



Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs

Tony Evers, Governor | Mary M. Kolar, Secretary

June 22, 2021

Honorable Governor Tony Evers
State Capitol, Room 115 East
Madison, WI 53707

Mr. Michael J. Queensland, Chief Clerk
Wisconsin State Senate
Michael.Queensland@legis.wisconsin.gov

Mr. Edward A. Blazel, Chief Clerk
Wisconsin State Assembly
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RE: Report Under Wis. Statute Section 45.437(3) related to the Veterans Employment and Entrepreneurship Grant Program

The attached document serves as the report to the Governor and the Wisconsin State Legislature as required by the above captioned statute related to the Veterans Employment and Entrepreneurship Grant Program for fiscal year (FY) 2020.

As prescribed, the report includes: (a) the number of grants awarded in FY 2020; (b) the amount of each grant awarded; (c) the purpose of each grant awarded; and (d) the outcomes attributable to each grant awarded.

From the appropriation under s. 20.485 (2) (qm), the department may award up to \$500,000 annually in grants to veterans, employers, and nonprofit organizations. One program is the Entrepreneurship Grant, which provides funds to entrepreneurial entities and employment training programs which benefit veterans. Any 501 (c) (3) or 501 (c) (6) nonprofit registered and in good standing with the Wisconsin Department of Financial Institutions that provides entrepreneurship training, technical or business assistance, or other assistance to veteran entrepreneurs to improve employment outcomes is qualified to apply. The second program, the Employment Grant, provides funds to employers to incentivize the hiring of disabled veterans. Employers that hire a disabled veteran to work full time at a business within the state may receive \$5,000 or up to \$2,500 for a part-time employee. The veteran must have a service-connected disability rating of at least 50%.

Grants to Nonprofit Organizations that assist Veteran Entrepreneurs are awarded once during the year through a competitive application process while the Grants to Employers are available on a rolling basis as employers apply. During FY 2020, five Entrepreneurship Grants were awarded totaling \$417,800.00 and 12 Employment Grants were awarded in the amount of \$38,289.39.

The summary of the support provided to the veterans by these organizations is summarized in this document.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mary M. Kolar'.

Mary M. Kolar
Secretary

Enclosures

Cc: James Bond, Deputy Secretary
Kathy Still, Assistant Deputy Secretary
Donald Placidi Jr., Division Administrator, Division of Veterans Benefits

Grants to Nonprofit Organizations that assist Veteran Entrepreneurs

1. Center for Veterans Issues, LTD (CVI) Milwaukee, WI

Grant Award Amount: \$100,000

Purpose:

Center for Veterans Issues, Troop Café applied for the Veteran Employment and Entrepreneurship Grant program to create a new approach to vocational training and employment. The grant was to support Troop Café where they train veterans in all areas of employment, with an emphasis in food service, credentialing the veterans for employment upon completion of the program and place them in established jobs within the community allowing the veterans to provide for themselves and their families. The program focused on resume assistance, skill and employability assessments, employer relations, creation of an individual employment plan and other services essential for reintegration back into the community. The Center for Veterans Issues focuses on serving those underserved populations across the state of Wisconsin.

Outcomes:

Troop Café trained and employed 20 veterans who participated and completed the culinary training and received basic life skills training and resume assistance. The veterans went through interviews and exams for SERV Safe and Prostart for certification. Upon completion of the program all 20 veterans were placed in jobs with community partners: Potawatomi Hotel & Casino, Hilton Hotel, Delaware North Bartolota's. The cost per veteran served in the program was \$5,000.

One example of a veteran's participant achieving success is Yolanda Baxter. Ms. Baxter as since created a start-up catering company with the life skills and lessons from this program. She has earned her SERV Safe Manager Certification from the National Restaurant Association. Additionally, Ms. Baxter was chosen as one of the "I Am Not Invisible Campaign". Yolanda went on from suffering multiple bouts of homelessness to running her own business with the assistance of this program at CVI. CVI prides itself on taking veterans from homelessness, incarceration, impoverishment, addiction, family-fragmentation, unemployment, or underemployment and transforming them into productive, viable, contributing citizens. This has required active collaboration from the community.

2. Fox Valley Technical College (FVTC), Appleton, WI

Grant Award Amount: \$97,800

Purpose:

Fox Valley Technical College, ENVoy Program is an innovation accelerator program designed to serve veteran entrepreneurs who want to start or expand their own businesses. The program gives the veterans real-world information and knowledge, technical training, coaching, and contacts needed to move forward as entrepreneurs. The program immerses veterans in the process of business model innovation and entrepreneurial and small business management training. Phase 1 of the program is a 3-day Business Model Design Workshop where the veterans develop and show their ability to create and assess a new business, product, service, solution, or technology. Phase 2 is a 10-week E-Seed Entrepreneurial Training Series where veterans the art of small business and entrepreneur management. They develop the business plan and begin to build their network. Upon successful completion of the program each veteran received \$2,500 of seed capital. This required submission of a working business plan, and an acceptable start up or growth plan and uses of funds.

Outcomes:

During the grant period twenty (20) veterans in total were served. Twenty veterans completed Phase 1: Business Model Design and eighteen (18) successfully completed the Phase 2: E-Seed Entrepreneurial Training Series. Eleven (11) veteran owned businesses were created and seven (7) veteran owned businesses were expanded. Seventeen (17) out of eighteen (18) participants received \$2,500 in seed capital for there businesses. For each veteran that went through the program \$4,313.02 is attributed to each veteran for the program.

3. The Financial Promise, Milwaukee, WI

Grant Award Amount: \$20,000

Purpose:

The Financial Promise with the use of the grant funds was seeking to expand economic opportunity for Wisconsin veterans. The funds were used for programs that can provide veterans an opportunity to connect with prospective employers and other business members to create veteran employment and workforce development. To align resources such as job training, career preparation, reintegration support, and to assist veteran entrepreneurs with resources dedicated to helping them achieve business ownership, as well as financial literacy. The financial literacy program teaches the knowledge and skills set forth in the personal financial literacy standards across of disciplines.

Outcomes:

During the grant period, the Financial Promise served a total of 164 participants with 66 of those participants veterans. The participants were able to demonstrate the financial skills and knowledge learned in the program through organized testing, attending a financial conference and financial seminars and training. A total of 100 participants attended these 35 of which were veterans. The average test scores were 75% and a total of 115 participants displayed growing financial knowledge and employment skills. One of the main focuses of this grant period were to ensure underserved populations and the Financial Promise achieved success in that area with 95% of the participants being minorities. Additionally, 85% of the participants were women and the income level served were \$35,000 or less.

4. Wisconsin Veterans Chamber of Commerce (WVCC) Milwaukee, WI

Grant Award Amount: \$100,000

Purpose:

The Wisconsin Veterans Chamber of Commerce requested the funding to support educational, networking, and promotional programming dedicated to supporting veteran-owned businesses across Wisconsin. This program, which is called the Wisconsin Veterans Business Initiative, takes a comprehensive approach to supporting Wisconsin's veteran business community. By coordinating existing resources, offering educational programming for veterans, and organizing a new market of consumer, the Wisconsin Veterans Business Initiative creates the opportunity for sustainable growth for veteran-owned businesses regardless of geography. The funding was to support events across Wisconsin supporting veteran entrepreneurs and veteran's business owners with technical assistance and education on business operations development topics, networking events bringing veteran entrepreneurs, business owners, professionals, family, and members of the community.

Outcomes:

During the grant period the Wisconsin Veterans Chamber of Commerce served 935 individuals attending Veterans Business Initiative events and programs. Based on registration from these events 535 individual businesses served and 159 businesses receiving multiple forms of service. The WVCC hosted 27 business development events. These events included networking events, educational workshops, and informational presentations featuring subject matter experts and panel discussions on a variety of topics related to business operations and development.

The WVCC provided veteran owned and disabled veteran owned businesses an informational presentation hosted by Reinhart Law. The information provided much needed assistance in equipping these businesses with what is needed to engage with public and private sector supply chain diversity and contracting diversity programs.

Two additional events focused on engaging women veterans and providing professional development and entrepreneurial resources. These events were hosted in Milwaukee and were attended by 43 women veterans.

The COVID-19 pandemic interrupted programming and required the WVCC to cancel all events and shift to a virtual programming format. The WVCC shifted to provide reliable support and information to businesses connected to the WVCCC and created a COVID-19 Veteran Business Guide, sharing up to date information on the developing pandemic, provided resources available to business owners, employers, and veterans in the forms of grants, tax credits, loans, and more. Weekly webinars were held for four months to provide the veterans updates needed to make it through the pandemic. Information from the Economic Injury Disaster Relief Loans to Paycheck Protection Program loans, to other relief programs available at the time. Lastly, in collaboration with the Ethnic and Diverse Business Council, all members of the WVCC were eligible to apply for a grant of \$1,000 to serve disadvantaged business owner.

During this grant period and support from the funds received the WVCC increased programing across the state including Southeastern, Southwestern and Northeastern regions of Wisconsin. During the grant period, 90% of WVCC members attended an event, 45% participated in a chamber program, 60% of members reported they have gained customers and increased their revenue directly from membership with the chamber and 95% of members say they will renew their membership.

5. Wisconsin Women’s Business Initiative Corporation (WWBIC) Milwaukee, WI

Grant Award Amount: \$100,000

Purpose:

To grow and expand the Veterans Entrepreneurial Training and Development Program. Of the grant funds requested, \$65,000 is set aside as grants to veteran entrepreneurs, \$35,000 will support programmatic costs funds for partial scholarships for the participants in the business planning series, QuickBooks, and other business education classes and to supply the veterans with 25 Chromebooks. Additionally, the amount will cover outreach and materials for the programs.

WWBIC is looking to reach 160 individuals through outreach and promotion and of these 25 veterans would participate in the programs.

Outcomes:

WWBIC administered 7 grants to veteran owned businesses totaling \$65,000.

Grants to Employers

The chart below identifies the employers in Wisconsin who hired a disabled veteran who has a 50% VA disability rating or higher and met the requirements of hours worked to be awarded the grant.

| <u>Employer Name</u> | <u>Location</u> | <u>Number of Awards</u> | <u>Award Amount</u> |
|------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Fabio Perini North America | Green Bay | 2 | \$7,374.39 |
| Gordy, LTD | Brookfield | 1 | \$2,500.00 |
| Middle River Health & Rehab | Range | 1 | \$2,500.00 |
| Mississippi Valley Conservancy | La Crosse | 1 | \$2,500.00 |
| NE WI Lutheran High School | Green Bay | 1 | \$915.00 |
| Peer Technical Group | Fond Du Lac | 2 | \$5,000.00 |
| Rosenbrook Construction, LLC | Auburn | 1 | \$5,000.00 |
| Statz Corporation | Middleton | 1 | \$5,000.00 |
| University of Wisconsin - Parkside | Kenosha | 1 | \$2,500.00 |
| Viterbo University | La Crosse | 1 | \$5,000.00 |