

Contestant Capacity

1. Organizational Background:

The legal applicant for this grant is Kankakee County Renewed Opportunity (KCRO), currently a 501(c)3. KCRO has been in existence for 13 years and serves the entire County of Kankakee, Illinois (population 112,120 – 2013). The unemployment rate for the County in 2016 was 6.8%. This grant opportunity aligns itself closely with the primary mission of this organization -- assisting in the reintegration of formerly incarcerated individuals into the community and work place. The core competencies are: Prepare formally incarcerated individuals for the workforce, develop sustainable workplace skills, and provide transitional services with access to community-based organizations to the reentry population. Currently, programming is offered that is intended to develop soft skills such as creative thinking, problem solving skills, work ethics, and the development of positive attitudes and values. Although these soft skills are critical for a successful transition back into the community, the development of hard skills is also equally essential. Due to lack of resources, little has been done to develop these hard skills that would transfer into sustainable work. The organization has envisioned expanding to provide for this unmet need of hard skill development. This expanded program has been entitled "RENEW." The intended outcome of this new effort is to provide entrepreneurial training resulting in the development of specific, defined, and measurable skills that will readily transfer into the workplace. This organization is suited to provide this expanded programming due to the cooperation of the community as demonstrated by partnerships between KCRO and four local businesses to form business apprenticeships, a church agreeing to provide classroom space, Kankakee Workforce Services (WIOA), and Kankakee Community College (KCC) agreeing to provide job skill training and educational opportunities, and the past Coordinator of the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) agreeing to assist with proper documentation for capital providers, develop events with local lenders and funders, and job skill training, and Olivet Nazarene University (ONU) agreeing to provide workplace instruction.

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2. Management Team Background:

The Project RENEW Management team consists of individuals who each have expertise in their fields collaborating to develop and sustain Project RENEW. **Dr. Diane Richardson** is the chair of, and a Professor in the department of Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) at ONU. She is responsible for FCS education, hospitality, family services, fashion merchandising, and interior design. She is also a certified FCS professional (CAFCS). **Professor Shelly Stroud** is a faculty member with ONU. She has also served as mental health professional working closely with probation, parole and the Courts, as well as community providers. She worked in conjunction with the Kankakee County Justice and Mental Health Collaboration Program (JMH) to assist returning citizens and justice-involved individuals with mental health and co-occurring disorder treatment and successful reentry. She also serves as a board member of KCRO. **Ken Crite** has been an employee of Kankakee Community College (KCC) and worked for the Job Training Partnership Act, currently known as the Workforce Investment Act. Ken was a past Coordinator of the SBDC at KCC. The SBDC was responsible for assisting small business start-up, expansion, and/or general employee training. As the Coordinator of Career Services, Ken currently offers assistance to students and the community at large in areas of resume development, interviewing techniques, establishing internships and employer hiring events, as well as organizing job fairs and employer spotlight events. **Dana Washington** is the Director of WIOA/ Workforce Services at KCC. WIOA helps people realize their potential by providing employment and training to persons who are justice-involved, low income, youth, unemployed or underemployed, veterans, or affected by business closures or layoffs. **Jasper Jones** is the Re-entry Program Coordinator for the Kankakee County Sheriff's Office (KCSO) and the Executive Director of KCRO. Jasper, with guidance from the KCRO/KCSO collaborative developed and implemented programs and services that helped countless participants and their families overcome their addictions, mental illnesses, and criminal behaviors to navigate the Criminal Justice system. He also hires returning citizens and those with felonies in his construction and lawn care services.

Entrepreneurial Education Delivery Solution

1. Participant Recruitment Plan:

KCRO/Reentry Services will be the outreach and referral source for Project Renew. Participants will be actively recruited from a list of non-violent applicants who have been (or about to be) released from the Jerome Combs Detention Center (located in Kankakee County) and from the Illinois Department of Corrections back to Kankakee County communities. Applicants will complete both cognitive behavioral (i.e. Thinking for a Change) training and Reentry services prior to applying to Project RENEW. Qualified applicants will be chosen from volunteers who are willing to develop the job skills and entrepreneurial spirit to create a small business or work for many area businesses.

2. Classroom Instruction:

Many formerly incarcerated individuals lack the education as well as workforce skills required to succeed (Toerbet, 2012). They also lack the ability to address the challenges of reentry due to limited experience. KCRO will develop soft skills by utilizing the “Living on the Outside” as well as “Thinking 4 A Change” curricula to enhance success. As a means of teaching hard skills, we have identified four courses at Olivet Nazarene University (ONU), the content of which will be used to provide training for individuals who will be reentering. Those courses are FACS 112 Clothing and Construction 1, FACS 113 Clothing and Construction II, and FACS 111 Textiles, and FACS 312 Professional Image and Dress. ONU students who are enrolled in these courses as well as those who have completed the listed courses, will be teaching their learned skills to the chosen RENEW participants. According to the National Career Service website (2015) entry level skills needed for tailors are sewing machine skills and understanding of textiles. The proposed program for RENEW participants would teach sewing machine skills and an understanding of fabric types in addition to professionalism in the workplace. Other workshops will include how to cost out products, determine retail pricing, and develop a small business plan as well as workshops on professionalism in the workplace.

ONU staff members will supervise the above program. In addition, retired ONU alumni and practicing business leaders in the community will share work place skills. By combining our services, all entities will be able to benefit from hands on training and guidance. These experiences are directly associated with the course room curriculum and program area expertise. RENEW participants will be organized into cohort groups of eight that will meet initially in person for class room instruction. This instruction will progressively develop over an eight-week span. Following this course room instruction participants will receive a certificate of completion and will select from four options of apprenticeships according to their own personal entrepreneurial interest. These will include: shoe repair shop, sewing machine repair shop, upholstery and alterations shop, and dry cleaning business that does alterations. As an alternative to the apprenticeship, participants may elect to identify a high quality saleable product that they can design, make, perfect, and market for a profit at a local Farmer’s Market. Initial internet employment research tools will be taught. Following that overview, participants will utilize the public library for online resources i.e. available jobs, resume development, personality inventories, etc.

At the conclusion of classroom instruction and apprenticeship experience, ENACTUS from the Business Department at ONU will be utilized to connect the classroom learning and the apprenticeship experience to the real business world. Participants will be guided into the development of a small-business plan, logo design, and marketing strategies. Once participants have a suitable product, a business plan, and training in work place behavior, products can begin to be marketed.

Kankakee Community College will provide participants with job skills training. This training will help develop the “hard and soft-skill” training that will greatly enhance long-term success. For those who choose to work for another business rather than owning their own business, the Coordinator of Career Services will also provide guidance on career and technical education opportunities. For those who would like to further their educational goals, Career Services will aid RENEW participants with researching eligible colleges and universities.

Kankakee Workforce Services will enable participants to easily access the information and services they need through the "one-stop" system; empower adults to obtain the training they find most appropriate through Individual training accounts, which allow participants to "purchase" the training they determine best for them; and ensure that all state and local programs meet participant expectations.

3. Mentoring:

Students from ENACTUS as well as the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences will contribute by assisting participants with a business plan, and marketing strategies. The long term goal would be for ENACTUS to help them develop a cost analysis of time, material and labor to determine wholesale costs and retail markup in order to make a profit. This will assist in making the business self-sustaining.

Students from the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences will mentor participants in determining sellable quality of goods by ensuring sewing skills are at a level of performance that consumers would find satisfactory.

The RENEW team will also partner with business leaders in the community who will sponsor and mentor RENEW participants to develop techniques that will help them better navigate the realities of owning a business. RENEW participants will be able to gain advice, instruction, and develop the leadership qualities needed to grow business and sustain profits. Also, once a mentor sponsors a business mentee, they have a higher probability of forming a professional bond that should leave a lasting impression on both parties.

4. Community Connections:

Since RENEW is a conduit of KCRO this provides numerous opportunities for the participants to be linked with other wrap around services as needed to ensure their success. The KCRO board consists of 40 community members including 10+ area agencies which provide services to formally incarcerated individuals.

Connections with various community agencies will enhance the chances of participants developing successful business within the community. KCRO/KCSO already has long term relationships with community agencies that connect individuals with: Drug and alcohol and mental health treatment, cognitive-behavioral training, basic job-skill training and access to educational opportunities. RENEW partners also understand the importance of financial literacy among the RENEW participants. Financial literacy training will be offered through the University of Illinois Extension with a curriculum named "*All My Money*". The curriculum is a research-based approach to assure that it addresses the issues and needs of today's limited-resource audiences. The curriculum content was driven by the results of a needs assessment survey of agencies serving limited-resource audiences and the financial education core competencies identified by the Financial Literacy and Education Commission (US Department of the Treasury). Each lesson was peer reviewed by professionals in the field of financial education.

Another service that is offered is the Thinking 4 a Change course. This type of cognitive behavioral therapy is also a method of evidence-based programming which appears to have been successful. Some of the positive effects have been seen not only with victim-offender relations, but also with recidivism rates, which implies this must be a beneficial program (Tsui, 2014). Due to this type of therapy a person is able to make a transformation or change from demonstrating criminal behaviors or thoughts to those of non-criminal thoughts (MacKenzie, 2013). Cognitive Behavioral Therapy has been proven to be effective as it has shown to help with life skills as well as job skills.

Reentry and transitional services offered through KCRO. Reentry services consists of a 12-10-week class conducted by our Reentry Specialist that guides participants through an evidence-based handbook called "Living on the Outside" (LOO); a manual that helps participants gather ID documentation, find employment and housing, and set up bank accounts. LOO offers advice on finding good health care, avoiding substance abuse, and rediscovering relationships. It also helps participants evaluate their job skills, set goals, create a budget, manage stress, and more.

Access to Capital

1. Access to micro-lending:

Micro-lending organizations through SBA nearest Kankakee County are approximately 50 miles north of the area due to recent closures of Small Business Development Centers by KCC and Governor's State University. However, Project RENEW partners have creative options to increase the likelihood of linking RENEW participants with lenders. RENEW partners' plans to collaborate with the Kankakee Chamber of Commerce and individually through private services conducted by the past Coordinator of KCC's Small Business Development Center.

The Kankakee Chamber of Commerce has already established resources to help those in small business. Programming includes Women in Networking, Kankakee County Young Professionals, and EnterpriseU. Access to these programs require membership in the Chamber, but by addressing the Chamber and sharing our goals to help the previously incarcerated learn new skills; we will engage their services as speakers, trainers, and supporters in our education program and as mentors in business. Interactions with individuals from the Chamber will put the participants in touch with community professionals who can provide small loans or know agencies and people who can support their goals.

The past Coordinator of the Small Business Development Center of Kankakee Community College has also agreed to assist participants of RENEW by linking participants with micro-lenders such as ACCION Chicago and with various Community Reinvestment Funds and foundations around Illinois and other states. He plans to meet with each participant individually to help prepare proper documentation to enhance the chances of acceptance by the various lending sources. He will work with the ENACTUS team at Olivet Nazarene University and the Kankakee Chamber of Commerce to develop events that connect RENEW participants with local lenders and funders.

The ENACTUS team, faculty at Olivet Nazarene University and Kankakee Community College, Kankakee Workforce Services, and members of KCRO are well connected with local small business professionals. As partners in the RENEW program; the above-noted organizations and community leaders will advocate for support and development of sustainable options with local business leaders and lending institutions.

2. Connection to Capitol and Funding Opportunities:

RENEW partners will aid and prepare the previously incarcerated individuals to meet with capital providers and preparation documentation through the classroom instruction described above. Olivet Nazarene University Family and Consumer Sciences hospitality majors and students in the department's event planning course will work with community supporters to host events where participants of the RENEW program can interact with community leaders to practice their social/business networking skills. Once RENEW program leadership identifies participants who have met competencies for high quality sewing (based on Career and Technical Education competencies for the work in Clothing and Textiles) an event will be held where RENEW participants can pitch their entrepreneurial ideas to key members in the Kankakee business community. This would include local bankers and business professionals. The RENEW partners will also research and develop marketing methods to attract Angel investors to our geographical area.