

**Proposal: "Diversity Enterprise Empowerment Program (DEEP)**

**Submitted by Black Leaders Acquiring Collective Knowledge in response to the City of La Crosse RFP – American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funding for Small business Organizations.**

Black Leaders Acquiring Collective Knowledge (BLACK or Applicant) has an established presence and/or office in the City of La Crosse. BLACK works to empower and elevate the Greater La Crosse Black Community through innovative leadership, education, and advocacy. Its goal is to develop a sustainable community where Black people can heal, live authentically, feel safe, and have real access to opportunities. This includes the work that we do with small businesses in the city.

The applicant has no outstanding municipal obligations to the city (i.e. property taxes, past due bills, etc.).

Applicant is able to comply with federal reporting guidelines, including but not limited to submitting quarterly project and expenditure reports. At a minimum, Applicant will be required to provide annual grant reports. The applicant will retain accounting support to assist with such compliance.

BLACK Unique Identity number is current and validated.

Applicant's project proposal is to provide technical assistance, counseling, or other services to support business planning. Applicant will identify small businesses impacted by the pandemic by one or more of the following ways:

- o Decreased revenue or gross receipts
- o Financial insecurity
- o Increased costs
- o Capacity to weather financial hardship
- o Challenges covering payroll, rent or mortgage, and other operating costs
- o Small businesses located in a [Qualified Census Tract \(QCT\)](#)

Black Leaders Acquiring Collective Knowledge is actively seeking funding to serve as a vital conduit for supporting 25 Black and diverse businesses in our community by providing essential resources for sustainability, expansion, and startup endeavor.

Applicant's project proposal is to provide support to businesses at incubators, or seeking start-up or expansion assistance, and/or enhanced support to microbusinesses. When applicable, Applicant will identify such small businesses as small businesses located in a [Qualified Census Tract \(QCT\)](#)

All funding requests will be for expenses incurred **after** May 1, 2024, and will cover up to two years of support, with a final completion deadline of June 30, 2026. Applicant expects most

program activities funded by this proposal will occur during the 18-month period starting in or about June 2024.

This proposal supports a new project to provide training, financial support, and assistance to primarily underserved businesses affected by the pandemic and/or interested in starting or growing businesses in La Crosse.

This proposal will enhance existing resources and leverage access to training and consulting support in La Crosse, with an emphasis on persons and businesses that lack equitable access to financial and other resources. Building substantive support for such persons/businesses will lead to a stronger and more equitable small business community in La Crosse.

## **Proposal Requirements**

### **General Information and Proposal Overview**

#### **Primary Contact Information:**

Shaundel Washington- Spivey- Executive Director and Co-Founder

Email: [sspivey@blacklax.org](mailto:sspivey@blacklax.org)

Phone number: 414-759-4017

#### **Brief Synopsis of the Project to be supported/Purpose of the Request:**

Black Leaders Acquiring Collective Knowledge is actively seeking funding to serve as a vital conduit for supporting at least 25 Black and diverse businesses in our community, particularly those affected by the pandemic and facing challenges in accessing capital and resources for effective startup and growth endeavors. We aim to provide essential resources for sustainability, expansion, and startup initiatives.

**Anticipated Number of Businesses Served:** At least 25 businesses.

**Qualified Census Tracts served and/or other ARPA eligibility requirements being met**

As noted above/specified in the RFP.

**Project Start and End date:** Start in or about May 2024 and end no later than June 30, 2026. Applicant expects most project activities as described in those proposal will occur during the 18-month period starting in or about June 2024.

**Total Project Cost and Amount Requested:** \$100,000

#### **Request Details**

See also attached Exhibit A

**Statement of Need:** La Crosse has increasingly become a more diverse city with an increase in population. Our organization has worked to promote and stay connected to diverse businesses. Through our connections we have hosted a few network events focusing on Business owners, through this there were shared sentiments that highlighted a broader socioeconomic landscape in La Crosse reflects deeply entrenched systemic inequities that hinder the progress of Black-owned and diverse businesses. Persistent racial biases, both explicit and implicit, influence decision-making processes within the business community, stifling opportunities for Black and diverse entrepreneurs to access markets, secure contracts, and establish strategic partnerships. For example, in La Crosse (zip codes 54601 and 54603), from 2010 to 2020, the number of people identifying as Black or African American increased by 36% (from 1,187 to 1,616), *U.S. Census Data*. These demographic changes indicate a need to build resources to support the development of successful business ventures for diverse populations to ensure a stronger and more equitable business community.

**Proposed Work/Project:** DIVERSITY ENTERPRISE EMPLOWERMENT PROGRAM (DEEP). See Exhibit A for additional details and proposal budget.

**Impact:** Expect to serve at least 25 primarily underserved businesses; project to focus on La Crosse based underserved populations (such as minority, women, and/or veterans) adversely affected by the pandemic and trying to start or grow a business in La Crosse, WI.

**Partners/Collaborators:** UWL SBDC, WWBIC Southwest, SCORE, other regional economic development organizations, financial institutions/funders, and non-profits.

**Organizational Fit:** BLACK's organizational fit stems from its mission that centers on the experiences, voices, and needs of Black and diverse communities. This includes the needs of the Black and diverse business community, aiming to provide essential resources for sustainability, expansion, and startup endeavors. By focusing on addressing challenges like limited access to capital and resources, BLACK intends to foster economic empowerment among underrepresented entrepreneurs. Its new commitment to serving at least 25 businesses underscores its dedication to making a tangible impact, particularly considering the pandemic's disproportionate effects on marginalized communities. Overall, BLACK's targeted approach to supporting Black and diverse businesses contributes to economic development and prosperity within the communities it serves.

## **Project Evaluation**

### **Goals and Objectives:**

1. Assist 25 businesses in an approximate 18-month period

- a. Objective: Develop a comprehensive outreach strategy to identify and engage with at least 25 Black and diverse businesses within the community.
  - b. Objective: Provide tailored support and guidance to each of the 25 identified businesses to address their specific needs and challenges.
2. Provide economic resources to 25 or more businesses.
    - a. Objective: Organize workshops, seminars, and training sessions to educate business owners on financial management, access to capital, and other economic strategies.
    - b. Objective: Distribute grants, loans, or other forms of financial assistance to at least 25 businesses, ensuring equitable distribution based on need, potential impact, and requirement completion.
3. Assist a minimum of 5 start-up businesses.
    - a. Objective: Offer workshops and training sessions specifically tailored to the needs of startup businesses, covering topics such as business planning, marketing, and legal considerations.
    - b. Objective: Provide access to incubator spaces, technology resources, and networking opportunities to facilitate the growth and development of startup businesses, aiming to assist a minimum of 5 new ventures in successfully launching and establishing their operations.

### **Evaluation:**

Black Leaders Acquiring Collective Knowledge (BLACK) is committed to assessing the effectiveness of its initiatives aimed at supporting Black and diverse businesses in our community. To evaluate our progress toward achieving our goals and objectives, we will employ a comprehensive evaluation framework that encompasses both quantitative and qualitative measures. We will track the number of businesses assisted within the designated time period, monitoring their growth and sustainability over time. Additionally, we will measure the impact of the economic resources provided to businesses, assessing changes in financial indicators such as revenue growth and profitability. We will evaluate the success of our efforts in assisting startup businesses by monitoring their progress through key milestones and collecting feedback from participants. Through regular data collection, analysis, and stakeholder engagement, we will continuously assess our performance, identify areas for improvement, and ensure that our programs and services effectively meet the needs of the Black and diverse business community.

### **Project Budget**

**Detailed Budget:** See Exhibit A

**Narrative:** See Exhibit A

**Sustainability:**

Applicant will continue to work with community partners to seek local, state, and federal funding and resources to continue supporting Black and diverse small businesses. Applicant has connected with regional business support resources and considers this funding as a catalyst to its development of targeted resources to enhance such other resources in the region to support Black and diverse owned businesses more effectively. Applicant will leverage such resources, seek additional funding, and enhance regional assistance for the targeted businesses that will improve the resources needed to attract and retain sustainable Black and diverse owned businesses in La Crosse, WI.

**Supporting Documents:** See Exhibit A

**Letters of Support** (see attached)

## EXHIBIT A

### Project Overview and Budget

#### *"Diversity Enterprise Empowerment Program (DEEP)*

Support at least 25 businesses from Summer 2024 to June 30, 2026 (with most work to occur in an approximate 18-month period starting in the summer of 2024) as described below.

□ **Scholarship/Grants to Develop Business/Financial Plans.** \$5,000

Run/participate in 2 to 3 cohorts of Entrepreneurial Training Program (ETP) with UWL Small Business Development Center (SBDC). Target number of scholarships: 20. Scholarships of \$250 each to enable program participants to access ETP program and follow on support to develop financial and/or business plans. Such funds may be used to support access to other financial and planning assistance and training. It is anticipated that most of the funds will be used in connection with ETP to access additional grant support for program participants.

*Goals to be met:*

- Bring established curriculum and training to underserved businesses/communities to strengthen businesses and encourage the startup of new businesses in La Crosse.
- Leverage funding to enable program participants to access business training grants available for businesses interested in completing ETP training program.
- Collaborate with UWL SBDC to enhance programming and technical support resources in La Crosse to serve minority and other underserved populations.
- Enable BLACK to support new and existing black owned businesses and others owned by underserved populations by encouraging training participation that can lead to access capital and regional resources to strengthen business startup and growth.

Note: These funds will support these program participants to access the ETP cohort training program offered by the UWL SBDC by reimbursing the \$250 participant fee for ETP paid by the program participants. UWL SBDC will co-facilitate the training with BLACK. Any funds not used to reimburse program participants for participant fees will be used to help businesses access other financial/business training or be added to and used for Business Grants as described below.

□ **Business Grants.**

\$35,000

Provide \$1,000-\$2,500 grants/reimbursement of costs for up to 25 targeted businesses completing ETP and/or other business/financial planning or management training. Targeted businesses are those meeting the criteria specified in the RFP as affected by the pandemic, engaged in startup activities, or eligible based on location or business situation. Such funds are to be used by program participants to cover business needs, costs to start, grow, or more effectively manage the business and/or improvements to support startup and growth-related activities.

*Goal to be met:* Many businesses lack capital to cover initial start-up costs such as insurance, license fees, inventory, etc. New and existing businesses would benefit from access to tools and technology to improve operations and efficiencies. These grants will help businesses cover such costs to put them in a better position to start and grow. These grants also may be leveraged to access other capital to support business start-up and growth.

□ **Staff and/or Student Intern Support.**

\$40,000

Grant and Program Management, Outreach, Facilitation and Business Assistance.

- Shaundel Spivey, BLACK Executive Director – 10-20% program support - program management (estimate) - \$19,200 – this effort will include outreach, overall program coordination, grant management and administration;
- Other staff (estimated 400 hours at \$25-\$30/hour cost with \$28 average per hour cost) - \$11,200 – this effort will include direct program coordination and logistics, assist with grant management and administration, support administrative related activities and outreach; and/or
- Student Intern(s) – 600 hours at \$16 average per hour cost (\$9,600) – this effort provides one or more internship opportunities for college aged student(s) to gain real life skills related to business development, marketing, financial management, business operations, and program delivery support. In collaboration with the UWL SBDC, the student(s) will be able to access additional support and, if desired, internship experience and/or credits. Student(s) and the

businesses being supported may access UWL SBDC consultants and resources to support BLACK’s businesses and program outreach. Student activities may include: assisting businesses with ETP, developing financial and business plans, developing and implementing marketing strategies, and facilitating start-up activities and ongoing business management. Estimated hours during the period: 600 hours.

Note: Staff/student estimates may vary based on program activities and needs. As such, it is expected the amounts actually paid to staff/students may vary from the estimates. It is expected that the total (\$40,000) represents the maximum expected to be spent from this funding for staff/student support.

- **Program Outreach and Support** \$6,000
  - Equipment/supplies (\$3,500)
  - Event support (\$1,500)
  - Program materials, etc. (\$1,000)

- **Instruction and Program Participant Support** \$8,000

Provide consulting and technical assistance related to startup, financial, and business management.

  - Up to 200 hours for contracted business specialists (primarily related to financial, HR, marketing, business management and operations, technical assistance, etc.). Estimate hourly rate between \$30-\$50 with an average of \$40/hour.

Note: UWL SBDC and other regional instructional/technical assistance providers (such as SCORE and WWBIC) will assist Applicant by providing access to their existing programs and resources and will assist BLACK to mentor program participants. BLACK anticipates contracting with business specialists to provide additional 1x1 instructional, technical assistance, and program support for individual businesses on specific matters to access specialized knowledge and expertise. These funds will be used to pay for such support.

- **Program Compliance Support** \$6,000

BLACK will retain accounting and other support services to satisfy federal and ARPA related compliance requirements. UWL SBDC also is



willing to share its knowledge, awareness of resources, and/or experience in grant management and administration to support BLACK and its program initiatives.

**TOTAL PROPOSAL FUNDING REQUEST: \$100,000\***

\*This proposal is intended to build and enhance technical resources for underserved communities and businesses in La Crosse. The proposal seeks to provide substantive support to better position businesses at the time of start-up and to help existing businesses address weaknesses caused by the pandemic and its aftermath. This project is targeted to support at least 25 La Crosse businesses (start-ups and existing) who were adversely affected by the pandemic and its aftermath and/or are starting a new business, with efforts to reach Black and diverse businesses needing more targeted assistance to succeed. The program activities will support such businesses with financial/business planning, marketing, direct financial support to defray costs that impede a business from starting or accessing technology or other resources to improve efficiencies to grow, and technical assistance to be better positioned for success. Should the projected activities not fully use the estimated funds for each item as specified above, BLACK proposes that unused funds for any item may be used to provide further direct support for eligible businesses (*i.e.*, start-up and existing) to access other training, technical assistance, and business grants to assist with startup and growth-related costs.

Note: Applicant, BLACK, will work with collaborating organizations to leverage resources available to businesses seeking business planning support, such as grants or other funding. BLACK will provide facilitation support for the cohorts. The UWL SBDC, one such collaborator, is willing to support the development of additional capabilities of BLACK to expand and build enhanced resources to enable BLACK to be positioned to support the needs of the eligible businesses that participate. This funding and the DEEP efforts will help better position participants to be able to access funding and other support. This will complement and leverage the training and support provided with this funding.

# Budget

<b>Scholarship/Grants</b>		5,000
\$250 X 20		
<b>Business Grants</b>		35,000
\$1,000-\$2,500 per grant		
Grant provided to up to 25 businesses		
<b>Staff and/or Student Intern Support</b>		40,000
Executive Director	19,200 (Estimate)	
10-20% effort		
Other Staff	11,200 (Estimate)	
400 hours at \$28/ahr		
Students	9,600 (Estimate)	
600 hours \$16/ahr		
<b>Program Outreach and Support</b>		6,000
Equipment/Supplies	3,500	
Event Support	1,500	
Program Materials	1,000	
<b>Instruction and Program Participant Support</b>		8,000
200 hours contracted at \$40/ahr		
<b>Program Compliance Support</b>		6,000
Accounting professional services		
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>100,000</b>



Wisconsin Small Business Development Center Network  
Local office | UW-La Crosse  
1101 Wittich Hall  
1725 State St., La Crosse, WI 54601  
608-785-8782  
[wisconsinsbdc.org/lacrosse](http://wisconsinsbdc.org/lacrosse)



April 4, 2024

Grant Selection Committee  
City of La Crosse, WI

Selection Committee: Re: ARPA RFP for Small Business Support Organizations

On behalf of the Wisconsin Small Business Development Center at UW-La Crosse (UWL SBDC), we provide this letter in support of the proposal submitted by Black Leaders Acquiring Collective Knowledge ("BLACK") for the City's Request for Proposal (RFP) for Small Business Support Organizations to provide support to businesses in La Crosse. This funding will assist BLACK in assisting diverse-owned businesses in La Crosse access resources to start, grow, and manage businesses.

BLACK's proposal supports a new initiative known as the Diversity Enterprise Empowerment Program (DEEP). This program focuses on improving La Crosse Black and diverse business access to essential resources for sustainability, expansion, and start-up activities. This initiative will increase support for such businesses and help build a more positive business environment.

DEEP will provide training, financial support, and assistance primarily to underserved businesses. The program will assist those affected by the pandemic and/or interested in starting or growing businesses in La Crosse. The proposal will leverage access to training and consulting support in La Crosse, with an emphasis on people and businesses that lack equitable access to financial and other resources. By providing substantive support for such persons/businesses, this effort will lead to a stronger and more equitable small business community in La Crosse.

The UWL SBDC supports regional entrepreneurs in launching, growing, managing, and transitioning businesses. We often are involved in providing business training programs and one-on-one consulting for participating businesses. In 2023 (with SBA related core funding only), the UWL SBDC served 516 clients, supported 1,096 jobs, assisted in starting 24 businesses, and facilitated more than \$7.58 million in small business financial support. The UWL SBDC is supported by the Universities of Wisconsin and is funded in part through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Small Business Administration. The UWL SBDC primarily serves seven counties in western Wisconsin, including La Crosse.

Our organization supports efforts like DEEP to effectively reach and meet the needs of the regions we serve. The UWL SBDC supports BLACK's initiative and will assist it by collaborating to provide greater access to training, providing access to existing programs and support, supporting BLACK's staff and students connect to and build resources that will enable BLACK to successfully perform and meet the goals of DEEP.

BLACK's proposal provides a collaborative partnership with the UWL SBDC and others, which will enable the funding to be leveraged and participating businesses to become more sustainable and better positioned to access capital and other resources to be successful.

We consider BLACK's proposal to be an important step to the development of resources to fill unmet needs. It will help businesses be better positioned to thrive in La Crosse. We look forward to working with BLACK and are prepared to offer training, consulting, and other support to assist this effort to enhance business and economic development in La Crosse.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Anne Hlavacka", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Anne Hlavacka

Director

Wisconsin Small Business Development Center at UW-La Crosse



April 3, 2024

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RE: Black Leaders Acquiring Collective Knowledge Inc.  
Letter of Support for the ARPA RFP for Small Business Support Organization

The Wisconsin Women's Business Initiative Corporation (WWBIC) is writing in support of the Black Leaders Acquiring Collective Knowledge, Inc. for their proposal to the City of La Crosse SSARP Funding.

WWBIC is a leading, statewide, innovative economic development corporation that is "Putting Dreams to Work" by assisting microenterprise and small businesses. WWBIC is AERIS rated and is Wisconsin's first Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) with a primary focus on women, people of color, lower-wealth individuals, and veterans. WWBIC opens the doors of opportunity by providing direct lending and access to fair and responsible capital, quality business training, one-on-one technical assistance, and personal financial wellness coaching.

WWBIC is aware of great work being done by the Black Leaders Acquiring Collective Knowledge, Inc. and would like to extend our services and expertise in support of the deployment of the program to the communities we serve. We believe the program would bring real opportunity and transformation to clients and communities served.

We are in favor of the plan in the proposal, and we express a willingness to serve as a potential partner in the economic development aspect of this strategy.

Sincerely,

Wendy K. Baumann  
President/Chief Visionary Officer