



TWO RACINE COUNTY GRANT PROGRAMS CONTINUE FOR 2010

by Jane Kurylo, Business Services Team Leader , Racine County Workforce Development Center

County Executive Bill McReynolds announced the availability of grants for local businesses. Each program is targeted at small- to medium-sized businesses based in Racine County: one to manufacturing businesses, regardless of ownership, and one to minority-owned businesses, regardless of type. Each program provides matching grants up to a maximum amount of \$2,500 per business per year. McReynolds stated "Racine County wants to be part of the solution for these firms. This matching grant program is one example of Racine County's commitment to fostering economic development."

Minority Matching Grants

This program is designed to help minority-owned businesses prosper and grow, so that they can continue to provide jobs in Racine County for minority entrepreneurs and their employees. The grants can be used to cover costs associated with improving business operations. Examples of goods/services that can be paid for with the grant funds are: staff training, business consulting services, marketing plans, and business systems upgrades. Grants will be made to for-profit Racine County businesses that are at least 51% minority owned; have no more than 200 employees; and average annual sales of no more than \$5 million.

Debra Brown, owner of the Debra Brown Agency of American Family Insurance, utilized the County's Minority Matching Grant program in 2009 to train her employees and develop more long-term growth strategies. The program helped her deal with economic change: "Although my agency is approaching 12 years of operation, due to our current economy we have been challenged in the areas of growth, profit, and retention."

McReynolds said: "This matching grant program is one example of Racine County's commitment to addressing the concerns of the small to medium minority entrepreneur, especially in these economically challenging times."

Manufacturing Renewal Grants

Qualifying local manufacturers may apply for Manufacturing Renewal Grants to be used to help underwrite investments in employee skills training, technology implementation projects or production efficiency consulting services. The program's objective is to help participating companies stay in business and continue to retain or create jobs for Racine County residents.

Bruce Jensen, President and COO of Bert Jensen and Sons, saw an opportunity with the Manufacturing Renewal Grant program in 2009 to prepare his workforce for additional training in Value Stream Mapping, Lean Manufacturing Principles, and 5S Training. "These programs create a much more efficient workplace. With these tools, we have become more competitive in our business," he said.

McReynolds said: "While manufacturing may not dominate Racine County employment as much as it once did, it is still an essential part of the county's economy. Small businesses have traditionally been the greatest source of job growth. Smaller, nimble manufacturing firms that can adapt to changing conditions will be better positioned to succeed, even in tough economic times."

Throughout the history of both programs, grant funds have been in high demand, so interested companies are encouraged to apply as early as possible. Both programs allow for 50% matching grants. This means they will reimburse a business for 50% of allowable expenses, up to a maximum of \$2,500. For example, a business with \$4,000 in allowable expenses will receive \$2,000; a business with \$5,000 in allowable expenses will receive \$2,500; and a business with \$6,000 in allowable expenses will receive \$2,500.

Grant programs are managed on behalf of Racine County by the UW-Parkside Small Business Development Center (SBDC). Grant applications may be found on-line at www.parksidesbdc.com or www.wdc.racineco.com. Contact Matt Wagner, Executive Director of the UW Parkside Small Business Development Center at 262-898-7512 with questions about these specific grant programs. To find out about additional services for recruitment, retention, and training available to Racine County Businesses, please contact Jane Kurylo, Business Services Team Leader at the Racine County Workforce Development Center, at 262-638-6603.