

CITY OF BURLINGTON
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT - 2021 APPLICATION

*Application must be no more than 9 total pages (including cover page) with 12 point font.
Refer to NOFA for required information for each question.*

Project Name: Women's Small Business Program Equity Project

Project Location / Address: 255 South Champlain Street Suite 8, Burlington VT 05401

Applicant Organization / Agency: Mercy Connections, Inc.

Mailing Address: 255 South Champlain Street Suite 8, Burlington VT 05401

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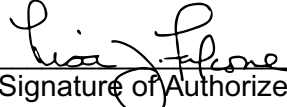
<p>CDBG Funding Request: <u>\$50,000</u></p> <p>Total Estimated Program/Project Cost: <u>\$266,320</u></p> <p>Grant Duration: mark one <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1 Year <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Year</p> <p><i>(Only Public Service programs with a focus on Housing and Homelessness are eligible for 2 year grant this year)</i></p> <p>Development: mark one <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Economic Development <input type="checkbox"/> Construction</p> <p>Public Service: <input type="checkbox"/> Housing <input type="checkbox"/> Homelessness <input type="checkbox"/> Health <input type="checkbox"/> Econ Opportunity</p> <p><i>Mark one</i></p>

1. **Type of Organization**
- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Local Government | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Non-Profit Organization (please provide copy of your <u>IRS 501(c)(3) tax exemption letter</u>) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> For-Profit Organization | <input type="checkbox"/> Institution of Higher Education |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Faith-Based Organization | |

Certification

To the best of my knowledge and belief, data in this proposal are true and correct.
I have been duly authorized to apply for this funding on behalf of this agency.
I understand that this grant funding is conditioned upon compliance with federal CDBG regulations.

I further certify that no contracts have been awarded, funds committed or construction begun on the proposed program, and that none will be prior to issuance of a Release of Funds by the Program Administrator. In addition, this project is ready to proceed as of July 1, 2021.

 _____ Signature of Authorized Official	<u>Lisa Falcone</u> _____ Name of Authorized Official
<u>Executive Director</u> _____ Title	<u>January 28, 2021</u> _____ Date

I. Demonstrated Need

1. What is the need/opportunity being addressed by this program/project and how does that contribute to CDBG's national objectives? *

The Women's Small Business Program (WSBP) addresses the CDBG national objective of facilitating economic development through the establishment, stabilization, and expansion of microenterprises. (§570.201(o)). Small business development is a proven strategy to move people out of poverty; however, Vermont's new business startup rate falls below the national average, according to the U.S. Census Statistics of U.S. Businesses; and only 48% of Vermont's business startups stay open five years or more, according to the Business Dynamic Series U.S. Census. WSBP expands economic opportunities in Burlington and reduces economic barriers by providing programs that benefit primarily low- to moderate-income female entrepreneurs. WSBP will continue delivering a solid portfolio of opportunities to address these findings. WSBP's Equity Project will bolster entrepreneurial efforts of black, indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) in Burlington. When low-income women gain access to inclusive, supportive, entrepreneur education opportunities, the gender gap in self-employment narrows, women move toward greater success, and the entire community benefits.

II. Program/Project Design

1. Give us a short summary (2 sentences) that describe the program/project.

The WSBP Equity Project will deliver semester-long business planning programs and an ongoing calendar of entrepreneur education, skill-building, and support for aspiring and existing entrepreneurs and makers (Mercy Marketplace; Idea to Action; Start Up; Co-working/Coaching; Equity Coordination), to drive economic opportunities and financial security for entrepreneurial women (and some men) in Burlington. The project will engage an Equity Coordinator to establish strategies to reduce inequities faced by BIPOC entrepreneurs; reinforce equitable access to entrepreneurial education and pilot an English Language Learning program for BIPOC to learn English for Specific Purposes (ELLSP).

2. Explain why the program activities are the right strategies to use to achieve the intended outcomes. Why is the program designed the way it is? (cite evidence, best practices, or community input)*

Mercy Connections (MC) has a proven track record of providing adult learning and entrepreneurial training. WSBP education is gender-sensitive and engages the best practice of empowering entrepreneurs to be supportive of each other and network as they progress through entrepreneurial action steps. The WSBP Equity Project is designed to build greater inclusion of entrepreneurial BIPOC, and help low-income students overcome barriers to success by ensuring an equitable infrastructure and ease-of-access. Current efforts to support racial equity, inclusion and belonging in Burlington and beyond have shaped this WSBP strategy. Our programs are also designed to be delivered online or in-person to accommodate working individuals and adapt to states of emergency, as necessary. Access is enhanced through our participation in the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation (VSAC) Advancement Grant program with additional direct scholarships and payment plan options through Mercy Connections are available for those who qualify. Programs are designed to support a continuum of entrepreneur readiness and our established ELL tutorials engage people from over 20 countries, utilizing proven techniques for language learning.

3. How will this program/project contribute to the City's anti-poverty strategy?

According to CEDO's Consolidated Plan, "As the state's largest city, Burlington must continue to be an economic engine...to support low-income residents in business ownership through entrepreneurial training" (CP, Executive Summary, 4). The WSBP Equity Project will contribute to the city's anti-poverty strategy by training and empowering entrepreneurial women from extremely low to moderate income means to establish, grow, and expand small businesses. WSBP is a local "entrepreneurial anchor" and

“critical pathway out of poverty.” A CDBG investment will support CEDO in achieving the 2018-2022 Consolidated Plan to “address community development needs in the area of... establishment, stabilization and expansion of small businesses”. It addresses Goal #8, supporting microenterprises “with a focus on special populations of women...” and “increase[es] employment/economic opportunities” (SP 116) through supporting micro-enterprises (EO 1.1). The project helps people retain and create jobs (EO 1.2) and contributes to “Reducing Barriers to Economic Opportunities” (CP Priority Need 8).

4. How do you use community and/or participant input in planning the program design and activities?*

WSBP actively assesses program relevance and quality, as well as student outcomes, by soliciting feedback from program participants, instructors, volunteers and alumni. Constituents engage in written evaluations, interviews and conversations, focus groups, and surveys. The WSBP Director, Executive Director, and WSBP Teacher Team review WSBP data, and collaborate with local municipal and entrepreneurial partner efforts to ensure the program is utilizing best practices while remaining relevant and effective. The WSBP Director maintains close contact with program alumnae and has proven the program’s ability to pivot to address the needs of Burlington residents through adapting program development, delivery, curriculum when needed.

III. Proposed Outcomes

1. What are the intended outcomes for this project/program? How are people meant to be better off as a result of participating?

WSBP’s primary outcome is that participants gain the knowledge, skills, competence, and insights they need to make informed decisions about launching, owning, and/or expanding a business. Outcomes also include individual successes of students’ business ideas and program participation. People are better off with increased inclusion, confidence, and effectiveness in business; decreased sense of isolation in business pursuits; equitable access to professional networks and education; and improved financial stability. WSBP adheres to evidence-based strategies to help people toward greater self-sufficiency.

2. List your goals/objectives, activities to implement and expected outcomes (# of units, # of individuals, etc.)

Goal/ Objectives	Activities Funded	Expected Outcomes
1. People move toward improved economic self-sufficiency	Delivery of Women’s Small Business Programs and Equity Coordination	63 Burlington participants attend programs; 90% gain increased knowledge of self-employment; 85% take concrete steps toward greater self-sufficiency; Equity infrastructure established with SMART goal strategies for equity and inclusion at MC.
2. Women plan, start and sustain microenterprise	➤ Two Semester-long English Language Learning for Specific Purposes programs (1.5hrs/wk)	85% increase ELL skills for sector-specific fields of work
3. Small business owners create economic opportunities	➤ One 10-week cycle of Mercy Marketplace (5 Classes, 5 blocks of coaching, 1 event), intensive support, business workshops, and skill building to craft & art vendors-in-training.	100% of participants earn income selling handcrafts and artwork at the Mercy Marketplace event; 36% plan to participate in in other craft fairs
4. Entrepreneurs gain confidence and skills for a	➤ Two 3-day cycles of Idea to Action , an introduction to business for aspiring entrepreneurs to consider the realities of self-employment then create a clear vision and action plan.	100% of participants decide if self-employment is the right choice for them; 40% select a business idea to pursue further.

stronger workforce 5.BIPOC access skill building opportunities for career/ entrepreneurial advancement	➤ Two semester-long cycles of Start Up , a rigorous business planning course	
		90% of graduates, complete business plans; 11% decide not to pursue a business based on research but apply new insights into their current position/life strategy; 33% of participants start a business within one year, 56% start businesses within 2-5 years.
	➤ Guided Group Entrepreneurial Support , monthly sessions with co-working and coaching	
		100% of entrepreneur participants make individualized gains in their business development within the first year of business
	➤ 12 two-hour Specialized Business Workshops	
		90% of participants gain new knowledge/insights to improve their business practices

IV. Impact / Evaluation

1. How do you assess whether/how program participants are better off? Describe how you assess project/program outcomes; your description should include: what type of data, the method/tool for collecting the data, from whom you collect data, and when it is collected. *

Mercy Connections evaluates program efficacy in a results-based accountability (RBA) framework to analyze quantifiable and qualitative data on program delivery and impact, participant satisfaction and expected outcomes/better-off measures. Tools include program applications, instructor records on student progress, surveys, student interviews, attendance records, and business plan assessments. Participants of this project will complete pre- and post-class surveys in each program cycle. WSBP will administer an additional mid-way assessment in Start Up and Co-working. Attendees of specialized workshops will complete post-workshop surveys. Quarterly, staff will analyze data to determine participant outcomes in business ownership & capitalization; income, career, financial mobility/stability; and program satisfaction. WSBP documents student changes in knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, circumstances, and sense belonging.

2. How successful has the project/program been during the most recent reporting year for your CDBG project? Report the number of beneficiaries you intended to serve with which activities (as noted in your last Attachment A) and your final outcomes (as noted on your Attachment C) from June 2020 (or June 2019). For non-CDBG participants – report on your achievements from the previous year.

Attachment A, 2018 application:

Total #	# low/mod owners*
33	20

SUBMITTED JUNE 2019	Total # of Owners / Persons Assisted	Result of Assistance: # of New Businesses	Result of Assistance: # of Businesses Expanded	# Owners / Persons at or under 30% AMI	# Owners / Persons between 30% and 50% AMI	# Owners / Persons between 50% and 80% AMI	# Owners / Persons above 80% AMI
This Period	15	13	1	2	4	6	3
Cumulative	29	19	9	10	8	8	3
NRSA Persons / Businesses**	19			7	4	6	3

V. Experience / Organizational Capacity

1. What is your agency's mission, and how do the proposed activities fit with your mission?

WSBP is a program of Mercy Connections with a mission to deliver education, mentoring, entrepreneurship, and community opportunities to people in life transition. The organization nurtures self-sufficiency by empowering these individuals to develop new insights, education, community/networks, and life plans. It is a mission of social justice and equity. Here, an individual can find support in each phase of their life journey as they navigate opportunities and barriers. The WSBP Equity Project's courses, strategies, intended participants, and outcomes are fully in line with these efforts.

2. Explain how your agency has the capacity to carry out the proposed activity (i.e. staff qualifications, years of experience related to this type of activity, etc.)*

WSBP has been moving people out of poverty in Burlington through self-employment since 1989 and is an entrepreneurial anchor in this area. Program alumnae are significant contributors to the local business landscape and the Burlington's economy. WSBP Director Lisa Wood founded Sprout New Media in 2008, is a certified business coach, and first came to the WSBP as a guest speaker in 2013. WSBP instructors are small business owners and experienced teachers in their areas of expertise. The Mercy Marketplace Coordinator is also an Education & Transition (E&T) Programs Coordinator at Mercy Connections. She is a graduate of WSBP and runs her own niche business. 30% of the current population of students in our E&T program are BIPOC, and we have delivered ELL programming for 20 years. The WSBP Equity Project will further merge expertise between E&T and WSBP with a focus on strengthening Equity and inclusion within our organization. Our Education Coordinator holds a Master's Degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages and has been teaching ELL for 34 years. There is also value inherent in the breadth of ages, stages and experiences of our program leadership; each is a role model of how to successfully navigate life and family circumstances, overcome barriers and not give up while learning how to embrace leadership and/or business ownership.

3. What steps has your organization/board taken in the past year to address racial equity, inclusion, and belonging internally? What new commitments have been made to address racial equity, inclusion, and belonging internally in the year ahead?

Staff and board attended this year's annual board retreat, dedicated to advancing MC as a diverse, equitable and inclusive organization. Expert Stephen Graves facilitated a process to help us recommit to our operating assumption: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion are integral to Mercy Connections and need to be recognized and supported in an authentic manner- reinforcing this in new ways is a goal for the upcoming year. CDBG funding for the WSBP Equity Project would be tied to this effort. After George Floyd's killing, we convened Zoom meetings with nonprofit partners from the social service sector to address issues of race and equity, then issued our commitment statement, responding to the national protests. We also convened conversations with small businesses about race and justice with two diversity consultants who are alumni of WSBP. We recruit and support women of color in starting and operating small businesses. The Mission of Mercy Connections is grounded in the practice of establishing classroom communities where people feel a sense of belonging. We have offered ELL, Citizenship test preparation and leadership programs, to advance BIPOC in our community, for years and intentionally encourage people of diverse backgrounds and ethnicity to participate. 30% of our E&T program participants are BIPOC and we intend to increase this over the next year. Our board is 20% BIPOC, and we are committed and actively working to increase our diversity of board members, employees and volunteers.

4. Have you received Federal or State grant funds in the past three years? Yes No

Mercy Connections receives partial funding from the Vermont Department of Corrections for our Vermont Women's Mentoring Program. We also received CARES Act Funds from the State of Vermont as COVID relief.

5. Were the activities funded by these sources successfully completed? Yes No N/A

VI. Proposed Low & Moderate Income Beneficiaries / Commitment to Diversity

1. Will the program solely serve a specific group of people? Yes No

2. a. For your proposed project, please estimate how the Burlington residents will break out into the following income categories during the total grant period.

Service / Activity	Unduplicated Total # of Burlington HH / Persons to be Served	# Extremely Low-Income (30% median)	# Very Low-Income (50% median)	# Low-Income (80% median)	# Above Income Limits (above 80% median)
Idea to action	15	5	5	3	2
Start Up	8	1	2	4	1
Guided Co-working	5	0	1	2	2
Mercy Marketplace	11	9	2	0	0
Specialized Business Workshops	10	2	3	3	2
ELL for Specific Purposes	10	8	2	0	0
Total	63	25	15	13	10

b. All CDBG grantees serving limited clientele will be required to use CEDO's **CDBG Beneficiary Self-Certification** form to collect beneficiary data including race, ethnicity, annual income, and family size. Is your organization willing and prepared to add this documentation to the intake process for your CDBG funded program by July 1, 2021?

Yes NO Not Serving Limited Clientele

VII. Commitment to Equity, Inclusion and Belonging

1. Who is the project/program designed to benefit? Describe the project/program's target population, citing (if relevant) specific age, gender, income, community/location or other characteristic of the people this program is intended to serve. How do you select and reach your target population?

The primary beneficiaries of the WSBP Greater Impact Project are entrepreneurial, extremely low-to-moderate income women. All have come to a crossroads in their lives, or in the startup phase of their business, and see entrepreneurial education as a strategy to achieve a more stable life. We would like to increase the number of BIPOC in our programs this year. Students are highly diverse in terms of education, income, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and life experiences. Most are unemployed, under-employed, or unhappy in their current employment. Many rely on economic benefits through the State of Vermont or, if they do not qualify for public assistance, struggle to make ends meet while living on the "benefits cliff". In addition to referrals from alumni and advertising, we reach our target population through an extensive referral network including the City of Burlington; Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity (CVOEO); the VT Chapter of Center for Women & Enterprise (CWE); US Small Business Administration (SBA); Small Business Development Center (SBDC); Vermont Works for Women; the Peace and Justice Center; Women Business Owners Network (WBON); Community Capital of VT; Burlington Housing Authority's Family Self-Sufficiency Program; ReSource's Apprenticeship Programs; Reach Up (the VT Department of Children and Families); VSAC; and Howard Center.

2. Describe the steps you take to make the project/program accessible, inclusive and culturally appropriate for the target population. *

Mercy Connections training facilities are handicapped accessible and our hiring policies are non-discriminatory. WSBP supports new students accepted into the Start Up program by assessing the computer literacy of participants then providing pre-program support, when necessary, to ensure readiness

while respecting diverse learning styles and abilities. The design of the program ensures those at all levels of financial circumstance or entrepreneurial readiness can access WSBP.

VIII. Budget / Financial Feasibility

1. Budget Narrative: Provide a clear description of what you will do with CDBG’s investment in the project/program. How will you spend the money?

CDBG’s WSBP investment will support salaries of the full-time Program Director the Mercy Marketplace Coordinator/ Instructor and the Equity Coordinator. Funds will be spent on time for program planning & establishing equity and inclusion systems, curriculum development, recruitment & enrollment, instructor & volunteer supervision, teaching & student support, and program evaluation.

2. If you plan to pay for staff with CDBG funding, describe what they do in relation to the specific service(s) / activity(ies) in your Project/Program Design.

Specific Service / Activity	Position/ Title	Work Related to CDBG-Funded Activity	# of Hours per Week spent on this Specific Service / Activity	% of Hours per Week spent on this Specific Service / Activity to be paid with CDBG
Start Up	WSBP Director	Teacher supervision	5	5.00%
		Program Delivery	4	4.00%
	WSBP Director	Student support	6	5.28%
		Recruitment, enrollment & alumni relations	6	5.00%
		Evaluation & Program planning	6	6.00%
Idea to Action	WSBP Director	Student Support	0.5	1.00%
		Program Delivery	1	2.00%
		Recruitment & enrollment	1	2.00%
		Evaluation & Program planning	0.5	1.00%
Specialized Business Workshops	WSBP Director	Program Delivery	2.	3.00%
		Evaluation & Program planning	2	1.50%
Guided co-working	WSBP Director	Program Delivery	1.5	1.50%
		Student support	1.5	0.55%
		Evaluation & Program planning	0.5	0.55%
Equity Coordination	WSBP Director	Recruitment & Enrollment	0.5	0.55%
		Program Planning/ Systems Development	1	0
	Equity Coordinator	Program Delivery	2.5	25%
		Program Planning/ Systems Development	8	62%
Mercy Marketplace	WSBP Director	Program Planning	0.5	0%
		Program Delivery	0.5	0%
	Mercy Marketplace Coordinator	Program Delivery	1	30.00%
		Evaluation & Program planning	1.8	20.00%
		Recruitment & Enrollment	1.6	6.00%
		Student support	0.5	32.00%

b. All CDBG grantees that use CDBG funds for salaries must submit timesheets that capture total time and effort of staff members funded with CDBG. These timesheets must record CDBG hours worked, other hours worked, all funding sources, and a narrative for all CDBG and non-CDBG funded activities, and they must be signed by the employee and supervisor. Does your organization have the ability to implement a timekeeping system for CDBG funded staff that meets these requirements by July 1, 2020? Yes No Not funding salaries

3. Program/Project Budget

Line Item	CDBG Funds	Other	Total
WSBP Director	30,000	47,478	77,478
WSBP Program Associate		40,594	40,594
WSBP Instructors		22,473	22,473
Equity Coordinator	13,000	2,018	15,018
Marketplace Instruction	7000	992	7,992
Stipend - Mercy Marketplace Coordination		1,000	1,000
In-kind: Participant Support		2,800	2,800
Marketplace platform		4,000	4,000
Supporting Staff (Evaluation, Exec. Dir, Marketing & Finance)		38,415	38,415
Scholarship		12,000	12,000
Marketing/Printing/Postage		17,750	17,750
Other Program Expenses: Supplies, Subscriptions		12,159	12,159
Admin/Overhead		14,320	14,320
Total Project expense	50,000	216,000	266,000

4. Funding Sources

	Project		Agency	
	Current	Projected	Current	Projected
CDBG	38,000	50,000	38,000	50,000
State (Department of Corrections)			126,000	126,000
Federal: N/A				
United Way: N/A				
Private (specify)				
Peoples United	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000
TD Charitable Foundation	10,000	15,000	10,000	15,000
Mascoma Bank	4,000	0	4,000	0
Vermont Community Foundation	25,000	25,000	25,000	25,000
Hearst Foundation	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000
Mercy Connections Annual Fund	89,870	100,000	417,000	450,000
In-kind	0	2,800	0	2,800
Program Income	66,450	66,200	68,950	66,200
Other (specify)				
Grants- other	3,000		186,500	153,000
Investments				
Total	243,320	266,000	882,450	895,000

5. Of the total project cost, what percentage will be financed with CDBG?

$$\frac{\$ 50,000}{\text{CDBG Funding}} \div \frac{\$ 266,000}{\text{Total Program/Project Costs}} = \frac{18.8}{\text{Percentage}} \%$$

6. Of the total project cost, what would be the total cost per person?

$$\frac{\$ 266,000}{\text{Total Program/Project Cost}} \div \frac{63}{\# \text{ Total Proposed Beneficiaries}} = \frac{\$ 4,222}{\text{Cost Per Person}}$$

$$\frac{\$ 50,000}{\text{Total Amount of CDBG Funding}} \div \frac{53}{\# \text{ Total Proposed CDBG Beneficiaries}} = \frac{\$ 943}{\text{Cost Per Person CDBG Investment}}$$

7. Why should CDBG resources, as opposed to other sources of funding, be used for this project?

Trinity College and Burlington’s Community & Economic Development Office initiated WSBP over 30 years ago. The business programs in this WSBP Equity Project preserve CEDO’s legacy of collaborating with and investing in locally-grown, successful entrepreneurship programs to empower Burlington women toward greater success. WSBP is directly in line with CDBG goals for economic development. This project is also in line with the mission of Burlington’s Racial Equity, Inclusion and Belonging Office, “promoting racial equity and inclusion throughout the City of Burlington both internally and externally through engagement, facilitation, and education”. For these reasons, CDBG is a natural fit. Mercy Connections is also committed to continuing to explore additional funding investments.

8. Describe your use of community resources, including volunteers. Include any resources not listed in your budget. Will CDBG be used to leverage other resources?*

Mercy Connections engages over 240 volunteers in all levels of the organization. WSBP organizes 50 expert volunteers who review business plans and serve as guest speakers. Twice a year, business support specialists from organizations such as CEDO, SBA, SBDC, CVOEO, Consumer Assistance Program, Opportunities Credit Union, local attorneys, WBON, CWE, Community Capital of Vermont, SCORE, and the State of Vermont AG Office and Department of Taxes volunteer their time to share their expertise to support WSBP’s new cohorts of entrepreneurs. The Center for Women and Enterprise conducts registration and provides space to deliver some of WSBP’s Specialized Business Workshops. The University of Vermont provides access to its research computer software. Mercy Connections continues to be mindful of the entrepreneurial landscape, consulting with relevant stakeholders. CEDO’s endorsement through CDBG funding of WSBP strengthens our leverage politically and financially to attract new funding sources.

IX. Collaboration/Efficiency

1. Give 1 or 2 examples of key successful collaboration(s) between your program/project and another agency/program/group to address the needs of the people you serve.

The WSBP Director frequently co-presents a “Business Plan Basics” class, among other occasional business workshops, alongside Center for Women and Enterprise staff, providing multi-layered services to potential business owners. WSBP also collaborates with At the Root on Pine Street to present facilitated peer-to-peer discussions on topics such as Funding Opportunities for Small Businesses; Time Management & Work-Life Balance for Entrepreneurs; Social Responsibility in Business; and Planning for Year-End Tax Prep.

2. Do identical or similar community programs exist? How does this program complement or collaborate rather than duplicate services? What makes this program unique?

WSBP’s full, multilayered, home base of entrepreneurship training and supports are well-known to complement the work of SBDC, CVOEO, Generator, and CWE, who also offer entrepreneurship assistance. WSBP meets regularly with and occasionally offers workshops collaboratively with these organizations to avoid service duplication. WSBP’s uniquely comprehensive suite of programs supports entrepreneurs from the idea-phase through the first five years of business; from taking first steps to embrace one’s

entrepreneurial potential, to constructing comprehensive business plans, then receiving mentoring, co-working support, and trainings once a business is running. A special benefit of WSBP is that students can receive support from a network of successful business owner alumnae ready to champion new graduates, as well as attending post-graduation workshops at no cost. By spending time in WSBP offerings, students create personal and professional networks that continue to support them throughout their small business journey. WSBP's Start Up course is a one-of-a-kind opportunity that includes comprehensive business training, business plan development and plan reviews from business and financial experts who provide important insights, confidence and assurance to students.

3. Provide 1 example of how your agency has become more efficient in achieving your outcomes or managing your project/program.

The WSBP Director and instructor team have done an exceptional job, moving all of WSBP's offerings online during COVID, without losing students or seeing decreased enrollment in the process. We also created a new e-commerce store for the Mercy Marketplace sales event, extending the sales period to two weeks versus holding a single day in-person event. WSBP alumnae reached out to us for technical assistance with securing CARES Act funds and other funding for their businesses during COVID, resulting in enhanced support of WSBP from this group.

X. Sustainability

1. How will this project have a long-term benefit to the City of Burlington? If this program/project ends, how will that benefit continue?

WSBP contributes to the City's revitalization goals through alumnae who reside and operate businesses in designated neighborhood revitalization areas. There are at least three WSBP alumnae-owned businesses located on or within a block of Church Street, three on Pine Street, and three on North Avenue. Benefits continue far beyond program completion - employers benefit as the City retains program graduates who are skilled workers, and individuals benefit as there are new job opportunities close to where they live.

2. CDBG funding is intended for new or expanded services. If CDBG funding ends, will the project be able to continue?

CDBG funds are used for direct program expenses. If funding ended, participant fees may need to increase, but the project will continue, relying more heavily on marketing to higher income students and utilizing VSAC assistance. That said, Mercy Connections has consistently depended on diverse funding sources to sustain our efforts and we continue to aggressively search for additional funding. The City's investment acts as endorsement and as leverage for engaging other funding sources.

3. How will you prioritize the proposed project activities if you do not receive the full amount requested?

WSBP has a legacy worth preserving and prioritizing. We value our partnership with the City and will do our best to avoid scaling down and limiting access to our programming and will seek alternate funding, if necessary.