

REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS (RFA)

Institute for Women Entrepreneur Excellence (IWEE)

Purpose:

The Institute for Black Women Entrepreneur Excellence (OIBWE2), Leading Women’s program (the “Program”) is an intensive 5-day, cohort-based program focused on bringing clarity around how entrepreneurs can collectively eliminate the barriers and challenges faced by those from disadvantaged backgrounds, especially women entrepreneurs. Each cohort focuses on women and encourages open participation to enhance awareness, productive discussions, and focused action to move the entire entrepreneurial community forward. The Program targets diverse communities within Maryland struggling to support their underrepresented entrepreneurs. Research has shown how the influence of race, social, human, environmental, and financial aspects further compounds the typical barriers women encounter. Some of the usual obstacles women business owners face are the lack of capital, gender discrimination, and access to solid networks. This Program seeks to address those specific challenges in the following ways:

- Enhance resource sharing and resources targeting women entrepreneurs,
- Raise visibility within and across the cohort on the availability of resources,
- Increase the focus of community resources to meet the needs of women business owners,
- Create a safe space for robust networking and mentoring to take place,
- Provide a grant focused on enhancing their business capabilities through the development of an action plan, and
- Increase the success of the women-owned business through the Program.

The Program is designed to create a diverse cohort of entrepreneurs who are collectively committed to this effort. It focuses on founders, co-founders, and CEOs of start-ups or ventures whose companies are at a minimum late pre-seed to growth stage pre-series A or a company with annual revenues between \$50K and \$10M. They must be willing to dedicate the required time to the Program and commit that their growth is worth the investment for longer-term personal, professional, and organizational success. They also must be committed to discussing openly their issues, challenges, and barriers.

The Program includes conversations designed to provoke discussion, thinking, and action to collectively move women entrepreneurs forward at a pace like other entrepreneurs. It focuses

on bringing to the forefront the unique challenges that women entrepreneurs face and how they may reflect the challenges faced by other entrepreneurs, especially those from underrepresented and diverse backgrounds. It provides a space where their voice, issues, goals, and success matter. The Program will help participants understand their challenge areas, pair them with a mentor or resources, and create an action plan to move them forward.

The Program's goals include (i) eliminating barriers to women entrepreneurs, (ii) boosting their businesses so their goods/services can reach a broader range of consumers, and (iii) strengthening MD's entrepreneurial ecosystem by helping women-owned businesses successfully scale their enterprises.

Eligibility:

To be eligible, an applicant must meet all the following criteria:

1. The applicant must be a founder, co-founder, or CEO of a Maryland-based company that is at a stage between pre-seed and pre-Series A or a company with annual revenues between \$50K and \$10M.
2. The applicant must be able to dedicate the time necessary for the Program 5 days, including committing to participate in all the class sessions, complete other activities, and be willing to discuss their issues, challenges, and barriers openly.
3. Upon acceptance to the Program, the applicant must be willing to pay a \$50.00 registration fee to cover a portion of the assessments taken as part of the program.
4. The applicant must be committed to long-term personal and professional growth.
5. The applicant must be able to bring unique perspectives associated with the challenges faced by female entrepreneurs.

Program Description:

The Program's mission is to build an alliance of diverse founders and CEOs to enable promising women business leaders and those from disadvantaged and diverse backgrounds to focus on unique challenges they face as they navigate Maryland's entrepreneurial innovation ecosystem and raise the economic standards for all. By 2025, we envision creating a powerful network of women entrepreneurs and other disadvantaged entrepreneurs. This network will empower future generations of entrepreneurs, including women, to achieve their professional goals, thereby strengthening Maryland's entrepreneurial ecosystem.

The Program team comprises representatives from each of Maryland’s Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and other Maryland organizations working in partnership with TEDCO. The Program is the first partnership of its kind in Maryland, focusing on bringing the best-in-class practices to fuel economic development, targeting their efforts to drive innovation and growing diversity.

The Program Director and Facilitator will be Dr. Linda Singh. Dr. Singh is the founder and Chief Executive Officer of Kaleidoscope Affect, LLC, providing leadership and management consulting and strategic advisory services for various public and private sector clients. Before that, she served as a Major General in the Maryland National Guard, dedicating more than 38 years of service.

The Program will include a variety of sessions, workshops, and topic areas, including:

- I. Introductory and Preparation Session
- II. Leadership and Communication Workshop
 - a. Exploration of Leadership
 - b. Well-spoken Entrepreneur/Executive
 - c. Trust-based Selling
 - d. Closing the Gender Confidence Gap
 - e. Unconscious Bias
 - f. Building Credibility
 - g. Power of a Team
 - h. Board and Management Effectiveness
- III. Real-World Perspectives
 - a. Doing Business with Government
 - b. Business-to-Business Engagements
 - c. Access to Capital Perspectives and Risk
 - d. Building Strategic Partnerships
 - e. State Government Day
 - f. Federal Government Day
 - g. Accelerator/Incubator Day
- IV. What’s Your End Game
 - a. Developing your Breakout Image
 - b. Personal Goals and Development
 - c. Strategic Goal Setting

d. What's Your Next?

(This outline is subject to change at the discretion of the Program Director and Facilitator.)

Sessions are designed to be thought-provoking to facilitate collaboration and group discussions. The sessions will include guest speakers, small and large group discussions, and various activities. Each session has required reading and follow-up assignments to further enhance the participant's immersion into the areas.

Program dates and times are specified on the TEDCO Women Entrepreneurs Leadership Programs page and the Institutes Program site, specified below.

Applying for the Open Institute for Black Women Entrepreneur Excellence Program:

Individuals can apply for the Program on either program page at:

<https://www.tedcomd.com/women-programs>
<https://sites.google.com/oiwee.com/iweeprogram?usp=sharing>

Information about the application components is provided below. Applications must be completed and submitted through the Institute's on-line application system to be considered.

Application deadlines are specified on the TEDCO Women Entrepreneurs Leadership Programs page and the Institutes Program site, specified above.

Application Components:

The application for the Program consists of nine (9) components:

1. General information about the applicant and the applicant's company;
2. Information verifying eligibility for the applicant and the applicant's company;
3. A series of five (5) essays assembled into one document and attached to the application;
4. A two-minute video, also attached to the application;
5. An executive bio – not to exceed 150 words;
6. A high-resolution headshot/photo;
7. Some additional company information;
8. Diversity and inclusion information; and
9. A certification statement.

The following screen shots show each section of the application.

General Information:

Section 1 of 10

Cohort Application

Form description

Email *

Valid email

This form is collecting emails. [Change settings](#)

After section 1 Continue to next section

Section 2 of 10

Applicant Background Information

Please provide your background information below.

First Name *

Short answer text

Last Name *

Short answer text

Title *

Short answer text

Section 3 of 10

Company Information ✕ ⋮

Insert full legal name. If applicant is already registered with the Maryland State Department of Assessments and Taxation (SDAT), the name inserted here should match the [SDAT registration](#). Principal Business Operations means the headquarters from which the applicant's officers direct, control, and coordinate the applicant's business activities.

Company Name *

Short answer text

Principal Business Operations Address (Line 1) *

Short answer text

City * ⋮

Short answer text

State *

Short answer text

Zip *

Short answer text

Company Website *

Short answer text

Company Overview (100 Word limit) *

Long answer text

Phone and Preferred Email

Description (optional)

Cell *



Short answer text

Preferred Email

Short answer text

Technology or Industry

Description (optional)

Please indicate your sector *

- Energy
- Healthcare
- Financial
- Industrial
- Technology
- Materials
- Utilities
- Government
- Other...

Information Verifying Eligibility:

Section 4 of 10

Eligibility Criteria ✕ ⋮

The applicant must be a female founder, co-founder, company officer or CEO whose company is at a minimum of pre-seed (\$50K minimum) to growth stage, but maximum of pre-series A.

Are you the: *

CEO/Founder

Co-Founder

Corporate Officer

Other...

Is your company: *

Pre-seed Stage

Growth Stage

Pre-series A

Other...

Essay Questions:

Applicants must answer five (5) questions in separate essays between 300 and 500 words each.

Section 5 of 10

Essay Questions



Each essay question will be used in conjunction with your bio, elevator pitch video, and application. This will allow our committee to get to know you.

Your essay is the most enjoyable part of the application process. We do not offer an initial interview as part of the evaluation process, so it is through your essays that we can hear your voice and get to know the real you. The word count for each question is 300-500 words. The selection of candidates for the cohort is extremely competitive. It is critical that you can articulate your responses in a manner that allows the committee to evaluate your entire submission.

Why do you want to participate in this program? *

Long answer text

What do you want your professional growth to be over the next five years? *

Long answer text

Can you describe your leadership style(s)? *

Long answer text

How do you view and evaluate yourself as a leader? *

Long answer text

What are the significant issues facing you and your organization? *

Long answer text

1. Why do you want to participate in the Program?
2. What do you want your professional growth to be over the next five years?
3. Can you describe your leadership style(s)?
4. How do you view and evaluate yourself as a leader?
5. What are the significant issues facing women entrepreneurs, and what actions do you recommend for addressing these issues?

The applicant's essays are the most enjoyable part of the application process for the review committee. The Program does not include an initial interview as part of the evaluation process, so through these essays, the review committee can hear the applicant's voice and get to know them better. The selection of candidates for the cohort will be extremely competitive. Applicants must articulate their responses in a manner that allows the committee to evaluate the entire submission.

Video:

Applicants are asked to make a two-minute video of their elevator pitch in which they pitch themselves as an ideal candidate for the Program. The video file must be attached to the application.

Bio:

Applicants are asked to attach a professional bio of not more than 150 words. The bio can be in Word or Adobe PDF format.

Headshot:

Applicants are asked to attach a high-resolution headshot.


Section 6 of 10

Bio and Professional Headshot




Applicants are asked to provide a professional bio and headshot (hi-resolution). Please upload word document for your bio of not more than 150 words.

Professional Bio *


 Add file

 View folder

Headshot *

 Add file

 View folder

After section 6 Continue to next section 


Section 7 of 10

Elevator Pitch



Applicants are asked to make a two-minute video of their elevator pitch in which they pitch themselves as an ideal candidate for the program. The video file must be attached to the application.

Elevator Pitch Video *

 Add file

 View folder

Additional Company Information:

Section 8 of 10

Additional Company Information



"**Employee**" means full-time or full-time equivalent W-2 reporting worker of a business. "**Founder**" means an individual who established a business by: (a) assuming a portion of the risk of the business; and (b) having the initial rights to a portion of the profits of the business.

How many founders and employees does the applicant have in total?

Short answer text

How many founders and employees does the applicant have working in Maryland? *

Short answer text

Diversity & Inclusion Information:

Section 9 of 10

Diversity & Inclusion ✕ ⋮

Description (optional)

Gender

1. Male
2. Female
3. Other
4. Prefer not to say

Race/Ethnicity

1. White
2. Black or African American
3. American Indian or Alaska Native
4. Asian
5. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

Certification Statement:

Section 10 of 10

Commitment and Confirmation ⌵ ⋮

Description (optional)

Are you willing to dedicate the required time to the program and make the commitment that your growth is worth the investment for longer-term organizational success? *

Yes

No

The undersigned hereby certifies and affirms that the statements and information set forth in the application, as supplemented by any additional materials or documents, are true, correct, and complete. The undersigned will promptly notify IWEE in writing if the undersigned acquires knowledge or information, directly or indirectly, that any of the statements, information, materials or documents are incorrect or incomplete. Material misstatements, material omissions or material misrepresentations in the application or any accompanying documents or materials will be basis for denying an application. *

Agree to above

Once complete, the application can be submitted by clicking on the 'Submit Application' button at the bottom of the form. Incomplete applications will not be considered.

Any questions regarding the application can be directed to the Program Manager using the e-mail listed below.

Review Process:

All completed applications received through the Institute's Web Portal will be reviewed by the required due date, as specified on the programs page. The review process comprises two (2) stages: Compliance Review and Final Review. Applications may be rejected at either stage of the process.

Compliance Review

All applications received by the required due date will undergo a compliance review to ensure the applicant has adhered to all the requirements of this Request for Applications. Applications not meeting these requirements, which include meeting the eligibility requirements, including all required attachments, and conforming to format requirements, will be rejected without further review.

Final Review

A review committee will evaluate applications passing the Compliance Review. The review committee will make a final decision regarding applicants. Up to a maximum of 30 participants will be selected for the Program. An invitation to participate in the Program will be sent to those selected. Program invitees will have one (1) week to reply by accepting or rejecting the invitation. Acceptance into the program will not be complete until an applicant formally accepts the invitation and pays the required \$50.00 application fee. Payment instructions will be included in the invitation. Once the cohort is fully subscribed, applicants not selected for the program will be notified.

Review Criteria:

The review committee will base its decision on the following criteria:

- a. The applicant's professional experience,
- b. The quality of the responses to the essay questions,
- c. How well the applicant can advocate for themselves in the submitted video,
- d. The unique perspectives related to the challenges faced by Black female entrepreneurs that the applicant will bring to the Program,
- e. Strength of character, motivation, and commitment to goals,
- f. Superior intellectual ability, as evidenced by their packet and essay questions and
- g. The capacity to contribute to and to benefit from the Program.

Reporting Requirements:

It is important for TEDCO and the IWEE team to evaluate the program's impact and assess its effectiveness. As a condition of acceptance into the Program, participants agree to submit an annual report for a period of five (5) years following acceptance into the Program. The reports will include information about the participant's personal growth, growth in their business, and other information deemed necessary for the longitudinal assessment of the Program.

Program Manager Information:

Inquiries regarding the IWEE Program should be directed to:

Inquires and information - info@iwee.com