

NATIONAL SMALL BUSINESS FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE WORKGROUP (NSBFAWG)

Conference Call Notes 12/19/00

Callers: Sally Tarowsky, Idaho Small Business Assistance Program
Pat Hoermann, King County Voucher Program, Seattle Washington
Audrey Zelanko, Concurrent Technologies Corporation
Sharon Goble, Michigan Small Business Pollution Prevention Loan Program
Mark Shanahan, Executive Director Clean Air Resource Center, Ohio
Charlie Kennedy, Minnesota Small Business Ombudsman

Call Purpose

This conference call was held to connect existing, new and potential members together as a means to help set the course and level of vigor for future NSBFAWG activities.

Call Item 1 – NSBFAWG Background

Pat Hoermann explained that the NSBFAWG was created in 1998 as a product of a work assignment that he conducted as part of his duties with the King County Department of Natural Resources. The idea was to gather as much information as possible about various small business financial assistance programs by contacting program managers across the country. In doing so, the contacts became part of a network of people interested in sharing information about financial assistance programs for small businesses. Since its inception the NSBFAWG has carried out its activities via electronic bulletins, telephone and e-networking, a website presence, and presentations at the National SBAP Conferences in Tampa, Florida in 1999, and in Missoula, Montana in 2000. At present, there are about 25 individuals who are listed as members of the group.

Call Item 2 – The “Cafeteria Plan”

The background discussion gave way to talk about the group’s effort to develop a “cafeteria plan” of financial assistance programs. The idea is to collect and maintain information about different types of financial assistance programs in an accessible reference format for use by individuals who are in the process of starting or improving a financial assistance program. (Note that the target audience is program managers, not end users, although an end user could use the cafeteria plan to locate a program in their area.) An individual would use the cafeteria plan as a means to sample different programs to select or tailor a program that would best suit their needs.

Callers unanimously supported the idea of pursuing the development of the cafeteria plan approach. To aid in the development of the plan and the workgroup as a whole, Audrey Zelanko suggested that the look of the information currently residing on the website (www.smallbiz-enviroweb.org/financialgroup.html) be improved. Since the call Audrey has prepared a draft website outline with suggested improvements for the site. The outline is included with these call notes as the file "outline" in MS Word and PDF formats. Members of the workgroup are asked to review and comment on the proposed outline by Friday January 19. Comments should be directed to Charlie Kennedy (charlie.kennedy@pca.state.mn.us). All comments will be forwarded to Audrey so that she can begin to design and implement the actual changes to the website.

Call Item 3 – How do we Proceed?

The workgroup agreed that getting the website improved would be a major step in the right direction, and therefore agreed to pursue this objective as discussed above. Time-wise the group agreed that it would be great to target the 2001 National SBAP Conference set for April 2-5 in Austin, Texas as a full roll-out date for the improved website. Based on input from Audrey, this should be achievable provided she gets all the info she needs from the workgroup. The workgroup additionally believed that it would be beneficial to hold more conference calls in the future. It was tentatively decided that the next call would be after Audrey has had a chance to put together a new look for the website based on the comments she gets on her draft outline. Time-wise this call would likely occur in early February.

Call Item 4 – National SBAP Conference

Sally Tarowsky informed the group that she is on the planning committee for the national conference and that she is working on pulling together a session on financial assistance. It was generally agreed that the NSBFAWG would be able to assist Sally in putting the session together. It was also agreed that this year's session on financial assistance would be more orientated towards the real "how tos" of getting a financial assistance program going, verses presentations of existing programs. Sally will work with members of the workgroup to design and recruit speakers for the session.