

# Putting people on the Roads to business success

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Those who have recently been released from incarceration face challenges when it comes to re-entering the workforce and establishing a steady source of income. Many possess skills from previous jobs or that they have obtained while incarcerated as part of the rehabilitation process, and have the potential to start their own business, with the proper help.

That type of assistance will be available in Lynn starting the end of January, thanks to a state Community Empowerment and Reinvestment Grant that will fund a coordinated effort to provide the acumen and training needed for an entrepreneur to start a business.

There will be a 12-week business incubator course taught by Roads Consulting Group, which is based in East Boston and provides services in seven states. There will be eight weeks of instruction followed by four weeks of 1-to-1 consulting, geared to help participants finalize their business plan.

The program is targeted to Lynn residents who have recently been incarcerated or have been impacted by the criminal justice system. Those who participate will receive a \$1500 stipend upon completion.

The comprehensive program will encompass individualized coaching, specialized business seminars, guidance on registering as a DBA (Doing Business As), legal compliance requirements, and invaluable assistance in navigating critical aspects such as networking, capital acquisition, marketing, advertising, and financial management.

The Economic Development Industrial Corporation (EDIC/Lynn) applied for the grant in partnership with Roads Consulting Group, the North Shore Latino Business Association (NSLBA), Essex Sheriff's Department and Lynn Police Department. Justin de la Cruz, outreach manager at EDIC, was the point person on the grant application, with the agency awarded \$900,000 over three years.

“We are excited to bring this program to Lynn and work with some amazing partners,” Mayor Jared C. Nicholson said. “We appreciate the North Shore Latino Business Association opening their doors to this and providing important resources for those who participate.”

Those who complete the course can access free legal services from EDIC and will be eligible to apply for funding to get their business started, according to Executive Director James Cowdell.

“This program will provide a critical service that will lead to opportunities for those who need a second chance,” Cowdell said. “EDIC is pleased to partner with so many capable agencies on this initiative.”

Sheriff Kevin Coppinger, a former Lynn Police chief, said this program provides a natural extension of the skills training and overall rehabilitation that starts at the Middleton Jail and continues in the community.

“We have a saying that reentry starts on day one (of incarceration),” Coppinger said. “We provide education and a wide range of vocational training and we’re always looking for more opportunities. This fits perfectly with what we do.”

The Essex Sheriff’s Department runs the STAR program (Supporting Transitions and Reentry) in Lynn and Lawrence, a referral program geared towards reducing recidivism in partnership with the courts, corrections, and the community.

“We extend the services we provide at the jail to when they go back to the community,” Coppinger said. “We have inmates with skills who should have the opportunity for a second chance.”

The course will be led by Dr. Jose Perez, president and CEO of Roads Consulting. Perez started his own small business, a shuttle bus company, while working out of his parents’ basement, and grew it to 300 employees before selling it in 2021. Several other Roads consultants will also serve as instructors. Roads Consulting includes 21 staff who speak a total of five languages.

“We want to create an avenue for people to earn revenue by opening their own business,” Perez said. “Participants will start on their business plan the first week and by the end of the program it will be ready to be presented to obtain financing.”

The course will begin January 29 and run through April 8. Sessions will mostly be held at the NSLBA office, though a few will be virtual.

The NSLBA will provide a refurbished Chromebook laptop to those who complete the course, according to CEO Frances Martinez.

“We are proud to be a champion for this program,” Martinez said. “This business incubator will serve as a pivotal resource hub and provide the training people need to be successful in business.”

Over the last 13 years, almost 800 businesses have signed up as members of the NSLBA, which provides education and technical assistance, while facilitating business associations and firms working together to expand business opportunities. The NSLBA encourages mutually beneficial ties with the public and private sectors and serves as an advocate in the Latino American business arena.

•  **Paul Halloran**