



**Entrepreneurship  
Assistance Centers**

# 2020-2021

## **ANNUAL REPORT**

to Governor Kathy Hochul and  
the New York State Legislature



**Empire State Development**

Hope Knight, Acting President & CEO, Empire State Development  
Acting Commissioner, NYS Department of Economic Development



## INTRODUCTION

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Entrepreneurship Assistance Centers (“EAC” or “Centers”) is an enterprise development program with centers in local communities throughout New York State. The EAC provide instruction, training, technical assistance and support services to individuals who have recently started their own business or are interested in starting a business and also strengthen the operation of these firms during the early stages of development, generally within the first five years.

This fiscal year covers the period from July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2021. State appropriations for 2020 funded the program at \$1,764,000 for Centers to provide business training and skill development to New York State entrepreneurs. These grant funds were matched with cash and in-kind funding from other non-state sources.

The EAC program assists new and aspiring entrepreneurs in developing basic business management skills by providing business training, one-on-one counseling and technical assistance. For Centers to maintain continued EAC program status, they must meet specific performance objectives set at the beginning of their contract year. The goals of the program are to increase the formation of new businesses and strengthen the operations of existing businesses during the early stages of development with increased sales, job creation and business financing. ([reference Table 1, Page 17](#))

For more than three decades the EAC program has helped aspiring New York State small business owners turn their dreams into reality and established centers in local communities to provide instruction, training, technical assistance and support services.

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Omnibus Economic Development Law of 1987 established the original Entrepreneurial Assistance Program (EAP). In January of 2019, the law was amended, and the program was renamed Entrepreneurship Assistance Centers. The law authorizes the Department of Economic Development d/b/a Empire State Development (“ESD”), through the Entrepreneurship Assistance Centers (“EAC” or the “Program”), to issue contracts to not-for-profit corporations, community colleges and boards of cooperative educational services for development of the Centers.

Encouraging the formation and growth of small businesses is an important strategic goal of New York State. EAC programs provide intensive, community-based training, technical assistance and other related services to small business owners or entrepreneurs, particularly minorities and women, to stimulate new business development and to strengthen businesses in the early stages of development—typically from one to five years. Such assistance is especially important in economically distressed areas where high levels of unemployment and declining infrastructure further limit the ability for these young businesses to develop. Effective programs are built on a working knowledge of the needs and resources of a community and its region.

**In FY 2020-2021, the EAC program provided over 20,316 hours of one-on-one counseling and training to help clients create more than 249 business plans.**

For 2020, the program consisted of 21 Entrepreneurship Assistance Centers ([see full listing, Pages 20](#)) serving New York State. The Centers work with ESD regional offices and many local and state agencies. In addition, they collaborate with local businesses, chambers of commerce, nonprofit agencies, colleges and universities.

The Centers provide a 60-hour entrepreneurship training course, supplemented by intensive technical assistance, to help new entrepreneurs complete business plans and develop a viable business. Participants learn how to refine their business concept, conduct break-even analysis, develop marketing strategies and learn financial management skills.

The Centers also give technical assistance to existing businesses that are generally less than five years old. This technical assistance is designed to help these microbusinesses over time to ensure conditions that will support their sustainability and allow for expansion. Such support includes access to working capital and cash-flow management, general management skills, new market development, hiring and managing employees, managing growth, and sourcing available credit.

## OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of the EAC program is to:

- Increase the number of new businesses in New York State, with a particular focus on expanding economic opportunity for minority group members, women, dislocated workers, veterans and individuals with special needs;
- Expand the sales and employment levels of small businesses during the critical first five years of operation;
- Decrease the business failure rates among small businesses in the state; and
- Assist in the revitalization of distressed communities through the encouragement of “home grown” businesses.

## ADDITIONAL SERVICES

The EAC program supports the following initiatives to increase the formation of new businesses owned and operated by minorities, women, Veterans, dislocated workers and individuals with special needs:

### **Business Mentor New York (BMNY)**

Business Mentor New York (“BMNY”) is an online platform that connects volunteer mentors to small businesses and emerging entrepreneurs to help them address specific challenges and realize their full economic potential. Centers facilitate BMNY registrations for clients, assist with their mentee profile and help connect the entrepreneurs with mentors. The EAC program recognizes that all successful entrepreneurs need confidence and connections. To facilitate this, they encourage local community professionals and EAC workshop presenters to register as mentors. During FY 2020-2021, Centers reported the following BMNY results:

- 244 new mentees enrolled into BMNY;
- 44 new mentors; and
- 118 counseling matches.

### **Minority and Women-Owned Business Enterprise Support and Outcomes**

The EAC program also works closely with NYS’s Division of Minority and Women’s Business Development. Centers provide direct assistance to individuals interested in becoming Minority Women Business Enterprises (“MWBE”) certified to do business with New York State. EAC staff are trained to provide guidance in the preparation of MWBE online certification applications. MWBEs receiving services from the Centers had the following outcomes: ([reference Table 2, Page 18](#))

- 78 MWBE businesses increased sales by \$2.9 million;
- 35 MWBE businesses increased employment by 85.5 new hires;
- 2 MWBE businesses retained 1.5 employees; and
- 56 MWBE businesses secured over \$1.2 million in financing.



## **Veteran Entrepreneurship Services**

Introduced in FY 2014-2015 as a pilot program, veteran entrepreneurship services are now a permanent part of the EAC program. Centers continued to meet veteran goals and provided entrepreneurship services to veterans interested in starting a business or expanding an existing business, which includes but is not limited to: (1) counseling on the feasibility of starting a business; (2) education in established management principles and practices; (3) access to veteran business support networks; and (4) ongoing and continued technical assistance.

Some EAC locations offer customized programs for veterans at free or reduced prices for services and have also formed partnerships with many different veteran organizations, support groups, hospitals and agencies across the state. During FY 2020-2021, 25 new veterans entered the program and started 7 new businesses. ([reference Table 3, Page 19](#))

## FUNDING

The FY 2020-2021 NYS budget appropriation for the EAC was funded at \$1,764,000. Twenty-one EACs were each awarded a grant of \$73,500 for 12-month contracts from July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2021. Centers are required to match these grants one-to-one (50% or more in cash and no more than 50% in-kind). The sources of matching funds include, but are not limited to:

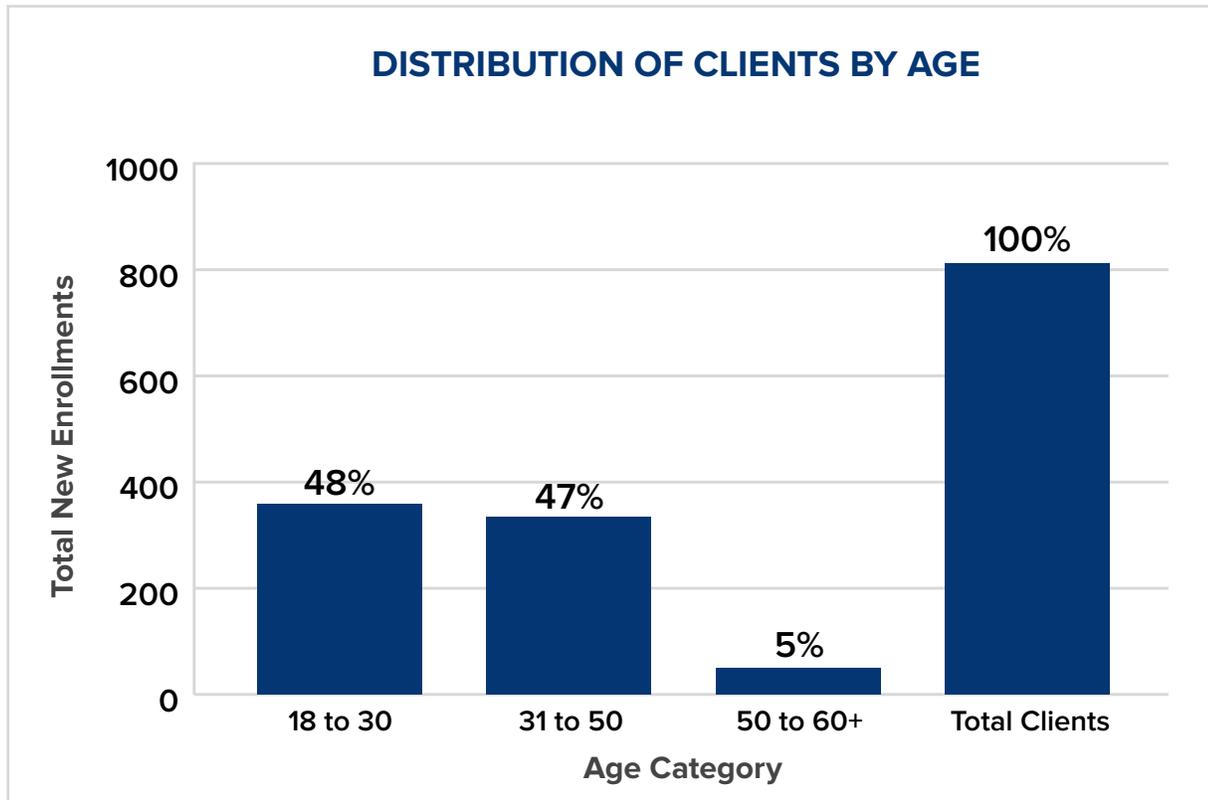
- Federal Government – U.S. Small Business Administration (PRIME);
- NYS Government – NY Business Development Corporation, Harlem Community Development Corporation and Genesee Valley Improvement Corporation;
- Banks and Credit Unions – Allegany County Land Bank, Apple Bank, Bank of America, Bank of Utica, Bridgehampton National Bank, Citibank, Deutsche Bank, Santander Bank, Savoy Bank, Signature Bank, Spring Bank, State Bank of India, and Sunmark Federal Credit Union;
- New York City – NYC EDC, NYC Dept. of Consumer Affairs, NYC Dept of Youth & Community Development, NYC Health & Human Service, NYC Human Resources Administration, and local municipalities;
- Universities/Community Colleges – Alfred University, Columbia University Law School, Dutchess Community College, Hofstra University, Houghton College, Medaille College/Buffalo, Rockland Community College, Suffolk County Community College, SUNY Broome Community College, SUNY Orange, and Syracuse University;
- Chambers of Commerce – Allegany Chamber of Commerce, and Capital Chamber Foundation;
- Local and County – Avenue NYC, Broome Triad, Broome Employment Center for Broome Tioga Workforce Development, Broome County Urban League, and Think Dutchess;
- Not-for-profits – ACCORD Corporation, Adirondack Economic Development Corporation, Anna-Maria & Stephen Kellen Foundation, Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration, Binghamton Local Development Corporation/ Broome Triad, BOC Network, Inc., Chinatown Manpower Project, Inc., Ewing Marion Kaufman Foundation, Farah Foundation, Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies, IBERO American Action League, Jumpstart, Inc., Korean American Community Foundation, Queens Economic Development Corporation, Refugee Social Services Program, Urban League of Rochester, Women’s Enterprise Development Center, Inc., Washington Heights-Inwood Development Corporation, the Women’s Foundation; and
- Corporate Sponsors – Key Boost and Build, State Farm Insurance, and Whiteman, Osterman & Hanna, LLP.

In addition, part of the costs were covered by hundreds of business owners, accountants, lawyers, marketing consultants, professional associations and bank employees who donated time and expertise on a pro bono or reduced-fee basis to help EAC clients start or expand their businesses.

# EAP CLIENT & BUSINESS CHARACTERISTICS (New Enrollments Only)

EAC’s rigorous program attracts persons with potential for success in business ownership.

## Client Demographics



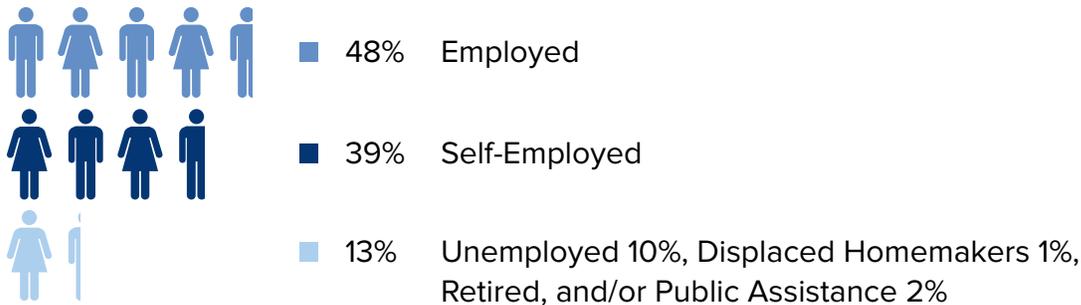
Of the total 803 new enrollments:

- 94% of clients enrolled were MWBE;
- 75% represented all woman-owned firms; and
- 77% had no business plan and 15% came in with a partial plan.

Education Level	FY 2020-21
High School or GED	25%
Trade School or 2-year college	19%
4-year college	33%
Graduate Degree	20%
Grade School/Junior High	3%

## Work Experience

Work experience captures the labor participation segment of this year’s new EAC enrollments. This year 87% of new enrollees were either employed as a wage earner or self-employed. The other 13% are unemployed representing displaced homemakers, retired, or those on public assistance. The Centers work with displaced workers or unemployed persons in partnership with the Self-Employment Assistance Program (SEAP) of the NYS Department of Labor to assess their readiness for business ownership and provide one-on-one counseling to prepare them for starting a business.



## Business Characteristics

At the point of intake, 48% of newly enrolled businesses were home-based, another 19% were operated out of a rented facility and 3% owned their facility. The remaining 30% were unknown at the time of intake.

The industry breakdown of the businesses categorized as either new or existing businesses is as follows:

Business Sector	Percentage
Service	54%
Retail	18%
Construction	4%
Manufacturing	3%
Wholesale/Distribution	2%
Finance, Insurance and Real Estate	2%
Undecided	17%

The EAC considers an entity a business when they have generated their first dollar. Of the 803 new enrollments, 34% (or 280 clients) had generated income and 42% are micro-enterprises with gross sales less than \$25,000. A micro-enterprise is a very small business operating from a home, storefront or office, which typically employs no more than five people. These businesses do not generally have access to commercial bank loans but could benefit from a loan under \$25,000. The gross business sales breakdown of EAC clients are as follows:

Gross Business Sales	Percentage of Total Clients	Percentage of Businesses Started
Had not yet generated any income	66%	N/A
Less than \$5,000	8%	24%
\$5,000 - \$10,000	1%	4%
\$10,000 - \$25,000	5%	14%
\$25,000 - \$50,000	5%	16%
\$50,000 - \$100,000	7%	20%
\$100,000 - \$500,000	5%	3%
Over \$500,000	3%	8%

## OVERSIGHT AND EVALUATION

ESD’s EAC Director provides overall program management, assists the Centers and monitors each Center’s performance. Performance monitoring consists of: site visits to the Centers, classroom audits, client file reviews, site visits to the clients and client telephone surveys. Other services provided to the EAC, include the definition of contract terms and program requirements, program orientation for new Center staff, monthly conference calls to review program direction and/or strategies, professional development webinars, and telephone/email support in planning program activities.

The Centers are evaluated annually based on specific performance objectives regarding business creation and expansion, increased sales, job creation, and business financing. A Center’s eligibility for reimbursement of expenses and continued funding are contingent on the Center achieving quarterly and annual performance objectives, along with other contractual obligations.

The Centers are required to meet all of the minimum performance standards. Centers that do not meet the minimum of at least 75% out of a total 24 standards may not receive the final 10% of the grant amount. Centers not achieving a minimum 75% of goals for two consecutive years will be subject to review for continued participation in the EAC program.

The EAC Director also convenes an annual training conference after the completion of each fiscal year to review the program’s effectiveness, compare best practices with national micro business programs as well to provide an opportunity for Centers to meet face to face and exchange best practices with each other. This is also a time to recognize the entrepreneurial spirit of the EAC clients and the top EAC performers. Winners of this year’s award for “Entrepreneur of the Year” were: Dawn Kelly, The Nourish Spot; Jennyfer Almanzar, ChargePal, LLC; Marie Saint-Cyr, Saint-Cyr Art Studio, Inc; Ewelina Zajac-Holdrege, Idea Kraft; Patricia Ejikeme, Patifco Corporation; and Steven Cruz, Omega Educational Consulting, Inc.; and for “Outstanding Performance of an EAC” were: Allegany County Community Opportunity & Rural Development Corporation (ACCORD), the Adirondack Economic Development Corporation (AEDC), Queens Economic Development Corporation (QEDC), and Washington Heights and Inwood Development Corporation (WHIDC).

# FY 2020-2021 ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR AWARDEES



EAC: **Queens Economic Development Corp (QEDC)**

Entrepreneur: **Dawn Kelly**

Business: **The Nourish Spot**

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## Trading an Executive Career to be Her Own Boss

After a highly successful career as a senior communications executive at a major corporation, Dawn Kelly decided it was high time to invest in herself—by opening a new restaurant in her old neighborhood. With her earnings she was able to finance the build-out for The Nourish Spot, attain all the licensing, and formally register her business in March of 2016. By September 2017, the doors to her quick-serve, healthy food and beverage restaurant were opened for business.

The Nourish Spot, in Jamaica, Queens, is the first sustainable health food cafe in South Jamaica. The area had long been a food desert in the heart of a high-poverty and low-income community that has been considered at-risk for generations.

Kelly initially ran all of the restaurant's business operations, but quickly realized that she had a lot to learn—and that she needed help. "I know that as a highly educated and overachieving woman, there are lots of things I just don't know – and one is not having the business acumen to be profitable." While she was able to harness her excellent communications skills in promoting her business, Kelly wasn't fluent in business vernacular—terms such as gross margins, inventory slippage—or familiar with pricing techniques and financial statements. That was when she discovered QEDC's end-of-summer rooftop mixers promoting their next business training class. The Nourish Spot netted its first profit in 2018, and in 2019 Kelly was awarded SBA microbusiness person of the year for New York .

Kelly took on the risk of owning her own business despite discouragement from her own community and family who were concerned that a health food business in an area that only had fast food options would not survive. Kelly persisted with her dream and is proving that her creative leadership and unique idea can make the business a success.

Throughout the pandemic, The Nourish Spot was able to provide community residents with access to organic and non-organic fruits and vegetables in made-to-order smoothies, salads, natural juice blends, sandwich wraps, protein waffles, yogurt parfaits and more to meet dietary or health requirements. The Nourish Spot exists not only to deliver fresh produce and custom food and beverages to the market, but also to create value within their community and for neighborhood stakeholders, including their staff.

Kelly says that QEDC was the very first stop on her journey to profitability and that she still leans on them for mentorship. She is proud of her determination to come back to the neighborhood where she grew up, and where her grandparents established a home nearly 100 years ago. She is grateful to be that beacon of light for the youth in this neighborhood. With The Nourish Spot serving as a host site for the Summer Youth Employment Program, Kelly is able to hire, teach, and mentor young people on the fundamentals of entrepreneurship, integrity, and business ethics.

Kelly embodies the true characteristics of a business leader who has not only sought success for herself but has created a path of success for the community. Two of Kelly's former interns have been hired at The Nourish Spot and another intern has successfully passed the Food Handlers License Test required by NYS law for workers who are in direct or indirect contact with food. Kelly has also become a mentor to countless fledgling young entrepreneurs in the neighboring area, using her own experience as a guide.



# FY 2020-2021 ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR AWARDEES



EAC: **Washington Heights and Inwood Development Corp (WHIDC)**

Entrepreneur: **Jennyfer Almanzar**

Business: **ChargePal**

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## **Activist Turned Unlikely Entrepreneur and Becomes a Role Model for Minority Youth**



ChargePal, a rental network for portable chargers, allows users to use its smartphone app to locate nearby charging stations and chargers available for rent. Users can charge their electronic devices on the go and return the charger to any other station. Founder Jennyfer Almanzar set out to solve the out-of-battery mobile phone problem by establishing a charging network across New York City. The app allows users to find the nearest stations, unlock a portable charger and return it to another station—where they pay for the time used. ChargePal batteries are also powered by 100% green energy. To offset the power consumed by the packs, Almanzar buys renewable certificates from generation sites using sun and wind power.

Almanzar is a first-generation college graduate with a double major in Economics and Global Studies and a minor in Capitalism. She was initially drawn to a political career, having grown up in the Washington Heights area where few people of color were in positions of power. That drove her interest and continued involvement in politics and inspired her to work for Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s congressional campaign. Almanzar credits Ocasio-Cortez for encouraging her to start ChargePal. The business idea that would eventually jump-start her journey from politics to the tech world happened during her time abroad where she saw networks of rentable portable chargers that operated like Citi bikes. Almanzar determined there was a need for a similar network in New York City and that she would make her mark in tech by creating a company to do so.

Almanzar, who had worked for a software startup in sales after graduating from college, tapped into the Business Mentor New York website for guidance on moving her idea forward. That led her to WHIDC, where she received help to work up a business plan as well as pro bono legal assistance and information on grants and funding resources. Almanzar also received assistance with developing and submitting the LISC (Local Initiatives Support Corporation, a NYC based nonprofit) grant application. Within a year between the spring of 2019 and the start of 2020, she managed to develop the company, create an app, and felt ready to finally launch ChargePal.

Once the pandemic hit, Almanzar was ready to fully focus on her company. She took out a \$20,000 loan from a commercial bank to obtain 50 portable charging stations from a factory in China and launched in May 2020.

When WHIDC was contacted by an NBC News field producer in February 2021, looking to showcase women entrepreneurs in a segment, Almanzar was eager to participate and help establish a greater audience for her business.

As of summer of 2021, ChargePal has 50 stations (10 chargers per station) and is looking to expand further in NYC.

# FY 2020-2021 ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR AWARDEES



EAC: **Hofstra University**  
Entrepreneur: **Marie Saint-Cyr**  
Business: **Saint-Cyr Art Studio, Inc**

## Entrepreneurial Young Artist Discovers Her Niche to Exponential Growth



Marie Saint-Cyr evolved her Wyandach, Long Island business—from hosting painting parties to creating large-scale murals—with purpose. She pivoted her strategy and focused her value proposition on bringing her clients’ vision to life, through murals that represent the communities she serves. Growing her business has involved guiding, supporting, and encouraging both the emerging artists that she has hired or subcontracted with and also learning how to rely on established muralists and trusted partners. Through collaboration and sharing her success, Saint-Cyr has created a

rising tide that is lifting all boats.

Ever since her family relocated to Long Island from Haiti when she was 8 years old, Saint-Cyr’s passion for art persevered, despite her mom’s many warnings about the hard life of an artist. As a student at New York City’s Fashion Institute of Technology, her vision of being a financially successful artist motivated her to push for approval to take business courses in addition to her art classes. In addition to working many jobs to help pay for college, Saint-Cyr also volunteered at numerous K-12 school art programs to augment her experience. There, she realized how little access those students had to art.

Saint-Cyr launched her business in 2019, first billed herself as a “visual arts program designer,” when she discovered that many Long Island municipalities and nonprofits wanted to build their cultural arts programs however, they had no teams to build them. During the pandemic, she organized young people to paint outdoor signs and murals to help spread COVID prevention and safety health messages. To diversify her income stream, Saint-Cyr hosted painting parties for children’s parties. Still, by July 2020 she almost quit, worried that she could not sustain this type of business.

After meeting other entrepreneurs in a Hofstra Entrepreneurship Assistance Center (EAC) Zoom session, Saint-Cyr realized she lacked specific goals and action steps for moving forward. She turned to mentorship offered through Hofstra’s Institute of Innovation and Entrepreneurship’s Entrepreneurs-in-Residence. The program’s digital marketing workshops gave her the hands-on skills to implement and develop marketing strategies for Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram and SEO (search engine optimization) to generate leads and increase revenue. Thanks to Hofstra’s EAC, she was also able to get MWBE-certified. That led to many substantial city and state contracts, including those from NYC’s Department of Education’s Summer Rising program, sponsored by the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs, City Cultural Aid, the NYC Dept. of Education, NYC Department of Transportation, and the New York State Assembly. She successfully pivoted to capitalize on these contracting opportunities changing her value proposition from ‘visual arts program designer’ to identifying herself as a professional muralist in ‘Murals are our Specialty’

Saint-Cyr also participated in Ascend Long Island, a 10-week program designed to help diverse entrepreneurs develop the capacity to win contracts from larger companies, such as Mastercard, and a grant from the Mellon Foundation initiative to give artists a living wage. This allowed her to scale and rapidly grow her business, from \$49,000 in 2019 to more than triple that in the first eight months of 2021.

# FY 2020-2021 ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR AWARDEES



EAC: **Binghamton Local Development Corporation (BLDC)**

Entrepreneur: **Ewelina Zajac-Holdrege**

Business: **Idea Kraft**

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## **Established Marketing Firm Shares Success Tips and Thrives through the Pandemic**



Idea Kraft is a Binghamton, NY branding and creative design agency specializing in brand strategy and business development. The agency builds brands, designs websites, and creates product packaging that stands out in the marketplace. From regional brands to global companies, Idea Kraft helps businesses grow and succeed through beautiful and innovative design. Clients include Binghamton University, Syracuse University and SUNY

Cortland, as well as the Broome County Health Department, the Alliance for Manufacturing and Technology and Amphenol. During the pandemic, Ewelina Zajac-Holdrege shared her success and concentrated on collaboration, posting free trainings and tips on her website for those struggling to keep their businesses alive.

Zajac-Holdrege built her award-winning company from humble beginnings. In 2004, she left Poland for the United States in the Binghamton area with only a backpack full of clothes and a couple hundred dollars in her pocket. Her graphic design education landed her jobs in the corporate world, where she further sharpened her skills and reputation and took on side gigs. By early 2013, her side jobs turned into full-time self-employment, enough to officially start a freelance graphic design business. That business initially operated out of her basement but moved later that same year to its current location at the historic Lackawanna Train Station in downtown Binghamton.

The business kept her busy, but Zajac-Holdrege knew she needed larger accounts and to diversify her income stream. She tried in 2014 and lost her first bid for a government contract. Zajac-Holdrege realized that her business did not have the capacity to compete with bigger firms, and that without any government contracting experience, she needed to start with smaller contracting jobs. She forged on and discovered another pathway via the EAC program at BLDC, which helped her understand the benefits of being certified as a woman-owned business.

By 2015, Idea Kraft was certified as a NYS WBE and encouraged to enter the EAC's business plan competition. She enrolled in the business plan training class and was one of the top winners. Idea Kraft has been growing double digits every year since then.

By 2016 Idea Kraft has been growing its revenues by 50% each year. Not only has Idea Kraft weathered the COVID-19 pandemic, it is now on track to report 2021 as the most successful year yet. Idea Kraft has grown to become a world-class creative and web business, working with many nonprofit organizations, Fortune 500 companies and higher education institutions. Zajac-Holdrege has created several high-pay, full-time jobs, promoted numerous freelance jobs in the Southern Tier and has spent more than \$1 million supporting local vendors and organizations. She has been given many prestigious industry awards and has served on many nonprofit boards in the Southern Tier, including the Southern Tier Communications Association, eatBing and Parents and Teachers for Students Organization at Palmer Elementary in Windsor, just to name a few. Zajac-Holdrege continues to be a great ambassador for small businesses and the local community and volunteers her time serving as a judge and mentor during the Greater Binghamton Scholastic Challenge Competition for high school students in grades 9 through 12 to develop ideas and businesses that directly impact the community.

One of Zajac-Holdrege's greatest lessons has been to stop micromanaging, allowing her to work on building her business instead of in her business; or as she puts it; learning how to maintain quality control with quality time versus quantity of time. Zajac-Holdrege's foresight has ensured that Idea Kraft will thrive in a global market, while still maintaining strong roots in Binghamton. Most importantly, her ability to remain well-grounded as a businesswoman, community leader—and mom to two active boys—is commendable; it certainly keeps her humble.

# FY 2020-2021 ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR AWARDEES



EAC: **Suffolk County Community College (SCCC)**

Entrepreneur: **Patricia Ejikeme**

Business: **Patifco Corporation, Inc.**

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## **Topnotch Consulting Firm Finds Opportunity Amid Pandemic Crisis**

Patricia Ejikeme, PMP, is the founder and Executive Director of Patifco Corporation, a Long Island-based MWBE that provides a wide range of strategic consulting and managed services to commercial, nonprofit and government organizations. In addition to her strong background in technology and finance, Ejikeme has demonstrated great resourcefulness and flexibility in identifying business needs and pivoting towards new opportunities.

Ejikeme, who founded her business in 2016, recognized the potential in providing commercial paper products to government agencies, even though she was new to the field. She designed and trademarked her products, worked with manufacturers, and followed through with the procurement process. Ejikeme has since successfully secured multimillion-dollar contracts for her commercial paper products with the New York City Department of Citywide Administrative Services and the New York City Housing Authority.

Ejikeme was tenacious in her mission to grow her business, overcoming each challenge that came with entering this new field of government contracting—including securing financing to fund the first shipment of her products from the manufacturer. Despite having already won a three-year, \$193,000 contract, and despite her extensive experience in project management, Ejikeme could not obtain the initial \$25,000 loan she needed. With no prior history of contracting, the lenders she approached would not lend her the funds due to her lack of business activity. That's when Ejikeme reached out to Daphne Gordon at the Suffolk County Community College (SCCC) Entrepreneurship Assistance Center. Gordon worked together with Ejikeme to contact multiple lenders until they were finally able to obtain the much-needed line of credit from La Fuerza Unida, a CDFI microlender and one of SCCC's partners.

Since securing that initial funding, Patifco Corporation has successfully contracted with additional government agencies and grown new revenues by 300% from 2019 to 2020. They now employ 31 part-time staff and operate out of warehouses in Brooklyn and Long Island.

By resourcefully exploring her options and having the confidence to pursue new opportunities outside of her experience and comfort zone, Ejikeme exemplifies the boldness and perseverance of the most successful entrepreneurs.

# FY 2020-2021 ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR AWARDEES



EAC: **Business Outreach Center Network (BOCNet)**

Entrepreneur: **Steven Cruz**

Business: **Omega Educational Consulting, Inc.**

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## **Consulting Firm Survives the Odds By Pivoting Focus from Global to Local**

Steven Cruz is the founder and CEO of Omega Educational Consulting, an independent educational consulting service in New York City that has been assisting domestic and international students with the U.S. college admissions process since 2008. A 31-year veteran of the industry, Cruz demonstrated resiliency and adaptiveness in navigating his company through the business challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, pivoting his efforts, diversifying his offerings, and creating a new line of services in response to the many ways in which his industry has been impacted.

Omega Educational Consulting's business, included a significant international client base, was hard hit by the pandemic and the tremendous uncertainty it caused in the field of higher education and college admissions. The imposition of travel bans and the restrictions on in-person learning threw everything into disarray and Cruz did everything he could to keep his company afloat. Despite the hit to his bottom line, Cruz took on significant pro bono work in order to keep his team working and compensated. Cruz also developed a multi-part college admissions course for hundreds of students and parents at the local high schools currently in the New York City school system that he hopes to offer nationally, covering everything from financial aid to personal statements supporting college entrance applications; he plans to roll out the course to more schools in the coming year.

Throughout the pandemic year, the Business Outreach Center Network (BOCNet) Entrepreneurship Assistance Center played an integral role in assisting Cruz, including helping him with two rounds of PPP applications and working hand-in-hand with him to value his business and expand his offerings. While information about pandemic-related assistance is publicly available, what Cruz especially appreciated from BOC was their personalized attention and guidance. "It was like they opened up a new world that I didn't know existed, about PPP, and all these programs and systems," says Cruz. "I want to provide the same kind of service to my clients that BOC did for me."

# ENTREPRENEURSHIP ASSISTANCE CENTERS PROGRAM

## OUTCOMES FOR FY 2020-2021

One of our EACs, ACCORD Corporation, summed up the effect that the COVID-19 pandemic had on how business is conducted, “the pandemic has upended our normal way of doing business.” This was the refrain heard from all of the EACs this year. The ongoing pandemic, which started four months before this fiscal year, continued to significantly impact the EAC’s activities throughout the year.

Since many of the EAC’s clients were focused on keeping their businesses operational, the EACs assisted its clients in accessing various new funding and market opportunities. With the help of pandemic initiatives, the EACs overall performance for number of businesses saved increased significantly from previous years by 89% (212 businesses saved vs 112 last year.)

Small businesses are the foundation of our communities and the pandemic stressed the need for business assistance to the small business community, especially in the low to middle income communities(LMI). Technical assistance became crucial during the pandemic. The EACs quickly pivoted by refining their teleconferencing infrastructure and technology skills as all classes, workshops, and counseling services were conducted remotely. All the EACs worked diligently to add skill building sessions on how to use digital platforms and a multitude of workshops on funding resources and best practices on how to stay open; partnerships with both private and public entities were made to increase their capacity to deliver technical and financial business assistance.

Gross sales for this contract year decreased by 51% for existing businesses, however, new startups experienced a 15% increase. For the minority EAC clients, which make up 94% of the EAC’s client base, gross sales plummeted by 99% for existing businesses and 58% for startups

Performance on sales, as reported by each individual EACs varied widely and depended on the business industries of the client population being served – those EACs whose clients’ industry focused on brick and mortar businesses were affected enormously as they were considered non-essential services during the shutdown period; those with child care services suffered greatly due to shuttered services requirements; businesses with global clients due to travel restrictions; and Asian businesses within heavily populated Chinese-American neighborhoods suffered greatly due to discriminatory attitudes.

Figures for the number of new hires mirrored similar declines between minority and non-minority firms this year; new hires for existing firms were down 30% overall; but the minority owned sector experienced a more drastic change with a 93% drop. Retained employees dropped 38% overall; but declined 100% in minority owned businesses.

Looking ahead to next year, the EACs will be accommodating more counseling assistance for the pandemic recovery phase. This will consist of adding programs related to recovery, debt management, and planning the successful return to full business operations. EAC clients with EAC staff will also be further developing and refining a hybrid model for delivering services both virtually and in-person.

**TABLE 1**  
**ENTREPRENEURSHIP ASSISTANCE CENTERS**  
**FY 2020-2021 GOALS AND OUTCOMES**

Clients	Individual Center Goals	Program Goals <sup>1</sup>	EAC Program Outcomes <sup>2</sup>	EAC COVID-19 FY20/21 Outcomes <sup>4</sup>
New Enrollments	10	210	803 <sup>3</sup>	884
Prior Year Clients Served	18	378	660	
<b>Businesses</b>				
Businesses Started	6	126	98	
Businesses Saved/Retained	5	105	212	624
<b>Existing Business Impacts</b>				
Businesses with Increased Sales	5	105	183	183
Aggregate Amount of Increased Sales	\$150,000	\$3,150,000	\$24,942,547	(\$168,506,918)
Businesses with Expanded Employment	3	63	111	100
New Employees	6	126	380	589
Businesses with Retained Employment	3	63	190	588
Retained Employees	6	126	837.5	6,381
<b>Start-up Business Impacts</b>				
Businesses with Increased Sales	2	42	84	
Aggregate Amount of Increased Sales	\$40,000	\$840,000	\$2382,727	
Businesses with Expanded Employment	2	42	39	
New Employees	2	42	111.5	
<b>Financing Impacts (Start-up and Existing)</b>				
Financial Packages Developed	6	126	253	114
Financial Packages Secured	4	84	243	770
Amount of Financing Secured	\$150,000	\$3,150,000	\$9,082,239	\$88,856,005
<b>Business Plans Developed</b>				
New Enrollments/Prior Year Clients	8	168	249	133 Workshops
<b>MWBE Goals</b>				
MWBE Certification Applications Developed	8	168	93	
<b>Veteran Goals</b>				
New Clients Enrolled	3	63	25	
Businesses Started	1	21	7	
<b>Business Mentor NY Goals</b>				
New Mentees Enrolled	20	420	244	
New Mentors Enrolled	4	84	44	
Number of Counseling Matches	10	210	118	

<sup>1</sup> Program Goals are equal to the sum individual center goals for 21 Centers.

<sup>2</sup> Program Outcomes captured from EAC on-line database for FY2020-2021 from July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> New Enrollment program goals were not increased due to added program goals and new program initiatives.

<sup>4</sup> Technical assistance COVID from July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021.

**TABLE 2**  
**ENTREPRENEURSHIP ASSISTANCE CENTERS**  
**FY 2020-2021 MWBE OUTCOMES**

MWBE Clients	MWBE Outcomes	% of Total Outcomes
New Enrollments	753	94%
Prior Year Client Served	615	93%
<b>MWBE Businesses</b>		
Businesses Started	43	44%
Retained Businesses	81	38%
<b>MWBE Existing Businesses</b>		
Businesses with Increased Sales	11	6%
Aggregate Increase in Sales	\$687,919	3%
Businesses with Expanded Employment	8	7%
New Employees	23.5	6%
Businesses with Retained Employment	2	1%
Retained Employees	1.5	0.2%
<b>MWBE Startup Businesses</b>		
Businesses with Increased Sales	67	80%
Aggregate Increase in Sales	\$2,246,635	94%
Businesses with Expanded Employment	27	69%
Expanded Employment	62	56%
<b>Financing (MWBE Startups and Existing)</b>		
Financial Packages Developed	67	32%
Financial Packages Approved	56	29%
Aggregate Financing Secured	\$1,237,393	41%
<b>MWBE Goals (Startups and Existing)</b>		
MWBE Applications Developed	93	100%
<b>Business Plans (MWBE Startups and Existing)</b>		
New Enrollees & Prior Year Clients	231	93%

**TABLE 3**  
**ENTREPRENEURSHIP ASSISTANCE CENTERS**  
**FY 2020-2021 VETERAN OUTCOMES**

Veteran Clients	Veteran Outcomes	% of All Outcomes
New Enrollments	25	3%
Prior Year Clients Served	24	4%
<b>Veteran Businesses</b>		
New Businesses Started	7	7%
Retained Businesses	2	1%
<b>Existing Veteran Businesses</b>		
Businesses with Increased Sales	0	0%
Aggregate Increase in Sales	\$0	0%
Businesses with Expanded Employment	0	0%
New Employees	0	0%
Businesses with Retained Employees	1	1%
Retained Employees	2	0.2%
<b>Startup Veteran Businesses</b>		
Businesses with Increased Sales	1	1%
Aggregate Increase in Sales	\$25,000	1%
Businesses with Expanded Employment	0	0%
New Employment	0	0%
<b>Financing (Veteran Startups and Existing)</b>		
Financial Packages Developed	2	1%
Financial Packages Approved	2	1%
Aggregate Financing Secured	\$93,220	1%
<b>MWBE Goals (Veteran Startups and Existing)</b>		
MWBE Applications Developed	2	2%
<b>Business Plans (Veteran Start-ups and Existing)</b>		
New Enrollees & Prior Year Clients	11	4%

# ENTREPRENEURSHIP ASSISTANCE CENTERS LISTING

## By Empire State Development Region

Organization	Service Area
<b>Region 1: WESTERN NEW YORK</b>	
ACCORD Corporation	Allegany, Cattaraugus and Steuben
IBERO and Greater South Buffalo Chamber of Commerce	Downtown Buffalo area, Erie and Niagara
<b>Region 2: FINGER LAKES</b>	
Urban League of Rochester, NY, Inc.	Erie, Genesee, Monroe, Ontario and Wayne Counties - Primary focus is Monroe
IBERO – American Action League, Inc.	Cayuga, Chemung, Ontario, Schuyler, Seneca, Steuben, Wayne and Yates
<b>Region 3: SOUTHERN TIER</b>	
Binghamton Local Development Corporation	Binghamton, Broome, Chenango, Delaware and Tioga
<b>Region 4: CENTRAL NEW YORK</b>	
South Side Innovation Center / Syracuse University	Cortland, Madison, Onondaga, Oswego and Syracuse
<b>Region 5: NORTH COUNTRY</b>	
Adirondack Economic Development Corporation (AEDC)	Clinton, Essex, Franklin, Fulton, Hamilton, Herkimer, Jefferson, Lewis, Montgomery, Oneida, Oswego, Otsego, Saratoga, St. Lawrence, Warren and Washington
<b>Region 6: MOHAWK VALLEY</b>	
Business Training Institute, Inc. (BTI)	Herkimer, Madison and Oneida
<b>Region 7: MID-HUDSON VALLEY</b>	
Women's Enterprise Development Center, Inc.	Westchester
Women's Enterprise Development Center, Inc.	Poughkeepsie
<b>Region 8: CAPITAL REGION</b>	
Capital Region Chamber Foundation, Inc.	Albany, Town of Colonie
<b>Region 9: NEW YORK CITY</b>	
CAMBA	Brooklyn - Kings County
Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation	Brooklyn - Kings County
Local Development Corporation of East New York (LDCENY)	Brooklyn - East New York and Brownsville sections
Chinatown Manpower Project, Inc. /Business Outreach Center	Manhattan - Chinatown (Assistance in Chinese)
Renaissance Economic Development Corporation	Manhattan - Chinatown (Assistance in Chinese and Spanish)
Washington Heights Inwood Development Corporation	Manhattan - Washington Heights & Inwood section of NYC (Assistance in English and Spanish)
Business Outreach Center (BOC)	Queens County
Queens Economic Development Corporation	Queens County
<b>Region 10: LONG ISLAND</b>	
Hofstra University	Nassau and Suffolk Counties
Suffolk County Community College	Suffolk County



# Entrepreneurship Assistance Centers

