

Hour Exchange Portland's Micro-Enterprise Development Programs

Hour Exchange Portland (HEP) recognizes that the authentic economy in Maine is not about financial wealth of an individual; it is the social wealth of its people. We facilitate a membership driven organization that invests in our neighbors. We value their skills and talents, their confidence and competence, their relationships to each other and their community. Every successful entrepreneur knows that business is all about relationships; investors, customers, employees, suppliers, et al. While financial capital is necessary, just as important to any enterprise, large or small, is social capital. This builds not just awareness and trust, but a reciprocal relationship in which both parties are willing to contribute the resources of their experience, time, energy and passion. Within the cash economy system it is often difficult for individuals from different social and economic backgrounds (the majority of our members are lower income) to meet on a level field. Someone with a entrepreneurial business plan may not have the social or professional confidence, or connections, to find and secure savvy business investors for their good businesses, especially for cottage industries.

Some of the Business Services our members provide each other include accounting, bulk mailing, clerical, financial planning and startup advice, office cleaning, transportation, marketing, web design, graphic design and promotional photography, advertising in newspapers, copy writing, audio and video services, legal advice, computer support, the list goes on and on.

Our members use Hour Exchange Portland to develop skills, experience, a community reputation, and a client base with access to our 600+ membership and all the services they provide, this includes access health care which is one of the biggest barriers to someone starting a new business. Entrepreneurs can the time and money they save in through HEP and invest it in their entrepreneurial endeavors. Our Micro-Enterprise program offers a support network where entrepreneurs can share resources, knowledge, ideas, connections and experiences, leveraging social capital into financial capital. HEP currently has over 30 micro-enterprisers who have exchanged over 1000 hours of service in just the past six months.

Hour Exchange Portland puts a special emphasis on those micro-enterprises that benefit the creative economy of Portland, bringing arts and culture and joy to the community. HEP's Artist and Crafters Guild increases opportunities for mentorship, workshops, group discounts and group marketing, and additional venues to sell their work, like HEP's Time Gallery Shoppe which currently attracts hundreds of visitors every month during the First Friday Art Walk. HEP also has an online gallery to showcase member art that can be made into Greeting Cards, providing financial support for the artist and HEP.

Hour Exchange Portland also supports business growth through technology development, like its Time and Talents software that tracks hours and services provided and received for any multi-member organization including Businesses and Business Groups (like Buy Local Campaigns), Cooperatives, Buying Clubs, Non-Profits, Time Banks, and Volunteer Organizations.

By, Orion Breen, HEP Microenterprise Developer