



**HOUSTON COMMUNITY COLLEGE**





# Entrepreneurship at Houston Community College

## A Timely Initiative Built by Seizing Opportunities, Building Relationships, and Hiring Talented Staff

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**T**ransforming an idea or a vision into a business is neither linear nor easy. Right from the start, the challenge is to integrate many complex factors such as: Is the business idea a real opportunity or just a good idea? When to start? How to fund? Launching a business includes many unexpected twists and turns that surprise even the best plans. The passage into business is always filled with risk, regardless of the category, service, or product. Risk is the one element that all businesses share. However, having the right knowledge and tools mitigates the risk and that's where education and training make an important difference.

At Houston Community College, a rich menu of resources and programs are available for small business owners and students. HCC proudly hosts the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses Program, the Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA), the HCC Newspring Business Plan Competition, the Idea Pitch Competition, the Teen Entrepreneur College, bilingual business classes in Spanish and Mandarin, and a diverse blend of workshops and seminars that are cosponsored with the local business community.

HCC has also developed key strategic partnerships to support businesses through certifications, funding, networking, and growth opportunities. Business success is built on these partnerships because they support the collective vision to promote the economic growth of Houston.

### Houston Community College has active partnerships with many local organizations including:

- Houston Office of the Small Business Administration (SBA)
- Houston Area Urban League (HAUL)
- Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE)
- Houston Minority Supplier Development Council (HMS-DC)
- Women's Business Enterprise Alliance (WBEA)
- Houston District Export Council (DEC)
- University of Houston-Small Business Development Cen-

ter (SBDC)

- City of Houston Office of Business Opportunity (OBO)
- Cámara de Empresarios Latinos de Houston
- Houston Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
- Asian Chamber of Commerce - Houston
- Indo-American Chamber of Commerce of Greater Houston
- Greater Houston Black Chamber
- Greater Houston LGBT Chamber of Commerce
- METRO
- Port of Houston
- Small Business Today Magazine
- TIE (The Indus Entrepreneurs)
- Good Works Houston
- National Association of Minority Contractors (NAMC)
- University of Houston - Procurement Technical Assistance Center (PTAC)

Warren Winston, Vanessa Zambrano and Chris Bilton attend Houston MBDA's Lunchtime Forum - "Killer Contract Clauses"  
*Photo Courtesy of HCC.*





Goldman Sachs Executive Director Cathy Landry and Program Coordinator Mishe Lamshing. *Photo Courtesy of HCC.*

- The Kingdom Builders' Center
- LiftFund, Inc.
- Houston Contractors Association
- Houston Super Bowl Host Committee
- Houston First Corporation

These partners regularly participate as cosponsors, panel presenters, and vendor agencies in the HCC-Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses Program, Minority Business Development Agency events, the Business Plan Competition, and college-sponsored business programs and workshops.

Tim Jeffcoat, Houston District Director of the Office of Small Business Administration comments, "Through the partnership with the Houston Office of the Small Business Administration (SBA) and HCC, we are able to reach more businesses and serve them better!"

#### The partnership with the Houston SBA has created many opportunities and events that have included:

- HCC enthusiastically welcomed Maria Contreras-Sweet who is the SBA Administrator and a member of President Obama's cabinet. Ms. Contreras discussed recent national business initiatives with a group of Houston business leaders.
- SBA Regional Administrator, Yolanda Olivarez also met with key leaders in support of the small business community.
- HCC, in collaboration with the Houston SBA, sponsored the annual SBA InnovateHer Business Challenge Competition for women business owners who competed with ideas and products to impact and improve the lives of women and families.
- A cosponsored conference titled ChallengeHer attracted 230 small women owned business who learned about business opportunities in Federal Contracting.
- The HCC partnership with SCORE produced 17 workshops at HCC campuses with a total of 715 attendees. According

to Beth Shapiro, SCORE Southwest Region Vice President, "This year we will well surpass 715 attendees. Our workshops attract over 52 participants! Just goes to show how partnerships work together!"

#### The entrepreneurial programs at HCC began nine years ago and involved three key ingredients that all successful businesses share:

1. Seizing opportunities quickly.
2. Building solid relationships.
3. Hiring talented staff.

The very first opportunity began with a grant application with the U.S. Department of Education to create an "Export Academy". HCC won the grant and successfully offered eight continuing education courses to several hundred small business owners.

The Houston Chronicle business section headline announcement, "HCC Teaches Exporting to Small Businesses," attracted businesses to HCC.

What followed next was the beginning of entrepreneurship. Dr. Zachary Hodges, President of HCC was invited to meet with Spring Branch community leaders, including Robert Westheimer, President of Newspring, Inc. Together they discussed ways to revitalize the Spring Branch community; and thus the HCC/Newspring Business Plan Competition was born. "The key to our success was my willingness to say, "Yes" to the entrepreneurial community who was willing to partner and coach future business owners. I'm so proud to have been part of developing the foundation for HCC's entrepreneurial programs," comments Dr. Zachary Hodges.

Today, the competition is in its ninth year, annually training 25 teams of new and aspiring businesses how to grow their enterprise. The competition is an excellent example of the deep and committed relationship between HCC and Newspring Inc. Together these organizations are growing and strengthening Houston businesses.





Sandra Louvier, Director of the Center for Entrepreneurship at NW College adds, “It is deeply rewarding to see how our entrepreneurs’ goals and plans are propelled forward during our three-month competition. The end result is that any contestant that completes the competition comes out a winner; thanks to this priceless collaboration between education and the business community.”

In 2010, HCC won the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses Program and began offering classes in 2011. To date, the program has graduated 452 small business owners; 66 percent of the participants have increased their revenue; and 52 percent have created new jobs just six months following graduation.

Over the past five years, Goldman Sachs graduates have won over 200 various awards and recognitions in the small business arena from local news features, magazine covers, to winning awards such as Retailer of the Year, NAWBO Women Business Owner, and most recently the 2015 SCORE Young Entrepreneur of the Year.

Award winning Three Brothers Bakery co-owner, Janice Jucker reflected on the impact of the Goldman Sachs Program. Jucker says, “It was the best thing since sliced bread! I didn’t

realize the importance of people from the perspective that our business creates jobs that support families and how vital that is to our community. I love it when my staff tells me they really like to work in our business because it’s also a family.”

The Houston Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses faculty and staff are also repeatedly acknowledged for their expertise and innovation through awards and invitations to make national presentations and to participate in the National Goldman Sachs Program at Babson College.

“I am proud that HCC has one of the best programs in the country because of the quality of our faculty and staff,” said Executive Director, Cathy Landry.

In 2013, HCC won the Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA) Grant that enabled HCC to focus specifically on minority owned businesses through access to contracts and financing. The results have been impressive and the Houston/HCC-MBDA Agency earned an “Outstanding” rating in each of the three years of the grant by meeting and exceeding the metrics established by the Department of Commerce. The MBDA staff has facilitated \$192 million in contracts, \$186 million in financing, served 161 clients, and created 276 jobs!

MBDA staff members, Mark Praigg, Maya Durnovo, Chris Bilton and Warren Winston at the Salute to Minorities luncheon in July 2015  
*Photo Courtesy of HCC.*



Chris Bilton, Director of the Houston MBDA Business Center, summed up the program, “If we continue to successfully assist our clients with growth opportunities, we will change the conversation from firms hiring minority businesses to meet their diversity numbers to firms hiring these companies because they are capable and provide exceptional services. That’s when our mission of parity and equity will be achieved.”

The MBDA Agency sponsors regular events such as monthly “Subs & Sandwiches” to keep minority owned businesses up-to-date on current opportunities with large contractors. MBDA also collaborates with the Houston Office of the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) to offer a broad range of workshops to meet local business needs. They include:

- The White House-sponsored American Supplier Initiative, a business matchmaking event with the Houston SBA that drew 340 small businesses for one-on-one interviews with large contractors.
- The LGBT Business Builder Workshop, which is designed to remove barriers and to increase access to strategic growth opportunities for LGBT business owners in America.

- A Lender/Borrower Matchmaking Event for small businesses to pitch financing needs to multiple lenders in one-on-one 15 minute sessions and learn about lending requirements as well as access to business advisory services through SCORE, the Small Business Development Center (SBDC), and the Women’s Business Center (WBC).
- The Salute to Minorities in Construction Awards Luncheon held annually that honors minority-owned construction firms and the advocates and organizations that support them.

The exemplary work performed by the MBDA won them a renewal grant for an additional five years from 2016 through 2021 from the U.S. Department of Commerce.

HCC developed the Teen Entrepreneur College, a business program designed for high school students. The program provides dual credit and mirrors many of the elements of the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses Program. High School students have an opportunity to explore business opportunities, discover the essentials of leading a business, and then develop their own plan while working with a business mentor. Many of

Rita Reed, Mishe Lamshing, Maya Durnovo, Liz Lara Carreno and Terri Almandarez at the graduation of Goldman Sachs Cohort 14.  
*Photo Courtesy of HCC.*





the Goldman Sachs graduates mentor these students by sharing their experiences and expertise.

HCC introduced an Idea Pitch Competition to support and promote social entrepreneurship. The competition is designed to encourage HCC students to explore innovative approaches to answer pressing societal needs and to foster an atmosphere of social dialogue. Students submit ideas that address one of five categories: education, environment, technology, health, and social issues.

According to Ravi Brahmabhatt, Director of Student Innovation and Entrepreneurship, “We are delighted students have innovative and creative ideas that have now become businesses. These are the students who will change our world!” Many students submitted ideas and some of the best include:

- HCC student Joseph Morris created ReadEng that is a smart-application that allows any text not clearly understood to be translated and summarized into layman terms in real time.
- HCC student Mohammad Almani created fundgro.com that is a crowd-funding website focused on educational institutions and nonprofit organizations looking to raise money for scholarships in the U.S. Mohammed has competed in business plan competitions and plans to enroll in an accelerator program at Rice University.
- HCC student Robert Ramirez developed the idea for a nonprofit company that helps learning-disabled students discover and develop their strengths with a group of successful mentors that share the same learning challenges.

Another program offering is a 32-hour small business curriculum that is delivered in both Spanish and Mandarin to serve those business owners who learn best in their native language. The Spanish curriculum is offered in partnership with Cámara de Empresarios Latinos de Houston members and to date 150 Hispanic small business owners have graduated with certificates. Adriana Gonzalez, President, shares the following insight, “Business education is the key to entrepreneurial success. The partnership between Empresarios Latinos and HCC enables us to empower small and medium size businesses to dream big and celebrate business goals.”

The bilingual program is offered through the HCC Corporate College. Jennifer Holmes, Director of the Corporate College comments, “We are delighted to offer business owners a program that is offered in Spanish, Mandarin and now Vietnamese”

The Asian Chamber of Commerce-Houston offered the same class in Mandarin and 27 small business owners graduated with certificates. Plans are underway to translate this program into other languages.

HCC has developed a new two-year degree plan in Innovation and Enterprise that will offer students an opportunity to learn the skills to develop new ideas into businesses. The program has received approval and will be offered in the Fall of 2016.

HCC is the one-stop-shop for support and education for small businesses. Armed with education and training, risks are not only mitigated but skills and talents blossom so that businesses prosper and contribute to our community. **SBT**



For more information on how you can be a part of the great entrepreneurship opportunities offered at Houston Community College, contact:

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