

HELPING VETERANS LAUNCH OR GROW THEIR OWN BUSINESSES



America’s military veterans have served and protected our nation while developing skills in risk management, leadership and performing under pressure. The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga is honored to help veterans translate those skills into successful civilian ventures through the Veterans Entrepreneurship Program (VEP).

Now in its 16th year, the VEP is a nationally recognized, immersive program designed around hands-on learning, one-on-one mentorship and exposure to inspiring role models. Our mission is simple but powerful: to foster the growth of profitable, veteran-owned businesses.

Guided by world-class faculty, accomplished entrepreneurs and subject-matter experts, participants take part in a challenging, interactive and transformative experience—one that equips them to turn their service-honed skills into entrepreneurial success.

“VEP gives you a community. You’re surrounded by fellow veterans who understand your mindset, your mission and your drive. As a disabled minority woman veteran, I felt seen, supported and empowered. VEP helped me clarify my vision and gave me the confidence to scale my businesses with purpose.”
Anjanette Wheeler, VEP 2025 graduate



VEP SCHEDULE

Application deadline: April 30, 2027

VEP Phase I

Concept Development and Self-Study | May 24-June 30, 2027

- Five-week online curriculum, guided by Rollins College of Business faculty and staff
- Build understanding of key business issues and prepare for Boot Camp
- Includes 12 months of free access to LivePlan business planning software

VEP Phase II

VEP Boot Camp | July 17-24, 2027

- Intensive eight-day residency in Chattanooga, Tennessee
- Hands-on workshops and networking with business experts
- Learn the “nuts and bolts” of launching and growing a business

VEP Phase III

Advising and Venture Development | August - December 2027

- Five months of continued advising and venture support
- Opportunities to apply for grant funding

Sample topics include:

- Business plans: Develop a strategy to help you plan, fund and grow
- Funding: How much you need and how to get it
- Marketing: Identify and reach your audience effectively
- Accounting: Understand key numbers that guide decisions
- Operations: Service delivery, costs, suppliers and systems
- Risk management: Common risks and how to protect your business



Normand Lavoie (VEP 2022)
Normand is the co-founder and CEO of NewTerra Compost, which he launched in 2020 and grew from zero customers to more than 1,500 members, while diverting over 7 million pounds of material from landfills. He has led the company’s expansion beyond Chattanooga into new markets like Huntsville, Alabama, building the foundation for long-term growth. He also works closely with the City of Chattanooga to pilot and implement innovative composting programs that make organics diversion more accessible to the community.



Norma Lubin (VEP 2018)
Norma Lubin is the CEO and founder of LIFE3 Academy in Montgomery, Alabama, where she has built a thriving K–8 institution serving over 500 students. She is also the Founder of Life Educational Solutions and Veterans for Academies (VFA), a pilot program supporting veteran-led teams launching charter schools across Texas, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Florida and Tennessee. Driven by faith and a commitment to service, Norma works to equip both students and veterans with the tools, vision and opportunities to succeed.



Kristi Mefford (VEP 2023)
Kristi Mefford is a beauty entrepreneur and textured hair wellness expert with over two decades of experience in natural hair care. Kristi is the founder of Kinky Rootz® Salon in Nashville, a B Corp™ Certified salon and one of the first of its kind in the nation led by a Black, veteran woman, setting a new standard for culturally rooted, sustainability-driven beauty. In 2022, she launched Queen of Kinks® Natural Hair Essentials, a plant-powered, multi-use collection carried at Nashville International Airport and known for its eco-conscious design, refill and reuse practices, and commitment to clean, intentional care. Kristi continues to lead at the intersection of beauty, culture and sustainability—reshaping the industry with purpose.



Paul Whitten (VEP 2023)
Paul is the founder of Nashville Adventures, a fast-growing tour company launched in 2023 that brings the city’s history, culture and music to life through immersive, story-driven experiences. The company reached profitability in year one and continues to expand across multiple formats. He has been recognized as a Nashville 40 Under 40, along with other industry honors, and his work has been featured in outlets such as USA Today and The Tennessean. Grounded in the belief that “we’re not in the tour business, we’re in the memory business,” Paul prioritizes passion, quality and lasting experiences while also mentoring aspiring entrepreneurs.

IMAGINE BELIEVE CREATE

COST

- Free to all selected veterans
- Includes instruction and program materials
- Phase II Boot Camp: travel, lodging and meals fully covered



ELIGIBILITY

VEP is open to veterans who:

- Have separated (or are separating) from active duty with an honorable discharge
- Have a business idea or an existing business less than three years old

Preference is given to veterans who are:

- Service-connected disabled (as designated by the VA), or
- Service-distinguished for exemplary military conduct

HOW TO APPLY

The VEP has a selective application process that reflects the unique opportunity and valuable resources being offered to eligible veterans. Successful candidates demonstrate a strong interest in entrepreneurship and venture creation, the motivation to own and operate a business, and a high likelihood of active participation and completion of the entire VEP curriculum.

For more information, contact
VEP Director Sandy Cordell, PMP

Phone: 423-425-4417
Email: Sandra-Cordell@utc.edu



GARY W. ROLLINS COLLEGE OF BUSINESS

The Gary W. Rollins College of Business at The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga is a nationally ranked, AACSB-accredited business school that produces academically prepared and business-world ready graduates for a competitive global environment.

The Rollins College of Business recognizes the role of entrepreneurship in the global economy and places a priority on entrepreneurship education. Our graduates receive a thorough foundation in critical aspects of business, such as marketing, accounting, management and finance, as well as relevant entrepreneurial topics such as cash flow management.

Courses in creativity, innovation, and business plans for new ventures help round out the College's majors. UTC students also benefit from the insight and experience of the area's most successful entrepreneurs.

VEP CONSORTIUM

In order to continue to serve as many of our nation's veterans as possible, VEP is also offered at **Oklahoma State University**. For more information about their program and schedule please visit their website: business.okstate.edu/riata/veterans/



NATIONAL VETERANS ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROGRAM

Empowering America's Veterans

**GARY W. ROLLINS
COLLEGE OF BUSINESS**
THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE AT CHATTANOOGA

Chattanooga, Tennessee

APPLY TODAY AT
UTC.EDU/VEP



The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga is a comprehensive, community-engaged campus of the University of Tennessee System. UTC is an EEO/AA/Titles IV & IX/Section 504/ADA/ADEA Institution. 26831667-27



WALDEN
SECURITY®



U.S. Small Business
Administration