

ENTREPRENEUR SUCCESSFULLY LAUNCHES WITH HELP FROM
MEP SUPPLIER SCOUTING

ABOUT INCLUDESIGN. “A great product does not always mean a huge company,” explains the website of *includesign*, a tiny Rhode Island design firm whose LapSnap™ basket offers accessibility and independence to wheelchair users. Founder Diana Kamada created the LapSnap as a capstone project while pursuing her engineering degree. She sewed 10 prototypes for this collapsible carryall on her own “dinky” home sewing machine - no easy feat given the durable, waterproof canvas, multiple layers, pockets and padded base that distinguish her product. Feedback and market research inspired Kamada to make LapSnap the *includesign* flagship product.

THE CHALLENGE. While the engineer had interned at manufacturing companies, she had worked with woods and metals. “I was used to making something exactly like it was in the drawing and that’s not how soft goods manufacturing works,” said Kamada. “There’s a lot of back-and-forth in soft goods as you come up with a true spec.” Her ultimate specs addressed not just production requirements but *includesign*’s values: materials must be high-quality, made in the USA by a manufacturer who employs people with disabilities and pays above minimum wage. Local connections yielded one potential vendor, but they lacked capacity. Kamada felt it important that the manufacturing setup was secure before pursuing funding. Without a firm supplier agreement, the LapSnap could not go to market.

MEP CENTER’S ROLE. Venture Café Providence (a non-profit that supports innovation) referred Kamada to Polaris MEP, the state’s non-profit Manufacturing Extension Partnership Center, part of the MEP National Network™. Manufacturing Advisor Chris Cinieri worked with Kamada to create a synopsis and submit it to the MEP National Network Supplier Scouting system. Supplier Scouting is a formal program that connects Rhode Island companies to domestic manufacturers to build their supply chain. “I honestly wasn’t sure how many matches we could possibly make for *includesign*,” said Cinieri. “Early-stage companies like Diana’s are looking at small quantities, and they have slim profit margins.” Cinieri promised, however, to keep looking.

Luckily, at the end of two weeks, Cinieri had found not one but seven different U.S. suppliers who were interested in working with *includesign*. The response was exciting and validating to Kamada, who now felt confident to proceed with a Kickstarter campaign to fund the LapSnap’s first run. *includesign* raised 150% of its goal, a total of \$16,000. The LapSnap is now enjoying steady sales to wheelchair users and *includesign* made Rhode Island Inno’s “10 Startups to Watch” list. Kamada anticipates working with Polaris MEP again.

“The MEP National Supplier Scouting program and Polaris MEP’s Chris Cinieri were extremely key to manufacturing my product. As a first-time business owner without contacts of my own in the industry, I genuinely don’t know if I’d be in business without their help connecting me to companies that could manufacture the components I’d need.”

-Diana Kamada, Founder & CEO

RESULTS



3 jobs added



2 jobs retained



\$20,000 unnecessary investments avoided



\$16,000 new sales (100% of company’s first funding raise)



\$10,000 direct savings

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