

Entrepreneurial Education Delivery Solution

The League's ***Entrepreneurship Center*** provides programs and services that align closely to the recommended components of the ASPIRE Challenge. The aims of the ***Entrepreneurship Center*** are as follows: (1) support aspiring African American entrepreneurs in the development of a viable product or service; (2) provide training and educational programs to equip African American entrepreneurs with the tools, resources and credentials to establish their business; (3) assist existing African American business owners with business and financial model redevelopment; (4) bridge the "Digital Divide" between African-American business owners and their peers; (5) provide support to African American small business owners that are seeking external capital resources, including traditional bank loans, microloans, venture capital, or angel investments; and (6) provide assistance with contract procurement and connections to clients and contractors. The ***Entrepreneurship Center*** serves approximately 500 clients annually consisting of roughly 70% pre-venture/start-up entrepreneurs (less than three years in business) and 30% existing small business owners (business in existence for more than three years). These clients represent a cross section of socioeconomic groups and are primarily African American. All clients are English speaking. Key FY2016 highlights include: businesses receiving coaching and support from the League resulted in nearly \$37 million additional investment attracted to the targeted communities served and the creation of 166 jobs.

Participant Recruitment

The ***Entrepreneurship Center*** will utilize a three-fold approach to recruiting participants for the entrepreneurial training programs associated with the ASPIRE challenge: First, the ***Entrepreneurship Center*** will internally target current and former participants of the Workforce Development Center's Adult Re-Entry Program (Training to Work). Fueled by the National Urban League, which has been serving the formerly incarcerated for more than fifty years, the League's program provides formerly incarcerated adults with the necessary skills and training to successfully re-enter the job market. The program served 121 participants between 2013 and 2016, 98% of whom did not return to prison. Prior to participation in the ***Entrepreneurship Center***'s programming, this targeted group will have already received soft skills training and peer mentoring through the Training to Work program and many have already expressed an interest in entrepreneurship. Second, the ***Entrepreneurship Center*** currently serves a number of clients who were formerly incarcerated and/or seek to hire the formerly incarcerated in order to help them re-enter society. The ***Entrepreneurship Center*** will reach out to these clients for referrals of individuals who may be interested in participating in the program. Third, the League maintains strong relationships with a number of other community organizations throughout the city of Chicago that offer services and support to the formerly incarcerated. The ***Entrepreneurship Center*** will reach out to each of these organizations in order to share information about the program and receive referrals for potential participants.

Classroom Instruction

The League offers four (4) intensive entrepreneurial training programs to clients based on the stage and needs of the business. Each program operates two (2) cohorts per year (spring and fall) for a total of eight (8) cohorts.

The **nextSTEP Business Launch Program** is designed to support startup business owners in properly establishing their entrepreneurial venture. Topics include but are not limited to: product validation, accounting basics, pricing strategy, branding and marketing, identifying key performance indicators, operational budgeting, leadership and people management, etc. The **nextLEVEL Growth Strategy Development Program** is designed to help business owners expand their businesses and develop policies and procedures that improve operations. Topics include but are not limited to: intermediate financial management, intermediate operations management, long-term planning, labor law, advanced marketing strategy, understanding small business funding sources, etc.



The **nextDEAL Teaming Program** is designed to connect established business owners with contract opportunities and financing for continued growth and expansion. Topics include, but are not limited to: bidding and estimating, contracts, forecasting, understanding certifications, project financing, bonding, business development, joint ventures and other teaming agreements, etc. The **nextCONNECTION Technology Integration Program** is designed to help business owners identify and implement technologies to enhance their business operations. Topics include but are not limited to the use of technology to aid with: customer acquisition, project management, financial management, marketing, operations management, A/B testing, etc.

In each program, participants complete the following program activities:

- Three (3) months of educational programming (12 classroom sessions total) and bi-weekly counseling check-ins (three business development coaching sessions, three financial coaching sessions)
- Bimonthly follow-up coaching for three (3) months (three business development coaching sessions, three financial coaching sessions)

In addition to the entrepreneurial training programs above, which are open to our traditional client base as well as clients served through the League's Training to Work re-entry program, the League's *Entrepreneurship Center* will also offer enhanced programming during the course of each three-month cohort to include workshops focused specifically designed for individuals with criminal backgrounds and/or incarceration histories. These workshops will prepare the clients to answer questions from lenders, investors, and potential customers regarding their criminal histories and will also give clients an opportunity to hear from others that have gone on to become successful entrepreneurs.

Mentoring

The *Entrepreneurship Center*'s entrepreneurship training programs require that participants attend both classroom sessions and one-on-one consulting sessions with both a business coach and a financial coach. In addition, the *Entrepreneurship Center* offers a number of other individualized support programs for entrepreneurs including in-house consulting services after the period of the training program has ended and partnerships with the University of Illinois Chicago, the University of Chicago, the Jewish Black Business Alliance, the Ernst and Young Black Professionals Network, and numerous subject matter experts such as lawyers, accountants, and HR professionals. All participants in the ASPIRE Challenge program would be eligible to participate in these other programs, so long as they meet the other requirements, which vary by program.

Community Connections

The *Entrepreneurship Center* offers numerous opportunities for clients to connect with both the local business community and other community organizations. We host dozens of events each year that draw a broad range of entrepreneurs, service providers, and partners and that range from trainings to informational workshops to networking events. We also maintain relationships with a broad group of internal and external service providers to whom we regularly make individualized introductions. In 2016, the *Entrepreneurship Center* staff made over 200 referrals to connect clients with additional resources ranging from the Chicago Housing Authority to The Law Project to various lending partners. Additionally, we have a robust group of buyers and established small business contractors who regularly ask for our assistance in identifying and referring sub-contractors for projects so we're able to not only train our entrepreneur clients but also connect them directly to business opportunities ranging from those with other small businesses to large anchor institutions and municipalities.