

RFP #

Business Ready “BizReady” Program

Request for Proposals (RFP) for an administrator to manage the BizReady Program, a training, technical assistance, and micro-enterprise funding initiative focused on supporting the development of BIPOC entrepreneurs

Please submit all responses and direct all questions to:

City of Madison – Purchasing Services

ATTN: xxxxx

210 Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. – Rm 406

Madison, WI 53703

Overview

The City is seeking proposals to manage the newly created Business Ready (“BizReady”) Program. This initiative is a part of the City of Madison’s ongoing effort to assist businesses led by owners who are diverse in terms of race, gender and other demographics typically underrepresented in the business community, and who provide needed goods and services to the local community. The BizReady program will recruit participants and provide a combination of training, technical assistance, mentoring, and micro-enterprise grants to help raise quality of life, increase wealth and jobs, and empower Madison’s communities of color. The City is seeking a BizReady Administrator with the skill and experience to manage the Program, including the micro-enterprise funding and the training/technical assistance components through strategic planning and partnerships.

Project Background

Over the last several years, the City of Madison has made strides in closing racial economic disparities in key categories such as unemployment and income levels. Further, numerous city-sponsored initiatives have improved conditions for Madison’s most vulnerable populations through programs focused on affordable housing, workforce training, food access, and transportation.

However, Madison still has progress to make in equalizing economic quality of life indicators between White residents and residents of color. In particular, Madison needs to do more to support diverse entrepreneurship. Data shows that while communities of color represent ~27% of the City of Madison’s population, business ownership rates for people of color tracks much lower (between 3-9% using varying metrics) within the City.

Entrepreneurship and business ownership is a vital pathway to economic empowerment. For Madison to truly embrace the goals of racial equity, the City must go beyond programs focused on addressing basic needs, and direct more resources and strategies toward building wealth and economic empowerment among communities that are not sharing in the City’s prosperity.

Further, retention of residents of color is a challenge within the City of Madison, and the State of Wisconsin at-large, as these community members often report feeling socially isolated within the City. Some of the contributing factors to this include a shortage of venues owned by people of color and venues where people of color regularly congregate.

The BizReady Program is designed to address these inter-related issues by identifying, and supporting entrepreneurship among communities of color and other under-represented populations.

The Purpose of the Business Ready (BizReady) Program

Enhancing opportunities for people to start successful businesses is a powerful force for upward mobility and financial independence for communities of color, immigrant communities, and low-income populations. Creating more stable and successful businesses in Madison that are owned by people of color can propel families into the middle class and create businesses that are statistically more likely to hire other people of color.

The complexity of regulation, permitting, financing, and licensing creates barriers to business ownership for communities of color, low-income populations, and immigrants. These systems favor business owners that may already know how to navigate these processes, have networks with attorneys and bankers, speak English as a first language, have access to other experts that can help them, and feel comfortable interacting with government officials. By improving business assistance services and focusing on breaking down these barriers, the BizReady Program will improve opportunities for more Madison residents to start businesses.

The BizReady Program will focus on developing entrepreneurs who are prepared to succeed as independent businesses operating within the City of Madison. It will emphasize recruiting participants from startup, small, and early-stage businesses that have an interest in additional support to help their business grow and succeed.

How the BizReady Program Will Work

The Madison BizReady Program is modeled after the Madison Public Market's MarketReady Program and will recruit and prioritize entrepreneurs with business concepts that reflect retail or service enterprises that benefit the Madison community. Like the MarketReady Program, BizReady will prioritize the selection of entrepreneurs that are historically under-represented among Madison's business owners. The BizReady program will offer direct business coaching, curated workshops and training, and access to grants and funding. BizReady will be an 18-24mo long program that offers participants the ability to receive grant funds to cover startup costs related to securing licensure, creating a business entity, purchasing supplies, etc. At the end of the program, participants will be eligible to receive a completion grant to cover additional startup costs that could include renting space or purchasing equipment. The BizReady Program will be a training, technical assistance, and micro-enterprise grant program designed to help entrepreneurs who are ready to start or grow their business. The program will focus on preparing business plans, establishing any required permits or licenses, developing marketing plans, defining equipment needs, and participating in training and technical assistance programs. The goal is for BizReady participants to complete the program and then start operating their business or take on activities to expand their existing business. It is expected that **at least** 25 entrepreneurs will participate in the BizReady Program and that **at least** \$75,000 (\$3,000/participant) in funding will be allocated for direct financial assistance to participants.

Within the larger BizReady Program cohort, the City of Madison also encourages the development of specialized cohorts that focus on particular business sectors such as childcare, arts and crafts, food service, etc. and areas such as Downtown to help recover from the pandemic.

Business Ready Administrators

Through this Request for Proposals (RFP) process, the City intends to engage a community partner to administer the BizReady Program. This administrator will be chosen based on their RFP response. The Administrator will coordinate all of the BizReady programming, manage BizReady grant funds, create a package of training, technical assistance, mentoring and micro-enterprise grants and manage the process. The ideal organization and/or team to serve in this role will have expertise and experience in managing micro-enterprise funding programs, experience with entrepreneurship, and experience providing training

and technical assistance to diverse small businesses. Further, in accordance with our equity goals, the BizReady Program will emphasize supporting BIPOC populations, and other populations that face historic barriers to starting businesses. It is expected that **at least** 25 entrepreneurs will participate in the BizReady Program and that **at least** \$75,000 (\$3,000/participant) in funding will be allocated for direct financial assistance to participants.

Funding

The BizReady Program will be resourced utilizing \$300,000 in City of Madison American Rescue Plan Act funds. The City will select one organization or team to run an 18-24mo program. The City anticipates that the selected BizReady Administrator will use a portion of these funds to create and manage the programming, training and technical assistance aspect of the project and will also use a portion of the funds to package individual micro-enterprise grants to selected participants. It is expected that **at least** 25 entrepreneurs will participate in the BizReady Program and that **at least** \$75,000 (\$3,000/participant) in funding will be allocated for direct financial assistance to participants. More details are provided in the budget section of this RFP. Through the selection process, the City will also prioritize selection of an administrator who can leverage additional non-city resources for the project. The City and the selected BizReady Administrator will coordinate to try and match the City's investment in the program with grants and other outside resources with the hope of growing the program over time.

Micro-Enterprise Grant Eligible Costs Examples

The City will work with the selected BizReady Administrator on the details of the program and eligible uses of BizReady grant funding. The following is a preliminary list of the types of activities the City envisions participants using the funding for:

- **Training** – Grantees could use BizReady funds for fees associated with workshops, classes, and other training programs that will support the growth and success of the participating business. Examples could include workshops or classes on business planning, financing, marketing, licensing, or any topic related to starting or growing a successful business. Grantees would be eligible to use funds to take such classes from a variety of community providers. The BizReady Administrator will also likely develop custom training and technical assistance classes as part of the Program, and the Administrator can also help participants identify and enroll in other business supports programs as well.
- **Marketing/Branding/Website** – Grantees could use BizReady funds for costs associated with marketing and branding. This could include engaging professional services to develop a marketing plan, logo, product labels and supporting graphics. This could also include costs associated with creating a website and social media presence.
- **Licensing/Permits** – BizReady funds can be used for fees associated with any required local, state, or federal licensing or permits.
- **Incorporation Costs** – BizReady funds can be used for costs associated for establishing a new business enterprise, such as filing to establish an LLC.
- **Trademark Filing** – BizReady funds can be used for legal fees associated with filing for a Trademark.
- **Product Testing** – BizReady funds can be used for various product testing requirements.

- **Supplies/Equipment** – Funds can be used to purchase necessary supplies and equipment.

Scope of Work

The City is interested in retaining an administrator to oversee the BizReady program, including coordinating and providing the training/technical assistance and managing the micro-enterprise funding program. Agencies and organizations that are focused on providing capital and technical assistance to small businesses are encouraged to submit a proposal. Agencies and organizations that demonstrate a clear emotional intelligence and understanding of the target entrepreneur demographics (BIPOC, low-income, other historically marginalized populations) are encouraged to submit a proposal. The anticipated tasks for the BizReady Administrator include:

- **Task 1: Create the details of the BizReady Program** - The first step would be to create the structure of the BizReady Program. This would include working with the City to organize the training and technical assistance programming, eligibility requirements for prospective participants, the application process for participants, the selection process, working with partners on programming, and setting up the fund.
- **Task 2: Recruiting Participation** – Task 2 will focus on outreach to identify and recruit potential participants in the **BizReady** Program.
- **Task 3: Manage Application and Selection Process** – Task 3 would be soliciting applications from **BizReady** program participants, creating a system to evaluate applications, and administering the selection process.
- **Task 4: Administer the Training and Technical Assistance Programming** – Task 4 would be managing, coordinating, and directing the technical assistance and training elements of the **BizReady** Program. This would include designing classes and seminars, coordination of events, lining-up instructors, coordinating site visits, etc.
- **Task 5: Administering the BizReady Micro-Enterprise Grants Fund** – Task 5 is managing the **BizReady Micro-Enterprise Grants Fund**. This would include setting up the fund, awarding grants to participants, processing payments, managing all reporting requirements, etc.
- **Task 6: One-on-One Assistance to Participants** – Task 6 is focused on providing individual assistance and support to **BizReady** participants. The Administrator will have periodic meetings with each participant to help them plan their next steps, find resources, and make progress.
- **Task 7: Communication, Reporting, & Evaluation** – This scope of work would be done in coordination with city staff. The chosen administrator will include in their scope of work a formal evaluation process that examines and analyze the challenges and successes of the program, based on quantitative data (# of business plans completed, # of participating businesses, funding leveraged by participants, etc) and qualitative data (participant interviews on program impact). A robust pre/on-going/post participant surveying process is a base requirement for the selected administrator. The selected administrator would also be asked to provide a monthly report to the Economic Development Committee at their meetings. The Administrator will be asked to provide a final report at the completion of the program that summarizes the results.

Budget

The City's Budget for the BizReady Program is \$300,000. This funding includes costs needed to manage and administer the training and technical assistance work, as well as funds that would be packaged into the micro-enterprise grants. The City is very interested in partners who can leverage the City's funding commitment with additional outside resources. Overhead/F&A expenses are limited to 10% of total city funds for the BizReady Program.

Fund Administrator Requirements

Organizations with experience providing capital and technical assistance to small businesses are encouraged to submit a proposal. The City is particularly interested in organizations that have proven records of accomplishment successfully working with and empowering entrepreneurship among people of color, women, low-income populations, and immigrant communities.

Specific preferred experience and expertise:

- Experience with fund management, particularly micro-enterprise funding for small businesses
- Experience providing technical assistance to small businesses including business planning
- Experience empowering people of color and other historically marginalized populations in entrepreneurship
- Experience implementing strategies that illustrate organizational awareness/possession of emotional intelligence and the ability to work with clientele of different backgrounds
- Experience training and supporting entrepreneurs

Recognizing that this is a wide range of expertise, the City would welcome applications from teams.

Proposal Contents:

Qualifications (please limit to 8 pages)

- **Team** - Describe your team. State organization(s) that will be part of providing the services, the number of years the organization has been operational, and experience with similar or related programs. If proposers are a team of several organizations, describe how each involved organization will contribute.
- **Team Members** - Describe individual team members. Include names, titles, roles, and responsibilities for each team member. Identify the project manager and primary contact. Describe who will manage the training/technical assistance work and who will manage the fund.
- **Project examples** – Provide descriptions of related work
- **References** – Provide contact information for clients from four recent projects or initiatives, which can be used as references

Approach and Budget (please limit to 5 pages)

- **Work Plan** – The [Scope of Work](#) described above identifies seven tasks. Describe how your team would undertake and complete each task. Based on your expertise, feel free to vary, re-arrange, or

alter the scope of work to better meet the overall goals of the program. The City is open to alternative approaches and different ideas.

- **Budget** - As stated above, the budget for the program is \$300,000. Describe how you would propose using these resources to create and administer the program. In particular, how much would be used for administration, programming, and direct micro-enterprise funding to participants. To maximize effectiveness, describe how you would propose structuring the direct micro-enterprise funding. Though not required, the City is very interested in leveraging city funding with additional outside resources. If applicable, describe how your team would do this. Include a detailed table describing the budget for the project, delineated by task, and clearly identifying leveraged resources.

Proposal Timeline, Deadline and Submission Information

RFP Release	July 17, 2023
Interested applicant Q&A meeting/teleconference	July 31, 2023
Submission of any questions	August 4, 2023
Answers to questions posted	August 9, 2023
Due Date	September 4, 2023
Panel Review and Scoring	September 4-15, 2023
Interviews (as needed)	September 18-22, 2023
Contracting	September 25 – October 13
Execute Program (approximate timeline)	November 2023 -May 2025
<i>Work with city to develop program details (1-2 months)</i>	<i>Nov 2023 – Jan 2024</i>
<i>Manage recruitment, application process, and selection process for BizReady participants (1 to 2 Months)</i>	<i>December 2023 – February 2024</i>
<i>Administer Program (12 months)</i>	<i>March 2024 – March 2025</i>
<i>Final Report</i>	<i>March 2025 – May 2025</i>

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