



Resources to start, run and grow your business

Microlending Returns to Hampton Roads via VCEN-Accion Partnership

Posted by Conaway Haskins on May 05, 2016 [Leave a comment](#)

Tanya M. Howard, the founder and CEO of Mouth Meets South, became the first person in the Commonwealth to receive a microloan under a pilot program that was established by the [Virginia Community Economic Network](#), [the Virginia Small Business Development Center Network](#) and [Accion](#), a nonprofit lender that has over 20 years' experience in serving small businesses nationwide.

[Mouth Meets South](#), founded by Howard in 2015, is a company that is ramping up to produce a unique line of "soul-food frozen meals" which will be available in grocery freezers. Howard, a former Associated Press reporter and Fortune 20 corporate businesswoman, is also an ardent "foodie" who enjoys a wide array of cuisines and culinary experiences. It was during her tenure in the corporate world, when working long hours that she would often reach for the convenience of frozen meals for lunch and dinner. The idea for her company was born when she recognized that there were no soul food meals in the frozen food aisle.

Working diligently to perfect her product line, find manufacturers who would work with her and package her products, developing her business model and successfully raising more than \$10,000 through an Indiegogo campaign, Howard approached Jack Leach, a counselor with the Small Business Development Center of Hampton Roads for assistance in moving her company forward. She states that working with him provided her with guidance about sound business planning and concept development. *"I first met Mr. Leach by participating in one of his SBDC courses for aspiring entrepreneurs and small business owners in Suffolk,"* Howard said. *"I have stayed in contact with him because he is very wise and has been gracious with his support."*

One of his recommendations was to for her to access the newly established microlending website at www.loanspot.org. There she completed the initial online application and submitted her request. Last month, she was contacted by the lenders at Accion and was informed that her application was approved.

Jim Carroll, the Executive Director for the Small Business Development Center of Hampton

Roads cannot be happier. *"It is fantastic to see this lending product return to the Hampton Roads area. Since the disestablishment of the Portsmouth-based Center for Community Development, local small businesses in the region have not been able to access capital in amounts of less than \$50,000. Having access to this tool will be a great assist to the region's small business community."*

Accion is a nonprofit microlender that provides business financing and support. Since 1991, Accion has lent to over 50,000 entrepreneurs across the United States, sparking business growth and job creation in local communities. In Virginia, its mission is to provide lending in amounts of \$1,000 to \$50,000. Accion provides business loans up to \$50,000 and start-up business loans for part-time entrepreneurs up to \$10,000. To apply for a loan, borrowers should complete an online application accessible at www.loanspot.org. All dealings with the lender are done via the internet or the telephone.

The return of microlending to the Hampton Roads area and the Commonwealth of Virginia is a great step forward in providing access to capital to the region and will enhance economic development efforts to further nurture and grow the region's small business and entrepreneurial communities.

Howard sums her experience up quite succinctly by stating: "Accion is professional, straightforward and efficient. I will recommend this lender to other small business owners and entrepreneurs who are seeking financing."

For more information visit the following websites: www.hrsbdc.org; www.hrsmallbizloans.com and www.loanspot.org