

Impact100 Metro Denver 2022 Grantee

Mi Casa Resource Center (MCRC)

Project: Transition to Hybrid Learning

Impact100 2022 Grant Priority Area: Economic Opportunity

Organization information: Mi Casa Resource Center (MCRC) identifies and responds to the needs of low-income individuals and families to create pathways to opportunity. Since 1976, our comprehensive and community-focused programming has helped our participants achieve educational and economic success. As Denver's largest and longest-standing Latinx-led and serving organization, we have earned community trust by providing culturally competent services grounded in community need. MCRC is Colorado's only Women's Business Center under the Small Business Administration and one of only a few Colorado organizations that offer full-scale supports in English and Spanish. In 2017, we were named the National Women's Business Center. In 2020, we were named the UnidosUS Far West Affiliate of the Year. Our expertise in career and business development uniquely positions MCRC as a leader in addressing equity gaps in economic mobility.

Need for Project: Data shows that the COVID-19 crisis has had devastating impact on low-income communities of color. This comes in addition to the already numerous barriers minority populations face to economic mobility, including lower incomes, higher poverty rates, higher unemployment rates, lower educational levels, lower homeownership, and poorer health outcomes. Small businesses owned by minority entrepreneurs face similar systemic challenges: they are less likely to be approved for financing and frequently receive smaller loan amounts, higher interest rates, and shorter pay-back durations. And while the Denver Metro area showed strong pre-pandemic economic growth overall, low-income small business owners and workers struggle to stay afloat because their income and success has not kept pace with Denver's rising housing costs. Our Business and Career Pathways programs pair skills education with basic needs navigation, financial coaching, and access to capital. Career Pathways trains, supports, and connects low-income students and jobseekers to high-demand careers that meet their personal and professional needs. Business Pathways combines trainings, consulting, and wraparound services for underserved business owners and entrepreneurs at every stage. With MCRC, participants gain the expertise needed to generate income, move up career ladders, and build wealth through business ownership.

MCRC serves low-income residents across the Denver Metro area and beyond. Our office is located in the Westwood neighborhood of Southwest Denver. This neighborhood is designated a "vulnerable area" by the Office of Economic Development due to its lower-than-average median household income, high percentage of rented homes, and low education levels. According to the 2019 American Community Survey, nearly 75% of the population in the immediate area is Latinx. The average income in 2016 was \$47,751, more than \$30,000 less than the average income of residents across the Denver Metro area. Altogether in 2020, 91% of participants served were in the Denver Metro area, and 89% were low-income.

With the onset of COVID-19, MCRC transitioned all services to a virtual delivery model. For the last 18 months, we have offered all long-term trainings, workshops, and webinars across Career and Business Pathways via Zoom, Google Classroom, and TalentLMS (a nationally recognized Learning Management System). This has had significant impact on both MCRC and the participants we serve. The transition has required significant investment to both train staff and transfer all materials and content to a virtual setting to ensure we continued providing strong, consistent services throughout program delivery. It also required investment, both in time and dollars, in digital training for our participants, as many who lacked access and technological literacy were locked out from the outside world when the economy shut down. However, there have also been significant benefits to the online service delivery. Online training has allowed MCRC to reach beyond our core geography of the Denver Metro area and support participants across the state. It has also offered significant flexibility to all participants, as online learning eliminates barriers like childcare and transportation and allows participants to join classes that would otherwise be difficult to fit into their schedules.

Grant Request: MCRC respectfully requests \$100,000 from Impact100 Metro Denver to support our Transition to Hybrid Learning project, which will support MCRC in delivering essential career and business technical skills, and support services to participants in the Denver Metro area and beyond. This proposal supports the Economic Opportunity focus area to advance economic independence, housing security, training, education, and/or life skills for Colorado communities in need.

The proposed project will transform MCRC's ability to deliver career and small business development assistance to our community while remaining flexible and adaptable to their needs. Currently, we only have capacity to serve participants either in person or virtually. This means we must duplicate the number of trainings to offer both options, resulting in an increase of staff time and much smaller class size. This decreases the availability for peer-to-peer learning and community building within the cohorts and limits flexibility for participants. MCRC's proposed project will build technological capabilities within our building and provide necessary training and development for staff to deliver hybrid program services for years to come. We will install additional screens, cameras, and software to support high-quality training delivery for off-site participants. We will build foundational and ongoing professional development trainings for staff on technology use as well as best practices for supporting a hybrid classroom. Support from Impact100 Metro Denver will allow MCRC to blend the benefits of online learning with the relationship-building and personal connection of in-person support.

With an investment of \$100,000 from Impact100, MCRC can purchase and set up the technology and professional training required for hybrid learning within one year. As we continue to train staff on technology use and best practices for teaching, we will document all learnings to ensure sustainability for years to come as MCRC expands. The total projected expenses for this project are \$110,500. Major budget components include the purchase and installation of key technology, support for staff training on new technology components, and support to train staff on best practices for hybrid content delivery. MCRC will leverage existing

funding relationships and general operating support to source the additional \$10,500 in required funding.

Project Impact Evaluation: MCRC will measure impact for this project through outcomes delivered in Career and Business Pathways programming. In Career Pathways, MCRC measures impact through training enrollment and completion, employment placement and retention, educational attainment, and wage growth. For enrollment and completion rates, MCRC collects intake documentation with demographic information, employment status, attendance records, and copies of program graduation certificates. For employment placement and retention, we collect self-attestations for participants to provide initial hire date and bi-annual updated job status. To stay connected with program alumni and continue collecting employment verification data, MCRC is refining processes for follow-up with alumni and testing collaboration with third-party providers. For educational attainment, MCRC measures credit earned through passing Prior Learning Assessments. For Business Pathways, we measure impact through businesses started, jobs created, and revenue generated. For new businesses, MCRC collects information on required registrations through the Secretary of State's Office. For jobs created, participants provide ongoing and updated information during business consulting appointments. Revenue generated is measured through the Small Business Administration's 641 form.

In 2021, MCRC will serve 1,556 unduplicated individuals across all programming. Career Pathways will serve 356 participants (96 in training, 200 in coaching, and 110 in workshops/webinars). 70% of participants will complete training, and 70% of completers will attain employment in a relevant industry. 50% of training completers will take at least one Prior Learning Assessment to earn college credit for training completion. Business Pathways will serve 1,200 participants (660 in long-term trainings). We will hold 1,000 consultation sessions, serve 120 individuals through business legal nights, and serve 180 in workshops/webinars. As a result of MCRC's support, 240 businesses will be launched and 240 jobs created. Businesses served will generate \$11,025,000 in revenue and access \$34,500,000 in capital.

MCRC anticipates the Hybrid Learning Project will enable it to increase the number of program participants by 25% and significantly expand the geographic area it serves within the first year of implementation.

A core element of MCRC's service delivery is to always offer participant voice, choice, and advocacy. Participant need and cultural competency is a MCRC requirement when implementing new and existing work and remains at the center of all conversations on inclusivity and equity. As a primarily Latinx-serving organization, we offer all core services in both English and Spanish to ensure accessibility to our most vulnerable community members. The majority of staff has lived experience that matches that of our participant community, and we train all staff on best practices for supporting diverse populations. Offering a hybrid learning environment is a crucial next step for MCRC to continuing offering choice in program services for both local and statewide Colorado jobseekers and small business owners.