

Contestant Capacity:

Nebraska Enterprise Fund (Lead Agency)

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The Nebraska Enterprise Fund (NEF) is a Community Development Finance Institution serving the state of Nebraska including both urban and rural. NEF has over 23 years of experience providing micro and small business loans to viable but otherwise unbankable entrepreneurs. NEF has over \$5.5MM of outstanding loans directly to these businesses as well as over \$2 MM to partners. During its most recent fiscal year ending June 30, 2016, NEF provided 106 loans valued at over \$2.75 MM. 69% where to traditional disadvantaged businesses.

In addition to direct lending to these entrepreneurs, NEF provides training in all areas of business with specific emphasis on developing and accelerating sales through its Business Acumen Training, Mentoring, and Finance project. NEF also provides one-to-one consulting and mentoring to business owners on areas such as business planning, financial planning and analysis, business organization, and marketing to name a few. In addition to its work directly with businesses, NEF also directly invests in 10 other non-profit organizations focused key underserved markets including the African-American community, Hispanic-Latino populations, and Native American businesses. Through these collaborations, NEF has further developed its capacity and core competencies.

NEF plans to collaborate with Black Men United which was formed in 2003 to foster black male achievement, and enhance performance of existing organizations where leaders within the black community can share their efforts and resources. In 2010, it expanded its mission to also address the social and economic concerns of ex-inmates and other disadvantaged populations. Its core competencies are grassroots organization and social engagement, fostering collaboration around critical issues and training and support for ex-inmates and other hard to employ populations. Currently it conducts a training program in Nebraska Your Correctional Facilities consisting of soft skills, employability skills and life skills along with one-to-one resource and job placement support.

Black Men United

Contact: Willie Hamilton, President. 402.707.3115, will@blackmenunited.org.

Background of Management Team:

James Reiff has been involved in Economic Development focused on traditionally disadvantaged populations for 20 years. He holds an MS in Economic Development and is actively involved in NEF's strategic development.

BC Clark, Loan Officer/Business Mentor at NEF has over 10 years of experience coaching and mentoring small diverse entrepreneurs. She is certified to deliver NEF's business acceleration training and a SCORE volunteer.

Willie Hamilton founded Black Men United to support the needs of Black men in low income communities of Omaha, NE. He has created and launched a wide variety of programs and initiatives and has received national recognition for his advocacy work. He is a member of the national Campaign for Black Male Achievement.

Dell Gines, Program Designer & Trainer a certified economic developer holding a MBA and MSF and a Ph.D candidate. He is a former adjunct professor at Creighton University where he designed and taught the college's first social entrepreneur class.

Through this collaboration, NEF will maximize its core competencies of small business coaching to diverse entrepreneurs as well as lending. Black Men United will enhance the program with its core competencies focused on social engagement, local collaborations, and training and support of ex-inmates.

Entrepreneurial Education Delivery Solution:

Participant Recruitment Plan:

Both organizations work extensively in traditionally diverse and disadvantaged populations where it is anticipated that the majority of participants will come.

Black Men United will leverage its extensive network of relationships with the current and ex-inmate populations in Omaha, Nebraska as well as its relationships with service providers across Nebraska to recruit program participants. Black Men United has an extensive relationship with both state and county incarceration facilities. The organization's president is heavily involved in city collaboratives with providers of re-entry support services. In addition, Black Men United is a trusted community provider of resources and services to ex-inmates. Black Men United has been working with this population both directly and indirectly for over five years.

The three primary ways program participants will be recruited are as follows:

1. By referrals from correctional institutions. Black Men United will work with program managers of local correctional institutions to develop a process where high potential, soon to be released inmates will be provided with opportunity to apply for the program.
2. By referrals from current ex-inmate support providers. Black Men United and Nebraska Enterprise Fund will also work with existing support programs to acquire referrals of high potential individuals to apply for participation in the program.
3. Through social media and community networks. Black Men United and the Nebraska Enterprise Fund has an extensive network of grassroots relationships. They will consistently share information about the program through these networks via social media, community events and other community platforms. Both organizations are active in the community and community initiatives and the program will be highlighted at these forums.

Classroom Instruction:

The Nebraska Enterprise Fund will collaborate with Black Men United to delivery both the business skills and the soft/social skills to the participants to ensure they have the tools and skills to develop a viable and realistic business plan that allows them access to additional resources and capital to become successful entrepreneurs. This will be done through a cohort learning approach with each cohort consisting of ten to twelve entrepreneurs. Cohort sizes will be limited based on past experiences of NEF and Black Men United to ensure quality and value is gained through the training. Two cohorts will be provided per year.

The Nebraska Enterprise Fund will augment its Business Acumen Training Mentoring Finance (BATMF) Program curriculum with key topics from Black Men United as well as a session on financial literacy and building credit. The BATMF program includes five to six sessions of business training focused on the development of a strong and measurable marketing and business plan. NEF anticipates the augmented program will include seven sessions focused on business acumen. Each session includes 2.5 to 3 hours of classroom training in addition to assignments and reading. Both NEF and Black Men United mentors are available outside of classroom sessions. At the successful completion of the program, participants will have a measurable business plan with financial projections and key milestones.

Business Training Sessions will include the following:

1. Financial Literacy and Credit Building
2. Goal Setting and the Strategic Planning Process
3. Developing the Customer Experience and Product Offering
4. Marketing and the Marketing Plan
5. Setting, Refining, and Measuring Key Performance Indicators
6. Developing the Finance Plan
7. Setting Systems Focused on ensuring Process Integration into Business Operations

In addition to the Business Acumen Training and Topics listed above, Black Men United will provide key training on leadership and soft skills including:

1. Understanding Your Personal Strengths using Gallup Strengths Finder materials
2. Emotional IQ and developing positive interpersonal relationships
3. Developing a life plan
4. Preparing for and keeping employment as an ex-felon
5. Leadership in business, work and community

Mentoring:

Both organizations have proven success in mentoring and coaching. NEF will focus its mentoring on business acumen and business related aspects of the program while Black Men United will focus on the interpersonal skills and leadership development. In addition to the classroom training, participants will be expected to receive specific and focused mentoring on an individual basis, both throughout their cohort instruction, but also for at least six months thereafter. Upon completion of the training, NEF and/or Black Men United staff will meet at least monthly with each participant to track progress against their goals, identify opportunities, and address areas that need improvements. It is the experience of both organizations that this consistent and ongoing access to coaching and mentoring is a proven dynamic to ongoing success of participants.

Community Connections:

Both organizations have strong connections with the local business community and social service providers that will provide resources to participants increasing their likelihood for success and economic well-being. These connections will be leveraged with the focus on participants needs and the areas where these needs can be best met.

Black Men United currently has a network of employers that are willing to employ ex-inmates that have graduated from Black Men United's programs. In addition, based upon the President's participation in a variety of justice and reentry collaboratives referring ex-inmates to these support organizations will be a priority (and it is already being done). Black Men United also conducts or partners with providers who conduct a variety of community based classes around financial literacy, employability and household stability. One of the priority objectives of Black Men United is to be a personalized one stop shop referral entity for ex-inmates. The organization recognizes that reducing barriers to services is one of the primary ways to reduce recidivism.

The Nebraska Enterprise Fund works closely with the Omaha Area Chamber of Commerce's REACH initiative that supports small and emerging business and contractors in securing business opportunities. REACH offers numerous ongoing training opportunities to small business owners ranging from contracting to bidding to accounting. NEF staff serve on various boards including Family Housing Advisory Services that provides financial literacy consulting and training. Further NEF has strong connections with Project Hope's office in Omaha to deliver individual counseling on credit and personal finances. NEF also regularly refers clients to the local SCORE chapters for specific and in-depth coaching.

Access to Capital:

Access to Microlending:

The Nebraska Enterprise Fund is an SBA Microlender and actively provides loans to viable entrepreneurs. NEF reviews lending decisions based on the ability to repay and cash-flow projections first and foremost, which is most important as many of NEF's clients do not have the collateral required to meet bank conditions. NEF will review all participants' business plans for feasibility and expects to fund the entrepreneurs meeting NEF's lending criteria. NEF offers loans from \$1,000 to \$150,000 based on lending program and business needs and capacity. NEF's average loan size is about \$40,000. Through this specific program, NEF anticipates that the majority of the loans will be under \$10,000.

Further, NEF collaborates with the Rural Enterprise Assistance Program, also a SBA Microlender serving rural Nebraska. In the event that NEF is not able to consider an application, it will be able to pass rural based applicants to REAP. In Omaha, where NEF expects most of the initial demand to be, it also collaborates with Catholic Charities Micro-Business Training program which offers loans up to \$5,000.

In addition, through the Greater Omaha Chamber's REACH program, NEF provides invoice financing for small and emerging businesses and contractors registered to do business with the city. This program expands businesses potential for contracts with construction projects, both public and private initiatives taking place across the city.

Connection to Capital and Funding Opportunities:

The Nebraska Enterprise Fund will work with its existing bank partners to identify opportunities for connections with banks for program participants eligible for loans and financing. NEF works regularly with several banks and regularly provides gap financing when bank financing is not sufficient. NEF also regularly provides and receives referrals from other financial institutions.

The Nebraska Enterprise Fund also runs several events annually including the "Start-up to Success" business forum sponsored by the Bank of the West which provides key training to participants as well as introducing them to bank representatives. Participants will be encouraged to attend events such as these to make key connections and become accustomed to interactions the banks.

NEF and Black Men United also propose to initiate a \$10,000 guarantee fund for cohort participants. These funds will allow the collaboration to guarantee the loans of six to ten participants which in turn proves their creditworthiness and viability.

Finally, NEF and Black Men United will organize a business plan competition for all participants, where the participants will have the opportunity to present their business plan to a panel of bankers and investors. This will provide participants with greater exposure to potential stakeholders as well as increase their confidence and presentation skills. \$5,000 will be budgeted for the event and prizes to encourage participation and provide a meaningful learning experience.

This innovative collaboration between the Nebraska Enterprise Fund and Black Men United will allow two cohorts of participants to increase their leadership and personal skills as well as raise their business acumen and capacity. This will enable them to develop viable business plans leading to increased access to capital. Ongoing mentoring and coaching will support their progress and decrease risk of recidivism. NEF is an SBA Microlender and has access and connections to other microlenders as well as bankers.