

Following are quotes from individuals who have worked with Cornerstone Alliance Small Business Services.

Enterar Magazine



"We are professional at what we do, but we have no idea how to start a business."
-Pedro Ledesma, Enterar Magazine

This introduction produced a successful relationship between the WBC and Enterar Magazine. Enterar is a bicultural/bilingual (English/Spanish) consumer publication designed to provide information, success stories, and access to the Latino market.

Cornerstone Alliance Small Business Services provided technical assistance in completing the business plan as well as providing marketing suggestions.

Express Personnel

"If not for Cornerstone Alliance Small Business Services, we would not be where we are today. There were too many options, and I was only certain that I did not want to do food."

-Steve Murray, Express Personnel



Steve decided that Express Personnel Services was the right franchise since it was a full service human resources provider, not just a temporary staffing service and the established systems helped reduce much of the risk inherent in starting a business. His goal is "to provide good people to good companies."

Here to help get you started

building your business

Want to start a small business or need funding for your small business?

Cornerstone Alliance Small Business Services (SBS) helps entrepreneurs to move from start-up to established and expanding businesses by providing long-term business guidance, technical, and financial assistance. Small Business Services assembles every possible resource- from local business professionals, to area colleges, to professional and technical consultants - into one strong support system dedicated to small business owners and entrepreneurs. Special emphasis is placed on assisting income disadvantaged, women, and minority owned businesses. By addressing the specific needs of the entrepreneur Small Business Services helps to insure the success of the business owners and strengthens their ability to grow and succeed.

A Place to Serve Your Needs

The Business Resource Center (BRC) provides clients with counselors, business reference material, computers, and computer software to help with starting or expanding a business. Computer workstations with Internet connections are available for client use. The BRC also offers a reference library addressing a wide array of business issues. The BRC is located on the 1st floor of Cornerstone Alliance offices at 38 W. Wall Street in downtown Benton Harbor. Initially the station is open 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. Call 925-6100, for an appointment to visit the library or use the center's computers.

Small Business Services

contact information



Staff can be reached at
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Se Habla Español

Cornerstone Alliance

Small Business Services

Assistance for Entrepreneurs



Visionary Assistance to the entrepreneurs of Michigan's Great Southwest.

Cornerstone Alliance Small Business Services (CASBS) provides business counseling, training, technical, and financial resource assistance to small businesses and entrepreneurs, with an emphasis on low-income, women, and minority entrepreneurs.



The Microloan Program and Women's Business Center are funded in part through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Small Business Administration. All SBA programs are extended to the public on a non-discriminatory basis. Cornerstone Alliance is an equal opportunity employer and provider.

Technical Assistance

If you fail to plan you're planning to fail.

50% of all new businesses fail in their first year for lack of planning. Cornerstone Alliance Small Business Services offers programs that provide free counseling assistance for both start-ups and existing small businesses. Services include assistance on business plan development, loan resource identification, accounting, financial planning, and marketing as well as targeted business training programs.

Women's Business Center

Cornerstone Alliance is the home of a Women's Business Center (WBC). The WBC provides assistance and/or training in finance, management, marketing, procurement, and the Internet, as well as addressing specialized topics such as home-based businesses, corporate executive downsizing and welfare-to-work. WBC's provide individual business counseling and access to SBA programs and services. The WBC's mission is to provide women & others from diverse backgrounds, many of who are facing social or economic barriers, with opportunities to develop the skills and acquire the knowledge needed to achieve financial independence. Program offerings include: **WBC Orientation; Free one-one-one business counseling; Business Development Courses; CORE FOUR Business Planning Course; Internet Training; WBC Roundtable; Quickbooks; Seminars; Certification Institutes; Workshops; and Networking.**

CORE FOUR Business Planning Course

In 6 weeks, learn how to figure it out: how to plan a successful, market-driven, cash-healthy, well-managed business. Test your business concept. Increase your marketing, operations, and cash-flow management knowledge. Plan your business to be a success for you! Entrepreneurs will be presented with information on how to plan a business, and will cover marketing, cash flow, and operations planning. The course will also present "Success Planning," which focuses on the personal goals of the business owner, business ethics, and other personal development topics.

SCORE of Michigan's Great Southwest

SCORE of Michigan's Great Southwest is a resource partner with the Cornerstone Alliance Small Business Services. The program consists of retired business executives who volunteer their services to small businesses. SCORE is dedicated to aiding in the formation, growth and success of small businesses.

Credit and Access to Credit

Renaissance Development Fund

The Renaissance Development Fund (Ren Fund) is the financing affiliate of Cornerstone Alliance that promotes business development, employment, and housing opportunities by providing business and housing development funds through loans and other means. The five C's of credit (**Character, Capacity to repay, Credit worthiness, Capital, and Collateral**) are considered in review of each loan application.

Microloan Program

The **Microloan Program** provides small loans to start-up, newly established, or growing small businesses. If your business is in Berrien, Cass or Van Buren County you are eligible to apply for a Renaissance Development Fund Microloan.

What must I do to apply for a Microloan?

- ◆ Operate a business in Berrien, Cass or Van Buren County
- ◆ Have a business or want to start one
- ◆ Meet with a Ren Fund loan representative and complete a Microloan application

How much is available?

- ◆ Typical loans are between \$500 and \$10,000
- ◆ Amounts up to \$35,000 will be considered

What can you buy with the loan?

- ◆ Equipment - machinery, fixtures, furniture, etc.
- ◆ Supplies and materials
- ◆ Inventory - parts to assemble or for resale
- ◆ Working capital

Commercial & Industrial Loan Program

The **Commercial and Industrial Loan Program** provides loans to established businesses possessing a substantial employee base or new businesses making significant investments in facilities, equipment, and personnel. If your business is in the communities of Benton Harbor or St. Joseph, the townships of Benton, St. Joseph, Lincoln, Royalton, or the village of Stevensville, you are eligible to apply for a Renaissance Development Fund Commercial and Industrial Loan. Most loans are done in partnership with a Cornerstone Alliance partner bank. **Commercial and Industrial Loan Program provides:**

- ◆ Flexible down payment and repayment terms.
- ◆ Competitive interest rate
- ◆ Fixed-rate financing
- ◆ Loan amounts from \$35,000 to \$250,000.
- ◆ Loan decisions are made by a local loan committee at Cornerstone Alliance.
- ◆ Ren Fund processes, closes and services all loans.

Credit and Access to Credit

SBA 504 Loan Program

The SBA 504 loan program, administered by Lakeshore 504 - a Cornerstone Alliance Small Business Services partner agency, provides healthy small and medium-size businesses with long-term fixed-rate financing for the acquisition or construction of fixed assets. The purpose of the Lakeshore 504 loan program is to enable small businesses to finance up to 90% of fixed assets at or below market interest rates. Advantages of the SBA 504 Loan Program:

- ◆ Easy to use.
- ◆ Low down payment.
- ◆ Below market rate.
- ◆ Long-term fixed-rate financing. 504 Loan portion from \$50,000 to \$1,300,000.
- ◆ Loan applications are reviewed by a local loan committee at Cornerstone Alliance.
- ◆ Lakeshore 504 processes, closes and services the 504 loans.

Façade Improvement Grant Program

The appearance of buildings plays a major role in the growth of a community. Improving the physical appearance of buildings promotes the attraction and retention of businesses and can halt property value deterioration, promote economic growth, and preserve historic resources.

The **Façade Improvement Grant Program**, Cornerstone Alliance's only grant program, is designed to encourage improvements, particularly historically minded improvements, in downtown Benton Harbor and in targeted neighborhoods. Façade Improvement Grant Program utilizes Cornerstone Alliance revenues to enhance the commercial building facades that are readily visible to the public. This is a rebate program under which owners will be reimbursed \$.50 for each \$1.00 spent up to a maximum grant amount of \$10,000.

Grants are available for the exterior repair, maintenance or rehabilitation of the facades of existing commercial buildings. Facades included are the front, rear or side of a building if the front, rear or side is readily visible from a public street or municipal parking lot.

Community Loan Funds

Loan funds targeted to specific communities are administered by Cornerstone Alliance Small Business Services. Funds and their uses are as follows:

- ◆ **Benton Harbor 108 Fund**- Commercial and industrial projects in city of Benton Harbor
- ◆ **Coloma Development Fund**-Façade improvement projects in city of Coloma
- ◆ **Stevensville Development Fund**-Building improvement projects in downtown Stevensville
- ◆ **Watervliet Development Fund**-Facade improvement projects in downtown Watervliet