

***PDP's 'Micro' Help is Well Worth Supporting***  
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Of the city's businesses, so-called micro-entrepreneurs often don't rate much notice. Their companies aren't publicly traded and they don't rank on area lists of largest businesses.

Many, in fact, may never grow to be more than a corner store. Some will never get larger than the basement office.

But for the Philadelphia Development Partnership, that's enough. PDP targets micro-entrepreneurs in low-and moderate-income neighborhoods – companies well below the radar of most banks and economic development agencies.

"Most of our micro-entrepreneurs are part time and have another job. "They're mainly home-based," said PDP's executive director Leslie H. Benoliel. For example, PDP made recent seed grants to a caterer, a maker of baby clothes and linens, and an interior decorator.

PDP dispenses cash and wisdom, not necessarily in that order, offering: loans of \$500 to \$5,000; an intensive class teaching the basics of cash flow, accounting and marketing; leadership training; and networking opportunities.

The latest round of grants was made possible with a \$50,000 grant from the Philadelphia Department of Commerce.

But PDP also gets help from organizations as diverse as the Pew Charitable Trust, HUD, the state Department of Community and Economic Development, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Commerce Bank, the William Penn Foundation, Mellon, PNC, Roxborough-Manayunk Bank and the First Union Regional Foundation.

Right now, the organization gets 40 percent of its funding from government sources at federal, state and local levels and 40 percent comes from foundations. The largest grants come from the William Penn Foundation, the First Union Regional Foundation and the state Department of Community and Economic Development.

A surprisingly modest 20 percent comes from corporations and individuals -- especially since banks can count the money donated toward their Community Reinvestment Act requirement.

Benoliel, who took over as executive director a month ago, says she spends about a third of her time raising money – more specifically, convincing existing contributors to extend their grants.

“The PDP’s annual operating budget has fluctuated between \$800,000 and \$900,00 in recent years,” Benoliel said.

If the organization had more money in its coffers, it could offer additional workshops, teaching micro-entrepreneurs about marketing, pricing, planning, sales strategies – in short, getting off the ground.

Many of these micro-entrepreneurs lack access to capital. They have poor credit or lack credit. They don’t have a network of potential clients and vendors, so PDP offers one.

PDP would like to provide more one-on-one counseling. And, of course, it would like more money for its loan fund. To do that, it will need another \$100,000 to \$250,000 a year, Benoliel said.

To state the obvious, an investment in the PDP may not provide the best tangible return but it is certain to deliver on that ever-scarce intangible: a sense of contributing to an effort that can make a difference in people’s lives.