

Community Resources

Self-Employment Q and A: Community Resources for Small Business Development - March 2008

Individuals with disabilities who want to start a business can find assistance and support from a number of different local agencies. These generic resources usually are funded by taxpayer dollars and are available to anyone including people with disabilities. Some of them include Small Business Development Centers (SBDC), the Service Core of Retired Executives (SCORE), One-Stop Career Centers, Business Leadership Networks (BLN), and others described in this Q and A. An individual interested in owning a small business can obtain information, gain access to personal and professional networks with others who have similar interests, and locate additional business resources available within the community when connecting to these organizations.

This Q and A introduces some of these business resources that are available across the country and includes a few specialized resources as well. This is not an exhaustive list, and many communities and states have unique, one-of-a-kind initiatives that should be identified and explored through local networking. An important point to remember when contacting a generic organization is that the staff may not have experience working with individuals who have disabilities. They also may not realize that people with disabilities, particularly those with complex disabilities, can and do own businesses. In these cases, the individual with a disability may need additional support from agencies that are familiar with business ownership issues that are disability specific.

Question: What is the first agency that an individual should contact if he or she were interested in starting a small business?

Answer: The Small Business Development Centers (SBDC) is perhaps one of the first places that an individual might go if he or she wanted to start a small business. The SBDC most likely will not specialize in any particular demographic group but is a generalized and a free service for the community. SBDCs are located in most communities and are funded by the U.S. Small Business Administration, which was established in 1953. They often are located at universities, community colleges, chambers of commerce, municipalities, economic development organizations, or private companies. Typically, the SBDC will be listed in the white pages of the local telephone book, or the local Chamber of Commerce can direct an individual to the location. In addition, a link to the Small Business Development Center locator is provided under resources in this Q and A.

SBDCs know the local market, especially in small towns including what has been successful and what has been unsuccessful. Staff can provide advice related to business structure, guidance through the legal procedures such as obtaining a business license and permits, and provide links to other community resources. SBDCs may offer business development classes, provide specialized seminars for people interested in starting or expanding a company, offer individualized business counseling and technical consultations, and may house or can direct an individual to local business and microenterprise loan opportunities. The business development classes and specialized seminars offered by SBDCs sometimes require a small tuition fee. They can be valuable as professional networking opportunities. If the prospective entrepreneur does not learn through traditional means, the courses can still be valuable if the individual has the support of a family member, mentor, and/or rehabilitation personnel in accessing the services.

SBDC staff regularly consults on the design of feasibility studies, marketing plans, financial statements, and operational designs. Many SBDCs across the country have agreements with state and local Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) offices and assist individuals with disabilities on a regular basis. Other SBDCs have very limited experience with the disability system. An individual with a disability who is seeking the assistance from the SBDC should also contact his or her VR counselor to determine if there is a link between the two offices.

Question: Do you have an example of how a Small Business Development Center assisted someone with a disability to start a business?

Answer: One example is of a young man with a disability in Kentucky who wanted to grow mushrooms. At the time, there was a lawsuit that was helping tobacco farmers find other crops to grow, and this young man joined classes at the SBDC working with his counselors. The Small Business Development Center connected him with a program that was funded through the tobacco settlement. They developed a business plan to start a shitake mushroom growing company. This was the result of a direct connection through the SBDC to the classes for the tobacco farmers.

Entrepreneurs are encouraged to sit down with staff at their local SBDCs. Ask questions about the feasibility of the proposed business. The SBDC can answer questions such as: "What are the key elements in a business plan?" "Is this a good business idea for this community?" "How could I best test the idea in my community?" Then, the individual with a disability can go back to Vocational Rehabilitation, for instance, with knowledge regarding the business plan. The partnership with the SBDC could be critical to getting support from other funding agencies, because it brings credibility and expertise to the individual's business concepts.

Question: Are there other services or resources that are provided by the Small Business Administration?

Answer: Yes, there are a number of other specialty programs that are supported by the Small Business Administration. This includes the Women's Business Centers (WBCs), Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE), Tribal Business Information Centers, as well as a number of financial assistance loan programs and others. The local SBDC may house some of these programs and can provide assistance with linking to them within a given locality. Some of these are described in more detail as follows.

Women's Business Centers (WBC): The Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR) defines a "women-owned small business concern" in Part 19.001 Definitions, as follows: "Women-owned small business concern means a small business concern—(a) which is at least 51 percent owned by one or more women; or, in the case of any publicly owned business, at least 51 percent of the stock of which is owned by one or more women; and (b) whose management and daily business operations are controlled by one or more women." The WBC program is a national network providing educational resources to assist women in starting and growing successful small businesses. WBCs operate similarly to the SBDCs, provide training, and can assist with developing loan applications and identifying local opportunities. The location of these offices in the United States can be obtained by using the website URL that is listed in the Resource Links Section at the end of this Q and A.

The Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE): SCORE is a nonprofit group of

10,500 volunteers across the country who provide their expertise free of charge through face-to-face and online counseling. Today, SCORE is a bit of a misnomer, because many members are active in their roles as business managers, leaders, and owners. SCORE operates nationwide as a non-profit corporation and many resources are available online through their e-mail consultation link "Ask SCORE." SCORE resources include business planning templates, loan identification, seminars, and networking opportunities. There is no limit to the amount of times a person can "Ask SCORE" or access other SCORE services. As with the SBDCs, most SCORE chapters will not have extensive disability resources or experience, but the members are civic-minded volunteers who approach any business idea professionally, helpfully, and enthusiastically. Some of the local offices also maintain extensive libraries and have members with diverse backgrounds

Tribal Business Information Centers: TBICs are funded through the SBA's Office of Native American Affairs and offer many of the same services as SBDCs with cultural competencies befitting the local Native American community. The Office of Native American Affairs ensures that American Indians, Native Alaskans and Native Hawaiians seeking to create, develop and expand small businesses have full access to the necessary business development and expansion tools available through the Agency's entrepreneurial development, lending and procurement programs. The office can be contacted by calling (202) 205-7364.

Question: Are there any other agencies that provide services specifically to Native Americans?

Answer: Yes, another related entity is the Native American Business Enterprise Center funded by the U.S. Department of Commerce, Minority Business Development Agency. NABEC provides professional business consulting services and technical assistance to Native Americans to manage, grow and expand their businesses. Assistance extends to both tribes and individuals living both on and off the reservation. Consultation is available for all stages of business from start-up through expansion and includes services such as market research, marketing assistance, financial analysis, loan packaging preparation, procurement assistance, minority certification assistance, and business plan development. They maintain 4 regional offices that are located in Mesa, Arizona; El Monte, California; Pembroke, North Carolina; and Seattle, Washington. More information can be obtained by visiting the website listed at the end of this Q and A.

Question: There are many veterans returning home from the war that will require assistance. Are there special programs that can assist them in becoming self-employed? Where should they go for supports and services?

Answer: The starting point for many veterans who are interested in self-employment will be the local SBDCs, which commonly house related business programs and can offer expertise and counseling. The Department of Labor, the Veterans Administration, and the Department of Defense all have veterans programs. Typically, the best place to start might be for the individual to go to his or her Veterans Administration (VA) counselor. However, there are many online resources that might help the individual "get started". This includes Veteranscorp.org, Vetbiz.gov and other listed at the end of this Q and A. The Office of Veterans Business development, which is also another SBA program, should know of loan programs that are available. Another good resource for Veterans is the local One-Stop or Workforce Center that typically has a

veteran's representative, depending on the size of the community. A veteran can apply and be eligible for services under the Workforce Investment Act.

Question: Please provide some additional information on how a One-Stop Center can provide support to an individual with a disability who wants to start a small business.

Answer: With the enactment of the 1998 Workforce Investment Act (WIA), a comprehensive streamlining of local job training efforts occurred. Central to this was the establishment of Workforce or One-Stop Centers across the country that guarantees equal access to people seeking employment. Under the Act, One-Stops and their affiliates (e.g. Vocational Rehabilitation) can provide self-employment services, training, and assistance. Some One-Stops are experimenting with microenterprise and business ownership and/or have demonstration projects geared toward enhancing enterprise development. However, many One-Stops may have very limited experiences with assisting individuals with disabilities in becoming self-employed.

It is important to note that the Employment and Training Administration Advisory System of the U.S. Department of Labor developed a Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) on self-employment for Workforce Investment Act Clients. The letter was issued on February 23, 2005, and the purpose was to encourage the workforce investment system to make entrepreneurial training opportunities available for people interested in self-employment under Title I of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998. Individuals with disabilities can obtain a copy of this letter by going online to the URL provided at the end of this document. Clearly, the U.S. Department of Labor has made self-employment assistance for individuals a focused policy initiative. The TEGL issued by the ETA provides detailed information as well as additional resources that are not mentioned in this Q and A.

Question: Are there any other resources that a person with a disability should know about?

Answer: There are countless other small business resources, some with strong Federal backing and others of grassroots origin. There are really too many resources to cover in a single Q and A. However, it is important to mention the growth of microlending and microenterprise, which is making small business resources more available all the time. One national website to investigate for links to local connections is the home of the Association for Enterprise Opportunity (AEO) at <http://www.microenterpriseworks.org/>.

And, in all communities of any size there are funding and resource opportunities through a myriad of economic development initiatives and programs. Most are not advertised within the disability community and a Resource Mapping activity should be undertaken to broaden community rehabilitation program, special education, family, and advocacy connections to local sources of support and information. A search online will reveal a number of websites that can provide additional information on how to implement Resource Mapping. In addition, the self-employment projects funded by the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) are conducting resource mapping activities. Contact information for these projects can be found at: <http://www.start-up-usa.biz/sites/sites.cfm>

Summary:

An individual who is interested in pursuing self-employment may be unsure as to where to even

begin. One recommendation might be to begin with more informal supports. Some examples of informal supports include family members, friends, and relying on some of the “social capital” that families and friends build with the business people in their communities. For instance, small business owners in the community often want to help. They can be very helpful in understanding the local markets and the resources that are available. The social network can be revealed very quickly if a person just starts by asking questions. Learning from people who have already started a business can help a person find out what is available in his or her community.

Resource Links:

NOTE: The links in this section are presented in the order in which the agency or resource appeared in this Q and A.

U.S. Small Business Administration: <http://www.sba.gov/>

Office of Women's Business Ownership Entrepreneurial Development:
<http://www.sba.gov/aboutsba/sbaprograms/onlinewbc/index.html>

SCORE / Ask SCORE for Business Advice: <http://www.score.org/index.html>

Find the SCORE office nearest you: <http://www.score.org/findscore/index.html>

Examples of SCORE Offices:

Knoxville, Tennessee: <http://www.scoreknox.org/index.htm>

Spokane, Washington: <http://www.scorespokane.org/>

Los Angeles: <http://www.scorela.org/>

Austin, Texas: <http://www.scoreaustin.org/>

Manchester, New Hampshire: <http://www.score-manchester.org/>

Tribal Business Information Centers: <http://www.sba.gov/aboutsba/sbaprograms/naa/index.html>

Native American Business Enterprise Center:
<http://www.ncaied.org/native-american-business-enterprise.php>

The Veteran's Business Resource Center: <http://www.vetbiz.gov/>

The Veterans Corporation: <http://www.veteranscorp.org/>

The Office of Veteran's Business Development:
<http://www.sba.gov/aboutsba/sbaprograms/ovbd/index.html>

Disabled Businessperson Association: <http://www.disabledbusiness.com/>

Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL), U.S. Department of Labor:
http://www.ows.doleta.gov/dmstree/tegl/tegl2k4/tegl_16-04.htm

Microenterprise and microfinance agencies: <http://www.microfinancegateway.org>

Additional Resources:

Business Incubators: <http://www.nbia.org>

Business Leadership Networks: <http://www.usbln.org>

Chambers of Commerce: <http://www.uschamber.com>

National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship: <http://www.nfte.com>

U.S. Department of Labor's Small Business and Self-Employment Service:

<http://www.jan.wvu.edu/sbses>

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