

this function (see Business Needs Analyzer under the heading of Enhancing the MBDCs through Technology for more details). This activity shall be conducted three times for each client on an annual basis: one at the onset of service delivery, one prior to the end of the second quarter and one prior to the end of the funding year. This process may also include referring the client to any of MBDA's other funded projects that specialize in specific growth assistance and/or strategic partners that are capable of continuing client growth. The referral process may occur in conjunction with MBDC direct assistance.

2. *Strategic Business Consulting*—This involves providing intensive business consulting services that can be delivered by two methods:

- *Personalized Consulting*—defined as one-on-one business consulting services utilizing an integrative systems approach to foster the growth of minority firms (see Integrative Systems Approach under the heading Client Services).

- *Group Consulting*—seminars that provide education and training to minority entrepreneurs on important business topics. The consulting should be hands-on, practical, and streamlined in order to reflect the time constraints of the typical entrepreneur. In addition, given the proliferation of online resources from MBDA as well as others, this training should be designed to educate MBEs in the use of the Agency's electronic business assistance tools and in the use of electronic commerce generally to better access suppliers, customers and information.

3. *Access to Capital*—This involves assisting MBEs to secure the financial capital necessary to start-up, and thereafter to fuel growth and expansion of their businesses. Undercapitalization has been a major contributor to the failure of business ventures in the minority community over the years. The goal of this activity is to help minority entrepreneurs obtain the amount of financing appropriate to the scope of the proposed business, thereby helping to ensure the greatest likelihood of success for the minority venture in the marketplace.

4. *Access to Markets*—This involves assisting MBEs to identify and access opportunities for increased sales and revenue. Activities include conducting market analysis, identifying sales leads, bid preparation assistance, creating market promotions, and assisting in the development of joint ventures and strategic alliances.

Enhancing the MBDCs Through Technology

Over the last several years, MBDA has developed a variety of new technology tools designed to leverage the benefits of information technology to assist the minority business community. MBDA uses a high-speed network strategy that links all of its funded projects into a single virtual organization. The goal of MBDA is to allow all funded projects to have access to this technology through the MBDA Portal.

The technology tools that will be available to the MBDCs include but are not limited to the following:

- *Business Needs Analyzer*—a software package designed to standardize and electronically record the Client Assessment process. This tool assists MBDC counselors to interview and benchmark the status, needs and potential growth of its clients. The program is designed and maintained by MBDA and operated by the MBDC.

- *Phoenix/Opportunity*—an electronic bid-matching system that alerts participating MBEs of contract and teaming opportunities directly via e-mail. Procurement leads are transmitted to minority firms on a targeted basis according to the company's industry classification and geographic market.

- *Resource Locator*—a software application that allows MBEs to search for business resources interactively on the Internet. Resource Locator can help MBEs identify trade associations representing their industries, government licensing and permit offices, management and technical assistance providers, and a host of other resources quickly and efficiently.

- *Capital Locator*—an Internet-based tool that allows MBDC consultants to inquire about, identify and locate potential financiers nearest them. This tool shall provide basic financing criteria for each identified capital resource. The tool is designed to give users the benefit of a nationwide market for identifying financing needs and products.

- *Business and Market Planning*—a software package designed to streamline and enhance the development of business plans, marketing plans and other strategic business documents.

- *Business Analyst GIS*—a software operated at an individual computer workstation that provides strategic business data through geographic-based information system. This software will be awarded to select MBDCs, based on availability of funds and competition.

These electronic tools will help streamline the process of delivering

client assistance to minority business enterprises, free up time so that the MBDC can implement MBDA's strategic goals and generate critical outcomes as described under the heading Performance Measures.

In addition, MBDA strongly encourages the MBDC to use these electronic tools daily because of the significant value they add to the MBDC and to minority businesses. These tools are designed to reinforce the standardization of services received throughout MBDA's extended network.

Work Requirements

The work requirements specify the duties and responsibilities of each recipient operating a MBDC.

Although it is not necessary for the applicant to have an office in the geographic service area at the time of application, one must be opened and be fully operational within thirty (30) days after receipt of the award. Fully operational means that all staff are hired, all signs are up, all items of furniture and equipment (e.g., hardware, software, Internet services, phones, faxes, etc.) are in place, and the MBDC's doors have been fully opened to the public for service.

The MBDC must be accessible to disabled persons and strategically located in the geographic service area (as defined in this Notice) to ensure that it is: (1) Close to the available public and private sector resources, and (2) within a reasonable commuting distance to the minority business community.

The MBDC operator must provide services to eligible clients within its specified geographic service area. Each MBDC operator must contribute its efforts to help support MBDA's online business assistance network as established by Agency policies.

All MBDC consultants and its project director shall be required to attend a one-time five (5) day mandatory training session on "Implementing a System for High-Quality Service." This training will be held three (3) times during the first year of program operation; in the east, in the west, and in the middle of the country (exact locations and dates will be announced). The training sessions may be conducted in the second and third year of operation based on availability of funding. The costs of tuition, materials, conference facilities and amenities for the training program will be covered by MBDA. However, the MBDC shall budget lodging, food and travel expenditures for its attending staff. The program will be conducted approximately forty-five (45) days after receipt of the award. The training shall focus on: