

Free startup and small business bootcamp for entrepreneurs

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ALTON - Alton Main Street and Chris Miller's Mission Center are teaming up to provide a free workshop series focused on helping entrepreneurs develop, test and refine their business ideas, as well as provide a space for existing small businesses to explore opportunities for new products or services. The six-week bootcamp will be led by two serial entrepreneurs, Chris Miller and Alice Layton, both of whom also serve as professors of entrepreneurship at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.



“Recognizing that startups – businesses less than 5 years old – account for nearly all net new job creation in the country,” said Chris Miller, “my team and I developed a fun and engaging process for training first-time entrepreneurs in the skills they need to successfully develop, test and launch new businesses.”

This 6-week series was originally developed for Washington University by Miller and his colleague, Alice Layton, a serial entrepreneur and educator who serves as Director of Education for The Mission Center. “When Chris and I were starting our first businesses a decade ago, this type of training simply didn’t exist,” says Layton, “and so the process we’ve developed takes all of the lessons we’ve learned the hard way over the years and essentially covers the things we wish we would have known ourselves.”

While the primary focus is on first-time entrepreneurs, also welcomed are existing small business owners interested in expanding into new products and services, as well as nonprofit leaders wanting to diversify the revenue streams they use to support their mission. “The collaboration between Alton Main Street and Chris Miller’s team is a natural extension of the advocacy and support we’ve been providing new and existing small businesses for decades,” says Sara McGibany, Executive Director of Alton Main Street. “With the success and energy surrounding the #OurAlton campaign and Small Business Revolution, this new addition to our work couldn’t come at a better time and we’re excited to partner with some of the region’s best and brightest entrepreneurial minds.”

The first 3 sessions of the series will be held from 2:00-4:00 p.m. at The Old Bakery Beer Company (400 Landmarks Boulevard). The topics for each session are as follows:

April 8th – “How to Generate or Validate New Ideas”

April 15th – “How to Find Customers for New Products or Services”

April 22nd – “How to Test New Business Models Quickly and Cheaply”

The second half of the series will be presented from 2:00-4:00 p.m. at Post Commons (300 Alby Street).

April 29th – “How to Develop and Grow a Customer Base”

May 6th – “How to Create New Business Models and Revenue Streams”

May 13th – “How to Pitch to Customers and Investors”

Space is limited and while participants are encouraged to attend all 6 sessions, innovators of all types and ages are welcome to drop-in for any or all of these free trainings. Participants who do complete all 6 sessions, however, will be awarded free headshots and other incentives.

Alton Main Street and its partners are available to help entrepreneurs and small businesses navigate any obstacles they may face. “Our goal is to provide guidance, resources and information.” said Penny Schmidt who serves on the Economic Vitality Committee for Alton Main Street, “Providing entrepreneurs and small business owners with access to this high-quality expertise enables them, and Alton, to flourish.”

Alton is fertile ground for entrepreneurs to grow and thrive. For many communities like Alton, fostering startups and small business growth has been the key to transitioning from a formerly manufacturing-based economy. The concept of fostering entrepreneurship to accelerate urban revitalization has been embraced by a wide spectrum of supporters, from artists and cultural organizations to business leaders and financial institutions.

The event is presented by Alton Main Street, with support from Simmons Hanly Conroy, the Alton Regional Convention and Visitors Bureau, Riverbender.com, The Telegraph, AdVantage News, and WBGZ Radio.