

## 2026 Start:ME Accelerator Application

Applications open through October 1st, 2025

Start:ME is a free program that provides entrepreneurs the tools and connections necessary to build and grow successful businesses. We serve small business owners in four metro Atlanta communities – Clarkston, East Lake, Atlanta's Southside, and Atlanta's Westside.

Please only apply to one program and be sure to explain your tie to that community – for example, living in, working in, and/or providing a needed product or service to residents.

We encourage you to be as detailed as possible with your responses. We receive many applications and select 16-18 businesses per community. For more information, please review a PDF of the application and Frequently Asked Questions.

We look forward to learning about your business!

### Your Contact Information

What is your name?

- First
- Last

What is your phone number?

What is your preferred email address?

What is your home address?

- Street
- City
- State
- Zip

Which program are you applying to?

- Clarkston
- East Lake area
- Southside Atlanta
- Westside Atlanta

## Your Application

*If applying to Clarkston:*

Which of the following describe your connection to Clarkston? (Check all that apply)

Please note that the target neighborhoods include Clarkston and surrounding communities, including, Avondale, Scottdale, Stone Mountain, and Tucker.

- I live in or near Clarkston
- I grew up in or near Clarkston
- I work in or near Clarkston
- I operate/plan to operate my business in or near Clarkston
- I employ/plan to employ people from Clarkston
- My business provides/will provide valuable products/services to the residents of Clarkston
- My child attends an area school or early learning center (please share which one)
- I work at an area school or early learning center (please share which one)
- I attend a school in or near Clarkston (please share which one)
- I attend a local faith institution (please share which one)
- I am/was part of a Friends of Refugees program - Embrace, Jolly Avenue Community Garden, Parwana, Refugee Family Literacy, or Youth Programs
- I have no direct ties to Clarkston

How many years have you been a resident of Clarkston? (Please provide a numeric value)

Start:ME Clarkston is delivered on Wednesday evenings from January through April, plus two Saturday mornings. Entrepreneurs will be expected to complete accompanying assignments between sessions. Are you committed to attending and participating in sessions?

- Yes
- No

*If applying to East Lake:*

Which of the following describe your connection to the East Lake area? (Check all that apply).

Please note that the target neighborhoods include: East Lake, Edgewood, and Kirkwood.

- I live in or near East Lake
- I live in the Villages of East Lake
- I grew up in or near East Lake
- I work in or near East Lake
- I operate/plan to operate my business in or near East Lake
- I employ/plan to employ people from in or near East Lake

- My business provides/will provide valuable products/services to residents of the East Lake area
- My child attends Drew Charter School (Elementary or Junior and Senior Academy)
- My child attends Toomer Elementary School
- My child attends Whitefoord Early Learning Academy or Child Development Program
- My child attends another area school or early learning center (please share which one)
- I work at an area school or early learning center (please share which one)
- I attend a local faith institution (please share which one)
- I have no direct ties to the East Lake area

How many years have you been a resident of the East Lake area? (Please provide a numeric value)

Start:ME East Lake is delivered on Tuesday evenings from January through April, plus two Saturday mornings. Entrepreneurs will be expected to complete accompanying assignments between sessions. Are you committed to attending and participating in sessions?

- Yes
- No

*If applying to Westside:*

Which of the following describe your connection to Atlanta's Westside? (Check all that apply).

Target neighborhoods include: Bankhead, Center Hill, Dixie Hills, Grove Park, Harvel Homes Community, Penelope Neighbors, and West Lake

- I live in the area
- I grew up in the area
- I work in the area
- I operate/plan to operate my business in the area
- I employ/plan to employ people from in the area
- My business provides/will provide valuable products/services to residents of the area
- I am a member of a neighborhood association in the area (please share which one)
- I participated in Grove Park Ready classes led by Eric Fears
- I am a member of the Northwest Business Association
- My child attends an area school or early learning center (please share which one)
- I work at an area school or early learning center (please share which one)
- I attend a local faith institution (please share which one)
- I have no direct ties to Westside Atlanta

How many years have you been a resident of Atlanta's Westside? (Please provide a numeric value)

Start:ME Westside is delivered on Wednesday evenings from January through April, plus two Saturday mornings. Entrepreneurs will be expected to complete accompanying assignments between sessions. Are you committed to attending and participating in sessions?

- Yes
- No

*If applying to Southside:*

Which of the following describe your connection to Atlanta's Southside? (Check all that apply).

Target neighborhoods are south of I-20, from Fort McPherson to Thomasville Heights, Pittsburgh to Browns Mill Park. These neighborhoods mostly (but not entirely) are within the Carver High School feeder pattern.

- I live in a target Southside Atlanta neighborhood
- I grew up in or near Southside Atlanta
- I work in a target Southside Atlanta neighborhood
- I operate/plan to operate my business in a target Southside Atlanta neighborhood
- I employ/plan to employ people from a target Southside Atlanta neighborhood
- My business provides/will provide valuable products/services to residents of a target Southside Atlanta neighborhood
- My child attends a Purpose Built Schools Atlanta school - Slater Elementary, Price Middle, and/or Carver STEAM Academy
- My child attends another area school or early learning center (please share which one)
- I work for Purpose Built Schools Atlanta
- I work at another area school or early learning center (please share which one)
- I attend a school in a target Southside Atlanta neighborhood (please share which one)
- I live in an FCS/Charis property
- I attend a local faith institution (please share which one)
- I have no direct ties to a target Southside Atlanta neighborhood

How many years have you been a resident of Atlanta's Southside? (Please provide a numeric value)

Start:ME Southside is delivered on Thursday evenings from January through April, plus two Saturday mornings. Entrepreneurs will be expected to complete accompanying assignments between sessions. Are you committed to attending and participating in sessions?

- Yes
- No

*All:*

The Start:ME program is taught in English. Can you read, write, and speak effectively in English?

- Yes
- No

Did you apply to Start:ME in the past?

- Yes
- No

*If yes:*

Which year(s) did you apply (select all that apply):

- 2025
- 2024
- 2023
- 2022
- 2021
- Other

### **Business Description**

What is the name of your business?

When did you first start working on your business?

Is your business currently in operation?

- Yes
- No

What's your primary business goal at this time?

- Planning your business - not actively operating. Determining if your business idea is viable and making a plan to turn it into a business
- Launching your business - turning your business idea into a reality. Registering, filing, and starting to actively operate
- Managing your business - mastering day-to-day operations, such as finances, marketing, and employee hiring
- Growing your business - expanding, seeking additional funding, and/or opening new locations
- Relaunching/reinventing your business

Do you have any business partners (in addition to yourself)?

- Yes
- No

Which industry most closely describes your business (select one)?

- Agriculture
- Arts/Culture/Creative
- Clothing/Accessories
- Education/Tutoring Services
- Entertainment
- Food/Beverage
- Health/Beauty/Fitness
- Healthcare/Social Assistance
- Home Improvement
- Manufacturing
- Professional Services
- Retail
- Transportation

(Optional) Which of the following platforms does your business currently use? Check all that apply and provide relevant address.

- Etsy
- Facebook
- Instagram
- LinkedIn
- TikTok
- Website
- Other

What is the legal structure of your business?

- Not Incorporated
- Incorporated as Benefit Corporation
- Incorporated as C Corp
- Incorporated as LLC
- Incorporated as Nonprofit
- Incorporated as S Corp
- Other

Have you already sold any products or services?

- Yes
- No

*If yes:*

This year (2025), what are your total sales? Please only answer with numeric values, no special characters (e.g , \$)

In an average week, how many hours do you work on your business? Please provide a numeric value.

Are you currently employed (full-time, part-time, freelance, and/or contractor) by another company?

- Yes
- No

*If yes:*

What is the name of your current employer?

Not counting yourself, how many people do you currently contract?

Independent contractors are typically paid by the project/assignment or receive a commission, do not receive benefits, are responsible for paying their own self-employment taxes and withholdings, may provide their own equipment, and may work offsite.

- Full-Time Independent Contractors
- Part-Time Independent Contractors

Not counting yourself, how many people do you currently employ?

Employees are typically paid a salary or wages (hourly, weekly, monthly), may receive benefits, taxes and other withholdings are deducted from paychecks, and they receive the equipment to do their work from their employer.

- Full-Time Employees
- Part-Time Employees

Do you have a "brick and mortar" business location - retail store or office space outside of your home?

- Yes
- No

*If yes:*

Is your "brick and mortar" space within a commercial kitchen?

- Yes
- No

*If yes:*

Which commercial kitchen do you operate out of?



What is your business "brick and mortar" address?

- Street
- City
- State
- Zip

When did your business "brick and mortar" open?

This year (2025), did you receive financial investment (loans, equity, grants, crowdfunding, friends and family) for your business?

- Yes
- No

*If yes:*

This year (2025), what types of financial investment did you receive?

- Equity investment
- Friends and family capital
- Grant capital
- SBA-backed bank loan
- Traditional bank loan
- Other

*If selected:*

This year (2025), how much financial investment did you receive from equity investment(s)?

This year (2025), how much financial investment did you receive from friends and family?

This year (2025), how much financial investment did you receive from grant(s)?

This year (2025), how much financial investment did you receive from an SBA-backed loan(s)?

This year (2025), how much financial investment did you receive from a traditional bank loan(s)?

This year (2025), how much other financial investment did you receive?

Please describe/explain other financial investment received.

At this time, does your business have a separate business checking or savings account?

- Yes
- No

*If no:*

What is the main reason(s) for your business not having a business checking or savings account?

- Application procedures are too complex
- Did not think it would be approved
- Distrust of financial institutions
- Fees are too expensive
- No need for checking or savings account
- No or little access to bank branches
- Other

### **Describe Your Business**

In 100 words or less, what does your business sell? How is it different than the products or services of your competition?

In 100 words or less, how would describe your ideal customer? Why are they motivated to buy your product or service?

*Depending on program:*

In 100 words or less, how does your business benefit the people who live and work in Clarkston/East Lake/Atlanta's Southside/Atlanta's Westside?

In 100 words or less, how do your past experiences (professional or personal) uniquely qualify you to run this business?

Have you ever started a business before?

- Yes
- No

*If yes:*

(Optional) In 100 words or less, how would you describe the business(es) that you started previously?

Would you describe any of your family members as an entrepreneur?

- Yes
- No

Have you participated in other cohort-based entrepreneurship programs?

- Yes
- No

*If yes:*

Please describe your past participation in cohort-based entrepreneurship programs, including which programs.

Start:ME focuses on business fundamentals, ensuring that participants exit with a strong actionable business plan, comfort telling their business story, good understanding of their financials, strong insight into their target customer and broader market, and a supportive network.

What are you hoping to get out of Start:ME?

(Optional) In 100 words or less, how did you come up with this business idea?

### **Household Income**

Including you, how many people live in your household?

In the 2024 tax year (last year), did your total household income exceed \$X?

- Yes
- No

## Final Questions

How did you hear about the Start:ME program? (Check all that apply)

- Alum of the Start:ME program (who?)
- Community agency (which?)
- Flyer (where?)
- Friend or family member
- Friends of Refugees
- Info session (how did you find out about the session?)
- Local newsletter (which?)
- Mentor of the Start:ME program (who?)
- Place of worship
- School (which?)
- Social media
- Start:ME team member
- Start:ME website (startmeatl.org)
- Other

Would you like to opt-out of regularly scheduled communications from Start:ME (example - newsletters, upcoming event announcements, etc.)?

- Yes
- No

Anonymized Information Sharing: Start:ME community partners and supporters, including Friends of Refugees, East Lake Foundation, Focused Community Strategies, Grove Park Foundation, Purpose Built Schools Atlanta, Regions Foundation, and Truist Foundation may request information on the status of businesses and mentors that participated in Start:ME. By selecting “yes” below, you give us permission to share information collected in this survey with our partners.

- Yes
- No

Start:ME contacts applicants about their application and upcoming activities through email and text messaging. By submitting your application, you consent to receiving communications from our team. We do not share your information with third parties.