

# Going Big? Then Partner Up!



## EDITOR'S NOTE:

Fox Valley Technical College is an awardee of the NACCE-Sam's Club Shared Vision for Small Business Grant Program. With their grant funds, Fox Valley is launching a four-part, 16-hour Marketing Made Lean workshop series to small business owners in Oshkosh, Green Bay, and Appleton, Wisconsin. As part of the 2014 Shared Vision cohort of colleges, Fox Valley is targeting small businesses that have one to five employees; are owned by a woman, minority, or veteran; have existed for at least one year; are interested and invested in growth; and have revenue under \$100,000.

In the fall of 2013, Amy Pietsch, Director of the Venture Center at Fox Valley Technical College, received good news: they would be invited back for a second round of funding through the NACCE-Sam's Club Shared Vision for Small Business Grant Competition. As part of the cohort, they would showcase best practices in providing training and/or direct support services to small businesses (less than \$100,000 in revenue, 1-5 employees) that have been in business for at least one year.

Of course, as with most good news, there was a caveat: they would have to reach at least 100 new small business owners through this project in addition to the small business owners they were already serving. In a recent interview, Amy described the successes, challenges, and pivots of the first three months of implementation of her Shared Vision project: offering four-part, 16-hour Marketing Made Lean workshops to small business

owners in Oshkosh, Green Bay, and Appleton, Wisconsin.

## STEP ONE: ASSESS EXISTING RESOURCE PORTFOLIO

The first step our team took was to research existing content, to interview small business owners about their training needs, and to identify training gaps. Thankfully, we were able to identify plenty of existing resources that would meet the identified training gap need for lean marketing principles. Coincidentally, during the planning process, NACCE's VP of Membership, Therese Fellner, recommended that I attend a local GrowthWheel® training, which not only further expanded our resource portfolio, but gave us the language to better communicate with local SBDCs.

## STEP TWO: IDENTIFY SCOPE

During the planning process, we realized that we would have to go wider than our normal service area to meet the required grant numbers. In doing so, we had to quickly abandon any notion of being successful on our own. To reach our numbers, we would need our partners to work alongside us, marketing and delivering our Marketing Made Lean workshops. So we teamed up with E-Hub, UW-Oshkosh & UW-Green Bay SBDCs, Economic Development organizations, area Chambers of Commerce and professional networks to get the job done.

## STEP THREE: MARKET, PIVOT, REPEAT

So far, I can identify two major pivots we've had to make:

1. Since we expanded the scale of our project from our local area to now cover an 18-county region to really drive enrollment, we have had to use a lot more marketing muscle and take a much more integrated approach. This has taken much

more man-power than we originally anticipated.

2. The second big pivot was the scheduling of the workshops. Traditionally, we offer these types of courses in the evening. However, our small business owners requested that we offer them during the day. So timing, not price, became the number one objection, which we did not anticipate.

YES, WE ARE COMMUNITY COLLEGES, BUT WE HAVE TO START THINKING ENTREPRENEURALLY.

## WHAT WE'RE LEARNING

Several lessons have already bubbled to the surface for us:

- Leverage existing resources. If we hadn't built our curriculum around our existing resource portfolio, we'd still be designing curriculum. That's one of the best parts of the NACCE community – you gain access to a national resource portfolio. In fact, that is one of our deliverables in this Shared Vision cohort: each project is contributing towards a toolkit that the entire NACCE member community will have access to in 2015.
- Retaining customers, driving profits, and achieving results: you can't inspire others if you're not doing this yourself! Yes, we are community colleges, but we have to start thinking entrepreneurially.

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