

Urvisha Koradia
National President, Start Up Council

Dated: November 30, 2021

To,
Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman ji,
Honorable Finance Minister,
Ministry of Finance,
Government of India

Subject: Seeking Start-up specific financial concessions, incentives and policies in the upcoming budget.

Respected Madam,

I am honoured to introduce myself as the National President of the Start-up Council at the Women's Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The Start-up Council is a national platform focused on empowering women entrepreneurs.

India, which has emerged as the second largest startup ecosystem in the world, and expected to witness YoY growth of 10-12%, has seen a massive growth due to the support of government initiatives. India has over 50,000 startups recognised by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) with at least 45% of them having women entrepreneurs. Our council takes this opportunity to further collaborate with the government and support women startups to be able to realise the true benefits of the schemes been provided.

Our Vision and Mission are as below:

Vision: Enabling women led startups establish and scale businesses through our guidance and support, thus providing equal opportunity to not just thrive but realize their full potential in the ecosystem.

Mission: To act as a catalyst by providing access to resources and creating awareness about the existing government framework support provided to women led startups pan India.

To empower women through various initiatives thus creating an environment of inclusion and diversity in the ecosystem.

IMPLEMENTABLE SUGGESTIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our research and experience in the start-up council space, we would like to mention some of the challenges that are being faced by women start-ups. While listing those, we would like to also put forth some of our thoughts which can help ease the process for women entrepreneurs.

Awareness Programs:

While we believe that many schemes such as those provided under The Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP) by Niti Aayog and under Start-up India Government are already prevalent, the awareness for the same still lacks in the tier-2 and tier-3 cities. Many are also not aware of registering themselves on the Start-up India portal to be recognized under DPIIT.

1. We suggest that the government allocate more budget for advertising through different channels of communication such as T.V, Radio, Digital Media, Short film Ads and Partners for better visibility online to help create awareness of existing grants and schemes for women entrepreneurs.
2. Having a board of self-made women entrepreneurs to drive awareness programs.
3. Incentives mentioned on the Start-up India Government portal for women from all states have links that are directed towards general start-up policy brochures. We recommend having separate women policy guidelines for quick access.

Information and Resources:

Resources for women startup benefits are completely fragmented between government, non-government, and independent institutions on Start-up India and other government websites, making it highly confusing to seek support. Too much information and data but lacks the structuring, flow, and quick access to avail those benefits.

1. We believe easy access to the schemes for women start-ups under each state is lacking. Example: To avail the benefit for "Reimbursement of internet and electricity charges" under Maharashtra State, we recommend having a contact us button which can directly lead one to the right authority as currently there is no clear understanding as to where to apply.
2. We propose having a platform which is extremely user friendly for woman start-ups. Simple upload of documents to quickly avail tax benefits, concessions, access funds/grants etc which can be approved in few days.
3. We suggest having a separate cell only for women startups with a dedicated team. A hotline number and email support to be running efficiently with prompt responses as currently there is a delay or no response from WEP for queries.
4. Have a knowledgeable panel assigned for queries relating to each of the below categories:
 - a. Mentorship &/or Support
 - b. Connecting to right Incubators/Accelerators
 - c. Fund Raising Guidance
 - d. Technology Support
 - e. Skills Development

Technology Development Support:

Since many of the schemes are now technology focused a lot of women entrepreneurs providing non-tech based products and services face challenges in upgrading themselves to use technology.

1. We recommend setting up a council that specially looks to identify those lagging in technology and encourage them in setting up their own websites along with providing social media guidance to grow their business online.
2. We suggest providing grants and marketing help for exporting "Made in India" products and services by women entrepreneurs wishing to expand internationally, thus helping local startups go vocal for global reach.
3. Internet connectivity in remote regions (such as Himachal Pradesh) should be improved so that more women can participate in online incubations/accelerator workshops etc.

Access to Funds:

1. A corpus fund of 10,000 crores has been earmarked for the Start-up India programmed to build a strong ecosystem by nurturing innovation and start-ups. 10% of the corpus fund is reserved for women led start-ups; we propose extending this to 20%.
2. Awareness drive can be carried out by the registered banks to inform the customers about the loan facility available under various schemes.
3. There is less synergy between various schemes. E.g. If a customer is not eligible under Start-up India but can get loan under Mudra then they should be informed about various alternatives under a common platform.
4. For availability of grants and funds, women entrepreneurs currently need to fill online forms which many are not skilled with.
5. For women-led startups, schemes offering funding in form of soft loans, IP patent returns, seed funds, technology commercialization support etc. have the condition that women have a majority stake. We propose to have more flexibility by allowing women leaders access to government aids and funds.
6. We recommend providing co-investments available (40:60 Government:Woman led startup) for select, qualified organizations with specific growth projects.
7. Special insurance could be offered to innovators and incubators who have their setup in earthquake/ flood zones of North India.
8. Lease rental subsidy: For start-ups which deal with experiments on huge land like sustainable farming etc, reimbursement of 25% should be extended to 30% for women entrepreneurs/co-founders of lease rental subsidy to eligible start-up units established in states like Punjab.
9. Grants in cash and schemes should be made available quickly to start small and mid-sized business for home entrepreneurs. Some business like beauty parlour, tailoring units, tuition classes, pickle making, papad making, mask making etc. can easily be started by them with initial cash of INR 10,000.

Skills Development:

1. As part of skilling initiative, a course on 'Introduction to Entrepreneurship' should be introduced at junior college level- 11th/12th.
2. Entrepreneurship as a subject should be taught in undergraduate courses to better prepare on the real world challenges.
3. Universities may introduce the concept of Student Entrepreneur in Residence. Students who wish to pursue entrepreneurship can take a break of one year, after the first year, to pursue entrepreneurship in real practice.
4. Women looking to restart their careers after marriage/pregnancy can be provided separate support by the government to enable them to take the step and help network with the right group of mentors.
5. We propose that the government observe best practice models which are being followed by the developed countries such as providing a dedicated mentor to work year long with the women entrepreneurs to scale their operations.
6. We recommend holding sessions for women for soft skills development in helping them pitch to investors.
7. We propose to encourage more women participate in start-up competitions from rural areas for which gram panchayats can hold awareness gatherings along with NGOs and provide larger monetary awards for women entrepreneurs.

Transparency and Accountability:

1. We propose having an online portal where each state uploads quarterly reports which can be viewed by all. Example: Maharashtra Government Innovative Startup Policy 2018 mentions having tinkering labs in schools, startup parks, virtual incubation centers etc. but results are not available. Authorities can update the portal by mentioning all activities undertaken. This will ensure correct fund utilization and act as a motivation for all State Start-up bodies to see the work accomplished.
2. We recommend having a startup body for each state with a separate women council to have a focused approach and quick resolution for them. Currently few states have established such setups, and we propose doing it for all.
3. A fortnightly report on number of applications received, processed and rejected for grants with proper reasoning should be sent to the concerned officials.
4. Recognition to be provided to the best State Startup Body for Women by The Ministry of Finance and Hon. Prime Minister who would have achieved great milestones, thus leading to encourage each state to perform their best for women entrepreneurs.

Gender Equality:

1. We recommend setting up of grievance cell for women entrepreneurs to report any kind of issues they face in terms of social, physical or any emotional abuse during their journey of entrepreneurship.
2. Government of Himachal Pradesh has appointed a nodal team 'Start-up and Incentive Cell' with 5 members for supporting the development of Start-up ecosystem. We recommend at least one should be well qualified women to address woman related challenges and have similar setups for other states.

We have a robust National Council that represents women professionals from startup segment, industry, and related domains.

National Council				
No.	Name	Council	Position	Company
1	Urvisha Koradia	National President	Founder & CEO	Pitch Books (OPC) Private Limited
2	Shreelakshmi Dinesh	Vice-President	Co-Founder	Ignito Energy
3	Ruchira Gole	Council Member	Founder & CEO	Thrivemax Private Limited
4	Urjita Kshatriya	Council Member	Founder & Managing Director	Idecution Marketing Studio LLP
5	Shrddha Shetty	Council Member	Founder	Hygiene HopHer
6	Amita Bais	Council Member	Founder & Managing Partner	E-legal.in
State Council				
1	Meghna Joshi	President - Delhi	Founder	Skilled Workforce Advancing Nation Livelihood
2	Laveena Laitonjam	President - Maharashtra	Founder and CEO	Rent An Attire
3	Dr. Krupa Mehta	President - Gujarat	Ass. Prof & Placement Incharge	S.K.Patel Inst. of Management & Computer Studies

We look forward to your kind attention and support on the requests that have been proposed.

Thanking you,

Yours sincerely,

Urvisha Koradia

National President, Start-up Council

Founder and CEO of Pitch Books OPC Private Limited