

Testimony to the  
Joint Appropriation Sub-committee on General Government  
2/15/2012

Good morning. My name is Bob Upton. I have Degrees in economics and apparel design. I have been a Small business owner since 1986 and currently operate two businesses, one in Seattle, WA and one in Columbia Falls, MT. I spent two years working with the Whitefish Chamber on their economic development efforts, and for a brief period was a BEAR program volunteer.

I am here today to share with you my experiences with the IWT program. I have personally researched and used many of the economic development programs available to small businesses. I strongly believe the IWT program is the most effective economic development tool out there.

I view IWT as an inexpensive, targeted, and effective tool. As a business owner it is hard to resist when you are offered a 50% discount in the expense of improving an employee's skill set. Especially when you learn this assistance produces fast, high impact results. The training provided is specific to the critical needs of the individual business, and the resulting improvements are immediate. Corporate Image Outfitters, LLC (CIO). had three full-time employees with 300,000 in sales when I was introduced to the IWT program through BEAR. The following year sales went to 1 million, then to 1.7 million with 6 employees.

The growth of CIO can not be attributed to a unique product or service; we sell and decorated garments, and had been doing so for nearly 10 years. The growth has come from the training and participation of our staff. The employees that participated in the IWT program were, and continue to be, instrumental in the growth of the company.

CIO has used IWT funds to bring a service out-sourced from Seattle in-house, develop and improve production processes, and to train sales and administrative staff.

Much of the benefit to CIO came from the staff attending Eureka Jump Start classes. This was clearly an expense I would not have incurred without the encouragement of economic development professionals and IWT funding. The Eureka Jump Start program trained the staff to work together to make improvements, and thoroughly engaged everyone in the business.

For my employees, the IWT program has led to promotions, higher wages, greater job satisfaction, and provided skill sets they can take anywhere.

IWT has helped my clerical, Administrative Assistant become our very capable Director of Business Operations. Our embroidery tech is now the Production Manager, supervising all aspects of the garment decoration process.

The training my staff has received continues to be shared with other staff members, and is spreading into our sister company in Seattle.

IWT funding played a significant, instrumental roll in turning a struggling business into a successful and expanding enterprise. Last year we purchased a building 5 times greater than the original shop, adding a warehouse for inventory, and more space to accommodate our growing office and production needs. This year we are adding at least two new employees.

In addition to the positive impact on businesses and their employees, the IWT program is invaluable as a catalyst for small business economic development.

Small business owners like myself are often too independent to ask for help, and typically just too busy to spend time exploring the labyrinth of government agencies for assistance that may or may not be applicable to their needs.

IWT is frequently used by the BEAR Program, introducing businesses to valuable economic development services. With a real prospect of fast and effective help, IWT opens the door to many busy professionals, allowing BEAR to collect data and begin engaging businesses in growing the local economy.

I view IWT as a gateway to economic development. The program has had a real and positive impact on Corporate Image Outfitters, LLC. and it's employees.

Please fund the IWT to the best of your abilities.

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