: Credit 101, Money Management, and Personal Finance and Access to Capital: Commercial Loans, Micro-loans, and Crowd-funding. In addition the graduation is a matchmaking and business pitch event to link participants with local lenders, SBA Microlending intermediaries and potential funders for new ventures. The regional partnership for access to capital will play a key role in the community connection piece of the program to create long-term relationships with funders. Each participant will be assessed for access to capital and guided towards the appropriate option for their individual access to capital needs.

Capital Access and Funding Technical Assistance

Besides “Access to Capital” education, ICON CDC provides technical assistance to obtain access to capital including:

- Assessing Loan Qualifications and Requirements
- Credit Counseling
- Loan Packaging Assistance
- Submitting Loan Packages
- Referrals to Responsible Alternative Lending Options
- Business Plan Creation and Projection Statement Requirements
- Financial Planning and Monitoring

In addition to the Access to Capital technical assistance, the participants will be empowered to learn the process and strategies for future funding. Our program will guide them and be supportive throughout every step of the way. Our program is holistic in scope while customized to the specific needs of formerly incarcerated individuals. By applying criminal justice best practices, mentoring, skill-based classroom instruction on entrepreneurship and access to capital, collaborating with strategic partners like community colleges, and including communities at the residential, business, and government level we can become a model re-entry program.