



H.E.R.O.E.S. Case Study

Executive Summary

Vanessa Landau's biography reflects someone who began cultivating resiliency from a tender age. Over the years she dealt with a troubled family and significant health crises, some that threatened her life. In 2014, after several years of research, Vanessa spun out a business model from her graduate research on Public Health at the University of Maryland into a start-up company she named H.E.R.O.E.S. to provide health strategies to employees about resiliency. "I was impressed by historical figures that triumphed in the face of challenges, hardships and adversity," she says, "such as Helen Keller, Anne Frank, and Martin Luther King, Jr." H.E.R.O.E.S. prepares people to respond effectively to adversity by "finding the hero within", says Vanessa.

Unfortunately, Vanessa lacked marketing and financial competencies to grow her business. "I needed a bridge to a viable business plan to legitimize H.E.R.O.E.S." So, after noticing an ad for *Innovation Fridays*, Vanessa took a chance and returned to the College Park campus one Friday in March and pitched her idea to an Entrepreneur-in-Residence not really knowing what to expect. "I'm glad I decided to go." Vanessa says, "I jumped on the opportunity, received great advice, and ended up connecting with board members from Empowered Women International, who taught me how to build a business plan and pitch my idea."

Empowered Women International, or EWI, is an intermediary organization headquartered in Alexandria, VA about 30 miles from the University of Maryland which provides business coaching, mentoring, and entrepreneurship training to women. By the end of July 2014, Vanessa completed a 3 month entrepreneurship training course at EWI and made two pitches to panels of judges, including one with a bank executive, and another in which she pitched a plan to grow H.E.R.O.E.S.'s revenue to \$60,000 per annum in two years. As one EWI coach remarked, "I loved seeing Vanessa grow throughout these three months. She's truly a change maker."

Vanessa's story highlights the valuable role anchor institutions and intermediary organizations play in the National Capital Region entrepreneurial ecosystem around Washington, DC. Entrepreneurial ecosystems are critically important to sustain innovation and economic improvement in a region. Anchor institutions and intermediary organizations are places where entrepreneurs, innovators, donors and investors can connect and access resources to help launch and grow businesses. They helped Vanessa from idea to launch to refining a business model. As the case demonstrates, with technical assistance from anchor institutions and intermediary organizations Vanessa became more capable of moving H.E.R.O.E.S. forward to achieve desired outcomes, reduce the risk of failure, and connect with possible investors and donors.