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Entrepreneurs urged to “Come WESST”

By Cindy Wilson, regional program coordinator and trainer, WESST

Anthony Urquidez sees two types of clients at the Roswell office of WESST, where he is regional manager: the aspiring entrepreneur who walks in the door – almost on a whim – armed with little more than an idea, and the would-be business owner who arrives with a business plan and a clear idea of what she needs, whether it’s a loan or instruction in computer skills or tax preparation.



All are welcome at WESST, which serves small businesses from offices in Roswell, Albuquerque, Farmington, Rio Rancho, Las Cruces and Santa Fe. The nonprofit small business development and training organization helps clients find loans when traditional lenders have turned them down, and it provides expert advice for people who don’t have the resources to hire a certified public accountant or attorney, Urquidez said.

Since its formation in 1989, WESST has helped 1,500 New Mexico businesses get started or move to the next level.

Professional Approach

A client serious about getting help begins a WESST consultation by filling out a client intake form and getting into the group’s system, Urquidez said. The form requests income information, work history and other basic data that helps WESST experts know where to begin helping the client.

When clients come specifically for a loan, Urquidez wants to see two years of tax returns and other financial documents, as well as a business plan. “People love talking about their business,” he said, and putting plans on paper can be a big relief to the business owner who’s been keeping all that information in her head.

A well-conceived plan is a blueprint that outlines what products or services the business will sell, what experience the entrepreneur has in that or any industry, where the business will be based, who will manage the business and what licenses or permits the business might need. From there the topic typically turns to money: what the business might need to get started or get bigger and where that money might come from.

WESST consultants help startups, maturing and mature enterprises by helping owners with strategic planning, market analysis, organizational development and financial forecasting. This one-on-one consultation is a free service offered by WESST, which sets it apart from resources that offer loans but no consultation or financial assistance, Urquidez added. The organization also offers free online tools, low-cost classes in business-related skills, microloans and other sources of business capital.

Getting Schooled

WESST's training schedule includes webinars, podcasts, blogs and in-person classes.

The Business Plan Working Group, for example, is an eight-week class that helps entrepreneurs — especially beginners — create a business plan and learn how to market and manage their small business. Another class helps with social media and search engine optimization skills, and another, Marketlink, is a six-week intensive class to help merchants position and price their products to targeted customers.

WESST experts can't provide tax or legal advice, but the organization does offer referrals to those professionals. And it has resources and tools on everything from good bookkeeping practices to succession planning, general accounting and human resources.

A list of WESST offices — and a Business Assistance Request form — is available at <http://www.wesst.org/contact>.

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