

**Name of proposed project:** *Networking and Support for Rural Entrepreneurs*

**Fiscal agent/applicant organization:** National Catholic Rural Life Conference

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### **The concept and approach of proposed project**

ISU Extension, Guthrie county, National Catholic Rural Life Conference (NCRLC) and Iowa Network for Community Agriculture (INCA) have undertaken pilot programs to find practical and effective ways to do work with building very local support and information networks for rural microenterprises and agricultural entrepreneurs. Materials, resources, and connections for expansion and continued documentation of these programs are now ready for the next steps—taking the programs deeper to match real people with real businesses in real places and develop local business systems(see attachments) This grant proposes to fund a coordinator to provide leadership to establish these informational and support networks and help to create sustainability for them.

### **How will this improve vitality of the community or rural area?**

Discussions with Economic Development directors about using local resources to develop entrepreneurship in the 5 county (Adair, Audubon, Greene, Guthrie, Shelby) CVC entrepreneurship pilot project area have revealed the need to provide a complementary step at the grassroots to help boost the success of agricultural entrepreneurs and other rural microenterprises by building local support and informational networks and working to bridge the gap between conventional small business resources, economic development and these rural entrepreneurs. As Economic Development work in these counties concentrates on providing specific assistance for small business management and development, building vitality in this segment of community economic activity can be that complementary step that will assist in creating holistic community revitalization.

### **Specific objectives for the project:**

- A. To expand Growing Food and Profit (GFP) program in 5 county area of the CVC entrepreneurship pilot to at least 2 more sites
- B. To continue work with the Guthrie Center GFP group to provide information, support and connections in a second year program and to document the Guthrie Center group to develop the “next step” of the program: structure and leadership for sustainability
- D. To establish Work of Our Hands (WOOH) microenterprise directories/networks in at least 2 parishes/congregations in 5 county area
- E. To continue work with SBDC and economic development directors, focusing on building connections with their resources for these rural microenterprise networks.

### **Desired outcomes:**

1. Five Communities of Practice (see attachments) established in local area for rural entrepreneurs:
  - at least 2 additional sites of GFP established with 25 in each group
  - at least 2 WOOH parish directories put together with 15-25 enterprises listed.
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Guthrie Center group completed with 25-30 members
2. Connections strengthened with SBDC, Economic Development programs and rural entrepreneurs using these services in these 5 counties

### **Important factors and community characteristics considered in approach/design of the project:**

1. Recent research and information indicating the prime importance of support and information networks among entrepreneurs at the local level to entrepreneurial development (see attachments for list of references)
2. Communities of Practice concept provides framework for ongoing development of groups/networks that provide practical business information and support and can become self sustaining
3. Work done in the CVC pilot program on entrepreneurship covering these 5 counties has convinced a number of people of the value of entrepreneurship development and created momentum for development using local resources
4. Economic Development directors have commented on the need to include a complementary step for rural microenterprises and agricultural entrepreneurs as connections have been created and strengthened
5. Interest and support of extension directors who report client interest in moving to microenterprises and a more entrepreneurial agriculture as part of their rural livelihood
6. Interviews with pastors in the counties have uncovered interest in churches sponsoring networks for microenterpreneur support and in increased participation in community development activities. Six pastors from the area attended the Sirolli workshop in Audubon.
7. Connections have been made with SBDC to work on finding ways to connect these local networks with business development resources.

### **Where did idea come from?**

Mentoring and small group learning has been used successfully in sustainable movements to develop skills for microenterprises and agricultural entrepreneurs. Research and experience show that they have the advantage of creating local support and information relationships among participants, and that developing entrepreneurs tend to learn best in this format (see attachments for list of recent research). SBDC programs such as Growing Your Small Farm Business have also demonstrated the benefits of intense, local support for rural entrepreneurs.

Members of the anchor team for GFP have the professional skills to design experiential learning to inform and support adults, and know how to implement it. Entrepreneurs themselves basically designed the WOOH network model with facilitation help from NCRLC. A pilot of GFP anchored by extension, INCA, and NCRLC, has been successfully operating in Guthrie Center since November of 2002, WOOH has been active in St. Mary's parish, Elkhart since 2001. Evaluation with participants for both programs is very positive. The groups consider it one of the most valuable things that has happened to help them start and grow their rural enterprises—and would not hear of an end to either program.

### **Specific steps for implementation:**

1. A coordinator would be trained by the partners involved to use methods shown in attachments
  2. The coordinator would be introduced to potential anchor team members for GFP expansion and to pastors who have expressed interest in WOOH
- D. Partners would assist in making connections with resources such as Economic Development directors, and SBDC
- E. Coordinator would work with anchor teams, mentor teams, to set up and facilitate GFP groups
- F. Coordinator would be available to facilitate and support parish/congregational work for WOOH

**Who will be involved in making decisions and implementing steps?**

A. *Decision making*: partner team (extension, INCA, NCRLC), coordinator, local anchor and mentor teams for GFP, local committees for WOOH

B. *Other important collaborators* will be: SBDC, economic development directors, pastors and committees, mentors and entrepreneurs in the area

**Budget details**

**Salary for coordinator**

Hourly, contracted by NCRLC  
300 hours @\$12.00, including taxes, benefits \$4,000.00

**Travel for coordinator** 500.00

**Program expenses**

Phone use by coordinator for project, supplies, educational materials for program needs. 1500.00

**Stipends for mentors for 2 GFP programs**

8 mentors @ \$200.00 apiece 1600.00

**Anchor team support (ISUE/NCRLCI/NCA)**

Staff time for program planning and coordination  
coordinator orientation, training, and, supervision 2400.00

**TOTAL ASKING: \$10,000.00**

**In kind funds:**

ISUE, Guthrie County  
Office/facility space and expense \$1,000.00

NCRLC  
Computer, phone, administration 1,000.00

INCA

Staff travel/consultation, board oversight and input 700.00

Other ISUE offices

Meeting spaces, support 500.00

Economic Development agencies in the 5 counties

Consultation and support 500.00

**TOTAL IN KIND SUPPORT \$ 3,700.00**

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Recent interesting research on entrepreneurs and social networks:

Coughenour, C. M. (2003) *Innovating conservation agriculture: The case of no-till cropping*. Rural Sociology 68 (2) pp 278-304

Fischer, E. and Reuber, R. (2003) *Support for rapid growth firms: A comparison of views of founders, government policy makers, and private sector resource providers*. Journal of Small Business Management 41(4) pp 346-365

Greve, A. and Salaff, J. W. (2003) *Social networks and entrepreneurship*. Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice 28(1) pp 1-18

Lichtenstein, G. A. (1999) *Building Social Capital: A new strategy for retaining and revitalizing inner-city manufacturers* Economic Development Commentary 23(3)

Please see other attachments for descriptions of programs/curricula



