



VISION TO REALITY

2023 - 2024

**Impact Report For
NorthSTAR**



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OUR “WHY”

NorthSTAR is a collaborative ecosystem, supporting and equipping social enterprises as they deploy impactful solutions to our world’s greatest social and environmental challenges. We illuminate pathways and eliminate barriers which limit individuals — especially underrepresented communities — from achieving their entrepreneurial potential and driving positive change.

LETTER FROM
STEPHAN ERKELENS

RevHub President + CEO

Dear Partners, Supporters, and Friends,

When we founded RevHub in 2019, we set out to build a thriving social enterprise ecosystem that could empower social entrepreneurs to develop scalable solutions to our world's greatest social and environmental challenges. As our ecosystem, partnerships, programming, and funding opportunities grew, we encountered a significant challenge: underrepresented founders—those with the greatest potential to succeed as social entrepreneurs, due to their unique backgrounds and lived experiences—often experienced barriers that limited their ability to start, let alone scale, their businesses. These entrepreneurs were routinely overlooked and underestimated by traditional funding sources like venture capital, and often lacked access to the social and intellectual capital necessary to gain business traction.

In early 2022, we launched the NorthSTAR initiative to meet this challenge head-on. Our aims were to create an entrepreneurial ecosystem in Orange County that offered a “no wrong door” path to entrepreneurship for underrepresented individuals, while igniting a social enterprise movement that could radically transform our region and the world. Today, NorthSTAR has become synonymous with these goals in Orange County and beyond.

We've seen remarkable progress in uniting public, private, and philanthropic partners to support entrepreneurs throughout their journeys. As a result, we have inspired thousands of entrepreneurs in Orange County to start and grow their businesses.

This unprecedented success has only fueled our ambitions, inspiring others across the nation to join us in creating a large-scale entrepreneurial movement across the United States.

But we couldn't do it without you—our supporters, partners, and fellow visionaries. Your belief in the transformative power of entrepreneurship is the catalyst that propels us forward.

In gratitude,



Stephan Erkelens
RevHub President + CEO



ABOUT US

In 2022, NorthSTAR (Systems To Access Resources) embarked on a visionary journey. We sought to create a robust social entrepreneurial ecosystem in Orange County that would simultaneously catalyze entrepreneurs to develop social and environmental solutions to our world's greatest challenges, and illuminate entrepreneurial pathways for underrepresented communities.

An \$8.5 million budget appropriation grant from the Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development (GO-Biz), championed by Senator Josh Newman (CA-29th District), became the seed capital that sparked the partnerships, programs, and practices which led to significant impact and built bright futures for social innovators, entrepreneurs, and the communities they serve and call home.

This report encapsulates the strides we have made in this transformative journey. It also underscores the importance of our entrepreneurial ecosystem in driving profound social impact.



OUR MISSION AND VISION

Our mission: To catalyze social impact at scale by coalescing a robust social enterprise ecosystem that equips and empowers entrepreneurs to shape our communities, our environment, and our future.

Our vision: By bringing together community organizations, research, education, governments, and businesses around a common agenda, we empower individuals—regardless of background or circumstance—with the essential pillars of Belief, Access, and Knowledge they need to create businesses that positively impact our community and our world.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Pursue opportunity with resourcefulness, imagination, and adaptability.

EMPOWERMENT

Allocate resources that allow entrepreneurs to access opportunities to build and scale their impact.

EQUITY

Illuminate pathways and eliminate barriers to impactful entrepreneurship for all individuals.



IMPACTFUL ENTREPRENEURSHIP ACCESSIBLE TO ALL!

A “NO WRONG DOOR” APPROACH

We believe that transformative entrepreneurship should be accessible to all. Our “no wrong door” approach ensures that aspiring entrepreneurs have multiple entry points and access channels to engage with our programs and resources. This approach is designed to eliminate barriers such as lack of access to capital, resources, and

networks while illuminating pathways to success. It fuels the upward social and economic advancement of individuals, empowering them to become authors of their own success stories, creating a virtuous cycle of economic growth and personal freedom for underrepresented and underserved communities.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP **ELEVATES**
INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES.

OUR MODEL

At NorthSTAR, we believe in the transformative power of entrepreneurship to unlock human potential. Through our program, we provide aspiring individuals with the essential pillars of Belief, Access, and Knowledge, enabling them to achieve upward social and economic advancement.



BELIEF | AMPLIFY SUCCESS STORIES.

We actively foster a belief that anyone can create a business which creates positive change, builds wealth, and ultimately shapes communities for the better.



ACCESS | ELIMINATE BARRIERS.

We eliminate barriers by providing equal access to resources, networks, and opportunities. NorthSTAR ensures that aspiring entrepreneurs from all backgrounds, genders, and socioeconomic backgrounds have equal opportunity to launch and scale their businesses.



KNOWLEDGE | ILLUMINATE PATHWAYS.

We equip individuals with comprehensive entrepreneurial knowledge and skills. Through robust training programs and practical workshops, we provide the necessary tools, business acumen, and insights to navigate the entrepreneurial landscape.

WHY ECOSYSTEM DEVELOPMENT MATTERS

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY
FULLERTON
 COLLEGE OF
 BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS
Center for Entrepreneurship



Alliance
 for SoCal
 Innovation



NORTH ORANGE COUNTY
 COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT



ENTREPRENEURIAL
 SUPPORT
 ORGS

INDUSTRY

ENTREPRENEURIAL
 ECOSYSTEM

MENTORS +
 SUBJECT
 MATTER EXPERTS

RESEARCH



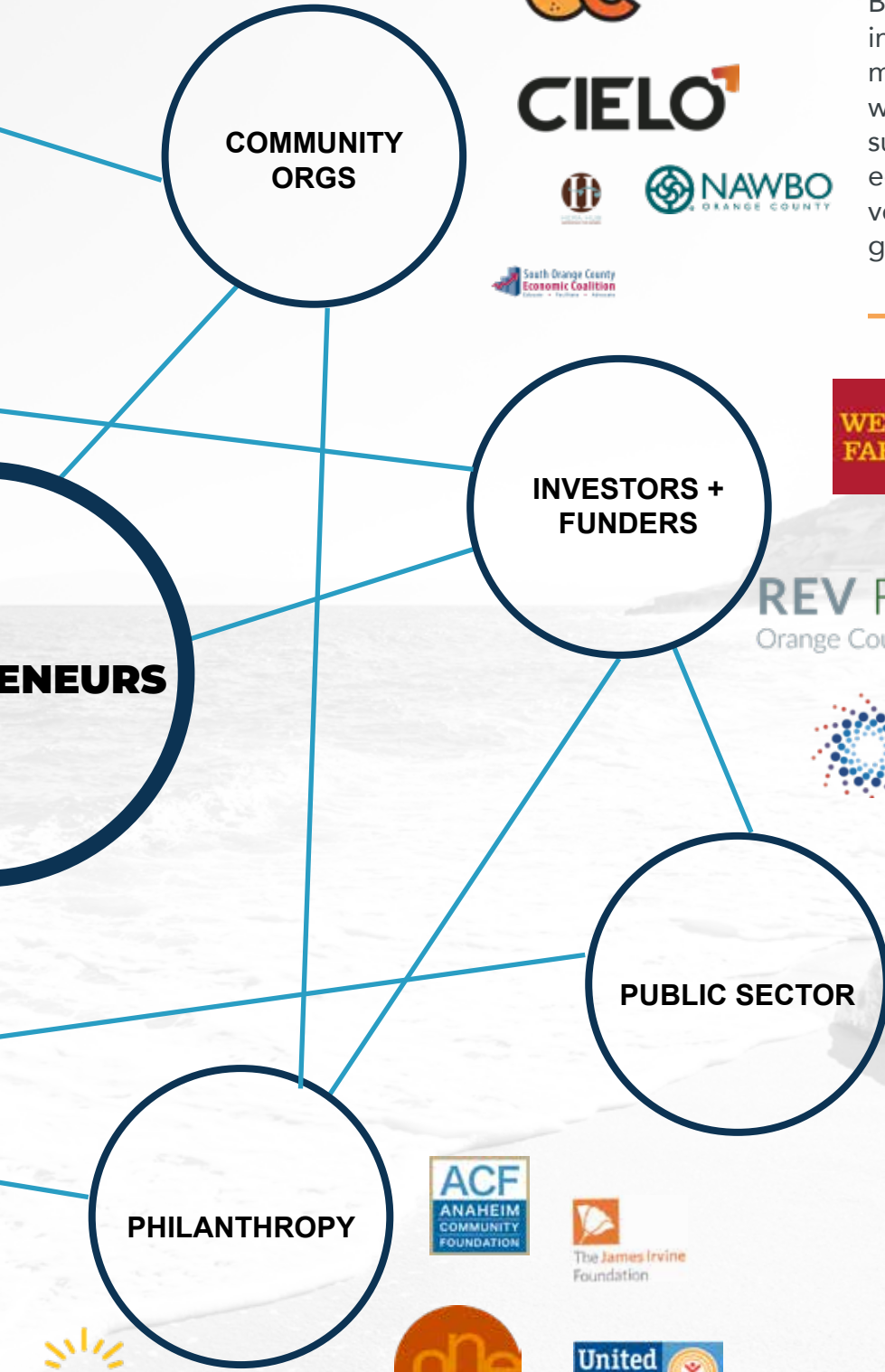
UCI Beall
 Applied Innovation





ECOSYSTEM DEVELOPMENT IS AT THE HEART OF OUR STRATEGY.

By creating a supportive and interconnected network of partners, mentors, investors, and resources, we are able to provide a holistic support system for entrepreneurs. This ecosystem not only nurtures individual ventures, but also fosters community growth and economic development.



U.S. Small Business Administration



KEY ACHIEVEMENTS



Comprehensive Program Launch: With the support of an \$8.5 million grant from the Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development (GO-Biz), championed by Senator Josh Newman, we launched a series of programs including workshops, webinars, mentoring sessions, and incubation initiatives. These programs provide essential resources and support to aspiring entrepreneurs, fostering a culture of innovation and inclusivity.



Engaging and Expanding the Ecosystem: Entrepreneurship is a key driver for economic prosperity and impactful solutions to our world's greatest challenges. For this reason, we connected and coordinated over 115 entrepreneurial support organizations around a unified mission within a collaborative ecosystem. As a result, our collective impact has been exponentially greater than any organization could achieve alone.



MEASURABLE SUCCESS



Establishing a Recognizable Brand: We have built consistent brand identity across the entire ecosystem of collaborative partners that positioned NorthSTAR as a key resource in the entrepreneurial landscape. This brand differentiation has enhanced our visibility and credibility, particularly among underserved communities.



Strategic Outreach: Our streamlined marketing efforts have amplified our reach and engagement. From high-quality presentations to impactful social media campaigns, we have successfully communicated our value proposition and built a supportive community around our mission.



Compelling Storytelling: By sharing inspiring success stories of entrepreneurs and collaborative partners, we have driven interest, engagement, and trust. These narratives have not only highlighted our impact, but have also motivated others to embark on their entrepreneurial journeys.



IMPACT

Through their ventures, entrepreneurs introduce innovative social initiatives, endorse positive change, and contribute to the betterment of society.

In under two years, NorthSTAR has evolved from an ambitious vision into a transformative force within Orange County. By building a scalable social enterprise ecosystem, we've propelled innovation that has tangible impact on our communities and our world. Moreover, we have expanded our programming to ensure all individuals, especially underrepresented and underresourced communities, have the resources and opportunity to build impactful businesses. Our collaborative efforts have fostered

personal achievement, community transformation, and financial prosperity by providing accessible financial and social capital at every stage of enterprise development. Our comprehensive blueprint engages diverse communities by leveraging significant state, federal, and local resources to empower thousands of entrepreneurs in our community. This approach has established NorthSTAR as a credible leader in developing entrepreneurship as a powerful vehicle to transform the future of Orange County.

HIGH-LEVEL OVERVIEW OF ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE IMPACT

- 1** Conducted Comprehensive Market Research Analysis
- 2** Developed Strategic Frameworks
- 3** Assembled a Talented Team
- 4** Community Engagement
- 5** Established Performance Metrics
- 6** Launched a Comprehensive Outreach Strategy
- 7** Developed and Launched Programs
- 8** Secured Additional Funding
- 9** Amplifying Success Stories
- 10** Sustaining and Scaling Efforts

**A COMPREHENSIVE BLUEPRINT FOR
INCLUSIVE ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND
COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION**

RESULTS OF OUR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

1,819,133

INTERACTIONS WITH INDIVIDUALS THROUGH OUTREACH

“Outreach” means interactions with individuals, bringing knowledge and awareness about social entrepreneurship to the general public.

Key Activities: Events, classes, presentations, webinars, websites, social media, videos, and flyers.

WHAT DOES THIS ALL MEAN?

Our metrics tell a powerful story of success and potential. In the past year alone, efforts have touched over 1.8 million individuals, inspiring them to explore the possibilities of entrepreneurship, and we’ve joined thousands on their entrepreneurial journeys.

But beyond the numbers, NorthSTAR represents hope, opportunity, and the promise of a better tomorrow. Our efforts have not only fostered innovation and growth, but have also ensured these opportunities are accessible to those traditionally underrepresented in the entrepreneurial space. Our community is now 70% women and 75% non-White, showcasing our commitment to diversity and equity of opportunity.

The value of NorthSTAR’s work is clear: we are not just creating entrepreneurs; we are building a diverse and inclusive ecosystem that supports sustainable growth and innovation. By continuing these efforts, we can expand our reach, deepen our social and environmental impact, and create a thriving, inclusive entrepreneurial landscape that benefits everyone.

10,327

INDIVIDUALS ENGAGED IN BUSINESS EXPLORATION

Formal or informal programming allows individuals to explore the fundamentals of entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship at their own pace.

Key Activities: Neighborhood canvassing that includes two-way interaction, workshops, networking events, entrepreneurship courses, and trainings.

3,898

INDIVIDUALS ENGAGED IN BUSINESS IDEATION

Individuals generate and develop new business ideas through structured programming with a clear beginning/end and deliverables.

Key Activities: Bootcamps, fast pitches, and structured entrepreneurship program.

2,518

INDIVIDUALS ENGAGED IN BUSINESS INCUBATION

Individuals refine, validate, and potentially launch their business ideas through structured programming that has a clear beginning/end and deliverables.

Key Activities: Incubators, microgrants, advisor support, and pitch practice.

2,565

INDIVIDUALS ENGAGED IN SOCIAL CAPITAL PROGRAMMING

Programming that is built on relationships and includes an intentional connection with other people helps participants succeed in their entrepreneurial journeys.

Key Activities: Mentoring and consulting.

1,050

INDIVIDUALS ENGAGED IN COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAMMING

Individualized and holistic support is provided in a variety of modes and settings based on participants' needs.

Key Activities: Ideation and incubation programming with a combination of support services – mentoring, funding, and technical assistance.

1

CONDUCTED COMPREHENSIVE MARKET RESEARCH ANALYSIS

Through comprehensive market and research analyses, we delved into the unique challenges and opportunities facing disinvested and marginalized communities in Orange County. Our findings revealed that, while there is an abundance of intellectual capital—resources and educational opportunities—several significant barriers persist.

This exploration led us to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that prevent individuals from believing that entrepreneurship is not only attainable, but a real opportunity for everyone.

We discovered that the obstacles in accessing the social capital (networks) and early-stage funding prevented millions of people from launching their businesses. To bridge the gap between belief, desire, and capacity, culturally relevant community organizations needed to act as trusted navigators who could bring together the different organizations, funding sources, and resources within a robust entrepreneurial support ecosystem paving the way for meaningful and sustainable opportunities are accessible to all.

TRANSFORMING OBSTACLES INTO OPPORTUNITIES FOR INCLUSIVE, SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY GROWTH

2

DEVELOPED STRATEGIC FRAMEWORKS

To chart a path toward meaningful change, we developed a robust Theory of Change and a detailed Logic Model for the NorthSTAR initiative. These strategic frameworks serve as our roadmap, guiding every step of our mission and ensuring our efforts align with our core objectives.

At the heart of our approach are three key impact objectives:

1. Establish a model for scalable social enterprise ecosystem building.
2. Illuminate pathways for aspiring entrepreneurs.
3. Eliminate barriers to underrepresented entrepreneur success.

By focusing on these objectives, this approach ensured our long-term sustainable impact and expansion to other communities.

With these outcomes established, the NorthSTAR collaborative developed a comprehensive measurement framework for outreach, multi-stage programming, research and evaluation, fundraising, and communication.

3

ASSEMBLED A TALENTED TEAM

RevHub's expertise in social enterprise ecosystem building and support programming ensured the success and sustainability of the NorthSTAR initiative by assembling a dedicated team.

- **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ECOSYSTEM BUILDING**
Works with individual ecosystem collaborators to deploy a strategic framework.
- **COMMUNITY NAVIGATOR**
Engages in strategic outreach, forging partnerships, and connecting individuals and organizations with resources.
- **IDEATION NAVIGATOR**
Establishes programming to guide idea-stage entrepreneurs in developing their business concepts.
- **INCUBATION NAVIGATOR**
Supports early-stage business incubation programming for entrepreneurs to develop early traction and impact.
- **ADVISOR NAVIGATOR**
Coordinates a network of mentors, advisors, and subject matter experts who guide and support entrepreneurs.
- **DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT**
Supports the program's financial sustainability through donor engagement and grant development.
- **CLIMATE ACTION PROJECT LEAD**
Oversees the Climate Action Business Incubator that supports ventures developing impactful climate solutions.
- **PUBLIC SECTOR ENGAGEMENT LEAD**
Builds relationships with government agencies and public organizations, advocating for organizational objectives.
- **MARKETING + COMMUNICATIONS TEAM**
Creates broadscale promotion of entrepreneurial opportunity by developing consistent brand and marketing.

4

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

By leveraging the specialized capability of ecosystem collaborators, entrepreneurs gain access to the resources and training needed to achieve their business goals, regardless of their experience or background. Moreover, to ensure cultural relevance and reach, NorthSTAR counts on the unique background of these multi-ethnic and diverse community patterns to reach their communities.

NorthSTAR collaborative partners conducted virtual and in-person training

sessions, organized community events to foster networking and collaboration, and participated in panel discussions to share expertise. Moreover, by mapping and communicating the various resources both on- and offline, RevHub has facilitated the “no wrong door” approach to entrepreneurship, ensuring relevant resources are accessible to entrepreneurs regardless of their particular business model, market, or stage of their journey.

**LEVERAGING ECOSYSTEM COLLABORATORS
TO ENSURE “NO WRONG DOOR”
APPROACH TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

5

ESTABLISHED PERFORMANCE METRICS

Developing metrics to track new business formation, access to capital, demographic characteristics, and indicators of upward social mobility is crucial for the success and sustainability of NorthSTAR's initiatives. These metrics provide a comprehensive understanding of Belief, Access, and Knowledge among underrepresented communities as benchmarks of the initiative's success.

This data enables the development of tailored programs designed to meet specific gaps in the entrepreneurial landscape.

By systematically tracking entrepreneurial engagement from business exploration, ideation, and incubation through new business formation, we identify the trends which effectively foster growth.

Moreover, by emphasizing not only "what" (activities) but "who" (stakeholders) these targets are through demographic data-gathering, NorthSTAR collaborative partners can create solutions that foster greater inclusivity, equity, and economic development.

MEASURING IMPACT THROUGH DEMOGRAPHICS, ACCESS, AND ECONOMIC INDICATORS

6

LAUNCHED A COMPREHENSIVE OUTREACH STRATEGY

To effectively promote NorthSTAR's "no wrong door" approach and to generate genuine trust, we needed to enlist trusted guides and community leaders who understand and resonate with specific communities, ensuring our initiatives are communicated authentically. Their involvement is essential for engagement in culturally relevant ways, making individuals feel understood, supported, and more likely to participate in entrepreneurial programs.

This grassroots activity was further reinforced by multi-channel storytelling – social media, digital and print advertising, broadcast, PR, etc. – which elevated success stories which create belief in entrepreneurship as a viable reality.

As a result, we had over 1.8 million interactions with individuals through outreach, reinforcing the power of entrepreneurship to transform the lives of individuals, families, and entire communities.

7

DEVELOPED AND LAUNCHED PROGRAMS

NorthSTAR understands that entrepreneurs need more than just workshops; they require integrated support and interconnected collaborative partners.

Data-informed, targeted programs ensure comprehensive assistance at every stage, fostering collaboration and providing the necessary for aspiring entrepreneurs to progress from ideation through exploration and incubation to successful business launches.

KEY STRATEGIC WINS:

- Opened the North Orange County Community College District (NOCCCD) Center for Entrepreneurship.
 - Launched three (3) business **ideation** programs and three (3) social enterprise **incubators**.
 - Collaborative partners conducted 300+ workshops, bootcamps, and networking events.
 - Selected by Samueli Foundation to develop business incubation programming focused on AgTech and Food Systems in collaboration with OC Hunger Alliance.
 - Created and are launching online platforms for entrepreneurship resources and community engagement.
-

8

SECURED ADDITIONAL FUNDING

NorthSTAR leveraged the \$8.5 million government appropriation to strategically engage with public and private entities, securing additional funding and sponsorships to bolster our entrepreneurial ecosystem.

The successful mobilization of these funds has enabled NorthSTAR ensure long-term sustainability by showcasing the impact of the initial government support to attract further investments from both state and federal agencies.

Additionally, we forged partnerships with private

foundations, corporations, and philanthropic organizations, demonstrating how they could amplify the mission.

Through targeted outreach and compelling storytelling, we illustrated the transformative potential of their support, ensuring a sustainable flow of resources.

This collaborative approach not only enhanced our financial stability, but also expanded our network of allies who each contribute unique expertise and resources.

**SECURING DIVERSE FUNDING TO
ENHANCE INNOVATION AND
INCLUSIVITY IN OUR ECOSYSTEM**

9

AMPLIFYING SUCCESS STORIES

NorthSTAR quickly became the authority for ecosystem development through effective amplification of the narrative of entrepreneurship. By sharing inspiring stories of entrepreneurs, we built trust and motivated others to pursue their ventures. We received numerous awards, delivered keynote presentations, and further solidified our position as a thought leader in fostering a robust entrepreneurial ecosystem.

AWARDS AND RECOGNITION BY SEVERAL COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS, INCLUDING:

- Orange County Business Council (OCBC) for public-private partnership that sparked economic development and entrepreneurship initiatives.
- National Coalition of 100 Black Women (NCBW): 2023 RevolutionHER Impact in Leadership Award.
- Orange County Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (OCHCC)—Estrella Award for Excellence in Community Building Through Partnership.

EXTENSIVE MEDIA COVERAGE, INCLUDING 27 PLACEMENTS, 91M IMPRESSIONS, AND FEATURES IN 13 MEDIA OUTLETS.

MANY EVENTS AND SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS, INCLUDING:

- 2024 Southern California Entrepreneurship Week.
- SoCal Celebrates Entrepreneurship (SCCE).
- National Association of Women Business Owners—California (NAWBO-CA) Propel 2024 Conference.
- Women in Impact Investing Event.
- National Coalition of 100 Black Women (NCBW)—Orange County Chapter Annual Conference.

10

SUSTAINING AND SCALING EFFORTS

To sustain and scale our efforts, NorthSTAR strategically brought together public, private, and philanthropic entities, creating a robust support network for our initiatives. This comprehensive approach includes engaging community organizations, conducting research, and partnering with industry leaders to expand our resource ecosystem and ensure ongoing support and growth.

- Secured additional funding through private foundations and philanthropists.
- Leveraged relationships with donor-advised fund managers for long-term support.
- Expanded our resource ecosystem through partnerships with 115 community organizations.
- Entered into long-term partnership agreement with Sustain SoCal based on their 30+ years of experience in the sustainability space and 4,000+ private sector members.



NORTHSTAR HAS PROVEN TO
BE A POWERFUL DRIVER OF
INNOVATION, INCLUSIVITY,
AND EMPOWERMENT.



LOOKING AHEAD

As we reflect on our achievements, we are motivated to continue our journey with even greater resolve. The progress we have made in building a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem in Orange County is just the beginning. We are committed to scaling our impact, inspiring more entrepreneurs, and driving lasting social and economic change.

What we started in Orange County has become broadly known as the “missing link” to building a comprehensive and inclusive model for economic growth and community empowerment, inspiring other influential private, public, and philanthropic organizations to join us in taking this model to local communities across the country.



CABI

(CLIMATE ACTION BUSINESS INCUBATOR)

Achieving NorthSTAR's strategic objective of creating a scalable social enterprise ecosystem in Orange County requires dedicated programming. Climate change is a particularly complex challenge our world faces, essentially requiring an ecosystem within an ecosystem. To properly identify and equip entrepreneurs pursuing solutions that are both market- and climate-driven, we collaborated with RevHub, the University of California, Irvine, and Sustain SoCal in launching Orange County's first Climate Action Business Incubator (CABI).

CABI was designed to foster the growth of companies behind new sustainable technologies that embrace immediate corrective actions, such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions and creating adaptive community solutions. By slashing the time lag between research and real-world application, CABI allows ventures to swiftly protect vulnerable populations from the most severe consequences of climate change. Not only does this safeguard public health and safety, but it also cultivates a robust green economy.

NOCCCD CENTER FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The rationale for funding and launching the North Orange County Community College District (NOCCCD) Center for Entrepreneurship centers on our unwavering commitment to expanding access to entrepreneurial opportunities for all individuals, regardless of their backgrounds. At NorthSTAR, we believe that entrepreneurship is a powerful vehicle for economic mobility and community transformation. By partnering with NOCCCD, we aim to provide accessible, high-quality entrepreneurial education and resources to a diverse student population.

Community colleges serve as a critical gateway to higher education and career advancement for many underrepresented and underresourced individuals. The NOCCCD Center for Entrepreneurship is strategically positioned to leverage this gateway, offering tailored programs, mentorship, and support services that empower students to turn their innovative ideas into viable businesses. By making entrepreneurial education more accessible, we are breaking down the barriers that often prevent aspiring entrepreneurs from pursuing their dreams.

This initiative also aligns with our broader mission of fostering an inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem. By equipping students with the necessary skills, knowledge, and resources, we are nurturing a new generation of entrepreneurs who are prepared to contribute to the economic vitality of Orange County and beyond. The Center for Entrepreneurship will not only inspire students, but also provide them with practical tools and a supportive community to help them succeed.

**BREAKING BARRIERS BY EQUIPPING
EVERY STUDENT TO TURN IDEAS
INTO IMPACTFUL BUSINESSES**



WII (WOMEN IN IMPACT INVESTING)

NorthSTAR, dedicated to fostering inclusive entrepreneurship, is proud to be the main sponsor of the Women in Impact Investing panel discussion. This initiative aligns perfectly with our mission to eliminate barriers and illuminate pathways for underrepresented communities, including women. The creation of this panel sparked a surge of interest and engagement, highlighting the vital role of women as social



entrepreneurs and impact investors. The event showcased inspiring stories of women leaders driving meaningful change, demonstrating the power of women-led initiatives in fostering sustainable, inclusive growth. Attendees were empowered by actionable insights and real-world examples, leading to increased participation in social entrepreneurship and impact investing. This momentum fostered a supportive community, encouraging more women to step into leadership roles and champion innovative solutions for global challenges. By sponsoring this event, NorthSTAR underscores its commitment to empowering women and amplifying their impact in the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

SUSTAIN SOCIAL EVENTS



NorthSTAR is investing in developing a robust industry network in the climate action space with Sustain SoCal to drive innovation and impact. By creating events and discussion panels, we aim to attract and support more entrepreneurs, especially from historically underrepresented communities, in the climate tech space. This partnership will catalyze the development of impact-driven enterprises, fostering collaboration and resource-sharing. Together, we can accelerate climate action, harnessing the power of diverse entrepreneurship to address environmental challenges, create jobs, and drive economic growth, all while positioning Orange County as a leader in sustainable innovation.



VERONIQUE RAE BREWS SUCCESS WITH URBAN V'S COFFEE



The aroma of freshly brewed coffee isn't simply a pleasant scent for Veronique Rae; it's a lifeline. After her government contract was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Veronique found herself questioning her career path. But amidst the uncertainty, a passion simmered—her love for coffee, nurtured since childhood by her grandfather.

"I was praying to God to help me know what to do, and I kept hearing a small voice saying, 'Look at your hands'," Veronique remembers

thinking, tracing the lines etched on her palms. "Every finger is a stream of wealth. Which will you put your hands to?" Coffee was the clear answer. However, Veronique wasn't naive. A coffee business operated by a single mother—let alone a Black woman in her 50s—faced hurdles; navigating business finances and competition seemed daunting. But then Veronique discovered NorthSTAR.

In time, NorthSTAR became Veronique's guiding light. When she connected with

“Six-week courses equipped Veronique with essential business skills, from branding to financial management.”

CIELO, a NorthSTAR collaborative partner, the experience truly blossomed. Six-week courses equipped Veronique with essential business skills, from branding to financial management. The program also fostered a crucial sense of community—a distinctive network of fellow entrepreneurs from underrepresented communities facing similar challenges. Veronique learned the importance of clear contracts and managing growth spurts, lessons that protected her business and built resilience. When a shaky initial order threatened her brand reputation, NorthSTAR collaborative partners provided guidance. Veronique wasn't just another applicant; she was a valued member.

Veronique's journey began with a simple coffee percolator and three bags of beans, but with each step, Urban V's Coffee has matured. Mason jars have been replaced with sleek branded cans, and pop-up shops have become a platform to connect with the community and create a buzz. Veronique's infectious personality, coupled with her exceptional coffee, resonates with customers. Every bag of coffee she sells isn't just a product; it's a conversation-starter, a

connection forged over a shared love for the rich, aromatic brew.

Today, Urban V's Coffee has evolved into a mission field. Beyond simply serving coffee, Veronique fosters a sense of belonging. "I never meet a stranger," she smiles, her passion evident. To her, witnessing the joy she brings to others is the greatest reward.

Veronique's success story is an illustration of the power of perseverance and the transformative impact of community support. From a single mom facing uncertainty to a confident businessowner and community leader, her journey inspires others to chase their dreams, no matter how vast. Veronique's own dreams are limitless; she envisions a future with a fleet of boutique coffee houses, each offering a unique experience that reflects the rich tapestry of coffee cultures across the globe.

The future is bright for Urban V's Coffee, and Veronique is ready to brew it, cup by cup, with the same passion and dedication that has brought her this far.



FROM ORANGE COUNTY KID TO COMMUNITY CHAMPION: KEVIN HOBBY'S THE COUNTY PROJECT TAKES ROOT

Kevin Hobby had always felt a deep connection to Orange County. Growing up in Brea, it wasn't only a place he lived, it was his entire identity. But after moving to Atlanta for college, he noted a disconnect. "Everywhere I went," he remembers, "people had this stereotypical view of Orange County—*The OC TV show or The Real Housewives of Orange County*. There was so much more to it, a vibrant diversity waiting to be celebrated."

Fueled by this desire to showcase the true spirit of Orange County, Kevin started sketching. His canvas? A simple orange hoodie. The response from friends was overwhelmingly positive, urging him to turn the design into a brand. "Honestly," Kevin admits, "clothing wasn't even on my radar. But I've always wanted to be an entrepreneur—someone who could make a positive impact."

The County Project was born as more than a clothing line; it's a movement to unite Orange County under a single banner. However, starting a business wasn't easy. "Banks wouldn't touch me," he recalls. "I

began with \$200, enough for the first batch of t-shirts. It was a constant hustle." He emphasizes the importance of education as an entrepreneur. "So many people skip this step," he says. "They see clothing as art, not a business, and they fail to equip themselves."

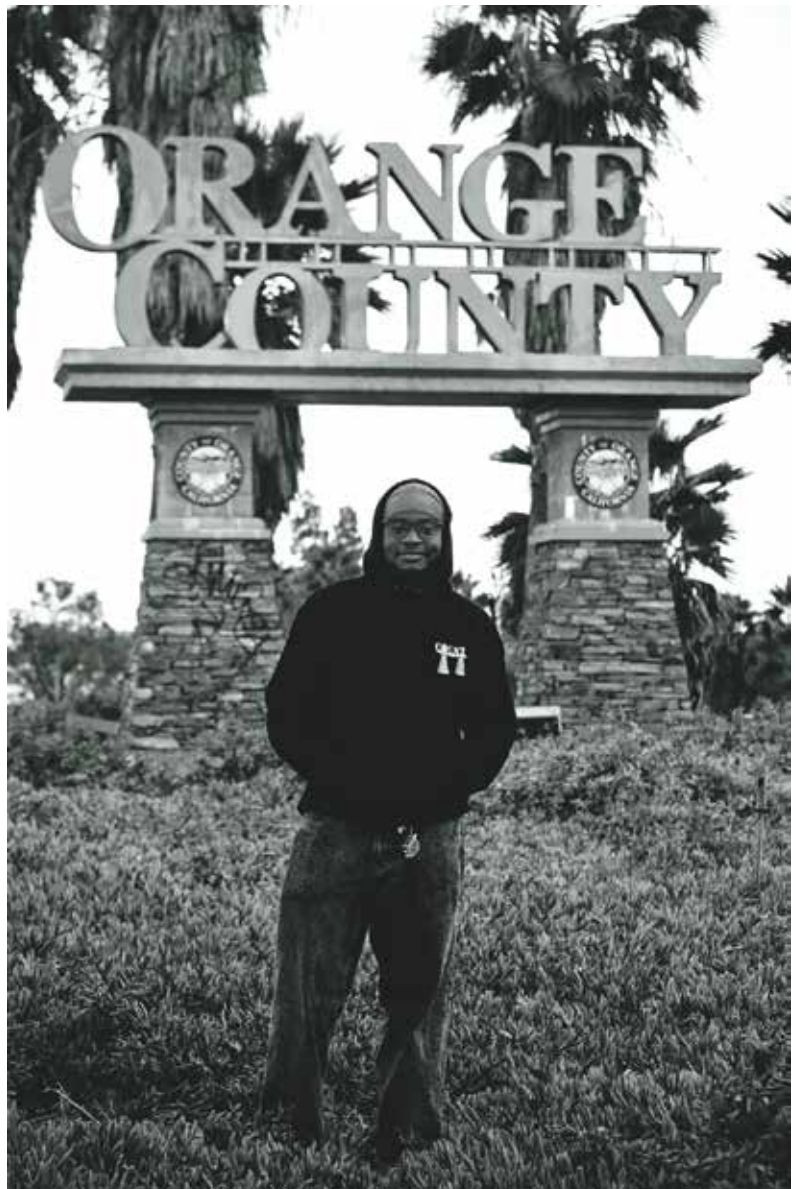
A young Black entrepreneur who was up against numerous obstructions, Kevin knew he needed guidance. Enter NorthSTAR collaborative partner, CIELO. "Meeting with CIELO was a game-changer," Kevin beams. "They plugged me into their network, connected me with mentors, and even helped me with a grant proposal. It forced me to create a solid business plan and realistic goals."

With the guidance and strength of a robust collaborative, The County Project has blossomed. Kevin opened a by-appointment studio and established partnerships with local organizations like the OC Soccer Club. "It's more than selling clothes," he explains. "It's about community pride. We've done events, raised money for good causes, and inspired others to give back." He sees The County

“ This collaborative brought with it an **inclusive environment that empowers entrepreneurs** of underresourced, underrepresented communities. ”

Project as a canvas, “a representation of our values, a platform for positive change that benefits our community.” Ultimately, Kevin’s vision extends beyond clothing. He’s leveraged his social influence to rally his followers to volunteer at different community organizations across Orange County. The result: more followers, more customers, and more individuals committed to the authentic Orange County culture.

The County Project’s story is one of passion, perseverance, and community building. As Kevin himself says, “I want to inspire people to chase their dreams. I want to show them that it’s possible, and together, we can make a real difference in Orange County.” With The County Project as his canvas, Kevin Hobby is painting a vibrant picture of a proud, united community.





RENA BRAR PRAYAGA'S MISSION TO EMPOWER COMMUNITIES THROUGH **STORYKASA**



Rena Brar Prayaga's journey has been far from linear. Lawyer, data scientist, innovator—her diverse background hints at a restless spirit, yearning to make a positive impact. But her trajectory lay shrouded in uncertainty until a passion for storytelling cleared the fog. Armed with the inspiration of using stories to bridge the “word gap” and

empower underserved communities, Rena embarked on building StoryKasa, an audio platform for people of diverse backgrounds and cultures to share their stories.

While the road ahead was paved with challenges, NorthSTAR's Ignite Impact business ideation program presented a

“ The program’s **practical approach** and **insightful sessions** proved invaluable in helping Rena refine her business model. ”

turning point for StoryKasa. Rena already possessed a strong foundation in social entrepreneurship; however, translating theory into reality demanded guidance. The program’s practical approach and insightful sessions proved invaluable in helping Rena refine her business model, challenging assumptions, and honing her value proposition.

The program isn’t just about refining the “what and how of business growth;” it fosters a supportive community designed to support underrepresented communities to which Rena and her intended audience belonged. The Mastermind sessions connected Rena with fellow entrepreneurs and mentors, offering a wellspring of practical advice. While the structured testing phase didn’t perfectly align with her needs, she found she could use the program’s overall structure to keep her forward-focused.

Beyond the curriculum, the connections have proved most valuable. Mentors offered strategic guidance, and the potential for a future alumni network has promised a lasting source of support. The program has also

helped Rena identify areas for improvement, such as design thinking workshops that benefit early-stage ventures, and separate user testing resources crucial for successful launch.

Today, StoryKasa’s captivating audio adventures offer a way to connect families and communities through the power of storytelling. Users from diverse backgrounds record their unique stories, promoting literacy and language development. In the process, they are also fostering deeper cross-cultural understanding and human empathy.

Rena’s story is a testament to the transformative power of a supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem. From lawyer to storyteller, her journey exemplifies the unwavering pursuit of a single mission: to empower communities and bridge divides all through the magic of storytelling.



BRIDGING THE GAP: SETH FELDMAN'S PROCUREMINT HEALTH CONNECTS COMMUNITIES TO BETTER CARE

Seth Feldman has always wanted to make an impact in the community. He got that chance when hospitals across California began implementing Supplier Diversity Initiatives (SDI) which had good intentions, yet offered no real way to empower underserved businesses. In this system, large healthcare institutions often struggled to find diverse suppliers, while smaller clinics lacked the resources to dedicate to the search. Seth resolved to bridge this gap of inefficiency and restriction, and so Procuremint Health was born.

With the creation of Procuremint, Seth saw a chance to be both a successful entrepreneur and a force for good. Procuremint would build a stronger, more efficient healthcare system, not simply fill a "diversity quota." By connecting hospitals and clinics with qualified suppliers of diverse backgrounds, the platform would allow minority-owned companies to become competitive, drive down costs, and propel groundbreaking medical technologies to the forefront.

But taking his business from concept to reality was a considerable feat—one that

required him to leverage the NorthSTAR ecosystem to build his knowledge and network. Through the process, Seth joined RevHub's social innovation incubator, where he received invaluable tools and partnerships needed to navigate the healthcare sector while also scaling his venture for maximal social impact.

In time, Procuremint has grown from a stalwart yet fledgling idea into a one-stop shop, cutting through red tape for hospitals and diverse businesses alike. Hospitals can now easily find qualified suppliers with innovative solutions. Conversely, entrepreneurs have prime access to a wider market eager for their products and services.

Seth looks to the future with optimism. After all, Procuremint's potential to increase healthcare representation ultimately builds a healthier, more equitable, future for all. By bridging the gap, Seth hopes to continue to revolutionize the healthcare system for the better, creating a ripple effect of positive change.

“Taking his business from concept to reality was a considerable feat—one that required him to **leverage the NorthSTAR ecosystem.**”





KAREN CASWELCH: BUILDING A BRIDGE BETWEEN AUTOMATION AND OPPORTUNITY

Enjoying a successful career in automotive manufacturing, Karen Caswelch didn't feel she was destined to be an entrepreneur. But a growing unease began to gnaw at her. As a woman navigating a male-dominated industry, the obstacles were myriad, and the corporate environment increasingly clashed with her strong value of social impact.

After years of climbing to the upper echelons of the corporate ladder while wrestling with a sense of greater purpose, Karen left corporate America to start her own venture. This wasn't just about finding a new job; it was about building something revolutionary. Karen's ultimate vision was a company that aligned with her values, and also embraced robotic automation—not as a job-killer, but as a tool for empowerment. This dream birthed Archytas, a company that manufactures low-cost, highly precise robots, perfect for small- and medium-sized businesses.



From the beginning, Karen knew her robots were valuable, but there was a missing piece: schools needed a way to teach students to work alongside these machines. Her quest for how to democratize robotic automation led her to NorthSTAR. Here, she found resources,

“ She found **resources, guidance, and a community** that embraced underrepresented women entrepreneurs like herself. ”

guidance, and a community that embraced underrepresented women entrepreneurs like herself. Her journey with NorthSTAR began at the Center for Entrepreneurship at the North Orange County Community College District as an entrepreneurial bootcamp participant. There, she was introduced to California State University Fullerton Center for Entrepreneurship, where she was invited to participate as an advisor, and finally came to know RevHub and their work on developing social enterprises.

Suddenly, doors began to open. Through her NorthSTAR connections, Karen collaborated with the Workforce Development Board to create Bridge Robotics, a youth program that offers hands-on learning for robotic operation and maintenance. Her belief in a future where people and robots worked together, not against each other, resonated with educational institutions; Saddleback College and Chapman University expressed interest in incorporating her robots into their curriculum.

Karen's ambitions began to stretch further. By properly upskilling current workers, she saw how robots could bridge the gap between

the millions of unfilled manufacturing jobs and the existing workforce. Essentially, companies could increase efficiency without sacrificing jobs. This struck a chord with a board member at California State University Fullerton, who asked, "Have you considered industrial training?" Another avenue emerged for Karen to explore.

NorthSTAR's influence on Karen has not been limited to connections. The program has helped her reshape her message, focusing on the positive societal impact of her robots. NorthSTAR has also invested Karen with a new perspective, reaching beyond mere automation and creating a new paradigm where everyone benefits from technological advancements.

Karen's journey is far from over. Both Archytas and Bridge Robotics are still growing. But the impact she is making today illustrates the power of a coordinated entrepreneurial ecosystem in Orange County.

COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS

Entrepreneurs can solve our world's most pressing societal and environmental problems.



Our collaborative partners include a diverse array of organizations dedicated to fostering entrepreneurship and economic growth in Orange County. These partners, ranging from academic institutions to community organizations, work together to provide comprehensive support and resources for aspiring entrepreneurs.

NORTHSTAR

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FOUNDING PARTNERS OF NORTHSTAR



Social enterprise programming, mobilizing resources for ecosystem building, and lead convener of NorthSTAR.



Outreach, engagement, and exploration for older adults and people with limited English proficiency among the AAPI community.



Outreach, engagement, exploration, and ideation programming for Black and Latino communities.



Outreach, engagement, exploration, and social enterprise ideation and incubation programming.



Outreach and engagement among multi-ethnic communities in north and central Orange County.



Exploration, ideation, and incubation programming.



Outreach, advocacy, and connection with the Orange County business community.



Fiscal sponsorship and financial oversight of the NorthSTAR initiative.



Impact research and analysis of NorthSTAR programming and activities.

EXPANDING OUR PARTNERSHIP



RESOURCE PARTNERS

Our resource partners include research institutions, industry leaders, mentors, investors, financial institutions, public agencies, and community organizations, all committed to provide the support, funding, and tools necessary for entrepreneurs to start and scale successful businesses.



PARTNERING TOGETHER



EXPANDING THE VISION

The NorthSTAR collaborative has set a new standard for system-wide change, economic development, and social impact. We've proven the exponential effect private, public, research, and philanthropic organizations can have when we collectively create a "no wrong door" approach to entrepreneurship. Most importantly, we've witnessed the transformative power of entrepreneurship in solving our world's greatest social and environmental challenges.

Looking toward the coming months and years, we're resolved to continue to expand this model. We invite you to join us in amplifying access to entrepreneurship,

eliminating barriers, and illuminating pathways for millions of change-makers in our communities and across the nation.

As collaborators, mentors, and investors, we inspire and empower innovators who turn their lived experiences and visionary ideas into tangible solutions. As champions and advocates, we shape policies and programs that make entrepreneurship not only possible, but truly realistic for everyone.

Together, let's continue to make this vision a thriving reality for our communities, for our planet, and for our future.



**YOUR PARTNERSHIP
AND SUPPORT MAKE
ENTREPRENEURSHIP POSSIBLE
FOR MILLIONS.**

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