

# A Roundup of Business Startup Programs for People 50+

Kerry Hannon (McGraw Hill Connect, Yahoo Finance, New York Times)

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*Entrepreneur Dennis Bozzi*

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Starting a business on a wing and a prayer is a fool's game. That's why older Americans eyeing entrepreneurship, perhaps in response to a layoff or an early retirement package, are seeking courses and programs to learn business skills and explore the possibility of being their own boss.

The educational options, I'm sad to say are limited. I did some digging, and there are simply not many courses solely for people in their 50s and 60s. But there are a few I'd like to tell you about, including a new one: Blissen, a three-month virtual boot camp for entrepreneurs over 50.

"Programs geared specifically to individuals fifty-plus are helpful because they address the unique concerns, and also strengths, of this demographic, said [Kimberly A. Eddleston](https://damore-mckim.northeastern.edu/people/kimberly-a-eddleston/) (<https://damore-mckim.northeastern.edu/people/kimberly-a-eddleston/>), a professor of entrepreneurship and innovation at Northeastern University and a senior editor on the EIX Editorial Board of the Schulze School of Entrepreneurship at the University of St. Thomas in Minneapolis (full disclosure: The Schulze Foundation is a funder of Next Avenue).

For many older wannabe entrepreneurs, launching a business is a [second career](https://www.nextavenue.org/how-do-you-know-if-youre-ready-for-your-second-act) (<https://www.nextavenue.org/how-do-you-know-if-youre-ready-for-your-second-act>). "And they have different goals and needs from those who are just starting out," Eddleston said. "Whether they are building a business around a well-honed skill or hobby, individuals fifty-plus

are usually less interested in experimentation and 'finding themselves' and more interested in developing a business that allows them to do what they love and capitalizes on their expertise. As such, these programs usually focus on business basics."

These kinds of preparatory programs can also serve as an essential reality check about the risks of entrepreneurship, said Eddleston. They can help attendees set parameters, so they won't lose their retirement funds.

Solène Oudet, the 31-year-old CEO and founder of Blissen's new online program, the Digital Encore Business Bootcamp (DEBB), gets it. I met Oudet, a former Google product manager, earlier this year through an introduction by [Chip Conley](https://www.nextavenue.org/chip-conley-influencers-in-aging/) (<https://www.nextavenue.org/chip-conley-influencers-in-aging/>), a Next Avenue Influencer in Aging who founded the [Modern Elder Academy](https://modernelderacademy.com/) (<https://modernelderacademy.com/>), a boutique resort for midlife learning and reflection in Mexico.

I was curious what motivated Oudet to launch this initiative. The short answer: She saw a growing market niche.

"With [ageism in the workplace](https://www.nextavenue.org/age-discrimination-will-be-more-widespread-heres-what-to-do) (<https://www.nextavenue.org/age-discrimination-will-be-more-widespread-heres-what-to-do>) that shuts older workers out of the job market, starting their own business might be their best option," Oudet told me. "I created Blissen to empower every person in their second half of life to change the narrative. I want to make starting and running a small business in later years accessible, fulfilling and enjoyable. And for people to leverage their wisdom and decades of experience to be an asset for their community while achieving financial security."

## Questions to ask and five sources of funding

One important ingredient of her boot camp's model: "Participants develop meaningful relationships with other people over fifty on the same path and learn from their cohort's wisdom and experience," Oudet said.

Blissen is small scale at this stage, with only 20 budding entrepreneurs planned per camp session in 2021. The next cohort kicks off in February, and applications are open.

Included in the \$2,999 tuition (for those who enroll by mid-December): a customized WordPress website; a brand toolkit; website copy reviewed by a copywriter, an automated email marketing series setup and marketing templates.

Participant prerequisites: "First, an idea of the service or product they would like to provide," said Oudet. "And someone must have an interest in having an online presence; a desire to leverage technology to run their businesses more efficiently; a willingness to learn the basics of new online tools and to engage with other encore entrepreneurs — to give each other feedback, support and hold each other accountable."

Dennis Bozzi, 69, a former association executive in Lincoln, R.I., was in the first Blissen cohort. He's launching Beating Time — a community of older adults dedicated to enhancing their quality of life to enjoy more vibrant, healthy years. "The program forced me to think strategically and quickly," he said. "I was left with the understanding that this is just the beginning of many iterations as my business vision forms and strengthens."

I should tell you that Next Avenue blogger Nancy Collamer is a Blissen coach (though Next Avenue itself has no connection to Blissen). She's impressed by the way it works.

"So many older entrepreneurs struggle with the tech side of the business, and this program helps to demystify and streamline the process," Collamer said. "And the participants clearly benefit from having a supportive community of peers who share similar challenges, fears and concerns. It's been really satisfying to see them gel as a group."

Here are other current and upcoming sources of virtual courses, webinars and workshops aimed at older

prospective entrepreneurs:

**The AARP Foundation's Work for Yourself @50+ (https://workforyourself.aarpfoundation.org/)** : This initiative offers free webinars and workshops as well as a gratis downloadable toolkit with worksheets to help you set goals, explore your options and review tax considerations.

**The Experience Incubator:** It was created by Elizabeth Isele, founder and chief executive of the Global Institute for Experienced Entrepreneurship and a Next Avenue Influencer in Aging and developed in collaboration with Babson College.

The Experience Incubator will be offered via a Babson executive education online program for 50+ entrepreneurs launching in January. A self-paced Babson course(<https://www.babson.edu/academics/executive-education/open-enrollment-programs/founder-finance/>) on the financial aspects of launching a start-up is now available online. Tuition: \$249.

**The Senior Planet Startup! (http://seniorplanet.org/)** course and webinars for entrepreneurs: Senior Planet is a nonprofit resource for people 60+ in New York City and helps them develop their business ideas, mostly by ramping up tech skills and learning how to market their businesses online. Senior Planet is part of the Brooklyn-based nonprofit Older Adults Technology Services (OATS).

**The Center for Women & Enterprise (https://www.cweonline.org/)** : It doesn't have an older entrepreneur mission but attracts a growing number of midlife entrepreneurs. It provides online learning program on topics such as raising capital, hiring and marketing. They range in price from \$75 per course to \$95 for a six-week online program.

A roster of **online entrepreneurship courses**, many free from universities such as Harvard, MIT and The University of Maryland, can be found on platforms such as **Coursera** (<https://www.coursera.org/browse/business/entrepreneurship>) and **edX**

(<https://www.edx.org/learn/entrepreneurship>) . One on edX that caught my eye: MIT's Entrepreneurship 101: Who is your customer? The University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School online has a Coursera roster of five free courses on entrepreneurship. [LinkedIn Learning](https://www.linkedin.com/learning/topics/small-business-and-entrepreneurship) (<https://www.linkedin.com/learning/topics/small-business-and-entrepreneurship>) has a good selection, too.

For those retiring, or transitioning from military careers, **Boots to Business**, is an entrepreneurial education and training program from the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) that's part of the Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program. It features an overview of entrepreneurship basics. Active duty service members (including National Guard and Reserve), veterans of all eras and their spouses are eligible for the course.

Boots to Business' Reboot is a one- or two-day course on business fundamentals that helps entrepreneurial hopefuls evaluate their startup ideas. It also covers resources for capital and potential contracting opportunities.

**SCORE**(<https://www.score.org/>) , a nonprofit affiliated with the Small Business Administration, provides mentoring and educational workshops nationwide.

And entrepreneurship courses are also provided by the SBA's **Regional Small Business Development Centers**(<https://www.sba.gov/about-sba/sba-locations/headquarters-offices/office-small-business-development-centers>) and **Women's Business Development Centers**(<https://ctwbdc.org/sba-womens-business-center-locations/>).