

Safer Foundation Aspire Challenge Proposal

Location: Scott County, Iowa

February 10, 2017

Safer Foundation



## Organizational Capacity

**Organizational Background:** Founded in 1972, Safer Foundation is one of the nation's largest not-for-profit providers of services designed exclusively for people with criminal records. Headquartered in Chicago, IL, we have 13 locations throughout Illinois and Iowa. As a Department of Labor Face Forward 2 Intermediary, our Midwest Reentry and Employment Network (MREN) project expanded our operations to include Missouri and Wisconsin. Our integrated service delivery model, the result of over 45 years of experience and informed by recognized best practices in reentry and workforce development, proves to be effective at moving those viewed as hard to employ back into the workforce. Our mission is to support, through a full spectrum of services, the efforts of people with criminal records to become employed, law-abiding members of the community, and as a result, reduce recidivism. We help people with criminal records gain meaningful employment; contribute to their communities and to not return to incarceration. In 2016, Safer served over 6,100 individuals with criminal records. Safer is well-situated to deliver entrepreneurship training to formerly incarcerated individuals and all persons with records. We have directly related experience through our Micro Enterprise Reentry Investment Trust (MERIT) program (2010 -2011) and our current Aspire Initiative grant. Moreover, Safer operates social enterprises and have staff persons who are expert practitioners in small business development and higher education in the field of business, finance and management.

The *geographic service area* is Scott County, Iowa. Scott County is located within the Quad Cities region, bordering Eastern Iowa and Western Illinois. Services will be delivered through Safer's Quad Cities (QC) office. Our Quad Cities location has been an integral part of the regional criminal justice reentry network since its opening in 1976. The *entrepreneurial ecosystem* in Quad Cities is considerable; however, there are no coordinated systems to bring formerly incarcerated persons into the small business sector. Like most cities, the Quad Cities entrepreneurship ecosystem includes: financial institutions, higher education, legal and insurance service providers, suppliers and vendors, chambers of commerce, public sector small business assistance programs and both corporate and governmental purchasing programs directed to small, minority and women-owned businesses. Safer has aligned ourselves with several key stakeholders in this community who share our intention to work collectively to advance small business creation among formerly incarcerated men and women. Our application includes representative letters in support of this application (see addendum). *Organization Contact:* Victor Dickson | *Title:* President/CEO | *Phone:* (312) 922-4767 | *Email:* [Victor.Dickson@saferfoundation.org](mailto:Victor.Dickson@saferfoundation.org) | *Program Contact:* Susan Davison | *Title:* Director, Quad Cities | *Phone:* (563) 322-7002 | *Email:* [Sue.Davison@saferfoundation.org](mailto:Sue.Davison@saferfoundation.org)

**Background of Management Team:** Susan Davison, Director of Operations Quad Cities office provides administrative oversight to QC staff and programs in addition to facilitating a local advisory board. She has extensive experience in designing, implementing and overseeing programs that remove barriers to employment for individuals with criminal records. Ms. Davison also co-chairs QC Advocates for Second Chances, a reentry advocacy group comprised of business and social service providers. Ms. Davison earned a BS in Corrections from Illinois State University and an MBA from St. Ambrose University in Davenport, Iowa. Technical assistance to the program will be provided by Harry Alston, Jr., Ph.D., Safer's VP of Strategic Planning and Development and Mark Yates, Safer's VP of Social Enterprises. Dr. Alston earned a Master of Business Administration degree from Indiana University, and a Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Leadership from Antioch University. He has served for over 25 years as a strategic planner, project manager, consultant and professor. Mr. Yates received his MBA from DePaul University. He teaches accounting and finance for City Colleges of Chicago and is an instructor for the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Business program where he is ranked the highest-rated instructor of their national corps of instructors

### ***Entrepreneurial Education Delivery Solution***

**Participant Recruitment Plan:** Safer's Aspire Challenge entrepreneurship program is unique due to our direct access to over 1,000 formerly incarcerated persons in partnership with the Seventh Judicial District, Department of Correctional Services in Scott County (Seventh District). The Seventh District provides community-based correctional services to a five-county area in Eastern Iowa. The Department serves the entire region and receives transfer cases from other jurisdictions in Iowa, however, the largest number of individuals with criminal records reside in Davenport. The district's administrative and Scott County field offices are located in Davenport. The district provides community-based services through a work release center (housing 120 parolees), a residential correctional facility (housing 68 probationers), and a field office providing oversight to 1,000 parolees and probationers that reside in Scott County. The district will provide office space for the Aspire Challenge program in their field offices and classroom space to deliver services. Two distinct cohorts of 12 – 15 participants will be selected over the course a 12-month period. Participants will be selected jointly by Safer and Seventh District staff based upon criteria that takes into account the criminal justice needs and entrepreneurship capability of the applicant. Eligible participants will be individuals currently receiving supervision in Scott County, which represents a prospective candidate pool of 1,000 individuals. The district reports a number of adults under supervision have expressed interest in entrepreneurship and many have gone on to start their own business. They believe there is sufficient demand for this program. Our relationship with Seventh District enables Safer to intervene with aspiring entrepreneurs at a critical juncture within their entrepreneurship journey, reaching them at a point when they can plan for their enterprises in a very focused and intentional way. Our approach coordinates services to help them make the transition from inmate to business owner.

**Classroom Instruction:** Safer has selected the Ice House Entrepreneurship Program (Ice House) as the entrepreneurship curriculum. Ice House is a proven, intensive entrepreneurship education curriculum specifically tailored for the formerly incarcerated. Safer currently delivers the curriculum through the Aspire Initiative in Chicago, IL. The cohort-based, in-person curriculum will be delivered on a weekly basis in two-hour, interactive content modules. These modules build progressively upon the participant's knowledge gained over several weeks of facilitated instruction and peer learning. More specifically, the curriculum and methodology are designed to inspire and engage participants in the basic philosophy that an entrepreneurial mindset is an essential life skill. Throughout the four-month program, participants will learn and practice concepts of the entrepreneurial thought and process. The eight lesson modules are Power of Choice, Recognizing Opportunity, Ideas into Action, Pursuit of Knowledge, Creating Wealth, Building your Brand, Creating Community, and The Power of Persistence. These concepts are presented to students through in-class instruction, a companion text entitled Who Owns the Ice House? Eight Life Lessons from an Unlikely Entrepreneur, and video lessons. Each lesson contains video case studies featuring a variety of real-world "unlikely" entrepreneurs who have overcome challenges by embracing these core concepts. Upon successful completion of the program, all students will be presented a certificate that affirms their mastery of the Ice House business concepts and completion of a business plan.

*The Ice House curriculum guides all students to explore their personal entrepreneurial interests and visions. This process of discovery is modeled through the four learning methodologies: Problem-Based Learning, Peer-to-Peer Learning, Experiential Learning, and Self-Directed Learning. Assignments enable participants to develop and apply new knowledge within real-world entrepreneurial experiences. Working in peer groups, students identify a problem to be solved, determine what they already know, what they need to know, and how and where to access new information that may lead to the resolution of the problem. Through this process, students take ownership of their learning and become self-*

directed. They apply their ideas in the real world by working through their solutions to problems with mentors and advisers to help their ideas evolve. Students then share experiences, conduct presentations, and attend guest lecture presentations. The Ice House curriculum is practical. It provides participants with a pathway to attract funding from financial institutions through the *development of a business plan* and it enables aspiring entrepreneurs to leverage their existing resources to kick start their business. *The base curriculum will be augmented to address financial literacy and life skills through online and face-to-face enhancements.* These program enhancements address the core business functions of *process, strategy, marketing, human resources, leadership, contracting, and market and product development.* Participants will receive a top-ranked business plan creation software to help them create their business plans. Safer will select the software based on the recommendations of our partners in the business community. Safer will also integrate Better Money Habits®, a free online resource created by Bank of America and Khan Academy to enable entrepreneurs to understand finances. By integrating the Better Money Habits® modules into the program, participants will receive personalized financial education and can progress through the material at their own pace. Although there are no local U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA) centers in Iowa, Safer will provide minority business owners with the tools, networks, and resources through the MBDA website and connect them to the regional chapter of the National Minority Supplier Development Council.

**Mentoring:** One-on-one mentoring is a central component of the Aspire Challenge entrepreneurship program. Mentoring begins during the first week and continues through the duration of the program. Safer's Aspire Challenge entrepreneurship program provides participants with a Safer Instructional Facilitator/Coach and a mentor from the QC entrepreneurship ecosystem. Starting the first week of the program, each participant will be provided one-on-one tutoring designed to help them master business concepts and develop a business plan. Additionally, each participant will be matched with a mentor from the QC entrepreneurship ecosystem based on their business needs and personal preferences. Safer has secured mentoring partnerships with the Quad Cities Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE) and the Eastern Iowa Small Business Development Center (SBDC), comprised of over 25 individuals who have in-depth, practical experience running and managing businesses. Mentors will help participants refine and execute their business plan, through technical assistance, life coaching and referrals. Participants may meet with mentors through scheduled appointments, or through drop-in hours available at the Quad Cities Chamber of Commerce. Safer will seek out new mentors through the Quad Cities Small Business Development Center, Quad Cities Chamber of Commerce, the Regional Chapter of the National Minority Supplier Development Council and other comparable agencies.

**Community Connections:** Participants will be connected to the local business community and social service providers through resource fairs, guest presentations integrated into the curriculum and referrals. Adapting an element from the Chicago Aspire Initiative model, Safer will use resource fairs, known as "collisions" to connect participants with the local business community and social service providers. In addition, businesses and social service providers will be integrated into classroom instruction as guest lecturers. Safer will ensure that lectures are tailored to the specific needs of the group and align with the curriculum. Lastly, participants will complete business and personal needs assessments at regular intervals throughout the program. Safer staff will use the assessments to make the best fit referral. Through connecting with the community, participants will refine their business plans, access public assistance and gain access to lenders and funders.



### *Access to Capital*

**Access to micro-lending:** Safer has partnered with the Iowa Foundation for Microenterprise and Community Vitality (IFMCV), an SBA Microloan Intermediary and the only statewide micro-lender in Iowa. IFMCV has experience providing loans to people with criminal records. IFMCV has agreed to meet face-to-face with program participants who meet loan pre-qualifications, provide post-loan technical assistance for recipients of loans and help Safer build a network of business and lending connections for program participants. Loans provided by IFMCV are designed to assist individuals with barriers, including those who have been denied a loan from a traditional lending institution or have low credit. Loans from IFMCV range from \$5,000 to \$50,000 with an average loan size of \$26,000. Throughout the program, participants will be prepared to obtain a loan based on the pre-qualification requirements provided by IFMCV. Safer will educate participants on specific loan requirements through classroom instruction, individualized financial education and mentoring. This model helps participants identify the capital needs to start up their business and provides assessments at regular intervals to gauge loan readiness. Participants are provided referrals to the best fit micro-lending provider. Safer will seek out new micro-lenders in the community and use this model to help connect micro-lenders and other financial institutions to qualified and talented entrepreneurs. Through our policy and advocacy division, Safer will continually seek to educate lenders and financial institutions on the unique marketplace challenges faced by entrepreneurs with records and to influence policy changes that create equity for greater “free market” participation.

**Connection to capital and funding opportunities:** Safer’s Aspire Challenge Program is designed to prepare participants to access to capital from the local entrepreneurship ecosystem. As participants progress through entrepreneurship training and workshops, business plan creation, mentoring and community connection events, their business plans are refined to attract capital and provide a roadmap to success. By leveraging our existing network and developing new partners, Safer will create a reentry entrepreneurship collaborative among members of the Quad Cities entrepreneurship ecosystem. This collaborative will be a conduit to financial and business resources for program participants. An advisory committee which includes Aspire participants, experienced entrepreneurs, financial experts and representatives of the Seventh District Court system will guide the direction of the collaborative. A central aim of the collaborative is to help program participants access capital and revenue opportunities by connecting with financial institutions, procurement officers, purchasing managers and a network of business owners. During the later stages of the program, each cohort will have a minimum of one “pitch event” where participants will have the opportunity to present their business to a panel of the local business community including lenders. The role of the panel is to provide feedback in a “risk-free” setting to help better prepare participants to attract funding. Participating in the collaborative has benefits for all program stakeholders. Examples of how participants will benefit include: (1) building their network at a resource fair sponsored by Safer; (2) gaining insights from facilitators, program participants and members of the entrepreneurial ecosystem; (3) attending workshops tailored to business owners with criminal records; and business service providers and lenders benefit by (4) hosting or attending matchmaking events; (5) participating in business pitch events; and (6) having direct access to new clients and up and coming entrepreneurs.

**Conclusion:** Over the course of the year, formerly incarcerated individuals will be guided through a sequence of education, mentoring and community connection events. Through the program, individuals will master business concepts, increase financial literacy, create a business plan, access capital and start or grow a business. Safer’s Aspire Challenge Program will help the formerly incarcerated make the transition to business owner through education, coaching, mentoring and securing capital.

## Addendum

### Letters of Support

1. Eastern Iowa Small Business Development Center
2. Quad Cities SCORE
3. Seventh Judicial District, Department of Corrections
4. Iowa Foundation for Microenterprise and Community Vitality



America's SBDC Iowa  
Eastern Iowa Community Colleges  
Kahl Educational Center, Suite 715  
326 W. 3<sup>rd</sup> St.  
Davenport, IA 52801  
P 563-336-3401  
F 563-336-3479  
[www.iowasbdc.org](http://www.iowasbdc.org)

February 10, 2017

U.S. Small Business Administration  
409 Third Street  
SW, Washington, DC 20416

**Re: Safer Foundation Aspire Challenge Letter of Support**

This letter details the support that the Eastern Iowa Small Business Development Center (SBDC) will provide to Safer Foundation's Aspire Challenge entrepreneurship program.

The Eastern Iowa SBDC opened November 1, 1985 and serves Clinton, Jackson, Muscatine and Scott counties. Containing both large metro and rural communities, the SBDC serves an area containing roughly ten percent of Iowa's businesses and ten percent of the residents in the state. As a part of the district's Business and Industry Center, the SBDC works in close conjunction with the district's three colleges and several other outreach programs. Headquartered in Davenport, the center is particularly well-known for providing business workshops and specialty programs in such areas as market development, international trade and business leadership.

Eastern Iowa SBDC will provide support to Safer Foundation's Aspire Challenge entrepreneurship program by:

- Offering one-on-one business mentoring to program participants.
- Offering workshops that focus on business strategy, business finance, business leadership, market development and international trade.
- For participants who are loan-ready, providing connections to available capital.

Eastern Iowa SBDC is dedicated to helping build a strong ecosystem for aspiring entrepreneurs with criminal backgrounds. Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Joel E. Youngs".

Joel Youngs | Regional Director  
America's SBDC, Eastern Iowa  
P 563-336-3401  
E [Jeyoungs@eicc.edu](mailto:Jeyoungs@eicc.edu)



Quad Cities

331 West 3<sup>rd</sup> Street • Davenport, Iowa 52801

February 7, 2017

U.S. Small Business Administration  
409 Third Street  
SW, Washington, DC 20416

**Re: Safer Foundation Aspire Challenge Letter of Support**

Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE), is a nationwide nonprofit organization dedicated to the formation, growth and success of small businesses. The Quad Cities Chapter is has over 25 volunteers who have in-depth, practical experience running and managing businesses. We cover a territory comprising the counties of Scott and Clinton in Iowa, and Rock Island, Henry, Bureau, Mercer, Lee, Henderson, and Whiteside in Illinois. One-on-one mentoring is one of the primary vehicles the Quad Cities SCORE Chapter utilizes to assist start-up and established small businesses.

**Quad Cities SCORE Awards:**

- In June 1997, the Quad Cities Chapter was named National SCORE Chapter of the Year.
- Two years later, Quad Cities was named Region 5 Chapter of the Year and one of the top ten in the nation.
- In 2016 Quad Cities SCORE has earned the Platinum Leadership Award

Quad Cities SCORE will provide support to Safer Foundation's Aspire Challenge entrepreneurship program by:

- Providing free one-on-one mentoring to Aspire Challenge entrepreneurship program participants (unlimited follow-up mentoring sessions).
- Providing free online mentoring through 1,200 nationwide email mentors.
- Providing online resources and trainings that assist entrepreneurs with process, strategy, marketing, human resources, leadership, contracting, and market and product development.

Quad Cities SCORE is dedicated to helping build a strong ecosystem for aspiring entrepreneurs with criminal backgrounds. Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions.

Sincerely,

Ted Ewing, Co-Chair  
Quad Cities SCORE  
Ted.ewing@scorevolunteer.org  
(309) 797-0082



# Seventh Judicial District Department of Correctional Services

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Serving-Scott, Clinton, Muscatine, Jackson & Cedar Counties

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February 6, 2017

U.S. Small Business Administration  
409 Third Street,  
SW, Washington, DC 20416

**Re: Safer Foundation Aspire Challenge Letter of Support**

This letter details the support that the Iowa Seventh Judicial District Department of Correctional Services (Seventh Judicial District) will provide to Safer Foundation's Aspire Challenge entrepreneurship program.

Located in Davenport Iowa, the Seventh Judicial District provides community-based correctional services to a five county area in Eastern Iowa. Although the Department serves the entire five county region and receives transfer cases from other jurisdictions in Iowa, the largest number of individuals with criminal records reside in Scott County. Community-based services provided through the Seventh Judicial District include: a work release center (housing 120 parolees), a residential correctional facility (housing 68 probationers), and a field office providing oversight to 1,000 parolees and probationers that reside in Scott County. Recipients of service through the Aspire Challenge entrepreneurship program will be from the population under field supervision. A number of individuals under field supervision have expressed interest in entrepreneurship and many have gone on to start their own business. We believe there is sufficient demand for this program.

The Seventh Judicial District will provide support to Safer Foundation's Aspire Challenge entrepreneurship program by:

- Assisting with screening and qualifying participants for the Aspire Challenge entrepreneurship program.
- Providing office space for Safer Foundation staff at the Seventh Judicial District's field office located in Davenport for the duration of the program.
- Providing training space for entrepreneurship training to be delivered by Safer Foundation staff.
- Marketing the entrepreneurship program to the 1000+ individuals under supervision of the Seventh Judicial District.
- Connect participants with supportive services offered by the Seventh Judicial District.

Sincerely,



Waylyn McCulloh

District Director

Seventh Judicial District Department of Correctional Services  
605 Main Street



Iowa Foundation for Microenterprise & Community Vitality

915 8th Street, Suite 205 • P.O. Box 793

Boone, Iowa 50036

(515) 212-0182

[cdowns@iowamicroloan.org](mailto:cdowns@iowamicroloan.org)

February 7, 2017

U.S. Small Business Administration  
409 Third Street,  
SW, Washington, DC 20416

**Re: Safer Foundation Aspire Challenge Letter of Support**

This letter details the support that Iowa Foundation for Microenterprise and Community Vitality (IFMCV) will provide to Safer Foundation's Aspire Challenge entrepreneurship program.

IFMCV is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt nonprofit foundation created for the purpose of initiating and operating model programs that assist Iowa's community foundations, other tax exempt organizations, and agencies of government in addressing a full range of eligible approaches for enhancing the vitality of Iowa communities and rural regions—including, but not limited to, the charitable operation of grant programs, technical assistance, credit enhancement and loan programs, and program related investments for improving the economic opportunities for the benefit of all Iowans, but particularly to reduce poverty for people with low and moderate incomes and underserved communities and neighborhoods.

The primary vehicle that IFMCV will use to support the Aspire Challenge entrepreneurship program is the IowaMicroLoan. The IowaMicroLoan program was created for those microbusinesses that are considered on the fringe of risk-bearing capacity for traditional financial institutions.

Iowa Microloan will provide support to Safer Foundation's Aspire Challenge entrepreneurship program by:

- Financing of loans of \$5,000 up to \$50,000 for a six-year term to qualified program participants who have previously received a credit denial letter required from lender
- A commitment to meeting face-to-face within program participants who meet loan pre-qualifications.
- Providing post-loan technical assistance for recipients of loans.
- Helping build a network of business and lending connections for program participants.

Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions.

Sincerely,

Craig Downs  
President and Senior Loan Administrator  
Iowa Foundation for Microenterprise and Community Vitality  
[cdowns@iowamicroloan.org](mailto:cdowns@iowamicroloan.org)  
Cell: 515-212-0182