

Free Help for Your Business Idea

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So you're like about 80 percent of the population- you want to be your own boss. You want the freedom and control of your own destiny that only your own business can bring.

That's great! Entrepreneurs are the reason America has the greatest economy on earth.

But what do you do next? You need help!

The "help" question is asked by everyone wanting to start a business. You have an idea that's the best thing since canned spam but how do you turn it into a business.

This article is for all Ark-La-Tex Entrepreneurs and small business owners, but it's also for all you Bankers, Accountants, Public Officials, and anyone else who is ever asked the "help" question.

The best kept secret in the Ark-La-Tex is all the FREE assistance available from our invaluable Entrepreneurship Support Organizations (ESOs).

ESOs help Entrepreneurs and small businesses by offering education and providing planning, technical and managerial assistance, and other services. They will assist in your pursuit of financing, but do not offer any kind of financing or monetary support and they sure do not have grants. There is no grant to start a for-profit business (the next column will attempt to kill that myth).

Probably the most valuable service ESOs provide is an honest critique of a business idea. Entrepreneurs fall in love with their ideas and notoriously over-estimate sales and profits and underestimate costs, expenses, and time. Entrepreneurial optimism is great, but over-optimism is deadly.

So, if you have a business idea that you want to develop or you have people ask you the "help" question, cut this out and duct-tape it to your wall for future reference.

The LSUS Small Business Development Center (SBDC), located in the LSUS Business/Education building, room BE 103, provides free one-on-one counseling, a free reference library, and workshops on important business topics. About the only thing they charge for are some of the workshops or seminars... like the Business Plan workshop this Thursday, April 27th (a business plan is a necessity and a first step). 318-797-5144; sbdc@lsus.edu; <http://www.lsus.edu/sbdc/>.

The Metro/Regional Business Incubator, located at 7100 West Park Road in West Shreveport, supports Entrepreneurs by providing subsidized rental space, office facilities, and assistance at minimal or no cost. The Incubator without walls program offers assistance to Entrepreneurs not located in the Incubator. 318-671-1050; dsimek@shreve.net; <http://www.cdconline.org/businessincubator.htm>.

Southern University's SUSLA Small, Women & Minority-Owned Business Incubator is an office space incubator also providing support, educational, technical and managerial assistance. They are located at 4000 Viking Drive, Bossier City. 318-741-2761; swilliams0131@susla.edu; <http://www.susla.edu/swmo/>

SCORE is a volunteer organization staffed by retired business people who offer their expertise to Entrepreneurs. They work out of the Shreveport Chamber of Commerce at 400 Edwards St. 318- 677-2536: <http://www.score.org/index.html>.

There are several other organizations, local and national, that offer support services but space doesn't allow listing them all here. So, if you want help, or someone asks you where they can get help developing a business idea... here's the information, duct-taped to your wall.