

McKenna Center

Seattle, WA – ON-RAMP – Albers School of Business and Economics, Seattle University

Location: Seattle, WA

Venue: Seattle University

Intro to the City and Overview of the Economy

In 2016, Albers School of Business and Economics launched RAMP-UP (Resource Amplification & Management Program – Urban Prosperity), a business-driven, campus-inspired, community-engaged initiative to support communities surrounding the campus. The program creates a unique experiential learning environment for students that connects university resources with minority owned local businesses in Seattle's under resourced neighborhoods, bridging the gap of classroom knowledge to solving real-world problems for businesses. RAMP-UP continues to support entrepreneurs in their journey with wrap around business consulting support and joined UPBI in 2025. ON-RAMP is the latest addition to RAMP-UP, leveraging our UPBI relationship to incubate the growth of new entrepreneurs in the Seattle area with a focus on economically challenged neighborhoods.

Seattle is Washington's largest city with 780,995 (2024 Census.gov) residents (4+ million metro area), strategically located between the Puget Sound and Lake Washington. Known for diverse neighborhoods, thriving arts, and Pacific Northwest innovation, Seattle is the nation's most educated major city with 70% of residents age 25+ holding bachelor's degrees. However, significant disparities exist across racial and ethnic lines, particularly in the Central District, Chinatown International District, and Yesler Terrace—communities experiencing substantial gentrification pressures and limited resources.

Regional Assets: Seattle serves as a Pacific Rim gateway with robust infrastructure including Seattle- Tacoma International Airport, the Port of Seattle, and extensive rail/highway networks. The region's natural resources, educated workforce, and innovation culture support a diverse economic base spanning technology, aerospace, maritime industries, healthcare, education, and the creative sectors.

Entrepreneurial Ecosystem: The city boasts one of the nation's most robust entrepreneurial ecosystems, anchored by major corporations like Amazon, Microsoft, Boeing, Starbucks, and Nordstrom. Seattle hosts numerous accelerators, incubators, and venture capital firms, with support from organizations like the Seattle Office of Economic Development and the Washington State Department of Commerce. 459,000 people are employed in the city of Seattle, primarily in professional, scientific, and technical services.

The Challenge

Approximately 9.9% of Seattle residents live below the poverty line, with substantially higher rates in communities of color. The Central District has experienced dramatic demographic shifts from gentrification, while Black-owned businesses face limited capital access and displacement pressures. COVID-19 worsened these disparities and Asian businesses in the Chinatown International District have survival rates 22% lower than citywide averages due to language barriers and limited resource access.

Despite Washington's income inequality being below the national average, a significant gender pay gap persists with male incomes 1.34 times higher than females.

The program

Name: Onboarding New - Resource Amplification & Management Program (ON-RAMP)

Target Demographics: New entrepreneurs in Seattle's economically challenged neighborhoods, specifically the Central District, Chinatown International District, and Yesler Terrace communities.

Governance Structure: Operated within Seattle University's Albers School of Business and Economics, Office of the Dean, utilizing a team-based approach with Seattle University students, experienced coaches, faculty, and mentors.

Annual Cycle: 10-month timeline from Fall through June (full academic calendar), beginning with a six-week bootcamp each Fall.

Unique Approach: ON-RAMP creates a "win/win/win" scenario through its 3E model: Engage, Educate, Empower. Students gain meaningful experiential learning, the university strengthens community connections, and businesses receive comprehensive support including coaching, resource connections, and technical assistance. The program integrates with our existing RAMP-UP initiative.

Our Vision

ON-RAMP envisions becoming a model for university-community partnerships addressing economic inequality while enriching academic experiences. Goals include:

- **Scale Impact:** Increase businesses served while maintaining quality support
- **Deepen Community Integration:** Strengthen relationships with neighborhood organizations and community leaders for culturally responsive programming
- **Enhance Student Learning:** Develop innovative approaches preparing students for social entrepreneurship and inclusive business practices
- **Policy Influence:** Inform broader discussions about equitable economic development in Seattle
- **Model Replication:** Share methodologies with other universities and communities developing similar programs

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