

RESOURCES FOR THE ENTREPRENEURIAL VETERAN



There are many resources for veterans who wish to establish their own business. Such resources fall into three areas: help with start-up training; business certification and government contracting for veterans; and financing, including small business loans. One of the best programs for training is the Institute for Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse in New York. The institute conducts four outreach programs for veterans online and also



in different cities around the country, according to the director of operations and development, Raymond Toenniessen. “We want veterans who are considering entrepreneurship to know that they shouldn’t be afraid to reach out to a program that offers training and education,” Toenniessen says. “We not only offer them training and give them knowledge, but we also equip them with practical resources and tools to overcome obstacles once they launch their businesses.” The program maintains connections with lawyers, web and graphic designers, and services to incorporate who will discount their services or even offer them free. These programs are very popular because of such support, as well as the fact that the training is offered at little to no cost to qualified veterans. However, because they are so popular, enrollment quickly exceeds available space and often veterans are turned away. Current programs offered by the institute include programs aimed at military families, caregivers, women veterans, reservists, and even a 9-day boot camp for entrepreneurs. Veterans wishing to start a business or those who may just need some additional formal training should consult their local colleges and small business centers to see what training is offered specifically for veterans. Many outreach centers offer business planning help and mentorships. In 1999, Congress passed a law that would require 3 percent of all federal dollars spent on contracted relationships to be allocated for businesses at least 51 percent owned by disabled veterans. This equals billions in yearly contracts, but the government persistently fails to meet this goal, blaming their failure on a lack of qualified bids. Nonetheless, there are federal laws that give preferential consideration to bids from disabled veterans, and many states have followed in their footsteps. There are many online sites that offer help and support for contracting with the government. VetBiz.gov is a division of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Here, veterans who would like to open their own business can get help registering their businesses, as well gain access to a small business database where they can find entrepreneurial opportunities. Many large corporations have set similar goals for working with companies owned by veterans under their supplier-diversity programs. Often corporations seek out business opportunities with businesses owned by veterans, says Chris Hale, who is president of the National Veteran-Owned Business Association. This is a private membership organization that helps veterans find jobs and helps them become business owners. There are also several franchise companies that will help veterans buy franchises at a discount.