



Contestant Capacity

The Urban League of Louisiana (ULLA) is one of 88 affiliates of the National Urban League. The mission of the Urban League is to assist African Americans and other underserved communities in seeking equity to secure economic self-reliance, parity, and civil rights. The organization works through three Centers of Excellence: Education and Youth Development, Economic and Community Development, and Policy and Social Justice. ULLA is currently undergoing unprecedented growth and is expanding from a local organization to a statewide entity.

In 2001, the ULLA established the Women's Business Resource Center (WBRC) to support minority and women-owned businesses. The WBRC provides small business development services, training, and other resources relevant to aspiring and existing entrepreneurs. Services include: business planning support, loan packaging, business certifications, and assistance with operational streamlining, business financials and accounting. In 2016, provided training to more than 670 business owners, helped clients create 184 new jobs and save 105 jobs, and assisted in the start of more than 30 new businesses.

The Contractor's Resource Center (CRC), an extension of the WBRC, was established in 2014 to support the ULLA's work in economic development and inclusion. The CRC provides resources to small, certified Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBE), minority, and women-owned contracting firms. Clients have access to a state-of-the-art plotter/printer and a computer lab for access to contractor-specific software programs. Classes offered include: estimating, project management, safety, compliance, back-office, licensing preparation, etc. In 2016, the CRC hosted 22 workshops serving more than 165 attendees, helped contractors obtain more than \$32 million in bonding capacity, and assisted clients in obtaining contracts totaling \$27.8 million.

The Urban League of Louisiana has a unique opportunity to provide services to formerly incarcerated individuals seeking to rebuild their lives through small business ownership. Louisiana currently houses more than 57,000 people in state, federal and local prisons. Data indicates that the state incarcerates about 1 out of every 122 of its citizens. Louisiana's incarceration rate is by a wide margin the highest in the world. We know that former prisoners who are able to secure work within three years are more likely to avoid recidivism. Unfortunately, these individuals continue to have trouble finding jobs and staying out of prison due to the prejudices attached to being a former felon. Small business ownership is one opportunity that can address this issue and offer a lifeline to ex-offenders seeking to re-enter the community.

In 2016, Mary Henderson, a non-violent ex-offender, became a client of the WBRC. Ms. Henderson owns a community thrift store in Arabi, Louisiana where she employs other ex-offenders, and sells furniture made by formerly incarcerated individuals on consignment. In December of 2016, with the help of the WBRC, she expanded to a larger location to accommodate a growing demand for products, increased inventory, and housing for employees. Henderson was a semi-finalist in the 2017 Women-In-Business Challenge and took part in the 9 module accelerator program. Ms. Henderson will be a continued resource for the WBRC in identifying and assessing the business resource needs of the ex-offender community.

Klassi Duncan, Director of the WBRC, is committed to supporting the New Orleans community through small business development. Ms. Duncan has an extensive background in supplier diversity, small business development, and entrepreneurial education. Her passion for community development make her a great lead for this initiative. The WBRC currently has two full time business advisors, Frank Johnson and Wayne Encalarde, who are experienced in providing counseling services to business owners across industries, at various stages. In addition, Ms. Duncan will mobilize a professional and experienced group of faculty members and mentors to successfully execute this program. (Contact: Klassi Duncan, 504-620-9647, kduncan@urbanleaguella.org.)

The Urban League's cumulative work, impact and expertise indicate that the organization is well positioned to execute small business development programming for ex-offenders in Louisiana.

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Entrepreneurial Education Delivery Solution

Recruitment Plan: The Urban League has an extensive history in addressing the economic and workforce development challenges facing underserved populations in the region, and specifically in supporting the small business development needs of minority and women-owned businesses in Louisiana. The ULLA Office of Workforce Development (OWD) provides quality workforce development initiatives and resources throughout Orleans, Baton Rouge, Terrebonne, and other surrounding Parishes within marginalized communities and serves at least 1,100 job seekers annually through various youth and adult programs. Its mission is to build core competencies that produce a common set of knowledge and skills for career success, and provide a foundation for job seekers to access a full range of occupations with livable wages.

Over the past three years, OWD has operated a national Training to Work Adult Mentoring Program (T2W), which provides workforce development and training services for 36-months to 220 incarcerated individuals so that they can successfully re-enter the community and the workforce. This program takes a "skills-based" training approach tailored to the needs of employers, by building a pipeline of best-matched employment candidates. For career seekers, the program supports them through the attainment of industry-recognized credentials, high school equivalency credentialing, and the pursuit of higher education. Additionally, this program provides incarcerated offenders with support services up to 6-months prior release from a prison reentry program and throughout their entire T2W engagement, and 9-months of post-program follow-up.

The OWD is well-positioned to provide a recruitment bridge to the WBRC for small business programming that supports formerly incarcerated individuals. This funnel will provide an excellent screening process to ensure that those ex-offenders that are admitted to the WBRC programming are committed to exploring small business ownership and becoming an entrepreneurial leader in their community. ULLA's Office of Workforce Development will refer ex-offenders for one of two cohorts hosted throughout the year.

Classroom Instruction: The Women's Business Resource Center provides cohort-based, modular education programming throughout the year including 'The Start-up Institute' and our annual Women-In-Business Challenge accelerator program. This modular approach is proven to be successful in conveying the building blocks of entrepreneurship education including opportunity identification, financial statements analysis, operations and processes, marketing, becoming a leader, and managing people. Most importantly, this approach allows for a focus on skillset and mindset, as those that are new to small business ownership must understand the key behaviors of an entrepreneur in creating a sustainable and profitable business.

Once participants are identified, they will be invited to participate in an 8 week cohort where they will be introduced to the basics of small business ownership. Each cohort may include up to 30 participants. All participants will be ex-offenders to ensure participant confidence and freedom of information exchange. Class size and make-up will ensure an optimal learning environment. During each 3 hour session, special emphasis will be placed on the tenants of goal setting, financial literacy and responsibility, leadership, and overall business acumen. Modules will include:

MODULE 1: 50 FIRST STEPS TO STARTING A BUSINESS - Starting a business is exciting, but can also be scary for first-timers. This session will cover what it takes to start a business, as well as, an introduction to the 'Business Plan', which will be used as a roadmap for success. Participants will also learn the difference between an idea vs. an opportunity.

MODULE 2: STRATEGIC BUSINESS PLANNING - Learn how to take a strategic approach to starting your business! Focusing on strategy and tactics ensures that you are taking the right steps towards creating a successful business. Participants will also be introduced to the 'Lean Startup' model, a new, principled approach to creating and managing a startup.



MODULE 3: UNDERSTANDING BUSINESS FINANCIALS - Discover why financials are so important to your business' success. Learn how to prepare the financials every business must have, as well as, how to analyze the numbers and utilize them to impact your bottom line.

MODULE 4: MARKETING FOR GROWTH - Gain a deeper understanding of your market and learn effective marketing principles that will help you to accurately identify and reach your target customers. Discuss how to develop effective business communication methods that potential customers will respond to.

MODULE 5: DEVELOPING YOUR OPERATIONS AND PROCESSES - Determine the critical processes that will drive your business' growth. Learn the fundamentals of 'process mapping' to continually establish, monitor, and improve your efficiency and eliminate waste.

MODULE 6: PRINCIPLES OF LEADERSHIP FOR ENTREPRENEURS - Effective leadership is the driving force of a small business. During this session, learn what it takes to lead the organization towards your vision. Understand more about personality styles and creating a culture that represents your core values.

MODULE 7: LEGAL READINESS - Learn your legal obligations as a new business owner. This session will provide participants with an introduction to employment, contract, and intellectual property law.

MODULE 8: FINDING THE MONEY – Need help with finding the money to finance your startup or business expansion? Learn how to prepare for a loan request or investment pitch. This session includes an extensive discussion on credit.

Mentoring and Community Connections: The WBRC will provide other activities to supplement the in-class curriculum. These activities include one-on-one business advising and mentoring from an experienced business advisor. Our business advisors are subject matter experts on business planning and will provide customized guidance to participants based on their needs and goals. They are experienced across various industries and can support business owners at varying stages in the development process. The primary benefit of the business advising and mentoring relationship is to support participants in transferring information from the classroom into a strategic and tactical business plan.

In addition to the classes and business advising sessions, small group roundtables will also be scheduled to introduce participants to various resource partners in the community including the SBA, economic development organizations, chambers of commerce, social service providers, transitional service providers, etc. These community connections are a vital part of ensuring the success of ex-offenders as they become entrepreneurs.

To further support mentorship, general and industry-specific roundtables will also be used to introduce participants to successful entrepreneurs from the community that can relate to and/or provide guidance into how they can be successful. Small group mentoring will be customized to meet the needs of the cohort, but may include entrepreneurs from construction-related fields, retail, as well as, various types of service providers.

To support overall engagement, web meetings and other online collaboration tools will be used to facilitate small group sessions with mentors, resource partners, business advisors, and other resources as needed. These activities will provide participants with the additional support that they may need to be successful.

The Urban League is looking forward to leveraging its strategic relationships to support this initiative. The WBRC has established numerous strategic partnerships within the region, including: the Small Business Administration, Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses, Idea Village, Capital One Bank Community Banking, Hope Enterprise Corporation, LiftFund, New Orleans Angel Network, SCORE Service, New Orleans Chamber of Commerce, New Orleans Regional Black Chamber of Commerce, City of New Orleans, and Terrebonne Economic Development Authority, among others.



Access to Capital

The Women's Business Resource Center offers continued support and resources for small business owners seeking to access capital to launch or grow their businesses. As a core competency and strategic imperative, we provide assistance to small businesses to assess bankability, develop action plans for capital access, create business and personal financial statements, and complete loan packages that include a business plan, amortization schedule, financial statements, collateral list and verification, uses of funds, etc.

At the WBRC, we understand that at the most important component and the driver of a small business owner's ability to access to capital is education. Aspiring small business owners must first be educated on the types and sources of funding that are available to them and the requirements necessary to utilize that funding source. During the cohort for formerly incarcerated individuals, the WBRC will host the *Finding the Money* module. During this module, small business owners are introduced to the difference between debt and equity funding, the 5 C's of Commercial Lending, personal financial health, assessing the need for credit repair assistance, etc.

Program participants will also be able to take part in the WBRC's summer training series called *Straight Talk: Access to Capital Series*. Once participants complete the *Finding the Money* module and have completed their business plan, they will be invited to participate in the Straight Talk series. This extended education series provides an even more robust, accelerated approach to learning about funding opportunities and moving forward in the process of becoming bankable and preparing a loan package. The series includes four sessions: 1) Funding Sources Panel and Networking Event, 2) Your Personal Financial Statement, 3) Examining Your Business' Financial Needs, and 4) Putting Your Funding Package Together.

The WBRC regularly hosts funding panels to introduce participants to various organizations offering debt and equity financing. The goal of these events is to provide more education directly from the institutions so that participants can learn specific requirements and how they can access needed capital. This is also a networking opportunity and a chance for participants to gain confidence in building a rapport with organizations that provide financial services.

In addition, we understand that formerly incarcerated individuals will experience challenges in accessing capital from traditional lending institutions to start and grow their businesses. To circumvent this challenge, the WBRC will provide guidance towards microloans as an entry point to participants. Microloans are a vital resource for start-up and early stage small businesses. They provide an entry point for access to small loans that enable a new business owner to build credit and business capacity. This is a valuable resource for formerly incarcerated individuals who are less likely to access loans from traditional banks. The WBRC has relationship with SBA micro lenders in Louisiana including LiftFund, NewCorp Business Assistance Center, and Fund17.

The Urban League's Women's Business Resource Center is proud of its work in supporting economic development in the region through small business support and advocacy. In the past five years alone, the Urban League's WBRC has supported more than 5,600 small business owners through counseling and training, helped to launch almost 80 new small businesses, helped to create 729 jobs, saved 50 jobs for businesses in decline, and helped its clients to secure \$109.3 million in bonding capacity and over \$53.4 million in contracts. We look forward to continuing this work and to supporting formerly incarcerated individuals in becoming entrepreneurs.