



# Successful Practices for Establishing and Modifying Entrepreneurship Programs for Women: Resources for Entrepreneurship Centers & Non-Credit Programs

## Executive Summary

In 2007, the National Women's Business Council (NWBC) began to investigate how two- and four-year colleges and universities could broaden the reach of entrepreneurial education to women. The primary goal of this investigation was to identify successful practices from the U.S. Small Business Administration's Women's Business Center Program. In addition, an introductory exploration of some successful practices being utilized by two- and four-year colleges and universities or Small Business Development Centers (SBDC) was incorporated into the research. These successful practices have been used to create a practical guide for colleges as well as other organizations establishing or modifying entrepreneurship centers and non-credit training programs for women.

The resulting report, ***Successful Practices for Establishing and Modifying Entrepreneurship Programs for Women: Resources for Entrepreneurship Programs & Non-Credit Programs***, includes two components.

- The first document, ***I. Report of Findings from an Exploratory Literature Review & Interview Study***, includes the findings from an exploratory review of literature and organizational practices along with interviews of WBCs and other organizations demonstrating successful practices.
- The second document, ***II. Resource Guide for Establishing or Modifying Entrepreneurship Centers & Non-Credit Training Programs for Women***, summarizes the findings of the report into a practical reference for program designers.

The guide is intended to be a "living document," designed to be periodically updated according to new research or based on feedback from the field and practitioners.

It is important to note that this exploratory study is not intended to guide curriculum design. Any examples of training and educational programs are intended as suggestions for complimenting for-credit programming. Many of the colleges listed in this report have for-credit programs, but the focus in this publication is on the delivery of services.

### Summary of the Part One Report Findings

The review of the literature provides considerable evidence that implementing entrepreneurial programs specifically with a focus on the audience of women is beneficial. First, there is evidence that specific learning styles and learning environments contribute to inspiring women to consider entrepreneurship and for helping current women business owners attain success in their entrepreneurial endeavors. For instance, research shows that women prefer relationship oriented education and holistic approaches to learning.

Second, women encounter more obstacles than men when becoming entrepreneurs in terms of experience, financial and social capital. Education has been one of the best options for helping to close these gaps. Entrepreneurial education is successful in serving women if, in addition to academic learning, it provides training in practical skills, support services and experiential learning aimed at increasing

women's understanding and access to human, financial, and social capital.

Women's Business Centers (WBCs) have been very successful in providing entrepreneurial programming tailored to women's learning preferences and using support services. In 2007 alone, WBCs served more than 148,000 clients—an increase of 18 percent from 2005.<sup>1</sup> Women who utilized WBCs reported \$550.2 million in receipts for FY 2007 which included a \$40.8 million increase in profits. That year, WBC clients created approximately 3,300 new businesses and 8,750 new jobs.<sup>2</sup> In addition to these economic trends, the majority of WBC clients indicate that they are satisfied with WBC services.<sup>3</sup> WBCs provide successful models for entrepreneurship program design for female students and are also important organizations with which colleges and universities should collaborate when establishing or modifying entrepreneurship programs for women.

As of 2008, there are 10.1 million firms that are 51% or more owned by women, and these firms have 7.3 million employees and \$1.1 trillion in sales.<sup>4</sup> The number of women-owned businesses and women engaging in entrepreneurial activity is growing, but large gaps still exist between men and women.<sup>5</sup> It is important to support nascent women entrepreneurs and established women business owners to make sure they have the resources to succeed.<sup>6</sup> Establishing or modifying entrepreneurship centers and non-credit training programs with a focus on the preferences and needs of women in colleges and universities would increase the number of aspiring and current women business owners being served and promote entrepreneurship to currently enrolled female students who are not yet considering entrepreneurial pursuits.<sup>7</sup>

### **Establishing or Modifying Entrepreneurship Centers and Non-Credit Programs for Women**

Three common themes for establishing or modifying entrepreneurship centers and non-credit training programs for women emerged from the literature and successful practice interviews:

- knowing the target audience,
- providing support mechanisms such as mentoring, networking, and counseling, and

- collaborating or partnering with other organizations or providers.

### **Knowing the Target Audience**

Four key strategies for programming for an audience of female learners consistently are demonstrated in the literature and by WBCs. These strategies are to:

- 1) have learning environments that incorporate relationship and holistic approaches;
- 2) have "safe spaces" for learning;
- 3) have women teachers or speakers; and
- 4) incorporate experiential learning and formal support networks.

Programmers should also consider the specific needs of their local audiences, including:

- learning styles and preferences;
- cultural or diversity sensitivities, including language;
- topic and industry interests;
- location and time of programming;
- dependent care or similar needs; and
- demographics such as: age, educational attainment, work/student status, type of profession or job titles, and family/age of children

### **Support services**

Research has shown that support services can help narrow the gap between women and men for accessing human, financial and social capital. Networking, mentoring and counseling opportunities are important support services that entrepreneurship centers can provide to their students. When designing a program for current or potential women entrepreneurs, an educational institution should consider providing access to support services such as women-only networking events, classes or workshops featuring women role-models or speakers, and access to mentorship programs that provide opportunities for women to build relationships with successful role models.

### **Collaborations**

Successful practices of WBCs identified in the report provide ample evidence that colleges and universities should engage in collaborations with and leverage the resources of partners within their own campuses and in the surrounding community in order to provide more extensive programming and services. Colleges and universities that engage in collaborative

endeavors when creating entrepreneurship centers and non-credit training programs for women are more likely to be able to increase women's access to elements of human and social capital—namely access to experiential learning and formal social networks. Collaborations and strategic alliances also help prevent duplication of services within a community or region and can be leveraged when marketing the program.

Other practices important to program success include: marketing and promoting the programs to women and evaluating programs to maintain and improve them.

### **Marketing Programs to Women**

After designing a program that addresses the learning styles of women entrepreneurs, current and prospective female students must be made aware of these newly tailored elements. Programs must be promoted frequently and in numerous ways because WBC leaders and other research has shown that it takes at least three contacts for reaching and attracting women business owners to entrepreneurial centers or training initiatives.

Techniques that may be useful for marketing entrepreneurship programs to women include featuring women students with successful businesses in articles or on local TV programs; using social media tools such as blogs, message boards, and podcasts; and providing orientations to a center or program so women can become acquainted with the offerings, staff, and space.

### **Evaluating Programs for Women**

Program evaluations help determine the success of an entrepreneurship program and the impact it is having on female students and women business owners. Most importantly, colleges embracing entrepreneurial education programming for women would get the most out of evaluations that endeavor to:

- 1) learn if and how the program has met needs and preferences of women entrepreneurs, and
- 2) determine ways in which programs can be improved to continually meet the changing needs of women entrepreneurs.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of this report support taking specific steps to establish or modify entrepreneurship

training for women. The companion resource guide is designed to serve as a practical tool for program designers, listing many of the successful practices and organizations contained in this report.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Small Business Administration. (2008). *Office of Entrepreneurial Development: Annual Report, Fiscal Year 2007*.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Center for Women's Business Research (2004), *Launching Women-Owned Businesses*.

<sup>4</sup> Center for Women's Business Research, (2008), *Key Facts about Women-Owned Businesses*.

<sup>5</sup> Minniti, M., Arenius, P. (2003). *Women in Entrepreneurship*. The Entrepreneurial Advantage of Nations: First Annual Global Entrepreneurship Symposium held at United Nations Headquarters.

<sup>6</sup> Brush, et. al. 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Riebe. 2009.