

Sierra Forest Entrepreneurs

June 24, 2021

Sierra Institute (SI) is developing a Sierra Forest Entrepreneurs Program to support forest products business development and innovation in the Sierra Nevada and surrounding region. SI will recruit a cohort of 10-12 forest business entrepreneurs through established relationships with organizations, including RCDs and other non-profits working in the forestry sector across the region. Entrepreneurs will apply and be selected to participate based on key criteria, including type of business, age of business, experience and current capacity level. Self-assessments will guide the identification of learning outcomes and development of training materials.

The program will begin in late August with a kickoff event the week leading into SI's ForestFest event which is a community celebration of forests and rural forested communities. At the kickoff we will gather forest business entrepreneurs, forest management agency staff, and others active in forest management and wood utilization to showcase emerging business opportunities that have co-benefits of wildfire reduction and economic development. The event will feature at least one start-up wood utilization business from the western US that has successfully launched connected forest restoration, wildfire prevention, and community benefit. At the kickoff, forest business entrepreneurs will take part in a hands-on workshop to initiate the process of developing or refining their business plans and each entrepreneur will take home a business development action plan for the next four months of participation in the Program.

After the kickoff, the Program will include monthly virtual workshops, held in September, October, and November, where a business development consultant will present on development needs identified earlier through self-assessments. These monthly calls will also include opportunities for participating forest business entrepreneurs to practice pitching their business ideas, share lessons learned, and network through small group breakout sessions. In addition, forest business entrepreneurs will have the opportunity to obtain one-on-one business consultation. SI will work with Sierra Business Council to connect participants to their local business development centers, and will provide funds for extra consultation as needed, likely around common business needs, like how to file a new business, QuickBooks, marketing, website development, among others.

The closing event will be scheduled for late November or early December and will be in person. This event will begin with a workshop on wood campus opportunities to create synergies around where and how new business owners may grow and locate their businesses. Forest business entrepreneurs will also have time to share their experiences and challenges putting what they learned to practice. The final event will also include a focus group and survey to evaluate the program's impact. Forest business entrepreneurs will receive a certificate to indicate successful completion of the program.