



City of Milwaukee's Community and Economic Development Committee

October 31, 2014

**Innovation Village Lab (iVlab)
Idea Challenge Grant Request**

Organizational Background

The Manufacturing Diversity Institute (MDI), a national demonstration project and the only institute of its type in the entire country is a University of Wisconsin-Extension Division of Entrepreneurship and Economic Development (DEED) business services affiliate institute established to be a leader in creating a bold and pioneering research driven diversity pipeline to increase the participation of individuals from under-served communities in the manufacturing industry as employees, innovators, and entrepreneurs.

MDI owes its conceptual origins to the Faith Based Economic Development Initiative (FBEDI) (January 1, 2012 - August 30, 2013) that focused on targeting high profile African-American faith based institutions and helping them to create economic development corporations and manufacturing firms. FBEDI was a special project of the University of Wisconsin Colleges and the University of Wisconsin-Extension Chancellor Dr. Ray Cross who is now the UW System President. Dr. Keenan D. Grenell, MDI's Executive Director and CEO of the Global Capital Group, LLC created and coordinated the FBEDI program.

In July 2014, MDI became one of the first two tenants in the Mid-West Energy Research Consortium's (M-WERC) new Energy Innovation Center located in Century City II at 4201 North 27th Street. As a tenant in the Energy Innovation Center, MDI is responsible for devising ways to help M-WERC increase diverse vendors in the energy, power, and control cluster in addition to serving as a member of M-WERC's workforce development committee.

MDI promotes a diverse workforce as the future of manufacturing with the intent of ensuring that individuals from under-served communities succeed in manufacturing careers and businesses. As an institute, MDI's current research consists of challenges and opportunities for African-American manufacturing firms.

start-ups, especially in Milwaukee's 30th Street Corridor in addition to growth company analysis of existing Wisconsin African-American manufacturing companies.

Organizational Qualifications

MDI offers specific manufacturing sector-based solutions that inspire and foster the development of science, engineering, entrepreneurship and leadership talent. Operations are divided into three distinct programs (outreach, education, and entrepreneurship). When taken together as a continuum, these programs form the manufacturing diversity talent pipeline.

MDI has an impressive board of directors consisting of individuals from higher education, legal community, energy, power, and control sector, private consulting, and finance. The Institute's staff has a combined total of over 60 years professional experience covering areas like higher education, corporate America, entrepreneurship, innovation, workforce development and talent strategies, international business, regional economic development, diversity leadership, non-profit management, commercial corridors revitalization in urban markets, neighborhood and community development, game based learning, learning technologies, modeling and simulation.

Use of Funds

The Manufacturing Diversity Institute requests from the City of Milwaukee's Community and Economic Development Committee a grant in the amount of \$19,600 (see attached budget). The funds will be used to establish an Innovation Village Lab (iVlab) Incubator/Accelerator providing a virtual platform for traditionally under-served individuals (especially African-Americans) interested in manufacturing entrepreneurship to propose their ideas through an **Annual Idea Challenge** process. The funds will be catalytic to creating "*idea commercialization literacy*" within the 30th Street Corridor and strengthen the capacity of individuals who have ideas to actually be put into a supportive pipeline that will prepare them to lead transformative manufacturing projects and initiatives in the area.

Individuals who participate in the Annual Idea Challenge will receive real-time expert feedback at the initial front-end of their "Big Idea". Five (5) under-served individuals whose ideas merit potential launch will receive a grant to help put them on a customized path to moving their idea into the marketplace. Pathway customization for each grant recipient involves accelerated technical assistance and business coaching intervention.

Grant recipients will be directed to a team of experts inside and external to the University of Wisconsin-Extension that utilize lean start-up approaches to assess commercialization potentiality. These lean start-up units will help veterans test business assumptions with potential customers; help them measure results, in addition to validating effects. These units will help each grant awardee (veteran) determine if they actually have paying customers and exactly which customers to target and through business intelligence ultimately building or designing something that customers want to buy and use.

Along with MDI, these units will assist each Idea Challenge grant awardee connect with mentors, customers, partners, investors, and others who have an interest in their “Big Idea”. A major technical assistance activity will be to help grant awardees determine if they have paying customers and exactly which customers to target. Another major technical assistance activity will help grant awardees through business intelligence to successfully build and or design something that customers want to buy and use.

Outreach and Screening

Outreach to Idea Challenge participants will be done through aggressive direct marketing using promotional items, print media, local morning and evening news shows, and MDI participating in targeted community events in addition to providing direct sponsorship at some of these events with the intention of generating opportunities for high profile Idea Challenge Program exposure and networking.

Each Idea Challenge participant will be asked to complete a short Innovator’s Idea Assessment that will outline the idea’s description and business concept, the problem the idea addresses, target market, the connectivity between the idea and the participants’ background and experiences and most importantly who will invest in the idea and why. All assessments will be reviewed, commented on, and judged by representatives from the above aforementioned team of experts. Success of the program will be measured by the number of grant awardees who used their customized pathway par excellent leading to ribbon cutting day and investors commitments.