



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Start:ME Accelerator Program Seeking Entrepreneurs for the 2017 Program, Offering Up to \$60K in Small Biz Loans to Small Businesses in East Lake, Clarkston**

**October 28, 2016** – The Start:Micro-Entrepreneur Accelerator Program (Start:ME) is currently recruiting promising entrepreneurs in and around Clarkston and East Lake through **November 14** for its 2017 programs. Fifteen to 20 entrepreneurs in each community will be chosen to participate and qualify for up to \$60K in small business loans.

Both communities offer peer-selected, low-cost loan pools of \$30,000 to invest in promising businesses. The program runs for 14 weeks from January through April and is free to participants. However, entrepreneurs must be 100% committed to their businesses and fully engaged in all peer-learning and support activities.

Start:ME made \$50,000 in loans to small businesses in the Clarkston and East Lake communities this summer. Since its inception in 2013, Start:ME has supported 84 local business ventures and made 15 working capital loans. Participants have attracted \$233,000 in investment capital, established seven new brick and mortar locations, and created 28 new jobs.

**About Start:ME**

Start:ME is a free 14-week accelerator program that provides entrepreneurs in marginalized metro Atlanta communities the business acumen, mentorship support, and early-stage financing needed to develop their businesses. The program works across all industries and skill sets – mechanics, artists/makers, bakers/caterers, farmers, tutors, and more – and focuses on entrepreneurs with promise and dedication.

The program's goal is to help entrepreneurs achieve business success and build neighborhood vitality.

- Karlotta Washington of **MarkSquared Studios** near Clarkston closed on a loan this summer to build out her multipurpose creative studio space. "The Start:ME program helped take my business to the next level in terms of my skills, business network and future vision. This loan allows me to scale my business and build my business credit" said Karlotta.
- **Scott-Madison Studio**, an East Lake full service makeup and photography studio founded by Sailauna Scott-Madison, is using loan funds to purchase state of the art travel equipment, training, and certifications to meet increased demand for events and photoshoots. Sailauna noted that Start:ME "helped me strategize and align my business with the direction I want to go. The help from



the mentors has been awesome; they really allow you that freedom to create and truly devise your own plan.”

**Applications are open through November 14, 2016.** Learn more at an upcoming information session:

- **Clarkston Session:**
  - Thursday, November 3rd at Clarkston First Baptist Church (6-8PM)
- **East Lake Session:**
  - Thursday, November 10th at Toomer Elementary School (4-6 PM)

Start:ME also engages 50+ volunteer mentors with significant professional business and/or entrepreneurial experience to provide critical support for entrepreneurs participating in the program. Start:ME welcomes applications from interested business professionals.

The program is developed and delivered by Emory University’s Social Enterprise @ Goizueta (SE@G) in partnership with Access to Capital for Entrepreneurs (ACE), the East Lake Foundation, and Friends of Refugees. Other local partners include PNC Bank, Drew Charter School, Villages of East Lake, East Lake Neighborhood Community Association (ELNCA), Kirkwood Neighbors’ Organization (KNO), Clarkston Community Center, and Partnership for Community Action.

Visit [startmeaccelerator.org](http://startmeaccelerator.org) for more information, to RSVP for info sessions, to complete your Start:ME application, or to apply to be a mentor.

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#### ***About Social Enterprise @ Goizueta***

*Social Enterprise @ Goizueta (SE@G), a research center within Emory University’s Goizueta Business School, stimulates innovative market-based approaches to generate positive societal impacts in places where markets are currently ineffective. Faculty, staff and students work with for-profit, non-profit, and hybrid organizations to inject business thinking into communities through research, fieldwork, and teaching/student activities.*

#### ***About Start:ME Clarkston***

*Social Enterprise @ Goizueta (SE@G) works with Friends of Refugees, Access to Capital for Entrepreneurs (ACE) and local partners Clarkston Community Center, and Partnership for Community Action to support entrepreneurs in Clarkston, GA since 2013. The Clarkston program has graduated 53 ventures since 2013.*

#### ***About Start:ME East Lake***

*Social Enterprise @ Goizueta (SE@G) works with the East Lake Foundation and local partners Drew Charter School, Villages of East Lake, East Lake Neighborhood Community Association (ELNCA), Kirkwood Neighbors’ Organization (KNO) to support entrepreneurs in the East Lake and neighboring Kirkwood communities of Atlanta. PNC Bank is the presenting sponsor. The East Lake program has graduated 31 ventures since 2015.*

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