



Inspiring High-Potential, Low-Income Women Entrepreneurs

Founded in 1988, our mission is to assist low-income women of diverse ethnic and social backgrounds in becoming economically self-sufficient through entrepreneurial activities. Women's Initiative has proven that women create jobs for themselves and others, access the mainstream economy, and increase their economic self-sufficiency when they are given business planning and financing support. By assisting women-owned businesses throughout the San Francisco Bay Area at our three training sites, Women's Initiative directly contributes to the economic growth of communities. Our graduates have started over 1,900 businesses from photography studios to catering companies and mechanic shops.

By targeting low-income women, focusing on the needs of traditionally underserved groups including minorities, immigrants, and welfare recipients, Women's Initiative brings new resources into local communities in a unique model. Over half of the Women's Initiative community participates in our classes offered in Spanish through our *Alternativas para Latinas en Autosuficiencia* (ALAS) program, which boosts culturally competent services and extensive networks that propel Latina entrepreneurs into business success.

OUR CLIENT PROFILE:

- Average age is 41*
- 100% are low-income at program entry*
- 96% are women*
- 78% are women of color*
- 46% speak Spanish as their first or only language*
- 29% are single parents*
- 15% are disabled*
- 100% have a business idea and a dream to help their families and their communities*

A "One-Stop" Shop for Women Juggling Business and Life

Women assess their businesses and entrepreneurial readiness through our comprehensive business management and personal development training. One-on-one technical assistance, peer support networking groups, and ongoing business support services ensure economic success and business growth. Scholarships and stipends for childcare and transportation are available for very low-income women to ensure that no one is turned away for lack of financial resources. Women's Initiative administers a revolving loan fund, disbursing loans ranging from \$1000 to \$25,000, and links women with asset building opportunities, including matched savings accounts called Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) where participants' have the potential to double their savings for capital investments.

Evidence that Self Employment is a Viable Path Out of Poverty

Women's Initiative tracks participant outcomes and finds that women dramatically increase their incomes, with the average and median incomes of the participants increasing by 85% within 18 months following completion of our comprehensive business management training. The effectiveness of our program in reducing poverty is equally significant. At the beginning of the study, 80% of participants were living within reach of poverty and often below the federal poverty guideline; 18 months later, this number dropped to 35% of those interviewed.

A Leader in the Microenterprise Field

Women's Initiative has been recognized for our excellence in enhancing entrepreneurial skills, for which we received the Presidential Award for Excellence in Microenterprise Development in 2001, and as a best practice organization for our client tracking database and program evaluation system by the Washington, DC-based Aspen Institute. During our history, Women's Initiative for Self Employment has served more than 13,000 women. Through our revolving loan fund, we have disbursed over \$800,000 to our clients and helped them to leverage more than \$1,800,000 in capital from other lending sources.