



Supporting the Startup, Sustainability and Growth of Minority Businesses In Rhode Island

The Rhode Island Commerce Corporation (“Corporation”) seeks applications for a Technical Assistance Cluster Grant from qualified entities, organizations, and firms to provide a comprehensive analysis of the business landscape in Rhode Island for Black, Latino and minority businesses, with a specific focus on the business ecosystem including common supply chains, markets, distributors, competitors, supports, and workforce needs. The Corporation would also like to assemble a database of Black, Latino and minority businesses to include business classification, form of ownership, operations, service area, and related business operation information and a determination as to whether a business is a registered MBE with the State. The Grant will be awarded under the Corporation’s Cluster Grant program that is administered in accordance with the regulations found at 870-RICR-20-00-05. Applications for this program are due by November 20, 2020. Additional details can be found in the accompanying application.

The State of Rhode Island is committed to creating and strengthening an economic environment where small business owners can start, sustain and grow their businesses. This is particularly important for minority small businesses which today make up 30% of the nation’s small businesses. Historically, minority-owned businesses have a lower rate of sustainability when compared to majority-owned small businesses.

In light of these opportunities and challenges, the Corporation is launching a multi-phase initiative to help strengthen the Black, Latino and minority business ecosystem in Rhode Island. The Corporation is seeking applications from organizations or teams of partnered organizations interested in describing and analyzing existing ecosystems and in helping plan for the development of a minority business accelerator, entrepreneurship center, or similar effort.

Such an effort should build upon work and organizational infrastructure that already exists in Rhode Island (thanks to the hard work of important existing organizations within the community). It should draw from best practices here in Rhode Island and from around the country. It should explore and propose ways of building capacity within Rhode Island so that emerging Black and Latino enterprises can receive the strategic and substantive support they need to succeed.

As part of the exercise, applicants should analyze the minority business entrepreneurial landscape in Rhode Island, with a particular emphasis on Black and Latino businesses. This analysis should identify the range of minority small businesses currently residing within the state, along with engaging and compiling feedback from entrepreneurs of color and minority-led business support organizations to understand the barriers to minority small business and the potential remedies to such barriers. Applicants are encouraged to team up in such a way that, if

possible, they involve Rhode Island-based expertise and on-the-ground experience and incorporate best-in-class national models, organizations, capacity, and insight.

Who Can Apply?

To be eligible for a grant, an applicant must be an entity and meet all of the following criteria:

- Business analysis and research background, preferably including experience within minority and urban communities
- Knowledge and experience working with cities and states on small business and entrepreneurship initiatives
- Clear understanding of the needs of minority businesses and entrepreneurs at all stages of business growth
- Experiencing working with Black, Latino and minority businesses and entrepreneurs of color
- It is preferred that applicants include a diverse professional team

Scope of Work

The work product should include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Review and compile a database of Black, Latino, and minority businesses currently in operation in Rhode Island, drawing from and building upon existing databases including Rhode Island MBE/DBE program, Rhode Island Secretary of State and membership lists of local minority business support organizations, as provided by the Corporation and other sources.
- Assess the resources currently supporting Black, Latino and minority businesses and entrepreneurs in Rhode Island and provide a set of recommendations on organizational capacity, effectiveness, collaborations, gaps, and opportunities for deeper investment in order to provide support to high potential, lower resourced businesses, with a focus on the extent to which specific resources are being provided to minority businesses and entrepreneurs and businesses at different stages of growth.
- Review the national best practices regarding existing minority business and entrepreneurship support strategies in order to assess effective models, identify potential critical partners, and share opportunities for learning and replication in Rhode Island, with a focus on models that help Black, Latino and minority entrepreneurs achieve higher rates of business success and sustainability.
- Engage and compile feedback from existing minority business and business supporting non-profit organizations regarding needs, gaps in services, and experience with available resources including common supply chains and workforce needs.

- Design and deliver a final report in accordance with Commerce team guidance that, among elements, includes a database of Black, Latino and minority businesses in the state. Provide summary of best practices in existing business assistance and development programs that focus upon Black, Latino and minority businesses and entrepreneurs. Provide a set of recommendations and next steps for a new initiative that draws upon best practices and fills identified gaps.

Primary Activities and Project Timeline

Component One: Compile Black, Latino, and minority business database

Key Deliverables for Component One:

Comprehensive database to include Business Classifications, Ownership Model, Operations, i.e. staffing, cash flow management, sales, marketing, etc., Services & Goods, Service Market(s).

Component Two: Describe the Minority Business Support Landscape and Prepare Needs Analysis and Recommendations

- Comprehensively review Rhode Island's Black, Latino and minority local business and entrepreneurial landscape, including support organizations, lenders, technical assistance providers, and philanthropic funders to provide a comprehensive view of Rhode Island's landscape, with a focus on the extent to which organizations are differentiating services based on the stage of business growth and providing services based on the needs of Black, Latino and minority entrepreneurs.
- Interview key stakeholders and minority business supporting non-profit organizations across diverse communities to obtain clear sense of business needs (including access to capital), capacity, and understanding of how such needs and capacity may be situated differently based on specific community feedback.
- Focus groups and individual interviews with sample of Black, Latino and minority businesses representing diverse industries, stages, sizes, and owner demographics.

Key Deliverables for Component Two:

- Needs and gap analysis of key areas of need (including access to capital) with recommendations on organizations to build capacity and/or identify new resources to address these gaps.
- Present opportunities within existing and emerging growth sectors with a priority focus on businesses owned by Black, Latino and minority entrepreneurs.
- Final strategy document articulating best practices in Black, Latino, and minority business and entrepreneur development. Provide a set of recommendations and next steps for developing and implementing a new initiative that draws upon best practices and fills identified gaps.

The successful applicant will enter into an agreement with the Corporation for the completion of a project as described in the Scope of Work.

Qualifications

- Business analysis and research background, particularly within minority and urban communities
- Experience working with cities, states and/or other organizations on small business and entrepreneurship initiatives
- Knowledge and understanding of the needs of minority businesses and entrepreneurs at all stages of business growth
- Experiencing working with Black, Latino and minority businesses and entrepreneurs of color

Application Structure

Interested parties should complete an application found on the RI Commerce Corporation Website. <https://commerceri.com/incentives/innovation-incentives/>

Application materials include:

- Project description/approach
- Qualifications of project personnel
- Samples of similar projects
- Proposed deliverables and timeline
- Proposed budget, using the budget template provided, including recommendations for subgrants to local partners

Program Budget

The Corporation anticipates funding in the amount of \$75,000. The scope and funding amounts may be revised or expanded (initially or subsequently). Additional funds from The Rhode Island Foundation may also be used to match the Corporation's funding. The total budget is not expected to exceed \$100,000.

Criteria for Selection

Applications will be evaluated according to the Evaluation Criteria outlined below. Designated Corporation staff and/or selected advisors will evaluate the written proposals and Proposers will be selected competitively. The Corporation may at any time during the evaluation process seek clarification from Proposers regarding any information contained within their submission. Final scores for each Proposer will reflect a consensus of the evaluations.

- 1.) Quality and Diversity of Proposed Team:** Relevancy of experience, organizational capacity.
- 2.) Practicality and effectiveness of Proposed Exercise:** Feasibility of program design, comprehensiveness and appropriateness of budget.

3.) Potential Contribution to the Strengthening of the Minority Business Ecosystem in Rhode Island.