



# growth

higher education  
job readiness  
entrepreneurship

Education and support for  
aspiring entrepreneurs  
and highly motivated  
individuals preparing for  
the new job possibilities in  
an emerging economy



## Introduction

The Phoenix Ventures Project (PVP) is based on the belief that, “employment with a true living wage is a primary key to breaking the cycle of incarceration.” The biggest challenges facing individuals reentering society is finding and maintaining stable employment. Weak work histories, poor social networks, limited education, and lack of job skills, plus the stigma of a criminal record, impede the ability to obtain employment at a livable wage. The inability to find employment negatively impacts the individual, their families, and our community.

## Vision

Phoenix Ventures envisions creating a groundswell in business ventures by preparing highly trained and motivated returning citizens ready to take advantage of new jobs that will emerge in the workforce. PVP will strive to be the forerunner in fostering viable training in entrepreneurship, and in-demand jobs that will allow our participants a fair and equal opportunity to succeed. As a result, PVP will foster a new beginning for families and transform communities impacted by incarceration.

## Mission

To create a pathway to economic self-sufficiency for returning citizens of the District of Columbia. Phoenix Ventures Project will begin to reimagine small business opportunities for returning citizens by equipping them with the skills and information necessary for setting up a business. This support can ultimately reduce recidivism and strengthen communities.

## Purpose, Values and Goals

The purpose of the Phoenix Ventures Project is to address the economic and social well-being of the District's returning citizens. In doing so, PVP understands the importance of ensuring our students can meet the challenges of the digital divide, particularly in terms of access to high quality computers, fast internet, and technical assistance in facilitating our program mission and goals. PVP believes the value of economic independence for our citizens is realized through human capital investment, empowerment, technological expertise and finesse, financial self-sufficiency, and increased employment, thereby reducing recidivism.

## Philosophy

Phoenix Ventures implements a values-based philosophy that supports the program's ideals. These are the SEVEN driving values upon which the program is based.

### **ACCOUNTABILITY**

Accepting responsibility for our actions. Accountability is one of the hallmarks of integrity.

### **SUPPORT**

Excel in your work and be transformative in it. As you do that, we will be here compassionately walking beside you, providing the tools, and wraparound services to support you in your journey toward economic independence.

### **INNOVATION**

We aim to be groundbreaking and revolutionary in our approach. We are solution focused and engage forward-thinking methods, modalities, and strategies to move participants from where they are to where they would like to see themselves in the future.

### **COMMITMENT YIELDS RESULTS**

We at PVP are committed to this mission and if you commit to your personal vision we will help you achieve the results. We make this commitment because we know that outcomes are causally related to what was invested. If you also invest your time, your energy, your sweat, and your resources the results will follow.

### **EXCELLENCE**

We strive for excellence. Excellence is not perfection because life is about continuous improvement. So, do your best, work hard, give 100%, and then see if there's even more that can be done. Attaining excellence is arduous work. But if you strive for excellence the results will be worth it.

### **PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION**

This program is about transformation. To transform one must challenge everything they know. Ask yourself the hard questions, and we will ask them of you as well, but don't give up until your heart is satisfied with the answer. You are in the process of restoring your life. This is a courageous journey. It is a journey that will require vulnerability, courage, heart, self-love, and trust.

### **SELF-SUFFICIENCY**

We believe that every human being has the right to be self-sufficient, to be able to satisfy their own basic needs and the needs of their family. This is your journey to self-sufficiency. Steward it.... Steward your work. Steward your progress. Steward the vision you have for your life, and your family's life.

## Program Criteria

### MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS

To be eligible for the Phoenix Ventures Project, participants must:

- Provide proof of District of Columbia residency. In determining domicile, the courts presume that the incarcerated individual remains a citizen of the state where he or she was before incarceration.
- Provide a recommendation letter sent directly to the program from a friend, relative, or community member or organization.
- Be drug free. Commit to random drug testing while a participant in the program.
- Not be actively affiliated with gangs. PVP understands that is close to impossible to know whether individuals are involved in gangs. But as part of our curriculum we will offer prevention education for our students, and work with our correctional institution partners to help those who need guidance and support.
- Possess a high school diploma or general equivalency degree. If one has not attained at least a general equivalency degree, there can be exceptions which can provide the participant with the opportunity to take an equivalency exam.
- Demonstrate proficiency in the English language. PVP will administer a short English proficiency quiz to applicants to assess proficiency and any need for mediation.

## Application Process

- Completion of two short essay questions; resume submissions; and an interview. Interviews may be conducted by PVP staff, educational partners, Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA) and Bureau of Prisons (BOP) case management staff.
- Completion of two assessments to evaluate character strengths (e.g., Grit Scale and VIA Character Strengths Assessments). These assessments will be used to determine one's focus, interest, and perseverance in obtaining long-term goals.
- Selected participants will receive an introductory packet that includes PVP's Mission, Vision, Purpose/Values/Goals, Driving Values, Program Summary, and Business Glossary.

## Scholarships and Transfer Credits

PVP will guide participants as they begin their journey to successful entrepreneurship, or in realizing other aspirations and dreams. PVP will provide scholastic grants for eligible students to enroll in business and high-demand technology training taught by our educational partners. PVP transfer credit value will be determined in conjunction with our higher education partners (employing a Memorandum of Understanding or "MOU"). PVP should award the scholastic grants with other funding directed through this MOU.

Phoenix Ventures Project students will have the opportunity to apply PVP courses towards degrees or certifications from our partnering institutions. PVP will assist its students in transitioning to another college or university, or job training program, so students can complete requirements and receive requisite certifications and/or degrees. Credits can be transferred or applied as long as the course in question is comparable in content and scope and the student maintains a "C" grade or better.

PVP prepares students to earn official certification credentials, demonstrating competency and skill mastery to prospective employers. Being able to pursue advanced learning and skill improvement in high-demand professions improves earning potential.

## The Phoenix Ventures Way

Phoenix Ventures Project will provide classes, seminars and consulting by industry experts that will improve skills and give students the support necessary to successfully start and grow a small business and/or pursue their preferred employment track. All participants, instructors and business professionals will be held to the highest professional and personal standards. PVP will help its participants develop its business vision by providing the highest quality business management education and support services. PVP is committed to empowering participants to increase their economic security through business ownership or gaining training in one of our livable wage job training tracks. When returning citizens are successful, they create opportunities for their families and communities.

# Educational & Job Training Tracks

Phoenix Ventures will conduct a 12-month pilot program that will offer college level course work and job training (“Training Tracks”) for 50 District of Columbia residents housed in a contractual facility and/or federal prison. The goal of the Training Tracks is to create a viable path to economic self-sufficiency for our residents returning to the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan area.

# Entrepreneurial Program Track

## *Three modules in the 12-month period*

Track One: “Entrepreneurs-in-Training” will offer a college-level curriculum in business and microenterprise development. The participant will receive the basic knowledge, information, and skills necessary to launch a successful small business.

The PVP program model entrepreneurial track will be built on the following core components:

### **LEADERSHIP & CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT (3 MONTHS)**

Participants will begin the program with a 3-month character development module. This module will include the most important principles of effective leadership. Participants will identify their core beliefs, thinking patterns, and behaviors that block positive life transformation. They will be guided toward regaining the confidence often lost during life behind bars.

### **BUSINESS & MICROENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT TRAINING (6 MONTHS)**

Classes will cover the necessary basics for launching a small business and give participants the foundation they need for small business success. Students will learn how to move their ideas from concept to reality, along with learning other practices and philosophies that have proven successful in the first year of business. Participants will be required to complete their business plan as part of their coursework.

PVP’s business curriculum will employ strategies to accelerate business growth. These strategies will address marketing, cash infusion, branding, and back office functions, along

with other components for successful practices. PVP will strive to provide the highest level of MBA-style coursework that teaches business theory and application. Whether a participant is in the conceptualization phase, planning phase, in start-up mode, or ready to expand, they will be matched with the right resources to progress towards their goals. Success of our program participants is guaranteed only when they bring significant commitment, ambition, and discipline to the Phoenix Ventures way.

### **PRACTICAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP CONCEPTUALIZATION & WRITING A BUSINESS PLAN (3 MONTHS)**

As part of PVP’s practicum component, participants will put their ideas to form through conceptualizations, writing, and presenting full business plans (including comprehensive financial models). The homework assigned in class will be designed to help participants gather the basic information required in a business plan. They will work actively on planning for their own business by learning how to answer the most important questions:

- Is my business idea feasible?
- Who are my customers?
- What should I charge?
- How much profit will I make?
- How can I beat my competition?
- How much money do I need to get started?
- Where can I get the money I need?
- How do I register my business?

Our students will develop a business plan answering these questions and more. PVP students will continue forming their business concept while learning the ropes of business development, market research, finance, operations, generating customers. PVP’s comprehensive, hands-on entrepreneurship training should equip participants to write a business plan, prepare financial statements, create presentation decks, and compete in business plan competitions.

### **BUSINESS PITCH CHALLENGES**

The Phoenix Ventures way is to challenge participants to perfect their skills in sales and presentation by competing in various business plan challenges. Entrepreneurs and business professionals would be asked to review and comment on participant presentations and share their best tips for writing and delivering a great elevator pitch. We will partner with the business community to generate cash awards, and to incorporate their expert feedback in these competitions.

### **INDUSTRY TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES**

While the pandemic has truly altered the dynamics and changed the landscape in the labor market, PVP will offer our students the customized industry training needed for them to be able to compete. Our goal of training is to meet special manpower needs, while supporting job growth, new technologies, and increased productivity.

# High Tech/Occupational Training Program Track

*Two high-demand training modules conducted in the 12-month period*

Track Two: “In-Demand-Job-Training” will prepare participants for jobs in the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Area. The Training Track consists of two specified industry sector-based curricula for middle- and high-skilled tech jobs. In choosing industry sectors, PVP avoids occupations with barriers prohibiting entry by individuals who have a criminal record.

PVP will introduce high-demand job training in occupational fields, and high-salaried tech jobs, not necessarily requiring a college degree. Occupational training can improve post-release employability prospects when tailored to high-demand occupations. Adjusting training to match changing labor trends improves employment prospects after incarceration. Learning in-demand skills can not only help prepare students for new jobs, but can also upgrade current job skills. Because of the coronavirus and the related job market upheaval, these curriculum modules are designed to meet the 21st century workforce needs during this challenging era.

PVP enters the higher education and training field for incarcerated individuals with a renewed focus brought about by Covid-19. We set our students up for success and expect them to excel in our in-demand and high-tech professional career track. We will take advantage of the current increased demand for more workers for products and services, from hospitals, to delivery services, government agencies, transportation and logistics companies. We will choose training from the

following areas: Amazon Web Services, cloud computing; drone training; telecommuting management; cyber security; IT infrastructure; and business and government response to coronavirus. Computer and information technology skill development will be a priority of our students. It is PVP’s vision that all our in-demand, high-tech training will ultimately lead to a recognized certificate for our participants.

We will also be focused on offering training in high-demand green jobs in climate and solar. We will rotate and develop renewable energy job curricula in wind-turbine installation and maintenance; systems software development; electrical power-line installation; and hazardous materials-removal.

## **TEACHING STRATEGIES**

In developing our in-demand job training curricula, we structure our course offerings to make our students employable and able to secure a prevailing living wage. PVP understands that entrepreneurship isn’t for everyone. The pandemic has shifted employment trends, putting companies out of business, employees out of work, and has pushed many jobs online. As a result, PVP has shifted instruction to virtual learning. PVP will work to institute a combination of teaching methods to transform learning for our incarcerated population.

- Virtual learning—online instructions by a remote teacher through video conferencing.
- e-Learning—self-guided interactive online classes

## **COACHING AND MENTORSHIP**

Mentors and coaches will be an integral part of our core philosophy. Executive mentoring offers personal support and guidance in meeting the challenges and responsibilities our participants will face on their journey to reentry. Mentors are solid role models with the ability to hold participants accountable.

PVP will build out its corps of mentors and volunteers through partnerships with organizations like MicroMentor. MicroMentor is a global network of entrepreneurs and business experts. They are particularly skilled in business planning and strategies, marketing, finance, sales, law, management and more. We would hope mentors will continue their relationships with participants well after program completion. Additionally, PVP will utilize the services of the Small Business Administration’s local SCORE Association of volunteer counselors, advisors, and mentors.

Through these relationships, PVP will access executives, entrepreneurs, investors, and other skilled, passionate professionals (e.g., lawyers and accountants) to coach participants in their business ventures. Coaches will work with participants every step of the way to support them in developing their skills, improving their confidence and self-esteem, and facilitating their best choices. The core purpose is transforming lives. Program participants benefit from access to professional expertise, while the companies provide their executives an unusual and highly rewarding experience.



## Appendix

# Phoenix Ventures Project Future Funding Prospectus

### ACCESS TO CAPITAL

Another long-term business plan goal is for PVP to establish financing access to capital to help start-ups by offering micro-loans and grants to start and grow businesses. In PVP's plan to seek funding, the majority of these funds will be earmarked for PVP graduates as a vehicle to finance ventures.

PVP's Access to Capital Fund will also work with new and existing business owners who encounter obstacles which prevent them from obtaining financing. PVP's plan is to provide "one-on-one" sessions with business coaches to support participants in acquiring the amount of capital that suits the needs of their venture. Participants can work with their respective coaches to review business goals, create an action plan, and prepare a financial forecast that gets their business investment ready. Coaches will work with participants every step of the way to package and submit all necessary information, answer questions, and facilitate making the best choices. PVP will seek to help participants:

### PREPARE

- Build a positive credit history
- Ensure that financials are up to par
- Make sure all necessary documents are in order

### CONNECT

- Explore all financing options that are appropriate
- Learn additional sources of financing

### GROW

- Utilize Fund experts to select the best options
- Work with a coach to maximize the financial health of their business

The Fund can have loan officers and business coaches who review business plans, particularly financials, critiquing and evaluating its strengths and weaknesses. In addition to direct business lending through PVP, the program will provide a network of financing partners who focus specifically on providing small business loans. PVP recognizes that the best way to expand funding options for entrepreneurs requires building partnerships with profit and nonprofit organizations that provide access to capital, especially in challenging situations.

Phoenix Ventures expects typical loans from the Fund to initially range from \$500 to \$10,000 and to eventually increase to a maximum of \$50,000 as the program grows. All lending to small businesses at the start-up level can be based on a personal guarantee of loan repayment. The plan will be that no credit history being required to access capital. The no-credits criteria obviously do not remove the reasonable obligations that monies will be used appropriately and repaid timely.

PVP will establish partnerships with non-profit lenders (e.g., Community Development Financial Institutions Fund (CDFI)) that provide access to capital to entrepreneurs with imperfect credit history. As participants demonstrate their dependability to meet debt obligations, PVP will encourage its partners to consider further investments as the business grows. The Fund can strive to be the entrepreneur's advocate in this process. ***The program's success is the direct result of the returning citizen's success.***

The Fund can reinforce the different facets of the business management training program, counseling, and guiding participants in their journey. For example, the Fund can provide supportive business services to both potential and current business owners, including a wide range of financial seminars and workshops (i.e., understanding credit, managing debt, saving for the achievement of future business goals).

## Phoenix Ventures Founder

### Kevin Smith

From infancy until the age of eighteen, Kevin lived in six different foster homes in New Jersey. He graduated from Lakewood High School, and earned a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology from Virginia Union University, with a focus on Urban Studies. A short time after graduating from college, he was accepted into the Public & International Affairs (GSPIA) graduate program at the University of Pittsburgh in hopes of becoming a Peace Corps volunteer or foreign service officer. He plans to complete graduate coursework for a degree in public administration. He focuses exclusively on helping formerly incarcerated individuals re-enter society and the workforce as productive and essential citizens.

Although Kevin achieved significant academic and professional success, he struggled personally, in large part due to the difficulties of dealing with the circumstances he faced as a young child and adolescent. His life deteriorated, he became addicted to drugs, and he lost the privilege to live freely. After Kevin's release back into society, he returned to the Washington, DC, area where he had been living and working previously. For almost a decade he has worked as a valued employee of the Council of the District of Columbia in the Legislative Services Division.

Kevin served as an advocate for other residents while in the correctional system. He developed and managed community projects to involve residents in prison affairs and policies, making significant contributions to the residents' quality of life. More importantly, Kevin was a key resource for men, assisting them in preparing for transition to life outside the walls and back in society.

Kevin has received numerous commendations and acknowledgments for his work inside correctional institutions and in the community. The following are a few recent highlights. As a member of the DC Reentry Task Force, Kevin led the effort to get Bill 21-463, Incarceration to Incorporation Entrepreneurship Program (IIEP) passed unanimously by the Council of the District of Columbia (although it was not ultimately funded in the city budget). He was selected by the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA) and its criminal justice partners as part of CSOSA's annual *Reentry Reflection* celebration. Kevin's efforts, along with others, in rebuilding their lives is highlighted in the challenges men and women face when returning to their communities after incarceration. *Reentry Reflection* is part of a series of events in an annual *Citywide Reentry Assembly* that recognizes successful reentry and fosters a dialogue to inspire action. *Reentry Reflection*, and the *Citywide Reentry Assembly*, specifically, are opportunities to share the untold stories of men and women who continue to successfully rebuild their lives.

Kevin's efforts to rebuild his life highlight the challenges men and women face when returning to their communities after incarceration. The work is hard, but the stories of Kevin and those of many others like him demonstrate the available opportunities for better futures.



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