

## GARY MICRO-ENTERPRISE INITIATIVE—EX-OFFENDER RE-ENTRY PROGRAM

**Name of Organization:** City of Gary, IN Department of Commerce  
**Contact Person:** Deardra Campbell  
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**Geographic Area of Focus:** Gary, IN

### Contestant Capacity

Organizational Background: The proposed program is a core collaboration between the City of Gary, IN Department of Commerce (Lead Applicant); the Gary Economic Development Corporation (Co-Applicant); and “Gary 4 Jobs”—the three of which comprise the City’s primary entrepreneurial ecosystem. The proposed ex-offender re-entry component will be part of the Gary Micro-Enterprise Initiative, a new City-sponsored, micro-enterprise development/expansion program.

The Gary Department of Commerce (“Commerce”) assists businesses in a variety of ways that include assessing their needs and providing guidance on a range of issues—the most common of which are proper licensing, permitting, zoning, and contracting with the City; connecting business owners with resources that can help facilitate their long-term sustainability; and helping with site selection for new, expanding, and/or relocating businesses. Commerce is also tasked with promoting the start-up and/or expansion of “home grown” (i.e. businesses owned by Gary residents) micro- and other small businesses.

The Gary Economic Development Corporation (“GEDC”) is a quasi-municipal, 501(c)3 organized to: facilitate the retention, expansion, and recruitment of business/industry in Gary; promote stability, economic growth, and the creation of partnerships between the City and business community; catalyze employment, contracting, and sub-contracting opportunities; and conduct charitable and educational activities to alleviate the disinvestment—and associated blight—that have occurred in Gary over the past several decades.

Gary 4 Jobs is the job training and workforce development component of “Gary 4 Life”, the City’s crime prevention and blight elimination programs. Gary 4 Jobs utilizes extensive, relatively short-term training opportunities to assist residents—including ex-offenders and other “hard-to-employ” individuals—in identifying and accessing opportunities to earn gainful income through either “traditional” employment or entrepreneurial pursuits. In several cases, the latter (entrepreneurs) have been contracted by the City to increase the capacity of municipal departments responsible for activities like landscaping, maintenance of green infrastructure, and other urban conservation efforts. Gary 4 Jobs identifies comprehensive entrepreneurial training, coaching, and financing as being among the primary needs of returning ex-offender/micro-entrepreneurs.

Background of Management Team: Gary 4 Jobs Director and Workforce Development Consultant, Diana Sandlin, GEDC Executive Director, Bo Kemp, and Commerce Director, Deardra Campbell, collectively possess more than 75 years’ experience that is directly relevant to the successful conduct of the proposed activities: Sandlin has almost 30 years’ experience in workforce development, as well as program development, coordination, and implementation, including working with ex-offenders on behalf of state and local organizations. Sandlin currently coordinates the Gary Reentry Coalition, a collaboration of more than 30 entities and individuals that work to connect re-entry residents with training and career opportunities. Kemp has spent much of his career overseeing municipal operations, including public safety, public works, and the creation of economic development growth strategies for “legacy” cities. Campbell has more than 15 years’ practitioner experience providing comprehensive classroom training, technical assistance, and micro-loan origination and packaging (including SBA 7(a) programs) to more than 17,000 micro-enterprise and other small business owners across the U.S. Both Kemp and Campbell also have extensive previous experience—10 and 20 years, respectively—in private-sector financial services.



## Entrepreneurial Education Delivery Solution

Recruitment: The City of Gary has an extensive partnership network with organizations/entities that include the Gary City Court, Gary Housing Authority, Gary Reentry Coalition, Calumet Township Trustee's Office, Interfaith Clergy of NW IN, and Urban League of NW IN, as well as City-administered job training programs in areas like brownfields management, urban conservation, and clean energy. On average, these partners have referred 75 to 100 individuals per year to Gary 4 Jobs for vetting of potential trainees. Potential micro-enterprise trainees will be interviewed by a panel for the final selection of participants based on their anticipated business outcomes, and eligibility relative to the 2015 Final Rule expanding SBA micro-loan access.

Classroom Instruction: Instructor-led classroom training is the cornerstone of the proposed program. Using a formalized, comprehensive micro-enterprise development curriculum—interspersed with a series of hands-on “work labs”—program participants will progress through thirty-two (32) topics and several milestones that will systematically impart the concepts, skillsets, thought processes, and behaviors that are critical to the successful formation, management, and growth of a micro-enterprise.

The topics covered will include: visioning/purposing/culturing (assessing existing skillsets, mission, values, and interests); entity formation (sole proprietorship, LLC, S-Corp, etc.); product/service development and refinement; supply and demand (including identifying niche opportunities); marketing (positioning, promotion, “stickiness”, branding, etc.); accurately pricing one's products/services; leadership, including managing human resources, paid—and volunteer (e.g. family members/friends assisting in the business); operations (cash flow planning and management; budgeting—including determining start-up costs; basic business accounting/bookkeeping; strategic planning; risk and insurance; etc.); sales/business development (including creation of an effective sales “pitch”; networking; contracting and registration/certification—e.g. HUBZone, DBE/MBE/WBE/VBE); and micro-enterprise financing tools and resources.

All topics are presented in “everyday language”, making them easy to understand for participants from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and with varying levels of educational attainment. Additionally, homework is a vital program component and—along with class and lab work—will assist participants in writing a comprehensive business plan by the conclusion of the classroom training cycle.

Classroom training (and some technical assistance) will be conducted by Cynthia Williams—Principal of Ideation Zone—who has more than ten years' experience teaching individuals how to “think entrepreneurially”. Williams has specialized expertise in working with micro-entrepreneurs. Using her proprietary curriculum, “Learn to Plan a Business”, she has successfully trained more than 500 micro-entrepreneurs (among them, ex-offenders) on behalf of a variety of organizations, including the Chicago Housing Authority and Chicago Urban League.

Each training cycle will be conducted over a period of ten to twelve weeks (accounting for holidays), with participants meeting two evenings per week. We will convene at least two cohorts in 2017.

### *Accountabilities, Expectations, and Successful Completion of Training*

To model the **real** world of successful entrepreneurship, a number of accountabilities and expectations are “built into” the program. For example, participants will be expected to arrive to class on time (or early) and can miss no more than three sessions over the duration of the training cycle. To record each session's attendance, there will be a sign-in sheet at the front of the classroom. This sign-in sheet will be removed 15 minutes after the start of each class. Consequently, anyone arriving later will be unable to sign in and will therefore be marked “absent” for that session. (At the start of each training cycle, participants will be encouraged to identify a “class buddy”. This is someone who can provide participants who must miss a class with an overview of what was covered during that particular session, and/or might serve as a study partner.)

Self-study is also a critical part of the training. Participants will be expected to re-read the curriculum and/or handouts, as well as complete a variety of worksheets that will help to reinforce the concepts presented in the classroom, as well as assist them in writing their business plans.

Participants who attend at least the requisite number of classes, *and* who complete and present business plans will be deemed to have successfully completed training. At the conclusion of each training cycle, there will be a “graduation” ceremony where completion certificates will be presented.

#### *Program Flow*

- Orientation

A group orientation will be held approximately one month before the start of each training cycle. The objectives of this event are to: provide a program overview (what participants can expect to learn during training, the potential resources to which they can be connected post-training, etc.); communicate general training information (class dates, times, location); discuss the above-referenced accountabilities and expectations, including what constitutes successful training completion; and give attendees an opportunity to ask questions. Individuals who wish to proceed will be asked to complete an application that collects a variety of data—contact, demographic, socio-economic, and other information that is needed to establish each participant’s file. Once transferred into the program database, some of this information will also form the baseline from which program activities and outcomes can be analyzed, managed and reported.

- Intake

This one-on-one, 30-minute appointment with a program staff member is used to collect any supporting documentation that might be needed to establish eligibility—e.g. income verification, ex-offender status, etc. The appointment also provides another opportunity for prospective participants to ask questions.

- Training

Discussed above.

- Mentoring

This activity will be conducted in two ways:

- *Formal technical assistance* (individualized consulting on a variety of business issues/challenges—e.g. accounting/bookkeeping; contracts and other legal documents; marketing; contracting/sub-contracting; etc.). Technical assistance will be provided by a cadre of local professionals—including the Northwest IN Small Business Development Center (SBDC)—with the relevant expertise.
- *Mentor-protégé relationships* in which experienced, successful small business owners provide guidance and coaching to micro-entrepreneurs in an informal setting. (The Gary Chamber of Commerce will likely populate much of this mentor “pool.”)

#### Community Connections:

As summarized throughout this narrative, the core team (Commerce, GEDC, and Gary 4 Jobs) has relationships with a wide array of businesses, as well as community and social service organizations, that can help ex-offenders successfully transition back into society, and help them improve their overall economic well-being.

## Access to Capital

### Micro-Lending:

The City of Gary has relationships with numerous lending partners/intermediaries that can potentially assist ex-offender/micro-entrepreneurs. These include the U.S. Small Business Administration (the relationship was deepened/expanded as part of the City's former Strong Cities, Strong Communities designation), as well as local/regional partners, like Accion/Chicago, Centier Bank, Fifth Third Bank, First Financial Bank, Peoples Bank; and ProFinance Federal Credit Union.

### Other Capital and Funding Opportunities:

As part of the overall Gary Micro-Enterprise Initiative, dollars have been set aside to fund a *grants* pool. Participants (including ex-offenders) who successfully complete the training program can apply for grants to help with start-up, working capital, and other business expenses. Grants will be awarded on a highly-competitive basis, which takes into account the amount—and specific use—of the funds being requested; whether grant funds will be used to leverage other funding (e.g. micro-loans); and the quality of the applicant's business plan.

As another way to increase micro-lending options, the City is also working with the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation to identify local organizations that might have the potential to become Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs).

We will work with ex-offender/micro-entrepreneurs to help them gather and prepare documentation to assist them in making application for loans and/or grants pool funding. We will also work with local lenders to sponsor match-making events and financial literacy workshops. Financial literacy (including the role of personal credit in most business lending decisions) will also be addressed, as will basic technology literacy.



## OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

KAREN FREEMAN-WILSON  
MAYOR

Phone 219.881.1302  
Fax 219.881.1337

February 03, 2017

Lori Gillen, Deputy Associate Administrator  
Office of Entrepreneurial Development  
U.S. Small Business Administration  
409 Third Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20416

Dear Ms. Gillen:

As both Mayor of Gary, IN and a native of the city, I can personally attest to the effects that significant disinvestment and out-migration have had on our community—among them, crime and widespread blight, as well as above-average rates of unemployment and poverty. Alleviation of these types of conditions have informed many of my administration's activities and policies.

I can also attest to the capacity of our micro-enterprises and other small businesses to help drive the economic diversification, job creation, community rebuilding and innovation that are essential to Gary's revitalization.

I wholeheartedly believe that, by providing entrepreneurial opportunities to as many of our returning ex-offenders as possible, we will not only help to reduce the rates of recidivism by offering a viable means for these individuals to earn gainful income and begin to create wealth, but also make meaningful strides toward greatly enhancing the quality of life for all of Gary's residents. I therefore fully support the proposed ex-offender component of the Gary Micro-Enterprise Initiative.

If you have questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Karen Freeman-Wilson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Karen" being the most prominent.

Karen Freeman-Wilson  
Mayor, City of Gary, IN





February 06, 2017

Lori Gillen, Deputy Associate Administrator  
Office of Entrepreneurial Development  
U.S. Small Business Administration  
409 Third Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20416

Dear Ms. Gillen:

The mission of the Gary Reentry Coalition is to connect formerly incarcerated individuals with the resources they need to successfully transition back into society. In addition to referring them to the appropriate social services, when indicated, the Coalition also connects them with job training and career opportunities.

Many of our reentry residents have talents and skillsets that—once honed—can make them ideal candidates for entrepreneurship. We therefore fully support the Aspire Challenge proposal being submitted by the City of Gary's Department of Commerce, Gary Economic Development Corporation, and Gary 4 Jobs to add an ex-offender component to the Gary Micro-Enterprise Initiative, which will provide the comprehensive training, technical assistance, and access to other resources, like funding, that these individuals need to successfully form, manage, and grow micro-enterprises.

I currently work for Department of Workforce Development through Hoosier Initiative for Re Entry (HIRE program) Region 1. Ms. Sandlin and I have been working together for 3 ½ years to assist formerly incarcerated individuals for employment and/or training.

If you have questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Canica Strong  
HIRE Coordinator, Region 1



# Calumet Township Trustee

## KIMBERLY K. ROBINSON

### Lake County, Indiana

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February 06, 2017

Lori Gillen, Deputy Associate Administrator  
Office of Entrepreneurial Development  
U.S. Small Business Administration  
409 Third Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20416

Dear Ms. Gillen:

The mission of the Gary Reentry Coalition is to connect formerly incarcerated individuals with the resources they need to successfully transition back into society. In addition to referring them to the appropriate social services, when indicated, the Coalition also connects them with job training and career opportunities.

The Calumet Township Trustee's office provides basic life sustaining support to those eligible persons in the community who find themselves in temporary need of assistance. Formerly incarcerated individuals represent a very large portion of the at risk population we serve. With that being said, programs designed to assist this population would be a tremendous benefit to our community and our agency would definitely be a major referral source.

Many of our reentry residents have talents and skillsets that—once honed—can make them ideal candidates for entrepreneurship. We therefore fully support the Aspire Challenge proposal being submitted by the City of Gary's Department of Commerce, Gary Economic Development Corporation, and Gary 4 Jobs to add an ex-offender component to the Gary Micro-Enterprise Initiative, which will provide the comprehensive training, technical assistance, and access to other resources, like funding, that these individuals need to successfully form, manage, and grow micro-enterprises.

If you have questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Cynthia M. Pruitt, MPA  
Calumet Township Trustee  
Manager Job Search Works  
[cpruitt@calumettpw-in.gov](mailto:cpruitt@calumettpw-in.gov)  
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