

Buffalo Urban League Inc_Aspire Challenge

Due: February 12, 2017

Contact:

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Organizational Background:

The Buffalo Urban League is a not for profit 501(c)3 organization that has existed since 1927 to bring positive change and opportunities for a better future to hundreds of thousands of individuals and families in the Buffalo-Niagara region. Our mission is to empower African Americans, other minorities and disadvantaged individuals in securing economic self-reliance, parity, power and civil rights; including those who were/are incarcerated. We conduct research, engage in advocacy and provide direct services annually to approximately 15,000 individuals through programs in family support and stabilization services, adoption, foster care, education, scholarships, job training, employment, financial literacy, housing, health and wellness education, business technical assistance and lending. The Buffalo Urban League has operated an adult re-entry employment and GED attainment program (2009-2014), a youth re-entry employment and GED attainment program (2012-2015) and currently operates a youth mentorship program.

Additionally, the Buffalo Urban League continues to operate a small business, economic empowerment and loan program which has been in existence since 1995. Partners include the County of Erie, the Small Business Administration (SBA), Small Business Development Center (SBDC); Woman's Business Center at Canisius College (WBC), Entrepreneurial Assistance Program (EAP), Pathstone (PS), the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus (BNMC) Innovation Center; which includes 43 North (43N) - the world's largest business plan competition, Launch NY- a venture development organization and Z80 Labs- an internet start-up incubator based in Buffalo, New York.

Background of Management Team:

Michael E. McCarley, Sr.: Coordinator/Small Business Educator

Mr. McCarley has worked for, within and through the small business community for more than 36 years. He has secured and implemented contracts providing management and technical assistance for entities including the City of Buffalo and the Federal government (i.e. U.S. Department of Commerce, Minority Business Development Agency- Minority Business Development Center (USDOC/MBDA-MBDC)), assisting businesses with growth and access to financing.

Ken Colon: Case Manager/Entrepreneurial Leader

Mr. Colon has worked within the correctional community for more than 14 years working in positions from Re-entry/PACE Program Case Management to Vice-chair of the Erie County Community Corrections Advisory Board. In working with current and recently paroled inmates, Mr. Colon monitors and mentors these individuals and helps them make better life choices by helping them gain entry into educational, vocational or drug rehabilitation and mental health programs, in order for them to make an easier transition into society. Additionally, Mr. Colon is a serial entrepreneur, providing expansive knowledge and options to those he mentors.

Participant Recruitment Plan:

Most participants, previously incarcerated and having an interest in learning to start a business, will be recruited through a number of referral sources reflecting cooperative partnerships that range from State and County facilities, half-way houses, criminal justice professional organizations, government agencies/programs and/or from the local education, faith-based and/or human service community. The referral sources include Erie County Correctional Facility (ECCF), New York State Division of Parole, County Offices of Corrections and Probation, the Wende Hub, and the New York State Prisoner Re-entry Referral Program (an articulation with the State University of New York University Center for Academic and Workforce Development coordinated through the Capital District Educational Opportunity Center). In addition, community organizations, faith-based institutions, welfare-to-work programs and workforce development programs in Buffalo and Erie County will assist in directing potential participant referrals to the program. Other referrals, concerning post-release, will be coordinated through partnerships with the Buffalo Halfway House, the UBEOC/Bridge, Fathers Forever and Strengthening Families Initiative programs and services.

Along with exciting programming, the Buffalo Urban League utilizes an incentive program which encourages participant retention and engagement. The Buffalo Urban League will provide a weekly stipend to our participants providing an incentive for them to maximize their hours of participation. Historically, participants have reported that stipends have played an integral part in their personal and family finances; in some cases providing extra support for food and bills. Some activities also count toward the participant's required community service hours.

Attendance is monitored through a sign-in process where each participant must sign in and out based on his or her individual program plan. Daily sign-in sheets are used to track attendance and then later recorded into an Excel database. All records of attendance and achievement are maintained in the Excel databases for each participant.

The Buffalo Urban League currently runs a small business education platform that includes one-on-one counseling and education workshops. Classes for this project will be on Tuesday and Wednesday from 6-8 PM. There are 2- program cycles per year. Programming outline will include the following:

Phase 1- (3 Weeks)- Introduction/Orientation and Why; Your TEAM and The Success Formula; One-on-One Counseling/Pre-evaluation; **Phase 2- (5 Weeks)-** The Business-Part 1 (General Business- Customer Sales and Orders- Contracting- Competition); The Business-Part 2 (Marketing-Employees-Property); **Phase 3- (5 Weeks)-** The Business-Part 3 (R&D-Governmental Regulation-Company History and Organization); Financial Information; Management; Principal Stakeholders/Family; Litigation; Other Material Factors; Leadership; Systems; **Phase 4- (1 Week)-** Presentation and PITCH Competition.

The coursework will touch on items such as work/business readiness, dressing appropriately, know your industry, hiring staff, professionalism, presentation skills, timeliness, demeanor, appearance, accepting constructive feedback, etc.

The program will explore their personal entrepreneurial interests and vision of the participant by looking at four (4) personal attributes; Personal characteristics; Interpersonal Skills; Critical and Creative Thinking and Practical Application. Subject matter that will be explored will be those needed in order to run and operate a successful business. Looking at personal characteristics, values, beliefs, optimism;

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vision; drive and persistence; risk tolerance; resilience; leadership and motivation; communication skills; listening; ethics; creative thinking; problem solving; goal setting; planning and organizing and business knowledge. During (Week 1) there will be scheduled One-On-One Mentoring sessions, Orientation/Introduction, Why, The TEAM and The Success Formula seminars. There are also One-On-One Mentoring in Week 14, 16 and 18. Additional mentoring will occur as outlined in the personal program plan.

As a part of the programming, entrepreneurship interests and business vision are challenged with two areas of focus (2) Draft Discussion Business of Plan and Planning sessions in Week 15 and 17; one (1) Final Discussion Business of Plan and Planning session (Week 19) and finally a Presentation / Business Pitch Competition (Week 20) in front of local entrepreneurs and finance specialists.

Mentoring:

Each participant will be assigned a mentor. The frequency of visits with the mentor will depend largely on the relationship established and the level of need. Each participant, however, will be required to complete at least (8 hours) of mentoring experiences throughout their involvement in the program. Among other things, time spent with the mentor will be focused on progress relative to educational, training and /or treatment programs, employment, achievements, community and family relationships. The mentor will be guided to focus on the needs of the participant as they relate to entrepreneurship. Critical to the experience spent with the mentor will be ability to foster a nurturing atmosphere, to encourage personal development, and form linkages to the business community, and to extend assistance to the participant relative to personal visioning and assisting with transition back into the community. Mentors will be identified from referrals from the transition team members, community partnerships and /or other collaborations. Mentors assigned will have the experience and skill set for the task expected and will complete an orientation designed exclusively to address the issues of the participant population.

In order to maximize mentoring, one-on-one sessions will enhance and build rapport with participants, define any issues or a problem and define solutions. In this way, the participant will graduate from the program with concrete, practical strategies and applications in hand. We believe this would improve the chances of their returning for assistance and reducing recidivism. One-On-One Mentoring sessions will be provided in Weeks 1, 14, 16, and 18. Additional mentoring will occur as outlined in the personal program plan.

Community Connections:

The Buffalo Urban League will create opportunities to connect participants with the local business community and social service providers through One-On-One Mentoring (Week 1), Micro-Enterprise Visits (Week 15), Meet the Bankers (Week 17) and Meet the Community will occur throughout the program cycle.

Access to Micro-lending:

One of the many lessons that will be presented to participants will be to look at options to borrowing money for their business idea. Learning when and how to borrowing funds will introduce some of the participants to the most common ways of borrowing. Microloans and from nonprofits- good for small business startups; family and friends- good if your relationships are comfortable with the risks; credit cards- good if you can keep the card use at a minimum; personal loans- good if your credit score is over 600; crowdfunding- good if you are looking to test the market or grants- good if you are willing to put in hard work for free money.

Participants are scheduled to Meet the Bankers (Week 17). Throughout the program year, micro-lending opportunities will occur and the participants will be advised accordingly. Other than the Meet the Bankers (Week 17), participants will meet with capital providers (when and as appropriate), the participants will be taught how to prepare certain documentation (Draft Discussion Business of Plan and Planning in Week 15, 17 and Final Discussion Business of Plan and Planning in Week 19, attend matchmaking events (i.e. SBA Matchmaker) as well as meet members of the Buffalo Urban League's entrepreneurial ecosystem throughout the program year. Specific programming assistance like One-On-One Mentoring will occur in Weeks 1, 14, 16, 18 or as outlined in the personal program plan. Meet the Entrepreneurs (Week 15), Meet the Bankers (Week 17) and Presentation / Business Pitch Competition (Week 20).

The Buffalo Urban League programming is designed to provide education and instructional assistance that will provide access to "capital and credit" otherwise unavailable to the small business and the self-employment community.