

## REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS (RFA)

# Open Institute for Black Women Entrepreneur Excellence (OIBWE2)

### Purpose:

The Open Institute for Black Women Entrepreneur Excellence (OIBWE2) program (the “Program”) is a 10-month, cohort-based program focused on bringing clarity around how entrepreneurs can collectively eliminate the barriers and challenges faced by those from disadvantaged backgrounds, especially Black women entrepreneurs. Each cohort focuses on Black 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 that are struggling to support their underrepresented entrepreneurs with a keen focus on Black women. 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 Black 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 Black 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 Black 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 \$100K 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 Black women entrepreneurs forward at a pace like other entrepreneurs. It focuses on bringing to the forefront the unique challenges that Black 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 disadvantaged entrepreneurs, including Black 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 disadvantaged businesses, including Black 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 \$100K and \$10M.
2. The applicant must be able to dedicate the time necessary for the Program – 5-10 hours per month, including committing to participate in all the class sessions, to complete other activities, and to be willing to openly discuss their issues, challenges, and barriers.
3. The applicant, upon acceptance to the Program, must be willing to pay a \$250.00 registration fee to cover a portion of the assessments taken as part of the program. For applicants that successfully complete the course, \$200.00 of this fee will be returned.
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 Black, 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. The vision by 2025 is to create a network of Black women entrepreneurs and other disadvantaged entrepreneurs that enables future generations of such entrepreneurs, including women, to achieve their professional goals and to strengthen the Maryland entrepreneurial ecosystem.

The Program will consist of approximately 10 in-person meetings at the Maryland Innovation Center in Howard County – 6751 Columbia Gateway Drive, Columbia, MD 21046 – and approximately 9 virtual sessions. **Participants must commit to attending all in-person meetings.** In addition, the Program will require a substantial amount of preparation and work outside of the scheduled meetings – approximately 5 – 10 hours per month for 10 months.

The Program team is comprised of representatives from each of Maryland’s Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) 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 as well as strategic advisory services for a variety of public and private sector clients. Prior to 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, specified below.**

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

Individuals can apply for the Program on the **TEDCO Women Entrepreneurs Leadership Programs page** at:

<https://www.tedcomd.com/women-programs>

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

**Application deadlines are specified on the TEDCO Women Entrepreneurs Leadership Programs page, 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:

### General Company Details

**Primary Contact Information**

First Name \*

Last Name \*

Title \*

Phone \*

Email \*

Company Name \*

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](#)

Company Type \*  Corporation  Limited Liability Company  
 Limited Liability Partnership  Limited Partnership

Company Website   
Full URL if applicable

Information Verifying Eligibility:

**Eligibility Questions**

Are you a founder, co-founder, or CEO of a company that is at a stage between late pre-seed and growth/pre-series A or that has annual revenues between \$150,000 and \$10,000,000? \*

Yes

Are you willing to dedicate the required time to the program (5-10 hours per month) commitment that your growth is worth the investment - for longer-term organizational success? \*

Yes

Upon acceptance to the program, you agree to pay a \$250.00 registration fee to cover a portion of the assessments taken as a part of the program? \*

Yes

You agree that you will bring unique perspectives associated with the challenges faced by black, female entrepreneurs? \*

Yes

You are willing to openly discuss issues, challenges, and barriers faced by black, female entrepreneurs. \*

Yes

**Principal Business Operations**  
"Principal Business Operations" means the headquarters from which the applicant's officers direct, control, and coordinate the applicant's business activities.

Street Address \*

City \*  State

Zip Code \*  County \*

**Company Overview (100 Word limit) \***

Essay Questions:

Applicants must answer the following five (5) questions in separate essays of not more than five hundred (500) words each. The essays must be put together into a single document, e.g., a Word or PDF file, and attached to the application.

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 it is through these essays that 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. It is critical that applicants 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.

**Document Submission**

If you exceed the file size limits, your application will NOT submit and result in an error.

**Essay Questions (35 mb maximum) \***

No file chosen

**2-Minute video: elevator pitch (35 mb maximum) \***

No file chosen

**Executive Bio - 150 words max. (35 mb maximum) \***

No file chosen

**Headshot (35 mb maximum) \***

No file chosen



Additional Company Information:

**Employment Data**

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

  
  

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

  
  

**"Employee"** means a 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.

Diversity & Inclusion Information:

**Diversity & Inclusion**

**Gender:**

  
  

**Race/Ethnicity**

Certification Statement:

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 the Maryland Technology Development Corporation 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 a 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 TEDCO Web Portal by the required due date, as specified on the TEDCO Women Entrepreneurs Leadership Programs page, will be reviewed. 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 that 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

Applications passing the Compliance Review will be evaluated by a review committee consisting of members of the TEDCO staff and others from the Program team.

The review committee will make a final decision regarding applicants. Up to a maximum of 25 participants will be selected for the Program. For those selected, an invitation to participate in the Program will be sent. Program invitees will then have two (2) weeks 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 \$250.00 application fee. Payment instructions will be included in the invitation. Once the cohort is fully subscribed, applicants not selected for the program will be so 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 OIBWE2 team to be able to evaluate the impact of the Program and to 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 OIBWE2 Program should be directed to:

Program Manager  
[oibwe2@tedco.md](mailto:oibwe2@tedco.md)