



MEMORANDUM

TO: City of Racine Redevelopment Authority

FROM: Gordy Kacala

SUBJECT: Transfer of Launch Box Program to Gateway Technical College

DATE: January 28, 2014

The Launch Box program is an entrepreneurial initiative that was initiated by the RCEDC in cooperation with the City of Racine in 2011. The program is a result of a July 2010 study that showed the need for the City to improve its entrepreneurial programs. Entrepreneurship is an important aspect of economic development in the City, as well as all of Racine County, in order to diversify and sustain the future of the economy.

Launch Box has been relatively successful to date:

1. Acting as an advocate to assist firms in navigating City Hall for permits and related approvals;
2. Developing written business industry guides that assist business in accessing necessary approvals;
3. Organizing other small business service providers to improve the delivery of small business development services;
4. Two successful "Fast Pitch" competitions;
5. The first successful "Open Innovation" competition; and,
6. The opening of the Launch Box entrepreneurs "drop-in" facility in fall 2013.

In 2014 and beyond, we need to build on, and exceed, this success. Based on other models that we have explored across the country, the following would seem appropriate:

1. Launch Box needs to become an educational tool for entrepreneurs—seminars, workshops, "think-meetings", and professionals in residence office hours;
2. Networking and social hub for entrepreneurs to enable the start of an entrepreneurial sub-culture;
3. Take advantage of the expertise of others working in entrepreneurship in order to "scale-up" the initiative and provide a wider range of services; and,
4. Begin to examine adding additional facilities throughout Racine County when the current location can be deemed a success.

In order to accomplish the above, we need to address the following:

1. The RCEDC is exceptional at initiating difficult programs that other organizations are not willing to address. There are numerous examples in our history where the RCEDC has initiated housing renovation and housing construction programs, minority business development, central business district revitalization, marketing programs, and others that were eventually spun off to more appropriate agencies after start-up.
2. Traditionally, we are not an organization that provides comprehensive services to entrepreneurs. Our staff's experience is limited in this area and, therefore, requires extensive research prior to moving forward on any new Launch Box initiatives.
3. Our Launch Box staffing is limited to a single person, thereby limiting "team collaboration" with others that can result in synergistic impacts.

The Proposal:

Recently, Gateway Technical College has made entrepreneurship a program priority with initiatives such as:

1. Growth wheel (a strategic planning tool) for private firms and private non-profit organizations;
2. The development of a fabrication lab at iMET;
3. A group of students termed the Biz Squad that researches private business issues to give student entrepreneurs real live experience;
4. Classical entrepreneurial classes;
5. A growing partner relationship with the UW-Parkside that takes advantage of the University's entrepreneurship programs; and,
6. GTC is an active member of the National Association for Community College Entrepreneurship which gives the campus faculty insight into the activities of other members.

Based on the above, we have discussed with GTC staff a scenario where RCEDC would transfer the Launch Box program to GTC. The RCEDC staff, Kristin Niemiec, would become a staff member of GTC. We would work with the City of Racine and Racine County to transfer our current grants to GTC.

GTC would integrate the Launch Box program into its existing entrepreneurship initiatives. RCEDC management staff would continue to work with GTC over a one-year time period to ensure that the transition is successful. We would retain a small portion of the City grant (\$5,000) to provide for the cost of this transition.

We have discussed this proposal with both Racine Mayor Dickert and Racine County Executive Ladwig, partial funders for the program, and they are in favor of moving forward. We are seeking the consent of the Racine Redevelopment Authority to move forward with this proposal.