

Presidential Awards for Excellence in Microenterprise Development

Excellence in Poverty Alleviation

Women's Opportunities Resource Center

Location: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Program Type: Training, technical assistance, loans, individual development accounts.
Service Area: Philadelphia and Bucks, Chester, Delaware and Montgomery Counties
Target Market: Low-income or underemployed individuals, displaced workers
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Women's Opportunities Resource Center (WORC) was selected to receive a Presidential Award for Excellence in Poverty Alleviation for its success in providing targeted and innovative services to help many low-income and unemployed individuals start microenterprises. With a mission of promoting social and economic self-sufficiency for disadvantaged women, WORC helps its customers by building assets while strengthening basic life skills and business expertise.

Over 80% of WORC's customers are low-income individuals. Given the economic and social challenges faced by this population, WORC has been remarkably successful in helping its customers start businesses. Each year, 40 to 50 percent of customers entering WORC's training program start businesses. Most of WORC's customers who had once received public assistance are no longer eligible due to increases in household income or assets. Since 1995, WORC has served nearly 1,200 prospective microentrepreneurs.

The core of WORC's services is its entrepreneurial training program. WORC assists prospective entrepreneurs in evaluating the feasibility of their business ideas and assessing their readiness for business ownership. WORC's customers learn business skills, including marketing, financial analysis, and business plan preparation. WORC also helps customers find jobs if they need part-time work to support themselves while their businesses are growing or if they decide not to start a business.

WORC provides one-on-one business assistance tailored to the needs of each microenterprise. Specialized assistance includes the Contract Access Services, which helps link WORC customers to contracting opportunities. For example, as a result of participating in a WORC-sponsored networking event, a program graduate landed a \$50,000 maintenance contract with Sunoco.

To help meet the unique needs of its low-income customers, WORC provides case management services. WORC helps microentrepreneurs address personal issues that could hinder business development. WORC also ensures that microentrepreneurs receiving public benefits are compliant with the requirements of such programs. WORC staff members help microentrepreneurs identify additional benefits that they may be eligible to receive.

Credit problems are often a significant barrier to WORC's customers in obtaining business financing. To address this barrier, WORC helps its customers develop credit repair plans. WORC provides customers with its own credit-scoring instrument—so that they can understand

what is needed to receive a loan. Since 1999, WORC has provided quick access to direct loans (up to \$2,500) to its clients through its subsidiary, the Economic Opportunities Fund, a certified Community Development Financial Institution. WORC also offers other bank and community development loan and loan guarantee products tailored to the needs of microentrepreneurs. Through its partnership with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, WORC has been a pioneer in bringing innovative services to its customers. Through its participation in Pennsylvania's Family Savings Account program, which offers individual development accounts to encourage low-income families to save. Participants in this program are required to save at least \$10 a week for a period of one to two years. For each \$1 saved by an account holder, WORC provides a 50¢ match on savings up to \$600 over two years. The savings and the match may be used to start a microenterprise, buy or repair a home, pay for tuition, or for other approved uses. As part of the program, participants receive training on personal financial management. In 1999, over 400 individuals participated in this program. In 2000, participation grew to more than 600 and was expanded to include new Americans.

Customer Profile: Nancy Santana, Nancy Santana Cleaning and Maintenance, Inc.

“WORC gave me the courage to reach for my goals and to believe in myself and my business,” says Nancy Santana, a WORC graduate was recently named one of “Pennsylvania’s 50 Best Business Women” by the *Philadelphia Business Journal*. She was also featured in Governor Tom Ridge’s budget address in 1997, and honored as a “citizen hero” at the Democratic National Convention in 2000.

Only four years ago Nancy was struggling to provide for her family -- raising three children on public assistance and dreaming of a better life. Today, she is President of Nancy Santana Cleaning and Maintenance, Inc., of Philadelphia. Her janitorial and maintenance service company employs 20 people, many of whom are former welfare recipients. The company specializes in pre- and post-construction cleaning, working primarily on commercial and government contracts. Nancy's business currently has a number of contracts including one with the City of Philadelphia. As a member of a number of local Chambers of Commerce, Nancy mentors other entrepreneurs and finds time to volunteer for community projects.

When Nancy came to WORC in early 1996, she was on welfare -- a single mother of three young children, one of whom was born with a disability. “I knew that the only way he would never need for anything would be for me to start my own business.” At age 15, Nancy started working to help support her family (including a widowed mother and six siblings) while working on her GED at night. Working in cleaning and maintenance for 12 years, Nancy knew the business, but she also knew she needed to know more if she was going to start her own cleaning company.

Nancy enrolled in WORC’s self-employment training program, an intensive 12-week program, where she learned the essentials of running a business and preparing a business plan. After she graduated from her program, she launched her company by negotiating a contract to clean the 57-unit complex in which she lives. Her landlord helped her with start-up costs, which she promptly repaid.

Nancy holds several small and large city contracts. She is a certified female business owner, is 8-A state certified and is certified with Amtrak and Conrail. Her business has received two

important loans, one through the American Street Financial Services of the Philadelphia Empowerment Zone and, most recently, another through the SBA Pre-Qualified program.