Best Practice Submission Form

1. What type of best practice is this?

x Marketing/ Advertising/ PR
x Veteran Fast Launch (piggy backing off of program)
x Other: Grant Program

2. Please provide a brief description of the best practice:

We developed a Post 9/11 Veterans Business Grant Program. This business grant and training program was designed for veterans of the post-Sept. 11 Iraq and Afghanistan wars and/or their family members. The program includes:

- Training curriculum with a minimum of 20 hours of learning, featuring counseling sessions, seminars and workshops.
- Counseling will be done electronically and or face-to-face and will include assistance in developing a business plan and in meeting requirements to receive funding.
- SCORE's veteran business experts will train participants in the basics of starting and successfully operating a business.
- Participants who successfully demonstrate both a need and a viable business plan may qualify for grants from the Pathway to Business Success Foundation Inc.

To be eligible, participants must be a Florida resident veteran of the post-Sept. 11 Iraq and Afghanistan wars who served in theater with an honorable discharge, an active-duty service member eligible for the military's Transition Assistance Program or reservists or a National Guard member that served in theater and received an honorable discharge. The official conflict period for Afghanistan is from Oct. 7, 2001, through a date to be determined by the President. For Iraq, it's from March 19, 2003 also through a to-be-determined date. The program is available to veterans who served more than 90 days of active duty in theater during the conflicts. Spouses or widowed spouses of qualifying veterans are also eligible for the program.

3. When did you begin using this best practice? How long have you been using it?

Start Date: Kickoff January 2012 (collecting applications now) End Date: N/A

4. What did you hope to achieve (goal)? Were there specific challenges or opportunities that served as your motivation?

Goal: To aid war/ conflict veterans in starting or growing their own businesses. The men and women who have served so valiantly in our country's recent conflicts deserve a chance to achieve the American dream for which they risked their lives – owning a business, The tragedy is that many of them return from fighting for our country, and have a tough time finding work. We won't let that stand anymore.

Opportunity/ Challenge: The average unemployment rate for veterans continues to climb higher than that of the general population. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data shows that:

- In December 2010, the national unemployment rate stood at 9.4 percent. For post-Sept. 11 Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans, that number was 11.7 percent.
- The average annual unemployment rate for these veterans has nearly doubled since 2007, and is getting worse through 2011.

5. Please describe the planning and execution process. In other words, how did you do it?

We tried to get this started many months ago by first approaching banks with the idea. We asked them to donate money as part of their community outreach, but we were turned down. We then approached wealthy residents of the Palm Beach area. We started by sending a letter giving a synopsis of the program idea and then followed up with a phone call and/ or face-to face conversation. Several of the residents loved it and formed a foundation called The Pathways to Business Success Foundation, Inc. The residents donated and pledged money to the foundation and will be working with SCORE as advisors for the program.

When a veteran submits an application, it comes to the chapter and it is handled in a similar manner to other client requests. We begin with the form 641 and conduct face-to-face mentoring sessions. The veteran is then taken through a training program for business plan development and business creation and management – basically all they need to know to succeed. After the training is done, SCORE mentors will make a determination on the business' chances for success. The determination is provided to the foundation for review in considering the size of the grant that will be awarded, if any. If a grant is provided, the veteran will be required by the foundation to receive continuous SCORE mentoring to ensure their chances for success. They will be asked to meet with a mentor every 3 months, provide financial reports (profit and loss, balance sheets, etc.), marketing strategy, and other pertinent information over a 3 year period. If the business doesn't succeed, the veteran doesn't owe anything.

In total, it took about a year to pull the program together and it will kick-off on January 1, 2012.

6. What were the results? Include info on impact & mentoring, client & volunteer feedback, etc.

We are working with several community organizations to spread the word and collect applications. Several of these partners are universities that are reaching out to their students (veterans using the GI bill) to help build awareness and distribute applications. We hope to gain about 400-450 from these relationships. We've received about 30 applications to-date. Partners include:

- Florida Atlantic University
- Lynn University
- SBDC
- The local VA office (Department of Veteran's Affairs)

Though a specific dollar amount cannot be provided, we can share that available pledged grant funds are currently in the mid-6 figure range from individual supporters. One of those supporters is a decorated Korean War veteran who has joined the Pathways to Business Success Foundation and really wants to help push the program. We will begin reaching out to corporations for support in March or April of 2012.

7. Can you provide a sample? Please attach any related images, links, videos, files.

Please see the Veteran Business Grant description, press release, and application.

8. Please provide your contact information. May we post this so that other volunteers can contact you with questions? Yes.

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