

***Aspire Challenge Entrepreneurial Assistance Training Program Proposal***  
**Johnstown Area Regional Industries (JARI)**

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**Organization Background**

Johnstown Area Regional Industries (JARI) is a full-service 501(c) (3) economic development organization that provides a comprehensive approach to meeting client needs by offering the following services: business consulting, financing, site selection, government procurement and workforce development. JARI's professional services provide access to a network of contacts that know how and where to do business successfully. JARI has been in operation since 1974.

JARI also owns an industrial park which includes the JARI Center for Business Development, a small business incubator that is a shared services facility offering below market space and extensive business counseling to new businesses and existing businesses considering expansion. The Center also offers cost effective solutions and amenities, including: conference room, 24-hour security, in house kitchen, convenient access to major highways, the airport, the PA Turnpike and free parking. A number of businesses are located in the park as well.

JARI's coverage area consists of Cambria and Somerset Counties. The 2-county area houses 5 prisons (federal, state and county) and 3 Community Correction Centers that assist ex-offenders with the re-integration process. In 2016, 646 individuals were paroled and released in JARI's service area.

JARI became a SBA Microlender in 2012. Since that time, 31 loans have been closed, providing almost \$900,000 in capital to start-up and expanding businesses. During that time, JARI provided 2,895 hours of technical assistance to borrowers and potential borrowers through the business counseling program. To further enhance the finance and technical assistance programs, JARI created an affiliate organization, JARI Growth Fund, in 2016 which has emerging CDFI status. Three loans have closed through that program, while two more have been approved with closings pending.

**Management Team**

**Michele Clapper, VP Economic Development** - Michele has over 20 years of economic development financing experience. She oversees the financing program including the Microloan program, the JARI Growth Fund, as well as the technical assistance delivery system. She graduated from Juniata College with a B.S. in accounting.

**Debi Balog, Workforce Development Director** - Debi has 27 years of experience in workforce training and development and 19 years of banking background. She oversees the industry partnerships, training and recruitment programs, and provides support to displaced workers. She has a B.A. from the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown and a MBA Certificate from Indiana University of PA. She is a member of TRAC.

**Lauren Brewer, Communications/Administrative Support** - Lauren has almost one year of economic development experience. She is part of the technical assistance team and provides marketing, communication, and social media expertise to borrowers and potential borrowers. She graduated Magna Cum Laude from California University of PA with a B.S. in Graphic Design.

JARI is in the process of hiring a Business Consulting and Technical Assistance Specialist. He/she will also be part of the technical assistance team.

## **Entrepreneurial Education Delivery Solution**

### **Participant Recruitment**

JARI, in-concert with U.S. Probation, State Corrections, the County Prisons and 35 non-profit support agencies formed the Transition Re-Entry Advisory Committee (TRAC) in 2015 in an effort to provide information on housing, counseling services, healthcare, training programs and employment. TRAC also includes a records expungement component through Pitt-Johnstown.

The group is a repository for the list of individuals paroled and released. All agencies involved provide referrals to the applicable supporting agency for transitional services.

For the Aspire Challenge Program, JARI will work with the probation officers and designated community correction center representatives to promote the entrepreneurial assistance training program and identify potential participants. In an effort to reach individuals no longer on probation, JARI will publically market the program through local media outlets, the county libraries, community and social service agencies and the Careerlinks.

Cambria and Somerset Counties have a limited amount of “second chance” employers making it difficult for these individuals to secure employment. Many of the individuals have a specific skill set or certification earned while in the system or before their incarceration making running a small business a viable option for them.

### **Classroom Instruction and Mentoring**

JARI currently offers an in-depth Entrepreneurial Assistance Training Program that covers practices, fundamentals and disciplines for individuals interested in starting their own business. The program includes 23 targeted subject areas with detailed curriculum. JARI will need to revise the training program to include customized programming for participants who have been released and are working on re-entry into the community. In 2015-2016, JARI provided short term training programs and placement of nine ex-offenders enrolled in Construction, Electrical and Commercial Driver Training. The programs were funded through PA Neighborhood Assistance Tax Credit Program with contributions from local businesses.

*JARI will provide the following services through the Aspire Challenge:*

1. Administer assessments and hold preliminary interviews with interested participant's to determine professional, financial and social service needs.
2. Identify the participant's level of business knowledge and if needed, make a referral to the Small Business Development Center for business plan assistance.
3. Hold one orientation session per month for individuals interested in starting a business. The session will be facilitated by the JARI Staff.
4. Provide Individual Business Counseling (approximately 15 hours per participant; hours will vary based on participant's knowledge and experience)
5. Offer Business Training Classes (approximately 20 hours per participant; hours will vary based on participant's knowledge and experience)
6. Offer Best Practice Training Sessions presented by Successful Entrepreneurs and Subject Matter Experts (accountants, attorneys, etc.).
7. Develop an on-line learning library that provides participants with easy access to supplemental information, webinars and links to other relevant training program sites. \*Note: JARI's Procurement Technical Assistance Center currently offers a webinar series between the SBA, JARI and North Central PTACs. The series offers a 15 minute eChat on government contracting topics with a follow-up hour long webinar. JARI will research the option to duplicate the webinar format to cover small business topics.

8. Provide ongoing Technical Assistance
9. Complete Participant's Progress Reports
10. Submit Reports to grantor as required
11. Final Project Evaluation Report
12. Track participants ongoing progress

\*Note: Upon completion of the Aspire Training Program, participants have the option to continue counseling with the JARI Staff

The JARI staff has extensive experience and noted success with assisting new business start-ups and providing training programs funded by Federal and State agencies and private foundations. JARI built and sustained multiple small business related programs for over 40 years. The organization has a long standing history of convening industry partners, small businesses clients, educational institutions and students of all ages for the purpose of providing targeted programs that lead to careers that pay family sustaining wages and offer opportunities for advancement. With every program/project implemented JARI addresses the effectiveness, return on investment and the overall impact on the participant. The notable success of these programs and JARI's ability to obtain support from multiple funding sources demonstrates that JARI is well positioned to implement the *Aspire Challenge Entrepreneurial Assistance Training Program* for Cambria and Somerset Counties.

#### Community Connection

JARI operates four industry partnerships representing 231 companies: Business and Education, Advanced Manufacturing (includes transportation and construction), Healthcare and Safety. The purpose of the formal partnerships is to address employee recruitment, training and retention issues. The members share best practices and leverage resources to assist with building workforce capacity. The partnership provides JARI with ready access to employers, educational providers, workforce related organizations, and social services agencies. The *Aspire Challenge Entrepreneurial* small business clients will be invited to participate in the industry partnership meetings, training classes and events and activities related to their respective businesses.

In addition, JARI's Workforce Director serves on the U.S. Probation Transitional Re-entry Advisory Committee (TRAC). The mission of this 35-member committee is to address the needs of the formerly incarcerated and assist with all aspects for re-entry into the community. Key members of the committee: U.S. Probation, PA State Corrections, County Probation, Cambria County District Attorney, U.S. Attorney General's Office, PA CareerLink, Beginnings Commission on Hope, PA Department of Human Services/County Assistance Office, Cambria County Behavioral Health, US Dept. of Veteran's Affairs, PA Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, Local Chapter NAACP, Mayor/City of Johnstown, U.S. Representative Keith Rothfus, County Commissioners, U.S. Court, Johnstown Police Detective Bureau, Free Medical Clinic, 4 educational institutions, 2 faith based organizations and 11 social services agencies. The committee's purpose is to assist re-entry candidates accessing housing, healthcare, training, counseling, addiction rehabilitation and employment. The committee meets quarterly to discuss re-entry related issues, new programs and assistance needed. Upon completion of the entrepreneurial client's needs assessment and preliminary interview, JARI will identify services and resources needed, make the referral to the appropriate agency and monitor progress.

## **Access to Capital**

### **Access to Micro-Lending**

Once the participant has completed the business plan process, JARI will work with the client to identify potential sources of funding for their start-up or expansion. Among those potential sources is the SBA microloan program. The program is currently available in Cambria, Somerset and Blair Counties.

In addition to the SBA microloan program, the City of Johnstown has various loan programs, including a micro-loan program which can be accessed by entrepreneurs and small businesses within the City. In Cambria County businesses can access micro-financing through the JARI Growth Fund. The Somerset Economic Development Council also has a microloan program for businesses in Somerset County. JARI staff is well versed on these programs and the organizations cooperate frequently on projects. Therefore, making the connection to micro-lending agencies is common in our region.

### **Connection to Capital and Funding Opportunities**

JARI will work in partnership with the SBDC to assist with the business plan development phase of starting a business. JARI will also provide information and have classroom sessions on relevant start-up topics, for example, the various legal structures and the pros and cons of each and how to register your fictitious name.

JARI has many experts who partner in the delivery of technical assistance to small businesses and entrepreneurs. Areas of expertise include: accounting, finance, insurance, information technology, human resources, legal, banking, marketing, website design, advertising, and software training. With these experts, the small business or entrepreneur receives assistance at no cost while gaining the skills for a successful business launch or expansion.

JARI also holds financing seminars on a regular basis where businesses and lenders have the opportunity to hear about public financing programs. Attendees interact with one another which gives the businesses the ability to meet loan officers in a more informal way. It is imperative that businesses have a strong working relationship and comfort level with their lenders.

JARI is part of the Southern Alleghenies Partnership for Regional Economic Performance (PREP). The members of PREP include Southern Alleghenies Planning & Development Commission; Ben Franklin Technology Partners; Catalyst Connection; MANTEC; St. Francis Small Business Development Center; and the six county-based industrial development corporations. Through PREP, connections are made to various funding sources and capital providers.

The overall goal of the financing program is to assist our clients with a customized financing package that best meets their needs.