



Urban League of
Greater Atlanta

*Empowering Communities.
Changing Lives.*

US Small Business Administration

Aspire Challenge: Finding Solutions to Empower Formerly Incarcerated Individuals with Entrepreneurship Training and Access to Microloans: ULGA Aspire Entrepreneurship & Capital Access Program (AECAP)
Contestant Capacity

Organization Background

The Urban League of Greater Atlanta (ULGA) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to enable and empower African Americans and others in underserved communities to achieve their highest human potential and secure economic self-reliance, parity, power and civil rights. To accomplish its mission, ULGA focuses on education, workforce development, home ownership, wealth creation, entrepreneurship, health, civic engagement and advocacy to bring about equal opportunities and access in Metropolitan Atlanta with a focus on the following nine counties: Fulton, DeKalb, Gwinnett, Cobb, Clayton, Coweta, Douglas, Fayette, and Henry. Since its establishment in 1920, ULGA has been a catalyst for economic empowerment for economically disadvantaged residents of Greater Atlanta. Georgia incarcerates more people than 44 other states and in 2013 61% of those incarcerated were African American, while Blacks comprise only 31% of the state's population. Approximately 6,000 inmates are released annually to the metro Atlanta region from the federal and state prison systems combined. Without interventions that lead to the ability to earn livable and sustainable annual incomes, 68% will be re-incarcerated within three years of release. ULGA is uniquely qualified to launch an entrepreneurship and capital access initiative for formerly incarcerated individuals to reduce recidivism because we have served this population since our inception and are currently working with over 350 youth and adults that are currently or previously connected to the criminal justice system through the following workforce development focused programs: US Department of Labor Training to Work 2 Adult Reentry Program that supports 250 adults pre-release; our New Beginnings Project Safe Neighborhoods initiative funded by the US Department of Justice that supports 50 previously incarcerated individuals living in targeted high crime high poverty neighborhoods and Urban Youth Empowerment Program RISE that supports 50 youth connected to the juvenile justice system. ULGA also operates an Entrepreneurship Center that offers training, coaching and access to capital to aspiring entrepreneurs. SBA Aspire will enable ULGA to expand its capacity to provide entrepreneurship training and access to capital to our youth and adult re-entry populations.

Background of Management Team

The official contact person for ULGA is **Nancy Flake Johnson**, ULGA President and CEO who has more than 25 years of small business development experience: contact number: 404-659-6575; email: njohnson@ulgatl.org. **Angela Marshal, and Marc Parham** will be responsible for management of the **ULGA Aspire Entrepreneurship & Capital Access Program (AECAP)**. **Angela Marshall** is Director for ULGA's Adult Reentry and Transitional Services Program since 2014. Angela retired from law enforcement after twenty-five years with supervision and case management experience with 14 of those years specializing in the area of reentry. Angela earned a B.A. degree in Sociology, with a Certificate in Criminology from Rutgers University and a Master of Administrative Science and Paralegal Certificate from Farleigh Dickerson University. **Marc Parham** has served as the Director of the ULGA Entrepreneurship Center since 2010 and is a small business expert, trainer, coach, professional speaker, radio host and author of the book "Yes I Can – Develop My Idea and Start My Own Business". He has over 25 years direct experience in training and coaching entrepreneurs to start and grow small businesses and access capital.

II. Entrepreneurial Education Delivery Solution

The ULGA has operated its Entrepreneurship Center for more than 12 years with a focus on training and coaching entrepreneurs to start and grow their small business enterprises. ULGA also has extensive experience in working with the formerly incarcerated population through its adult reentry and youth development workforce programs that offer the ULGA the direct access to formerly incarcerated individuals with a passion for and interest in entrepreneurship.

The Urban League of Greater Atlanta is uniquely positioned to offer an innovative and impactful entrepreneurial education delivery solution – the **Aspire Entrepreneurship & Capital Access Program (AECAP)** - for the formerly incarcerated by offering the program to participants in our agency's well established youth and adult reentry service platforms that currently serve 350+ current and formerly incarcerated individuals that will directly meet the goal of the SBA Aspire Challenge:

- **ULGA's Adult Reentry and Transitional Services Programs** – these two programs serve individuals pre and post-release from state and federal correctional facilities and supports them to earn secondary and post-secondary credentials, access stackable occupational skills training and secure employment that will lead to livable and sustainable wages/earnings.
 - **Training to Work 2 Adult Reentry Program** – funded by the US Department of Labor supports 250 adults preparing for and recently released from federal and state prisons to gain access to meaningful employment and stackable occupational training credentials and life skills that will ensure they earn livable wages that will reduce the incidents of recidivism. The current recidivism rate for this program is only 13%.
 - **Project Safe Neighborhoods: New Beginnings Program** – funded by the US Justice Department supports individuals that were previously incarcerated that live in high poverty high crime neighborhoods to access stackable workforce training and credentials and employment opportunities that lead to living wages that will reduce recidivism. The recidivism rate for this
- **Urban Youth Empowerment Program RISE** – supports youth 16-24 who are connected to the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice to earn GEDs, stackable occupational skills credentials and secure sustainable employment.

Many of the individuals that we serve through these programs have entrepreneurial aspirations and the Aspire Challenge will enable ULGA to offer these individuals comprehensive training, coaching and access to capital that we currently do not have the resources or capacity to do. ULGA will recruit participants through each of these platforms via our staff: **Empowerment Advocates (case managers) and Career and Employment Specialists** who get to know our clients well and who will assist with recruitment and screening of candidates. The candidates we will target will have characteristics that will include work ethic, demonstrated leadership, occupational skills and credentials, self-starters, positive attitudes and demonstrated positive behavior and classroom decorum. We will host **AECAP Information Sessions 30-60 days prior to the start of each of two cohorts** (at least two cohorts per year) to explain the program and recruit individuals with a genuine interest in starting a small business. Based on our experience, there are many individuals in this target group that have entrepreneurial aspirations and many already have skills and work experience that will support small business start-up. Participants will also be recruited from three partnering state transitional centers located throughout the Metro Atlanta area and from the Federal Work Release Program which is administrated through our partnership with the Georgia Department of Corrections.

Classroom Instruction and Program Design - The ULGA Aspire Entrepreneurship & Capital Access Program (AECAP) represents a combination of classroom instruction that supports the development of a business plan, one on one

and small group coaching and assistance with the development of a microloan application package and presentation. The program will **operate via at least two cohorts per year of 20-25 participants over a 12 week cycle via weekly 3 hour evening and/or weekend classroom sessions (to allow individuals with full-time jobs to participate)** and will utilize the CORE FOUR Business Planning Course® that teaches aspiring business owners the information and skills they need in four fundamental or “CORE” elements of business planning: 1) Plan for business success 2) Plan to meet the needs of the marketplace 3) Plan the business cash flow needs and 4) Plan how the business will operate. By starting with a business idea, the CORE FOUR Business Planning Course® is used to help participants to plan a business in real time and build a business plan. As students and entrepreneurs learn by doing, they will see the business idea evolve as they build the details into a comprehensive business plan. The CORE FOUR experience demonstrates that a strong, well-researched business plan increases the likelihood of success. Entrepreneurs will save time and money later on by making mistakes up front and on paper. The skills they learn in business planning will pay off in other areas of their life as well. Throughout the course the instructor will guide participants to on-line and library resources that will help prepare to finance and operate their business and supplement the in-person curriculum. Topics include the right mindset, venture feasibility, market research and marketing, branding/social media, pricing, personnel and management, the business plan, small business financing, financial planning and more. Each session will include the lead instructor and special guest speakers who are successful entrepreneurs and other small resource providers. ULGA will also augment the CORE FOUR curriculum with additional sessions to include entrepreneurial skills and characteristics, financial literacy, small business contracting (public and private sector) and budgeting, credit worthiness and building credit, leadership skills, critical thinking, problem solving and business communications.

Coaching and Business Plan Completion - Participants will also have access to business coaches each week for one on one and group coaching sessions to facilitate the completion of the business plan. The coaches review each business plan, provide feedback and assist with completion. Upon completion, each participant presents their plan to a panel of business experts that will include a cross section of small business micro lenders, successful entrepreneurs, corporate supplier and government procurement professionals and other small business experts who will provide feedback to each participant on how to strengthen their plan to secure financing.

Coaching and Microloan Application Process - Once the plan is completed and presented, the coach will work one on one with participants to prepare to secure microloan financing and assist with the completion of the microloan application, make the introduction to the SBA micro lender and support the process through the approval and implementation process. ULGA has long standing relationships with SBA micro lenders including Access to Capital for Entrepreneurs (ACT) and Lift and other funders.

Mentorship -To enhance the development and potential for success of participants, the ULGA will create an **AECAP Mentors Network** that will be comprised of committed successful entrepreneurs, **many who have been previously incarcerated** who will rotate one on one and group mentoring activities each week. One evening a week, mentors will volunteer to be on site to support the development of the business plan, provide advice and counsel on business ideas, how to overcome obstacles and barriers to success and share experiences and lessons learned. Some of these sessions will be hosted by entrepreneur mentors at their places of business, chambers of commerce, corporate headquarters and other venues to give the participants exposure to all types of business people and environments.

Community Connections -The ULGA’s Adult Reentry and Transitional Services Program and Urban Youth Empowerment Programs, from which participants will be recruited, all have **Empowerment Advocates (case managers)** that each participant is assigned to throughout their matriculation through the program. These individuals are trained to support participants to connect with the community based supportive and transitional services, transportation resources that they need to ensure their success. In addition, the weekly classroom sessions and the weekly mentoring sessions will all support opportunities for participants to connect with the local business community to increase participants’ financial literacy and any other service that improves the economic well-being of the returning citizen.

Access to Capital

Access to Micro-lending

UGLA maintains long-standing relationships with two SBA Micro-lenders that serve metro Atlanta that we work with through our Entrepreneurship Center on an ongoing basis to refer entrepreneurs and assist with the preparation of their business plans and loan applications: 1) **Access to Capital for Entrepreneurs (ACE)**, a non-profit organization that provides loans and business development resources to help its borrowers create and grow sustainable businesses which generate jobs, and 2) **LiftFund**, a non-profit organization that helps small business owners with limited access to capital have a chance to live their dreams by providing small business loans and minority business loans for women, startups, and entrepreneurs. ULGA has cross-referral relationships with both lenders whereby they refer clients that need assistance with business plans and applications and ULGA refers clients and supports them through the process that are ready to apply.

ULGA will provide access to these lenders through classroom sessions and the delivery of the curriculum by having ACE, LiftFund, SBA Bank Lenders such as Citizens Trust, Fidelity and PNC staff participate in panels and presentations. ULGA will also provide access to micro-lenders and other funders by supporting each participant to complete a micro-loan/SBA loan application upon completion and critique of their business plans during the 12 week AECAP Program. TEC Coaches have expert experience in developing loan applications and will bring this expertise to each participant. Volunteer lenders will review packages before submission to ensure they are comprehensive and address all lending criteria and requirements.

Connection to capital and funding opportunities

Connections to capital and funding opportunities are fostered through a series of specialized training and workshops, the critique of the business plan and via Coaches supporting the micro-loan application process once the business plan is completed. The CORE FOUR course includes a number of modules that will help develop the participant's readiness for capital access and the Coaching and mentoring sessions will also support the process.

The AECAP will also host a "Meet the Money People" Session during the program that will include a cross section of lenders to include SBA micro-lenders, other micro-lenders, banks, angel investors and Invest Atlanta. Following the panels, lenders will conduct one on one counseling sessions to provide information on lending and investing criteria as appropriate and provide feedback on the participants' ventures.