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Report - September 2018

Starting Later: Realizing the Promise of Older Entrepreneurs in New York City

A growing number of New Yorkers over 50 are quietly but purposefully turning to entrepreneurship, boosting the city's economy and helping scores of older New Yorkers become more financially secure. As the city's population ages, New York has a major opportunity to further expand encore entrepreneurship and support aspiring entrepreneurs who are starting later.

by Judith Messina

- The following is the introduction to *Starting Later: Realizing the Promise of Older Entrepreneurs in New York City*
- Read the full report (PDF)
- View the recommendations from this report

Ask most New Yorkers to picture an entrepreneur, and they imagine a 20- or 30-something in jeans and sneakers. But the face of entrepreneurship across New York City is changing. Throughout the five boroughs, a growing number of older adults are quietly but purposefully turning to entrepreneurship for the first time. Spurred by recession-era layoffs, lowered barriers to entry, longer life spans, age discrimination in the workplace, and the need for financial security later in life, a diverse mix of New Yorkers over 50 are starting new businesses.

This wave of "encore entrepreneurship" is still in its early days, but it is already showing signs of remarkable growth. Citywide, there are now nearly 210,000 self-employed residents ages 50 and above, up 19 percent since 2005.[1] There has been an even greater increase in entrepreneurial activity for those 60-plus, with the number of self-employed New Yorkers age 60 and above up 44 percent, to more than 104,000. Moreover, many of the chambers of commerce, small business assistance providers, and microfinance organizations that work with aspiring entrepreneurs report that New Yorkers over age 50 have gone from a sliver of their clients to one-quarter or more.

The surge in encore entrepreneurship is already boosting the city's economy and helping scores of older New Yorkers become more financially secure. But this could be just the beginning. Thanks to several emerging demographic, economic,

and social trends—from the aging of the city's population to the increase in the average life expectancy—New York will have an enormous opportunity to further expand the number of older entrepreneurs in the months and years ahead. For instance, New York City is home to 2.2 million New Yorkers between the ages of 50 and 74, nearly 26 percent of the city's population. Older adults are also among the fastest-growing segments of the city's population: The 50-plus population has grown more than 10 percent since 2010, and demographers project that nearly one in three New Yorkers will be over 50 by 2030.

But realizing the full potential of older entrepreneurs will require a new level of planning and support from city policymakers. Indeed, though encore entrepreneurship is on the rise, the numbers of older New Yorkers who see entrepreneurship as a viable path are still relatively low. While several push and pull factors have made entrepreneurship more enticing for many New Yorkers in their 50s and 60s, the realities of transitioning to entrepreneurship are often daunting for adults who have spent decades working for someone else. Meanwhile, many older adults face unique obstacles when attempting to start a business in New York.

New York has dozens of public, private, and nonprofit programs for supporting entrepreneurship, but hardly any initiatives have been targeted at older entrepreneurs. This is not unique to New York; there are few such programs in any American city. But New York policymakers and economic development officials would be wise to view the city's aging population as an economic asset, and the rise of encore entrepreneurship as a vital opportunity. As this report makes clear, expanding the number of encore entrepreneurs would help many older adults become more financially self-sufficient while also spurring job growth and boosting the city's economy.

This study—the latest in more than two decades of research by the Center for an Urban Future focusing on opportunities to grow and diversify New York City's economy—provides the first detailed look at the potential to expand the number of older entrepreneurs in New York City. Funded by Capital One, this report examines the rise of entrepreneurial activity among the city's older generations and analyzes the promise of future growth. The study is informed by an extensive data analysis and interviews with more than 40 encore entrepreneurs located across all five boroughs, as well as dozens of business development consultants, nonprofit executives, community leaders, researchers, and other experts.

The report defines entrepreneurship broadly, both as self-employment and business ownership, to capture the full picture of entrepreneurial activity among the city's older population. It identifies the neighborhoods where boomer entrepreneurship is growing and analyzes the industries where these founders are establishing a presence, such as professional services and food-based businesses. The report also documents the challenges older first-time entrepreneurs face—many of them unique to their age group—and explores the potential to help more of their new businesses grow.

Older adults are a significant and increasing share of the city's entrepreneurs. Nationally, the share of new entrepreneurs between the ages of 55 and 64 increased more than for any other age range over the past two decades—from less than 15 percent in 1996 to more than 25 percent in 2016, according to the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, a Kansas City–based foundation that supports entrepreneurship and has identified and analyzed entrepreneurship trends in the U.S. for two decades.[2] The rate of new entrepreneurship among people ages 55 to 64 is higher than for people between the ages of 20 and 34, and Americans over 45 are now more likely to become first-time entrepreneurs than are those under 45.

Our research reveals a similar spike in older entrepreneurship in New York City. Although there is limited city-level data available on the rates of small business formation broken down by age, our review of available data and interviews with leaders of organizations that support entrepreneurs makes it clear that New York City's older generations are turning to entrepreneurship in record numbers.

Overall, New York City is now home to 209,972 residents ages 50 and above who are self-employed, an increase of nearly 35,000—or 19 percent—over the past decade. During this period, every borough has seen a jump in self-employment for the 50-plus population: Queens (11 percent), Manhattan (19 percent), Brooklyn (20 percent), Staten Island (31 percent), and the

Bronx (38 percent). One in six working New Yorkers over 50 is self-employed, compared to just 1 in 9 for the workforce overall.[3]

The rate of growth has been even more pronounced for New Yorkers 60 and older. Indeed, the population of New Yorkers 60-plus who are self-employed has increased 44 percent since 2005, going from just over 72,000 in 2005 to more than 104,000 in 2016. Every borough has experienced double-digit growth: Manhattan (32 percent), Staten Island (35 percent), Queens (43 percent), Brooklyn (64 percent), and the Bronx (69 percent).[4]

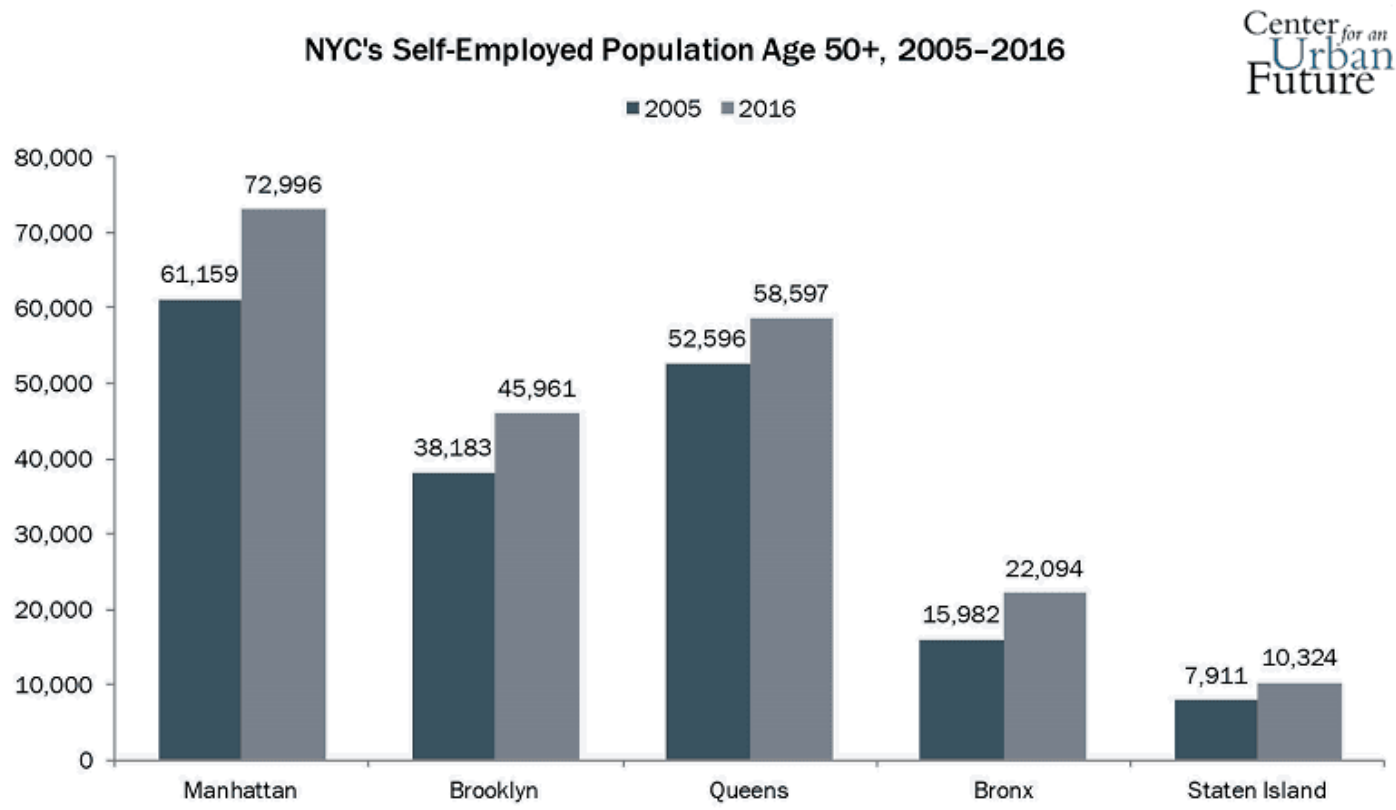
According to data from the American Community Survey, 15 percent of all working New Yorkers ages 55 to 65 are self-employed—the highest share of any age group. That's compared to 13 percent of 45- to 55-year olds, 11 percent of 35- to 45-year-olds, and just 7 percent of 25- to 35-year-olds.[5]

Our interviews with more than two dozen leaders at chambers of commerce, micro-enterprise organizations, local development corporations, and other small business development groups throughout the five boroughs provide further evidence that older entrepreneurs are on the rise. Our research found that as many as one-third of all entrepreneurs and aspiring business owners seeking help from these organizations are over 50, and most small business counselors say that interest from older adults is increasing.

The Women's Brooklyn Enterprise Center at the Local Development Corporation of East New York, for example, works with 1,200 people a year, and estimates 25 percent are over age 50. It has seen enough continuing growth in this population that it is considering creating a "silver club," a networking group specifically for older entrepreneurs. "Absolutely, we are seeing more interest from older adults," says Gail Davis, director of the Women's Business Center. "They're retired or looking for something else to do or wanting to monetize off the skill and talent set they have."

According to the Harlem Columbia Small Business Development Center, older entrepreneurs comprise 25 percent of the 400 clients they work with each year to develop new business ideas. At Brooklyn's Business Outreach Center (BOC), which provides financing, advice, and technical assistance to microenterprises and small businesses, roughly 30 percent of its clients are encore entrepreneurs.

At Grameen America, which provides microloans and technical assistance to low-income women entrepreneurs, 25 percent of its borrowers in New York City and nationwide are over the age of 50. Kiva, another microlender, reports that individuals over 50 account for 10.2 percent of all its borrowers in New York City versus 7.3 percent nationwide.



Source: Center for an Urban Future analysis of self-employment data from the U.S. Census American Community Survey, 2005 and 2016. Tabulated using IPUMS.

Older entrepreneurs also comprise 15 percent of the food entrepreneurs working at Entrepreneur Space, a kitchen incubator operated by Queens Economic Development Corporation. In fact, our informal survey of food business incubators across the five boroughs finds that approximately one in six participants is at least 50 years old.

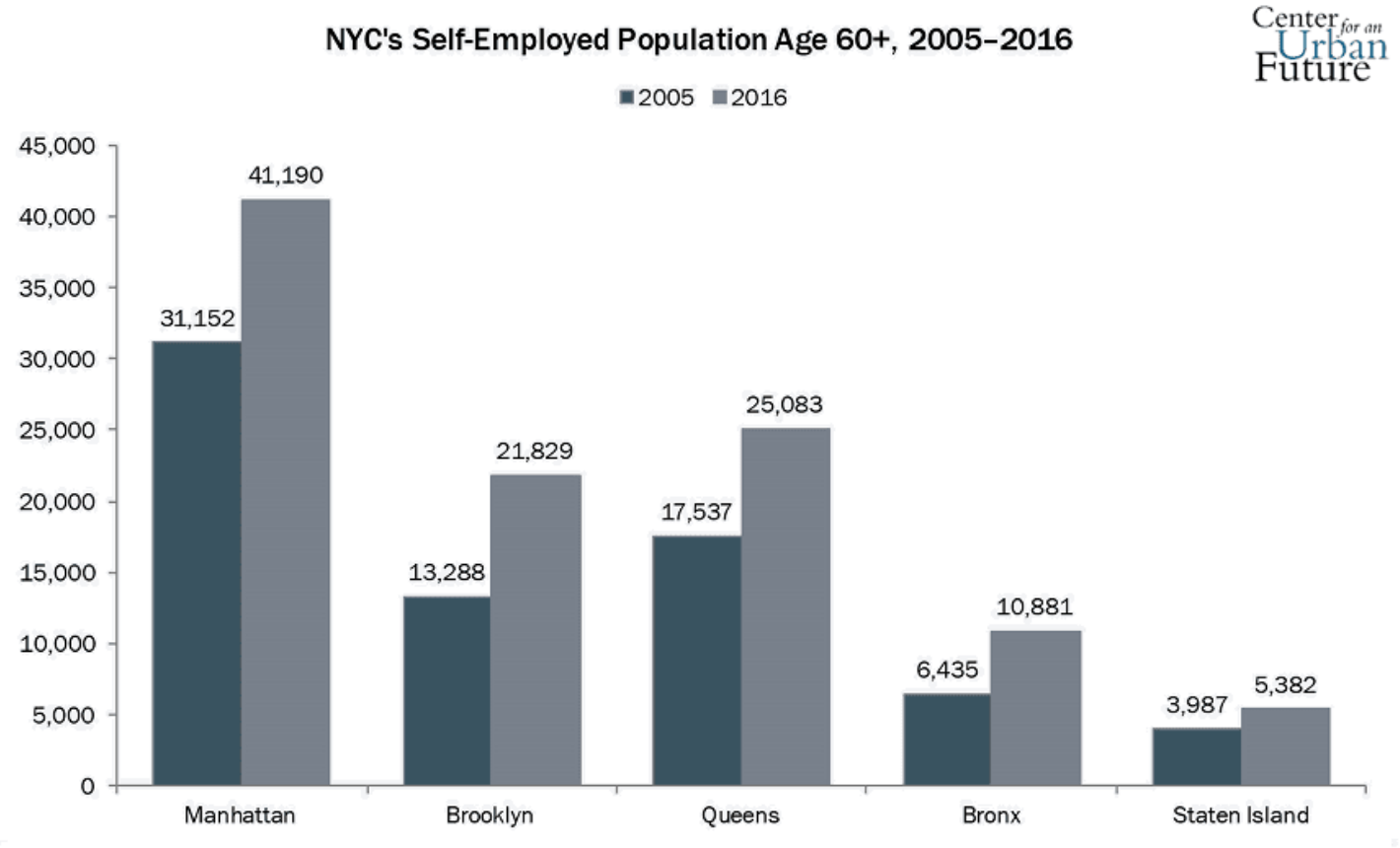
The New York Women's Chamber of Commerce based in Upper Manhattan reports that the number of women over 50 attending networking groups, seminars, and workshops for entrepreneurs has risen 10 to 15 percent in recent years. Likewise, the Harlem Business Alliance has seen a steady increase in the number of older adults in its programs, including in its Lillian Project, an incubator that helps black women develop and launch new businesses.

The lure of entrepreneurship for boomers is also on display in the Brooklyn Public Library's PowerUP! start-up competition, which each year awards $15,000 to first-time entrepreneurs. From 2011 to 2017, between 13 percent and 22 percent of entrants were at least 50 years old, up from 11 percent in 2003.

For many aspiring older entrepreneurs, the first foray into self-employment is freelance work. Older New Yorkers are taking the skills they have acquired from a lifetime in the workforce and offering them to clients in business, the nonprofit sector, and government. At the Freelancers Union, an advocacy group for independent workers, older adults are a significant share of the membership. Approximately 25 percent of the 150,000 New York City members fall into the midlife category. They include some long-time freelancers, "as well as folks who have been making a transition later in life," says Freelancers Union Executive Director Caitlin Pearce. "Rather than moving to full retirement, they are now moving to consulting work for income, to do meaningful work, and to stay engaged."

Drawing from decades of experience, a wealth of connections, and some start-up capital, older entrepreneurs are also playing an increasing role as founders of high-growth start-ups. A Center for an Urban Future analysis of data collected by PitchBook, a company that tracks venture capital investments and transactions, reveals that the number of founders over 50

is on the rise. Between 1995 and 2006, just nine venture-backed companies in New York City were founded by entrepreneurs over 50—a rate of less than one per year. Between 2006 and 2016, there were 64 founders over 50, an average of nearly six per year.



Source: Center for an Urban Future analysis of self-employment data from the U.S. Census American Community Survey, 2005 and 2016. Tabulated using IPUMS.

In addition, the recent growth of women entrepreneurs in New York City includes a large share of founders over 50. Of the more than 1,000 female entrepreneurs who participated in a 2015 survey by the city's WE NYC initiative, 37 percent were over 50 and 15 percent reported starting their businesses when they were older than 50.[6]

"Older founders are a source of growth and employment," says Edward Rogoff, dean of the Long Island University Brooklyn School of Business and an expert in older entrepreneurship. "In fact, the older you are when you start a business, the larger it tends to be."

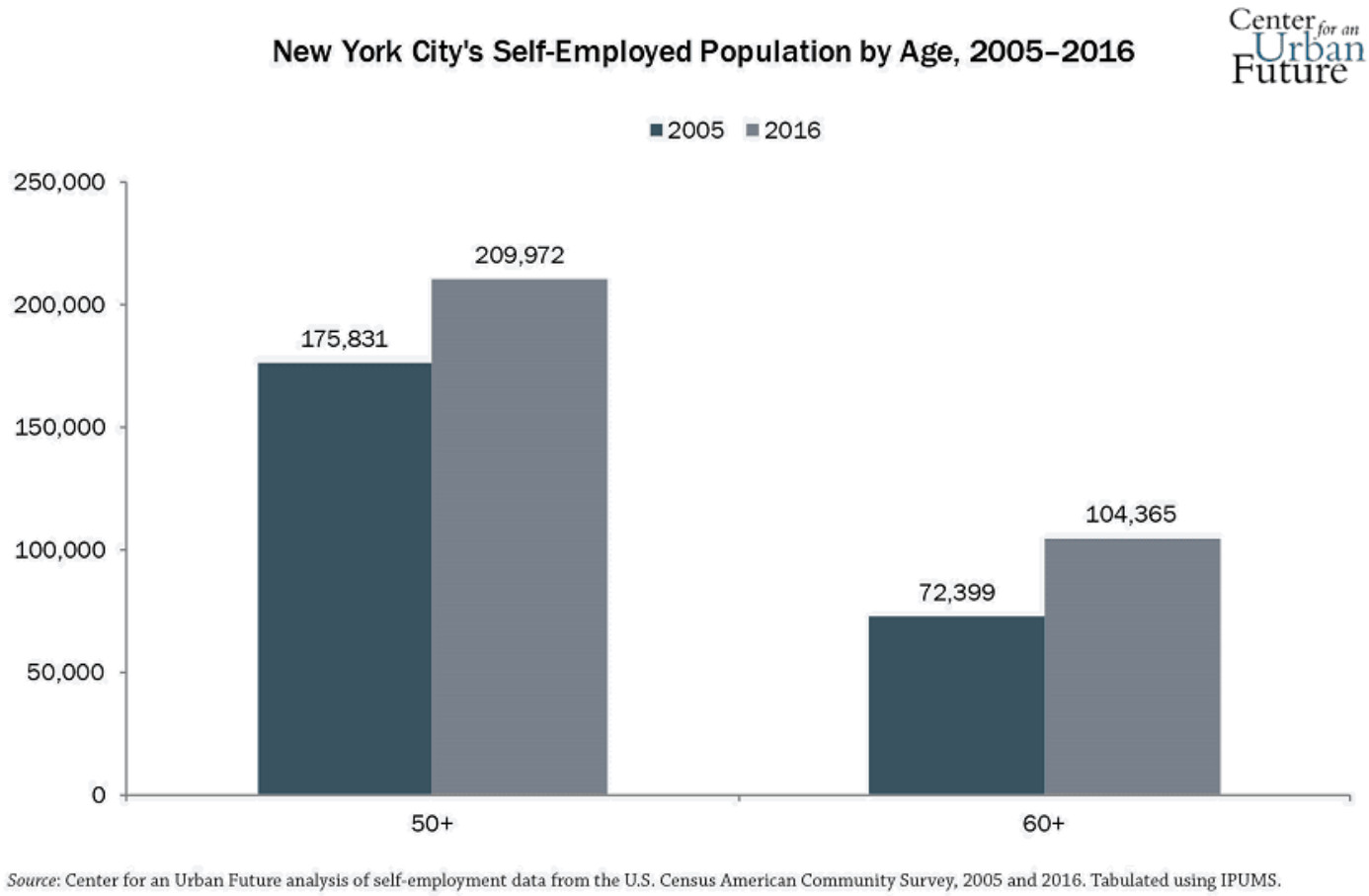
Older New Yorkers are turning to entrepreneurship both by choice and by necessity. Thousands of older New Yorkers are turning to entrepreneurship every month, for reasons as varied as their businesses. Some are drawn to entrepreneurship as the fulfilment of a lifelong dream, while many others are pushed toward self-sufficiency in the face of a daunting labor market for older workers or the inability to afford retirement. It's the combination of these enticements and pressures that has been fueling the phenomenon in recent years—and it shows no signs of abating.

The entrepreneurs we interviewed are striking out on their own as consultants, caterers, speech therapists, Uber drivers, and day care operators, attracted not only by the money they can make, but by the flexibility to set their own hours, be their own bosses, and offer services to a receptive and accessible marketplace. They include a work-from-home consultant in Manhattan who recruits college interns for Wall Street banks and real estate firms, a postal worker in Brooklyn who is turning

her passion for cooking into a catering business, and a long-time employee of a Bronx motorbike repair shop who, upon his employer's death, launched his own repair service—at the age of 55.

At the same time, legions of older New Yorkers found themselves laid off or their roles scaled back in the wake of the Great Recession, and turned to entrepreneurship by necessity after facing long odds in the job market and age discrimination. Reentering the workforce after 50 poses serious challenges, according to labor market experts and older jobseekers themselves, especially for those with limited skills or education. Older workers are often more expensive in terms of both salary and healthcare costs, which creates an additional incentive for employers to hire younger candidates instead. In some cases, older adults report turning to entrepreneurship as a last resort, after struggling for months or years to regain full-time employment.

In fact, the number of New Yorkers over 55 who are unemployed and looking for work has nearly tripled since 2006, from 9,622 to nearly 25,000 today.[7]



Source: Center for an Urban Future analysis of self-employment data from the U.S. Census American Community Survey, 2005 and 2016. Tabulated using IPUMS.

"[Would-be] entrepreneurs are coming to us," says Yanki Tshering, founder and executive director of the Business Center for New Americans, which provides training and business loans to immigrants and refugees. "They are starting a business because they've become older and they are not going to get other employment."

New York City's demographics reflect the ideal conditions for a boom in encore entrepreneurship. Although there are many reasons for the rise of encore entrepreneurship, one obvious factor is driving the growth: the aging of New York City's population. As of 2016, there were an estimated 2.2 million New Yorkers between the ages of 50 and 74, nearly 26 percent of the city's population. In the past five years, the senior population—individuals 65 and older— surpassed 1 million for the first

time in the city's history. Meanwhile, the 50-plus population has grown more than 10 percent since 2010. By 2035, New Yorkers ages 50 and older will constitute nearly a third of the population. And by 2040, the population ages 65 and older will have grown 22 percent since 2016, to 1.4 million.

The aging of the baby-boom generation is the chief driver of the most recent increase in the number of older New Yorkers, and better health is playing an important role. Life expectancy increased citywide to 81.2 years in 2015, a jump of 1.5 years since 2006. In 2015, life expectancy nationwide was 78.7 years, a rate exceeded by 51 of New York City's 59 community districts.[8] The added years mean New Yorkers are enjoying a longer middle age, a period when they continue to be productive and creative —and eager to contribute to the financial stability of their families.

Additionally, women comprise a greater share of New York City's aging population than men, and their rates of entrepreneurship are on the rise. Among the 1.1 million residents over age 65 in New York City, there are more than 1.6 women for every man, making older women one of the city's fastest-growing demographics. Meanwhile, entrepreneurship among women is increasing: in the decade from 2002 to 2012, the most recent year for which rigorous data is available, the number of women-owned businesses grew 65 percent, adding roughly 45 new businesses every day. As the city's population ages, the share of new businesses started by older women is likely to expand.[9]

"The prime age group for new entrepreneurs is a woman about 50," says Amy Grossman, a former small business strategist who coaches many older entrepreneurs. "So many weren't satisfied in the workplace because they didn't get responsibility or salary or recognition and now say, 'I've had it. I don't want this life anymore. I want to reinvent myself.'"

The increase in encore entrepreneurship is also boosted by New York City's large and growing older immigrant population. Immigrants start businesses at twice the rate of native-born residents, driving growth in self-employment and new business formation in communities citywide. And today, a growing share of the city's older adult population is foreign-born: last year, for the first time since the end of World War II, the share of older New Yorkers who were born outside of the U.S. reached 49.5 percent—nearly equal to the native-born share. Immigrants to New York will soon comprise the majority of the city's older adults, as growth far outpaces that of the U.S.-born senior population: The number of native-born seniors grew just 6 percent from 2010 to 2015, while the number of immigrant seniors increased 21 percent. Ultimately, the aging of New York's highly entrepreneurial immigrant population is likely to spur the growth of encore entrepreneurship in the decades ahead.

Older entrepreneurs face unique challenges. Like all entrepreneurs in New York, older adults face obstacles as they try to start and grow businesses here—from the high cost of real estate to the challenges of accessing financing. But our research shows that aspiring encore entrepreneurs face several unique barriers, which sometimes make it hard for new enterprises to get off the ground and grow, and other times end up discouraging older New Yorkers from starting a business in the first place.

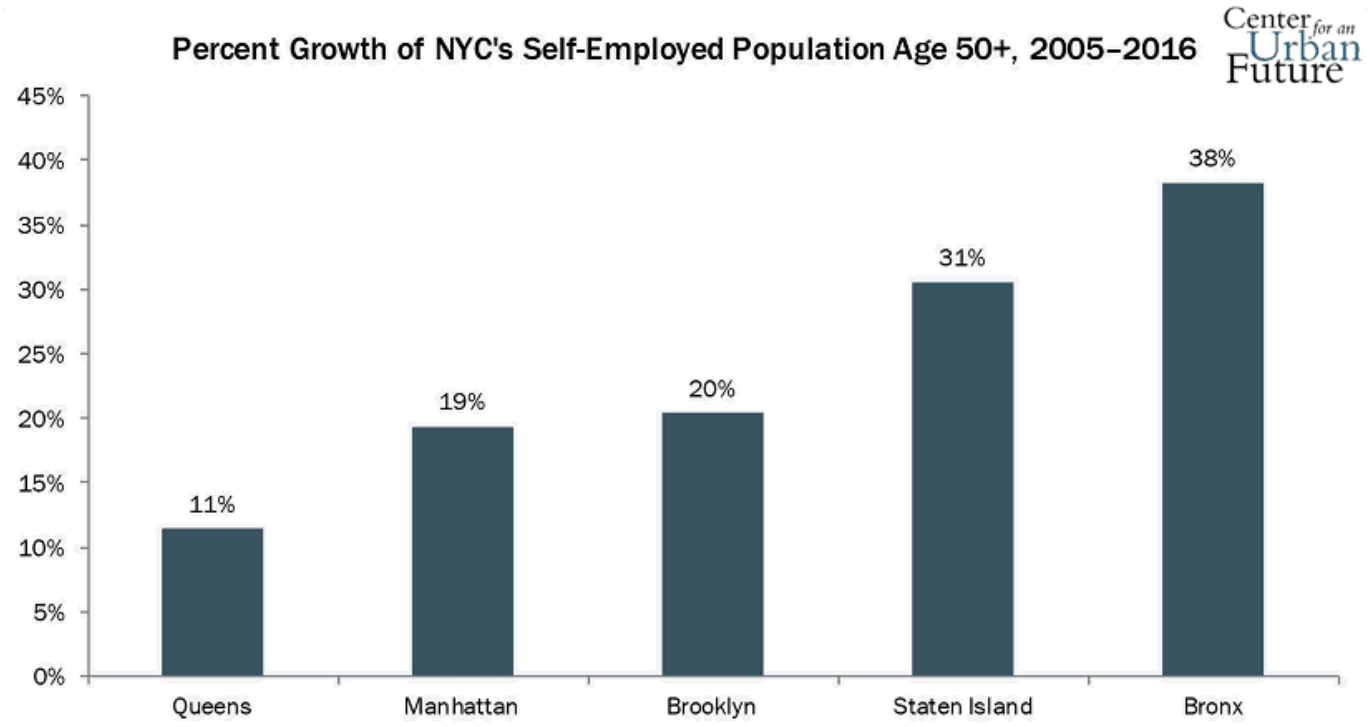
When it comes to raising capital, all start-ups face struggles, as lenders are generally reluctant to provide capital to a business that has yet to prove itself. But for many older entrepreneurs, who are mostly starting smaller-scale, home-based businesses—not high growth start-ups—finding financial backing can be especially difficult. As a result, many older entrepreneurs report tapping their retirement accounts or other savings, with little time or opportunity to make up for a shortfall if the investment fails.

Older first-time entrepreneurs also face challenges when it comes to taking advantage of new technology in managing and marketing a business. In a world where social media has become an essential marketing tool, unfamiliarity with platforms like Instagram is a major disadvantage. Many older entrepreneurs report spending time and money acquiring the tech fluency that many younger founders were seemingly born with.

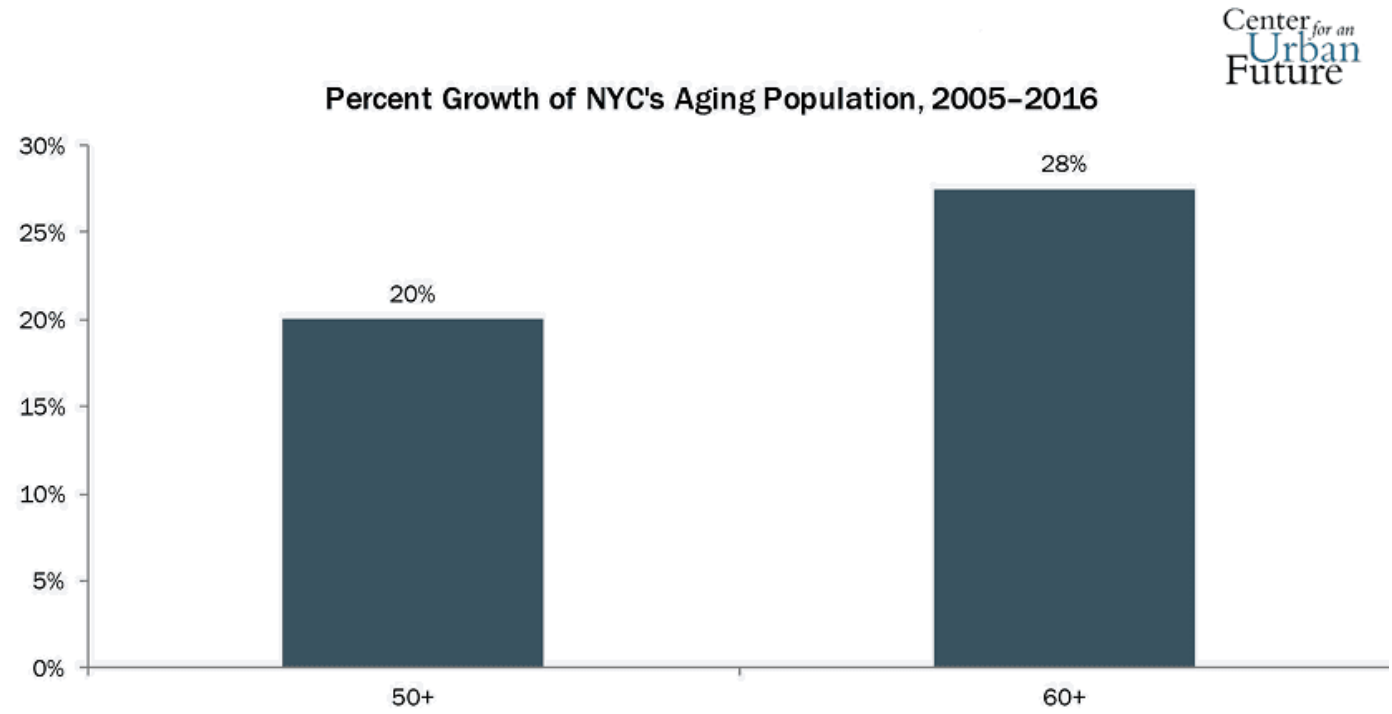
Older entrepreneurs also must contend with customers who wonder if they are up to the task or who are reluctant to pay for the decades-long know-how and experience that they bring to the table, especially if they have other, cheaper alternatives. Potential clients are often looking for younger people, says one sixtyish first-time entrepreneur: “There are a lot of young people right out of college who are doing what we’re doing for almost no money.”



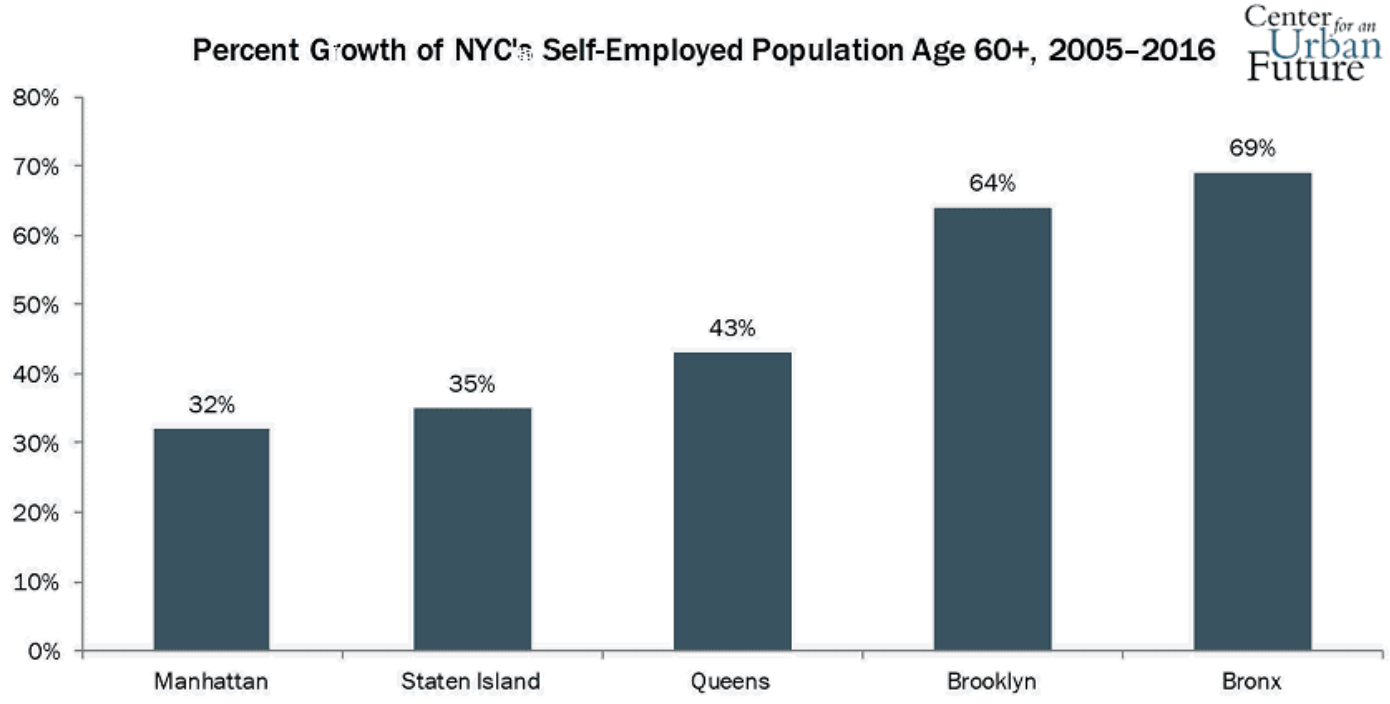
Source: Center for an Urban Future analysis of self-employment data from the U.S. Census American Community Survey, 2005 and 2016. Tabulated using IPUMS.



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Although there are clear challenges facing older entrepreneurs, the biggest problem of all—or, rather, the biggest opportunity—is that relatively few of the older adults who could benefit from self-employment or entrepreneurship are currently pursuing this path. In New York, an opinion survey last year by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) found that 36 percent of its members in the state were interested in finding new ways to make money, including 15 percent who want to start a whole new career, and 12 percent who were itching to launch their own businesses.[10] Yet, after

spending all their adult lives working for someone else, many New Yorkers over 50 simply haven't viewed entrepreneurship as a viable option. "Older New Yorkers don't even know that this is an opportunity, that entrepreneurship is something they can do," says Allison Nickerson, executive director of LiveOn NY, an organization that advocates for older New Yorkers.

Countless others considered entrepreneurship, but ultimately lacked the confidence to take the plunge. "It's the biggest obstacle, the lack of confidence that they can do it," says Elizabeth Isele, co-founder and CEO of SeniorEntrepreneurshipWorks.org, and herself an older entrepreneur. One factor limiting the confidence of aspiring older entrepreneurs is a lack of visible role models. Exposed to few prominent examples of successful encore entrepreneurs, many New Yorkers over 50 question whether entrepreneurship is a path that's open to them.

Unlocking the considerable potential for older entrepreneurship in New York will require new efforts that encourage older adults to consider self-employment, perhaps similar to "teaching entrepreneurship" programs that exist today in some city high schools. Although the city boasts an arguably unmatched network of public and nonprofit small business assistance programs that provide training, advice, and incubation spaces for aspiring entrepreneurs, many older adults never get to the point where they seek out technical assistance, apply for a loan, or attend a seminar on writing a business plan.

Beyond new initiatives to promote entrepreneurship, New York could also benefit from a more robust support system for older adults who are considering entrepreneurship or self-employment. Few of the existing small business assistance programs actively target or recruit older clients, and most have never built relationships with the organizations that work mostly closely with older New Yorkers—from advocacy organizations like AARP to senior centers. "It's a population that has never been included when we talk about entrepreneurship," says Quenia Abreu, executive director of the Women's Chamber of Commerce.

At the same time, senior centers, churches, and other places in the city where older adults gather tend to focus on issues such as health, recreational activities, and achieving financial security in an effort to ensure older New Yorkers a safe, comfortable old age. If they deal at all with work-related issues, it is to help participants find a job, not start a business. As a result, many if not most older New Yorkers lack any reason to believe that they could be entrepreneurs and rarely come in contact with those who have taken the leap and succeeded.

"You have hundreds of senior centers in the city," says Edward Rogoff of Long Island University. "What would it take to say, 'Put away the mah-jongg games, we want to talk to you about role models and about making money.'"

To be sure, the de Blasio administration has rolled out several promising programs to help small businesses and support a diverse mix of entrepreneurs, including new initiatives for supporting women entrepreneurs, immigrant entrepreneurs, and low-income entrepreneurs. But given the graying of the city's population, the fact that New Yorkers are living longer, and the increasing need for older New Yorkers to develop new income streams, it's time for the administration's economic development leaders to develop a set of programs for harnessing the potential of older entrepreneurs.

New York can look abroad for inspiration. An incubator in Israel, Dare to Dream, is providing a launching pad specifically for first-time entrepreneurs in their 50s, 60s, and beyond. New York could adapt that model for the five boroughs and launch the nation's first public incubator focused on encore entrepreneurs. But that's just one idea of many for boosting New York's aspiring encore entrepreneurs.

To help New York City realize this enormous potential, this report concludes with a dozen practical recommendations for the city, private industry, and nonprofit organizations. Taken together, these steps can enable more older entrepreneurs to start and grow businesses, add momentum and vitality to the city's economy, and ensure their own financial well-being.

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Photo Credit: Jeff Sheldon

- The following are recommendations from *Starting Later: Realizing the Promise of Older Entrepreneurs in New York City*
- Read the full report (PDF)

Today, New York City’s boomer generation amounts to nearly one-quarter of the population. By 2035, one in three New Yorkers will be over 50. They are healthier and living longer lives than any previous generation in the city’s history. Moreover, they are starting businesses at rates that exceed those of younger adults and turning to self-employment in record numbers. As the ranks of older adults swell, this demographic shift also signals the emergence of a large and growing market—one that their contemporaries know best. In the decades ahead, older New Yorkers are poised to become a much larger part of the city’s entrepreneurial ecosystem.

But most older adults face significant barriers in seeking out and exploiting entrepreneurial opportunities. Not only do veryfew programs serve this population, but most older New Yorkers don’t even know that entrepreneurship is a possible path for them. Those who do take the leap run into unique challenges—including risks to financial security in retirement, the digital skills gap, and a dearth of networking opportunities—all of which can limit or stymie their success. To harness the full potential of older entrepreneurs, New York City’s policymakers, nonprofit organizations, and business leaders should take several important steps to make it easier for New Yorkers over 50 to start and grow businesses.

Make older adults part of the city’s entrepreneurship agenda. The de Blasio administration has launched several important initiatives aimed at supporting entrepreneurship in recent years, including new incubators in a variety of sectors, resources for women entrepreneurs, and programs aimed at the city’s immigrant business owners. It’s time to make encore entrepreneurs the next step forward for the city’s entrepreneurship agenda. The city’s economic development agencies—New York City Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC) and Department of Small Business Services (SBS)— should launch at least one new initiative focused on helping aspiring encore entrepreneurs get their business off the ground. As they look to design at least one new program supporting older entrepreneurs, NYCEDC and SBS ought to seek input from agencies and organizations that have more expertise in working with older adults, such as AARP, LiveOn NY, the Department for the Aging (DFTA), and New York Academy of Medicine (NYAM), which manages the city’s Age-Friendly NYC initiative.

In addition to creating new resources to support older adults interested in entrepreneurship, NYCEDC and SBS should help increase awareness of the entrepreneurship resources that already exist. New York City has developed several new programs in recent years to help would-be entrepreneurs start businesses, some operated by city agencies like SBS and others operated by nonprofit organizations. Most of these programs are not targeted to specific age groups, but offer services—from financial advice to help drawing up a business plan—that could help many of the city’s aspiring first-time business owners over 50 overcome the barriers to entrepreneurship. SBS, local economic development corporations, chambers of commerce, Small Business Development Centers, and colleges can all do more to market their

entrepreneurship programs to older adults, who are often unaware of the range of services provided in communities across the city. The city's public library systems, which are already highly effective at reaching a broad audience of older adults, could also seize the opportunity to better involve older adults in existing entrepreneurship programs.

Encourage more older adults to turn to entrepreneurship. Boosting the number of encore entrepreneurs in New York will require more than just providing resources for older adults who have already started down the path of self-employment and small business ownership. The de Blasio administration should also take steps to encourage more over-50 New Yorkers to turn to entrepreneurship. Even though encore entrepreneurship is on the rise, the vast majority of older New Yorkers do not see themselves as potential entrepreneurs. That's not surprising since many have been in the workforce for decades, and never needed to consider a path that involved starting their own businesses. But as many older adults now face different realities—including thousands who struggle to get or keep jobs, in some cases due to age discrimination, and others who are looking for opportunities to add to their earnings after retirement—there is a real opportunity to increase the number of encore entrepreneurs.

Currently, few programs in the city promote entrepreneurship as an option for older New Yorkers or raise the visibility of successful older entrepreneurs. The few existing employment programs focused on older adults are aimed at preparing candidates to re-enter the job market, rather than supporting ambitions of self-employment and entrepreneurship. The de Blasio administration should change this. As a model, NYCEDC and SBS might look to the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship and other existing programs that "teach" or promote entrepreneurship to young adults. New city efforts to encourage and promote entrepreneurship among older adults should begin where older New Yorkers already are: institutions like local branch libraries, naturally occurring retirement communities, and the city's 250-plus senior centers that the Department for the Aging operates throughout the city. Programs at these venues can help older adults learn about entrepreneurship in its many forms and introduce them to the growing array of supports—including small business development programs, tech skills-building workshops, networking events, microfinance organizations, and financial planning services—that can help them get started and offer ongoing support. City programs should also tap successful older entrepreneurs to help promote this potential career path.

One ready-made avenue for developing encore entrepreneurs is to incorporate entrepreneurship, microbusiness training, and self-employment guidance into workforce development programs that are targeted at older adults, both at senior centers and nonprofit organizations that focus on skills training and job placement. The city's Age-Friendly NYC program should also consider incorporating entrepreneurship into its education initiative by teaching classes on developing a business plan, social media marketing, or software like Excel and QuickBooks.

Develop start-up competitions for aspiring encore entrepreneurs. New York City is abuzz with start-up competitions and demo events, where aspiring entrepreneurs pitch their business ideas to investors, business experts, and the media. But despite growing in popularity every year, none of these events is focused on tapping into the world of older entrepreneurs. NYCEDC should fund a series of start-up competitions in each of the five boroughs with a focus on entrepreneurs over 50. These events should aim more broadly than the tech sector to encompass food-based businesses, online businesses, and services of all kinds. NYCEDC could partner with one or more of the library systems to launch the competitions, along with community-based small business development organizations and even senior centers. New York City should also develop the first national start-up conference for older entrepreneurs. This annual event would put New York City at the forefront of this emerging opportunity while calling attention to New York City as a supportive place for encore entrepreneurs and providing a platform for the city's homegrown businesses led by older entrepreneurs.

Launch the nation's first public incubator for encore entrepreneurs. New York City should establish the nation's first public incubator space specifically aimed at aspiring entrepreneurs over 50. New York can look abroad for inspiration and model a program on Israel's Dare to Dream initiative. This program combines business development assistance and

mentorship for aspiring older adults with a vibrant community of fellow encore entrepreneurs—many of whom continue to meet regularly well after their participation in the incubator. Dare to Dream also offers a model in which young business and technology students help and advise encore entrepreneurs, creating intergenerational collaboration in the process. By creating the first encore entrepreneurship incubator in the United States, New York City can send a strong signal of support to its older adult population and become a global leader in this nascent but growing field.

Increase business-focused tech training for older adults. Today, New York's older adults are more tech savvy than ever. Many have basic computer skills and regularly use email, search the Internet, watch videos on YouTube, and FaceTime with family and friends. But these skills are only the beginning. Although a handful of organizations provide tech training to older adults, including nonprofits like Older Adults Technology Services (OATS) and the public libraries, there are few opportunities to learn more advanced tech skills that are increasingly essential for entrepreneurship. To help older New Yorkers acquire the skills they need to start and run a business, nonprofits and other training providers should add more programs aimed at teaching older adults the technology needed for business. The de Blasio administration should provide resources to support these efforts. Programs could introduce aspiring older entrepreneurs to online marketing tools and budgeting, sales tracking, and customer management software, as well as social media branding and digital design. Small business development organizations could also develop partnerships with colleges and universities to pair undergraduate tech, marketing, and design students with aspiring older entrepreneurs, providing a valuable learning experience on both sides.

Develop and expand mentorship opportunities, including intergenerational mentorship and peer mentors. A successful leap into entrepreneurship often requires a wealth of good advice, whether it's from lawyers, business experts, accountants, marketers, or fellow entrepreneurs. But while New York City and State boast several programs designed to connect entrepreneurs with mentors and advisors, very few of the individuals running these programs can speak from experience about the process of starting a business after age 50. Many encore entrepreneurs say that they wish they knew someone their own age who had gone through a similar experience and could help them navigate the unique challenges of starting a first business later in life. New York's existing mentorship programs should recruit more encore entrepreneurs to join their ranks, where they can provide a powerful boost of confidence to other older New Yorkers looking to follow in their footsteps.

At the same time, some encore entrepreneurs say that what they want most in an advisor is someone with a fresh perspective, ideally a younger person who can help them catch up on new technology and think strategically about the future. The Department of Small Business Services and small business organizations can leverage the city's entire entrepreneurial ecosystem, as well as colleges and universities, to forge these intergenerational connections, creating teams of student advisors to work with older entrepreneurs on issues like business planning, marketing, and implementing new technology.

Promote networking opportunities for aspiring encore entrepreneurs. While there are numerous networking groups and events for entrepreneurs in the city, few cater to older entrepreneurs facing life-changing decisions or to entrepreneurs who are building the kind of small, low-tech, neighborhood-based businesses typical of older founders. Networking programs directed specifically at older entrepreneurs can provide the learning, interaction, feedback and support that all entrepreneurs, whatever their age, need. As important, they allow encore entrepreneurs, many of them already short on confidence for the road ahead, to interact with like-minded people of their own generation who have had similar experiences and share the same concerns and aspirations. The city and nonprofit organizations should create and support business networks for older first-time entrepreneurs, introducing aspiring entrepreneurs to successful encore entrepreneurs to help them build confidence. In particular, the city can support more peer-to-peer events and programs that allow aspiring older entrepreneurs to meet and learn from other older entrepreneurs. A broader initiative should encourage community groups, small business programs, local development corporations, and chambers of commerce to identify potential senior entrepreneurs and feature them at meetings and other support programs. The city could also sponsor a marketing campaign for encore entrepreneurs, perhaps under the Age-Friendly New York brand, which would drive visibility of successful older adults.

Launch a program focused on supporting—and scaling up—home-based businesses. For many older entrepreneurs, the first step is a home-based business. Whether providing childcare, baking pastries, selling products online, or offering consulting services, many of these small-scale enterprises begin out of the home. To help more home-based entrepreneurs succeed, whether over 50 or under, the city should create a suite of support services aimed at their specific needs. In addition, the city should develop new efforts to help some of the many home-based entrepreneurs increase their revenues and expand beyond their homes. A first step is to offer workshops or webinars specifically geared to home-based businesses—on topics such as social media marketing, ecommerce, and legal and tax issues, for example. Further initiatives could include a grant program to cover some of the costs of moving a business from the entrepreneur's home into a commercial space.

Develop better data on older entrepreneurs. Other than the Kauffman Foundation's Index of Growth Entrepreneurship and GEM's study of senior entrepreneurship globally, there is little data on the extent and character of encore entrepreneurship in the United States, much less in New York City. Building new programs and services aimed at aspiring older entrepreneurs will require a new level of data collection and analysis. New York City should lead the creation of an on-the-ground research initiative to measure the size and scope of encore entrepreneurship in New York City, identify characteristics of encore entrepreneurs, document their unique needs and challenges, and measure their impact.

Help older adults transition to self-employment after leaving the workforce. Rather than waiting until people retire or leave a job to introduce the possibility of entrepreneurship, small business development organizations should partner with employers to develop in-house entrepreneurship training programs for soon-to-be retirees, helping them identify skills and market opportunities. "We need more companies bringing entrepreneurship programs into their corporations," says Elizabeth Isele of Senior Entrepreneurship Works. These programs could prove to be an important and competitive benefit, while introducing more working adults to the idea of entrepreneurship while they still have ample time ahead to take the plunge.

Help more older entrepreneurs make the transition from part-time to full-time self-employment. Although some older entrepreneurs are content to view their businesses as a part-time commitment, others express a desire to transition to full-time self-employment. In some cases, the challenge is finding enough clients to make freelance consulting a sustainable source of income. Others wonder if they will be able to turn a side business selling baked goods at local markets or clothing on Etsy into a full-time enterprise. To meet the needs of these aspiring full-timers, SBS, nonprofit small business development organizations, and the city's library systems should consider developing new programs aimed at helping entrepreneurs transition from part-time to full-time self-employment, including steps for growing a freelance business and strategies for going from 10 hours per week of entrepreneurial activity to 20 or more.

Create a succession planning system to match business owners looking to retire with aspiring entrepreneurs. For successful older entrepreneurs, succession planning can pose a challenge. Without a trusted employee or family member interested in taking over the business, the prospect of choosing between closing a business or working on it in perpetuity can be a major source of stress. At the same time, many aspiring entrepreneurs over 50 are interested in taking over an existing business rather than starting one from scratch. New York City can address both the challenge and the opportunity by creating a succession planning system to match aspiring entrepreneurs with business owners seeking to retire. Modeled on a successful program in Barcelona known as Reempresa, this initiative could pair small companies looking to wind down with interested buyers through an online matching system. Participants go through an intensive business education and assistance program and the companies are vetted to ensure that they are financially sound. The result is that small businesses are sustained through a transfer to new ownership and aspiring entrepreneurs gain access to many more opportunities.

This study was made possible by **Capital One**.

Capital One's Future Edge initiative is a $150 million, five-year effort to help more American workers and entrepreneurs succeed in the 21st century economy. Through Future Edge, Capital One works with hundreds of leading community and nonprofit organizations in NYC and beyond, including microfinance and micro-lending organizations empowering encore entrepreneurs such as Grameen America, Accion, and the Business Outreach Center Network.

General operating support for the Center for an Urban Future has been provided by **The Clark Foundation**, the **Bernard F. and Alva B. Gimbel Foundation**, and the **Altman Foundation**. CUF is also grateful for support from **Fisher Brothers** for the Middle Class Jobs Project.

STARTING LATER is a publication of the Center for an Urban Future. Researched and written by Judith Messina. Edited by Eli Dvorkin and Jonathan Bowles. Additional research by Gail Hankin, Julia Hotz, Nicholas Hoynes, Leah Jacobson, Elsa Van Latum, Stefan Manuel, Jennifer Meer, Alexa Schatzmann, Naomi Sharp, Neil Suri, Isabella Willeboordse, and Shiming Xiong. Designed by Rob Chabebe.

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