

Fostering an Entrepreneurial Spirit

By Jackie Turner-Lovsness and Karen Grasmon

SOUTHWEST INITIATIVE FOUNDATION HELPS KEEP BUSINESSES GROWING IN SOUTHWEST MINNESOTA

The Southwest Initiative Foundation (SWIF), a rural community foundation serving 18 counties in southwest Minnesota, has launched a number of successful efforts to support business development and entrepreneurship throughout its region. The organization's recently-merged Microenterprise Loan Program and Entrepreneurship Initiative uniquely combine education, financing, and technical assistance, often helping make dreams of business ownership become realities for people of diverse circumstances and backgrounds. SWIF received an Excellence in Economic Development Award from IEDC in 2010 for its Entrepreneurship Initiative.

The award honors organizations and individuals for their efforts in creating positive change in urban, suburban, and rural communities.

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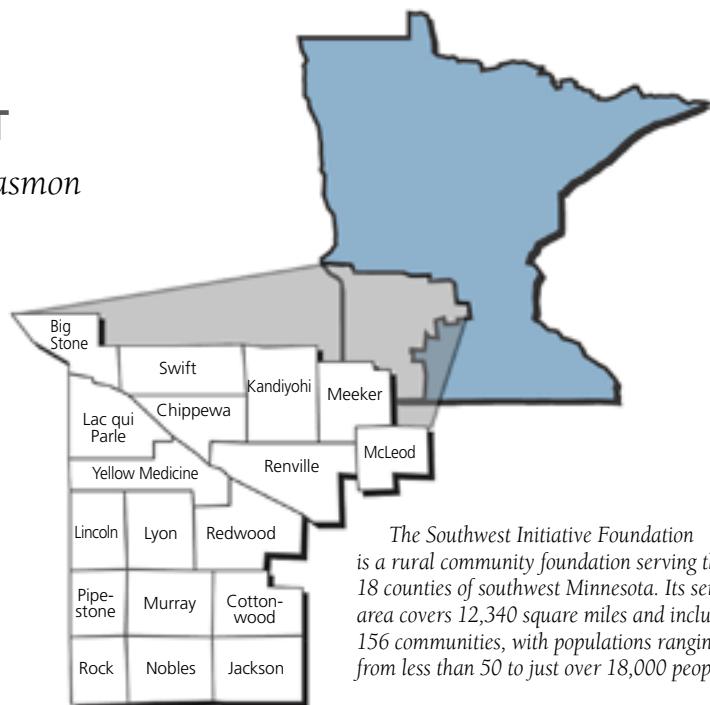
fostering AN ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT

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for 25 years, the Southwest Initiative Foundation (SWIF) has been impacting the economic and social framework of southwest Minnesota. Even during economic downturns, an entrepreneurial spirit has remained a strong characteristic of the region's people. With the help of SWIF's business development programs, entrepreneurs and communities have seen that spirit transform into positive results.

As a regional community foundation, SWIF's mission is to be a catalyst, facilitating opportunities for economic and social growth by developing and challenging leaders to build on the region's assets. Current areas of focus include economic advancement, leadership and community development, building regional capacity, and philanthropy. SWIF dedicates resources – including staff time, expertise, and grant and loan dollars – around several initiatives and programs that fit these focus areas. Current efforts include the Renewable Energy Development Initiative, Early Childhood Initiative, Entrepreneurship Initiative, Microenterprise Loan Program, Revolving Loan Fund Program, Youth Energy Summit Program, and Community and Designated Fund Program.

SWIF has a governing board of 12 volunteers representing various areas of expertise. It employs 24 full-time staff to deliver its programs and support organizational operations and has more than \$59 million in total assets. A portion of its unrestricted endowment's earnings is used to fund its work, in addition to generous contributions by



The Southwest Initiative Foundation is a rural community foundation serving the 18 counties of southwest Minnesota. Its service area covers 12,340 square miles and includes 156 communities, with populations ranging from less than 50 to just over 18,000 people.

other foundations, organizations, businesses, and individuals. Its service area includes 18 counties covering 12,340 square miles in rural southwest Minnesota. That's a lot of ground to cover, and with communities varying in size from less than 50 people to just over 18,000, economic and social development needs span as great an area. The common thread of this region is a rich agricultural history, which is the foundation of SWIF's organizational history as well.

A HISTORY OF RESPONSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

SWIF is one of six Minnesota Initiative Funds founded by The McKnight Foundation. The McKnight Foundation was established in Minneapolis, MN, in 1953 by William L. McKnight and his wife, Maude L. McKnight. One of the early leaders of 3M, William L. McKnight rose from assistant bookkeeper to president and CEO in a ca-

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The Southwest Initiative Foundation (SWIF), a rural community foundation serving 18 counties in southwest Minnesota, has launched a number of successful efforts to support business development and entrepreneurship throughout its region. The organization's recently-merged Microenterprise Loan Program and Entrepreneurship Initiative uniquely combine education, financing, and technical assistance, often helping make dreams of business ownership become realities for people of diverse circumstances and backgrounds. SWIF received an Excellence in Economic Development Award from the IEDC in 2010 for its Entrepreneurship Initiative. The award honors organizations and individuals for their efforts in creating positive change in urban, suburban, and rural communities.

reer that spanned 59 years, from 1907 to 1966. The McKnight Foundation, however, is an independent private philanthropic organization; it is not affiliated with the 3M Company.

The McKnight Foundation seeks to improve the quality of life for present and future generations through grantmaking, coalition-building, and encouragement of strategic policy reform. It makes grants in support of children and youth, region and communities, the environment, the arts, neuroscience research, and select international efforts. For more than 50 years, its primary geographic focus has been the state of Minnesota. A truly unique effort was creating these six regional funds in response to the farm crisis of the 1980s.

SWIF and the other five Minnesota Initiative Funds started as a way to reach deeper into rural Minnesota and address the issues crumbling communities. In many instances 25 years ago, families were losing everything as both business and morale continued downward. Each of Minnesota's six funds had unique challenges facing their areas. Once-vibrant Main Streets were becoming deserted. Successful manufacturers were closing their doors. International mining companies were shutting down. Bustling farm operations were being abandoned.

While the challenges were varied in each region of Minnesota, a common solution was created in the form of revolving loan funds at each Minnesota Initiative Fund. By providing gap financing to businesses of any size, SWIF and the other Minnesota Initiative Funds could help keep businesses running and even help new businesses start up. These kept needed jobs available throughout the state and kept people in communities, helping to spur a rural revitalization.

There was a recognized need to serve starting or expanding small businesses in the region that perhaps did not have access to more traditional financing. Microloan projects include, but aren't limited to, manufacturing, service, retail, and child care. As of February 2011, five staff members work specifically within this program area.

Today, the six funds continue to impact their rural regions through economic development, grantmaking, and other programs. The McKnight Foundation remains SWIF's largest funder as work continues to build and strengthen southwest Minnesota. Additional partnerships have led to changes in design and delivery of various programs. While most SWIF initiatives can be linked to economic impact in the region, the Entrepreneurship Initiative and Microenterprise Loan Program show significant impact in fostering an entrepreneurial spirit and serve as the focus of this article.

TAKING THE NEXT STEPS TO GROW BUSINESSES

With local economies getting back on track in the 1990s, SWIF looked to other opportunities available to grow businesses in southwest Minnesota. It launched its Microenterprise Loan Program in 2001 with funding from the Small Business Administration (SBA). There was a recognized need to serve starting or expanding small businesses in the region that perhaps did not have access to more traditional financing. Microloan projects include, but aren't limited to, manufacturing, service, retail, and child care. As of February 2011, five staff members work specifically within this program area.



With assistance from the Southwest Initiative Foundation, Becky and Dan Kuglin were able to purchase Blossom Town Floral, a business that has operated in Redwood Falls, MN for more than 70 years. Dedication, creativity, and some technical assistance have this business poised for success in the coming years as well.

The Microenterprise Loan Program relies heavily on referrals from chambers of commerce, economic development professionals, other lenders, and existing loan clients throughout the SWIF region. An entrepreneur interested in more information contacts SWIF and meets with a program staff member.

An inquiry meeting is usually conversational and varies greatly, depending upon the entrepreneur's education about the business process and stage of development.

During the inquiry meeting, staff discuss the business idea, estimated project costs, funds that are needed – real estate, equipment, inventory, or working capital – and equity available. Staff also ask about background in management, ownership, or other experience that would be valuable to a potential venture; whether the entrepreneur has taken any entrepreneurial education or training; and if a business plan has been developed. A form is also completed with this basic information during the inquiry meeting.

Based on the staff's initial assessment of needs, the entrepreneur may begin steps toward applying for a mi-



In rural areas, Microenterprise Loan Program clients like Tracy Computer and Office Supply often help fill Main Street store fronts, impacting entire communities. Owners Caleb and Joshua Schmidt quickly became leaders in their community as they worked to better their business and the local economy.

croloan or he or she may be referred to another resource for more preparation. SWIF will assist with finalizing business plans, organizing financials, and preparing projections. A primary tool for this process is the *Guide to Starting a Business in Minnesota*, an annual publication produced by the Minnesota Dept. of Economic Development. But if entrepreneurs have done too little or no preparation of a business plan, they will be referred to the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) serving southwest Minnesota for free assistance. SBDC counselors will work with the entrepreneurs, who will then return to SWIF when they are better prepared and ready to begin the microloan application process.

Credit score, income, and collateral are considered during the application process. Staff must also verify entrepreneurs' residential status and consider feasibility of financial projections. Maximum loan amount through this program is \$35,000, with other lending financing not to exceed \$105,000. Loan term is six years or less with an 8.5 percent interest base rate and may be used for start-up costs, equipment, inventory, furniture and fixtures, and working capital. Loans are collateralized. Funds may not be used for real estate purchases, but a mortgage can be given as collateral.

Staff present loan applications to a review committee composed of SWIF's president/CEO, sr. program officer for economic advancement, microloan staff, two board members, and one external business leader representing the region at large for an approval vote. Upon approval, one microloan staff – usually the staff already working with the client for the application process and assigned based on area of expertise – immediately begins technical assistance to help the client move their project forward.

Clients receive customized support through ongoing technical assistance and training as needed for the length of the loan. Staff and business consultants provide one-to-one business planning, accounting, marketing, and other training opportunities that will help entrepreneurs

succeed in their venture, taking a more proactive approach to impacting a business's success.

This proactive approach carried forward as SWIF looked again at new business development and assistance needs in its region. With the growth of the Microenterprise Loan Program, the foundation recognized the various needs of entrepreneurs in many stages of business development. SWIF saw that there were many beneficial services for entrepreneurs through nonprofit organizations, economic development authorities (EDAs), educational institutions, and others. However, with no streamlined process to find and access the appropriate resources, entrepreneurs often had to fend for and teach themselves what they needed to know when considering business ventures.

To address this apparent need, SWIF focused on its potential role in coordinating entrepreneurial resources in southwest Minnesota. Goals to improve the region's entrepreneurial support network were included in the five-year strategic plan, which was implemented in 2007. As the first step toward this goal, SWIF launched its Entrepreneurship Initiative in 2006, dedicating staff who were currently serving the Microenterprise Loan Program to researching existing resources and options for streamlining assistance programs and education for the region's entrepreneurs.

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To begin the process, SWIF hosted what it called the first Entrepreneurship Network Academy. SWIF invited resource providers, educators, lenders, EDAs, business students, and entrepreneurs to the event to learn, brainstorm, and network. During the Academy, through facilitated large and small group discussions, the more than 70 participants explored strategies focused on developing entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial ventures that could build a stronger southwest Minnesota and create a strong regional network to support entrepreneurship. Key findings from this Academy confirmed the belief that while strong resources existed in the region, entrepreneurs needed more streamlined access to them. These findings also confirmed the need to dedicate staff time and resources to entrepreneurial education and resources, as well as microlending, to support small business ventures in the region.



Southwest Minnesota entrepreneurs attend educational seminars that address economic and trending needs, like this "Surviving the Recession" seminar series. Entrepreneurs gained new business ideas for dealing with a new economic reality. Many of these participants have continued to attend other seminars and classes.

HELPING ENTREPRENEURS GET A SOLID START

Since the Academy, the Entrepreneurship Initiative continued focusing its strategies around key deliverables including entrepreneurial education, technical assistance, access to capital through gap and non-traditional financing, and networking. The purpose has always been to facilitate and support regional resources to assist and invest in entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial ventures.

The foundation's entrepreneurial education classes became a key component to the Entrepreneurship Initiative. The Business Consultation Session and Starting a Business Class, which as of winter 2011 were offered monthly in 12 southwest Minnesota communities, provide an opportunity to help prepare entrepreneurs and connect them with the appropriate planning resources before reaching the financing stage. Business Consultation Sessions are non-structured. Entrepreneurs are welcome to attend and ask questions about their business ideas. Sessions are usually just one hour and often most successful when multiple entrepreneurs attend and begin discussing each other's ideas, options, and questions. These sessions are considered the first step of entrepreneurial education, where staff can give entrepreneurs basic tools to start their business planning and point them to the best resources for their area, industry, or situation.

Starting a Business Class is considered the second step in SWIF's entrepreneurial education approach. This structured, two-hour class covers a realistic approach to understanding what is truly needed when owning a business, building a business plan, creating marketing plans, and understanding financials and operations. Again, staff will connect entrepreneurs to the next appropriate resources, which for more intense planning and assistance would be the SBDC, and for financing options, SWIF's loan staff.

SWIF launches these sessions and classes in communities throughout the region, with staff from its Entrepreneurship Initiative teaching them for the first few months. This establishes the classes and builds awareness in the targeted area. During that time, the local EDA staff are trained to take over the classes and become the instructors and contact persons. SWIF provides the curriculum, marketing, and any resources needed on an ongoing basis. This system gives the community ownership of the classes while benefiting from the expertise and resources of the Entrepreneurship Initiative and SWIF staff.

The goal of these deliverables is to meet entrepreneurs where they are in terms of geography and state of mind. All of the technical assistance, education, consultation, and coaching is non-threatening and without judgment. This provides entrepreneurs with the tools that can move them forward, allowing them to be successful. It also helps instill confidence in entrepreneurs that there are trusted resources and people available to help them succeed in their business ventures. A key component of the education is recognizing the importance of assisting entrepreneurs early in the process. Education also helps connect entrepreneurs to other resources, as SWIF often collaborates with local partners including EDAs, chambers of commerce, Minnesota Extension Service, and others to provide these educational opportunities.

Staff have found that by connecting with entrepreneurs early in the process, planning and preparation are strengthened. Staff can ask questions entrepreneurs may not have thought of, offer additional ideas based on similar business experiences, and help modify business plans to find a feasible model to move forward. Staff have found that the more time they spend up-front with entrepreneurs, the less likely they will be to need help after starting their business. Entrepreneurs who seek education early on are more adept at change, flexible within their business, and have a keen eye to see and react to changes in the market.

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Regular, customized, one-on-one technical assistance early in the business development process helps connect microloan clients with the tools, information, and networks they need to move their businesses forward. From helping read financials to simply being a trusted face walking through the business door, staff meet entrepreneurs where they are in terms of business needs and state of mind.



Tammy Makram received financing assistance from the Microenterprise Loan Program to open a coffee shop in downtown Luverne, MN. Microloan clients like Makram benefit from one-on-one technical assistance for the duration of the loan. They also attend entrepreneurial education events where they learn valuable information and expand their local networks.

In many cases, entrepreneurs going through early education realize that they are not ready to launch their businesses. They are more apt to rework their plans; ask for assistance from friends, family, and others; and in some cases walk away from their plans altogether. Rather than looking at this reality as a negative outcome, it is an opportunity to equip entrepreneurs with information that will help them make good personal decisions, while supporting businesses that have a strong likelihood of success.

ADDRESSING ECONOMIC AND TRENDING NEEDS

In addition to early-stage education, SWIF also offers educational opportunities on topics including succession planning and workshops on social networking, blogging, marketing a website, e-commerce, roadside advertising, and mapping a business. Other topics include beginner, intermediate, and advanced QuickBooks training and Ask the Accountant and Ask the Lawyer seminars. Topics are selected based on trending needs and requests by clients and partners.

These opportunities are usually offered in multiple communities throughout the southwest Minnesota region and open to all business owners or employees. Registration fees are minimal for participants and sometimes waived for loan clients, with SWIF absorbing the costs. Local EDAs, lenders, and other resource providers often attend as well, in yet another effort to better serve entrepreneurs.

RECOGNIZING THE IMPORTANCE OF NETWORKING

Feeling supported and having a peer network for sharing new ideas, successes, and challenges has consistently been identified by SWIF staff, partners, and entrepreneurs as a great need. Despite many changes in how businesses operate due to changing technology, economies, and other factors, the need to connect with people – and resources – has not changed, which is why networking is a large component to the Entrepreneurship Initiative.

SMALL BUSINESS OWNER TAKES ON-GOING ADVANTAGE OF ENTREPRENEURIAL EDUCATION

Tammy Makram, owner of The Coffey Haus in Luverne, attended SWIF's Surviving the Recession seminar in 2009 for new ideas to keep and attract her customers. Her downtown business has been a gathering spot for good coffee, good food, and good company since 2005, but like many business owners Makram was feeling the impact of a stressed economy. People were not eating out as much, which had a direct impact on her business. Staff teamed with a business consultant from a local college to offer these seminars to loan clients like Makram, entrepreneurs, bankers, and economic developers in six different locations.

The seminars addressed a trending need and included an overview of how the economy got to where it was at that point and discussion of what was next for businesses. They also introduced action steps that owners could immediately put into place in their businesses, with the first step addressing attitude. The seminars also highlighted marketing and networking. By

sharing success stories and ideas, participants were able to connect with people who were dealing with similar challenges and could provide needed encouragement.

Greg Raymo, executive vice president of First State Bank Southwest in Worthington, encouraged his bank's loan officers to invite and accompany their clients to the seminar when it was hosted in their community. He noted the timeliness of the topic, since many business owners took a hard hit during the fourth quarter of 2008. Since the seminar, Raymo and the group have continued to meet to provide a platform for local support.

Makram has since attended other SWIF educational opportunities, most recently a 2010 social media seminar. She has found great success by utilizing technology and new networks to promote her business, and the seminar provided a platform to ask questions, learn new ideas for using the tools, and make connections with other business owners in her area.

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As a direct result of brainstorming at the Entrepreneurship Network Academy, the foundation created a regional, structured network that provides the appropriate path to engage resources and entrepreneurs for support and education. This network is the Center of Rural Entrepreneurship (CORE) website. In addition to referrals to resources through loan inquiries and educational opportunities, SWIF staff recognized a need to create a one-stop-shop that entrepreneurship resource providers and entrepreneurs could use. SWIF invited six participants from the Academy, representing various regional resource providers and entrepreneurs themselves, to help design the new CORE website, www.swmncore.com.

Staff gathered resource information, developed content, and coordinated the design process to launch the site, which receives more than 6,000 visits per month. Staff continue to maintain the website content. Entrepre-

neurs and resource providers can search for and connect to local, state, and federal information and tools that are useful for their business development. CORE also serves as a clearinghouse for education event schedules.

Educating entrepreneurs about the importance of networking is also a priority. SWIF created the Step Up Your Business program as a sub-branded identity of the Entrepreneurship Initiative, serving as a platform for connecting entrepreneurs and resources through education and online tools. During three seminars hosted by the Step Up Your Business program in 2010, groups of area business owners, economic development professionals, and community leaders explored networking of the past, present, and future. Step Up Your Business seminar presenters challenged participants to understand their networks and participate in them.

In terms of technology, it is no secret that new tools, marketing tactics, and cultural shifts have changed far more than traditional working networks. Social networking – through online tools like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn – means entrepreneurs can connect with customers, vendors, and colleagues with the click of a mouse instead of a handshake. When asked what was working in their marketing at the present time, the resounding answer from seminar participants was word of mouth and referrals. Presenters compared social media to “word of mouth on steroids,” explaining that businesses

can connect not only to their contacts, but their contacts’ contacts, and so on, exponentially expanding their reach.

In hopes of inspiring entrepreneurs to select the tools that are right for their business and not be afraid to try using social media for their business, Step Up Your Business is building its online presence via Facebook and Twitter to offer continued networking and to share ideas for using the tools. This also serves as another way for staff to stay connected and available to assist entrepreneurs, extending accessibility and building stronger relationships with existing and potential clients.

SPECIALIZED PROGRAMS DESIGNED FOR UNIQUE ENTREPRENEURS

In addition to education opportunities and Step Up Your Business, other specific programs have been developed within the Entrepreneurship Initiative to serve segments of southwest Minnesota’s entrepreneurs with unique business development needs. The Diverse Business Program is a resource for businesses and entrepre-



THE NEW FACE OF AN OLDER ENTREPRENEUR

Encore Entrepreneurship Program Offers Unique Employment Options

After retiring from a career in sales, mostly within the industrial cleaning supply business, Greg Jodzio of Hutchinson thought he had left the world of work behind him. Then, the economy tumbled and forced him to reassess his future. His decision was to go back to work – for himself.

Using his wit, personality, and entrepreneurial spirit – as well as assistance from SWIF’s Encore Entrepreneurship and Microenterprise Loan Programs – Jodzio and his wife Betty, an elementary school teacher, opened Red’s Hot, a traveling hot dog stand. After opening in 2009, Jodzio immediately began using social media for his

main marketing, both to amuse his patrons and inform them of his location.

Red’s Hot was a perfect fit for the foundation’s new Encore Entrepreneurship initiative, designed specifically for entrepreneurs age 55 and better. The program offers technical training, a network of support, startup and sustaining loans, as well as education about meaningful work for older adults. Encore Entrepreneurship helps provide new opportunities for individuals who are nearing retirement or who have recently retired and are looking for supplemental income. These individuals may also be looking for a way to stay active and

connected to their communities by using their many years of experience, knowledge, and passion.

Like many rural areas of the U.S., the mature adult population is increasing in southwest Minnesota, while their financial assets have often been decreasing. Economic opportunities have been limited and these residents face upcoming retirement with the need for a sustained income. SWIF leaders believe the economic health of its region’s communities will be influenced by the economic vitality of those 55 and better. If older adults are struggling financially, their communities will also struggle, and their abil-

ity to obtain additional income is especially important for the future of small communities.

Jodzio is now working with staff to provide technical assistance to other Encore Entrepreneurs. Pairing new clients with a business consultant who has successfully been through the experience himself has brought a level of confidence and credibility to the program. Through loan financing, technical assistance, and overall awareness of changing workforce needs, Encore Entrepreneurship provides new opportunities to a very capable generation that has a great deal yet to offer.



Staff and consultants offer customized technical assistance to all microloan clients, which is especially beneficial for entrepreneurs who may require help understanding the U.S. business system. A trusted relationship and strong understanding of cultural differences that affect the business development process are extremely important when working with diverse entrepreneurs.

neurs from populations with limited English proficiency and knowledge of U.S. business systems. Southwest Minnesota's growing population of Hispanic, Somali, and Hmong residents provides continued opportunities for the region to diversify businesses but often requires diverse and/or native language business assistance to provide training and access capital.

The Diverse Business Program follows the Microenterprise Loan Program model of using education, financing, and technical assistance to support businesses. The main difference, however, is that these resources are offered by consultants who speak the clients' native languages and have a strong understanding of cultural differences that may be factors in the business development process. Consultations, classes, and other seminars are offered in Spanish in multiple communities, and resources and translators can be provided for other languages as well. SWIF and its diverse business consultants become trusted partners and connect culturally diverse businesses that can network and build on each others' success.

Southwest Minnesota also has a growing number of older adults, with projections that people age 65 and up will make up 30 percent of the region's population within the next 30 years. This reality, combined with changing workforce needs in communities with decreasing populations and the start of the recession, highlighted a new need to serve entrepreneurs age 55 or better. Many older adults were finding themselves unemployed or having to come out of retirement, and in many cases, self-employment provides an appealing option. Similar to the Diverse Business Program, Encore Entrepreneurship was launched in 2009, offering tools and resources specific to that age group.

Engaging youth by building stronger programs helps connect the region's youngest entrepreneurs. SWIF convened the first Youth Entrepreneurship Academy in southwest Minnesota where educators and youth leaders spent a day taking inventory of youth entrepreneurship programs. Participants shared resources, ideas, and tools to vision and build capacity in youth entrepreneurship. Immediate results included the expansion of Junior Achievement into two more communities and the regional Students in Free Enterprise chapter offering training to high school students to teach youth entrepreneurship classes to sixth grade students in their respective schools. These efforts continue to encourage the region's next generation of entrepreneurs.

LESSONS LEARNED LEAD TO PROGRAM INTEGRATION

Continued growth in the Microenterprise Loan Program and Entrepreneurship Initiative, as well as an increased demand for education, technical assistance, and financing services due to changing economic situations, led to discussions about merging these program areas within the past two years. Crossover often already occurred between the two programs: loan clients benefited from education opportunities and SWIF connections, and entrepreneurs attending classes and seminars often came to SWIF for gap financing and technical assistance. By merging the two areas, staff could combine resources, increase capacity, improve processes, and leverage available funding. The result of creating one cohesive team is the ability to provide the tools necessary for entrepre-

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Business consultant Roberto Trevino teaches a business marketing class in Spanish in Willmar, MN as part of the Diverse Business Program. This program utilizes the Microenterprise Loan Program model – providing education, financing, and technical assistance – to support entrepreneurs using their most fluent language.

neurs of all levels and skills to be successful in their business endeavors.

The revised entrepreneurship team structure maintains flexibility, increases capacity, and has the foundation poised for continued growth. Since merging the Entrepreneurship Initiative and Microenterprise Loan Program in 2010, staff have provided more than 5,000 hours of technical assistance to nearly 400 existing and potential clients. About 50 percent were women and 16 percent minority or immigrant entrepreneurs.

In the past year alone, SWIF closed 27 microloans averaging \$10,200. A number of these loans were to low-income or below poverty level families, providing a needed source of income and encouragement through their businesses' success. A number of loans also went to entrepreneurs who had experienced layoffs and unemployment due to the economic recession but were ready to put their skills, knowledge, and determination to work for their own businesses.

TRANSFERABLE MODELS INCREASE IMPACT

SWIF's model of an entrepreneurial education series is easily replicable for other organizations as well. An organization that serves multiple counties, or that has a large geographic area, could potentially transfer this entire program to fit its independent footprint.

As SWIF's entrepreneurship assistance continues, it recognizes the importance of transferring programs to local leadership for sustainability. Similar to its steady commitment to business development throughout its organizational history, the foundation's mission, "to be a catalyst, facilitating opportunities for economic and social growth by developing and challenging leaders to build on the region's assets," has not changed drastically since its inception in 1986. SWIF will react – as should entrepreneurs – to address current, changing needs. But more importantly, like a successful, visionary business person, SWIF should be constantly looking to the future, pushing for and establishing new and better ways to capitalize on the region's unfailing entrepreneurial spirit. ☐

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