

Proposal for Funding the National Institute for Civic Enterprise Project



Submitted by
Homes That Change Lives/Circle of Nations, Inc.

www.homesthatchangelives.org

The National Institute for Civic Enterprise



A national network of innovators solving America's social challenges.

www.NICENetwork.org

PROPOSAL NARRATIVE OUTLINE

Organization Name: Circle of Nations Inc. dba Homes That Change Lives

Project Name: National Institute for Civic Enterprise (NICE Network)

Introduction

Meet Leanne McGrath. Leanne was a housewife in a middle class Chicago suburb when, after a personal crisis, her comfortable “suburban view” of the world changed. She started tearing up when she would watch stories on the news about poor children in Chicago. Initially she thought she had a psychological problem, but came to learn that she had a calling – to help children. She used her passion for helping poor children, families in transition, and her networking skills to invent a home furnishings supply chain that connects businesses with social service agencies throughout the Chicago area.

Fran Heitzman was a part-time custodian at a church in Minnesota when a woman dropped by to donate a baby crib. Unsure with what to do with it, he contacted a local social service agency. He was surprised to find that they were ecstatic to receive it. This seemingly random event eventually led Fran to create Bridging, Inc., one of the largest home furnishing-donation programs in America.

Enter Debra Berg, an author who was writing a book documenting the stories of everyday people doing amazing things in their local communities. Debra was compelled to write this book in response to a 1995 Harvard study that touted evidence of a major decline in America’s civic health, painting a bleak picture of Americans evolving into a self-absorbed group with waning interest in their communities. Debra was plagued by the idea that Americans didn’t care about their communities and began her own probing. As Debra began interviewing “civic entrepreneurs” she was amazed by the solutions everyday citizens like Leanne and Fran were designing, with the support of a family, friends, and local businesses, to help their communities. This journey resulted in Debra’s publishing of ***The Power of One: The Unsung Heroes Rescuing America’s Cities***, a book praised by foundation and nonprofit leaders, compiling in-depth interviews illustrating the work of some of America’s most successful civic entrepreneurs.

As Debra interviewed these amazing everyday citizens, she imagined how help to the needy could be provided more rapidly and more efficiently if there was a place for civic entrepreneurs to collaborate. Debra began connecting some of the heroes of her book, including Leanne and Fran, who began sharing board members to grow their visions and missions. As a result, both have since expanded and replicated their initiatives.

Debra’s work struck a chord, spurring the creation of a platform that is sorely needed in the United States today. The civic entrepreneurs Debra documented are generally so busy with their community work that they don’t have time to research other efforts that could complement and enhance their effectiveness. Most of these initiatives, that are truly grassroots, are highly successful, but below the radar of potential donors and supporters. Convinced that initiatives like these, which place 85% of the previously homeless in good jobs within nine months or achieve an unprecedented 89% adoption rate of special needs foster children, merited broader exposure, Debra became committed to spreading the

word and connecting more civic entrepreneurs. Thus, the National Institute for Civic Enterprise (NICE Network) was born.

The vision of the NICE Network is to develop an online knowledge base chronicling these ideas and a mentoring/collaboration networking opportunity (online and offline) for civic entrepreneurs, donors, business leaders, and volunteers. If these priceless civic enterprise experiences are lost, future nonprofit founders will have to “reinvent the wheel” and lose valuable time with which to help the disadvantaged achieve self-reliance. We are seeking your support to help make this vision a reality.

Organization Background

1. Organization’s History

The NICE Network is sponsored by the Circle of Nations Inc. d/b/a Homes That Change Lives, a national nonprofit organization that was originally established in 1996 to serve as a community development network to promote self-sufficiency and entrepreneurship among Native Americans and promote the rich legacy of Native American culture. Between 1996 and 2007, Circle of Nations participated in several programs including:

- The TRIBE Project (Technology Resources to Improve Basic Education), which was designed to serve as a conduit to transfer donated computer hardware and software to educational institutions on reservations;
- A partnership with Today’s Native American Television Program to broadcast programs that showcased exemplary Native American leaders and artists and increased awareness of Native American culture in the general public, and;
- A partnership with Moccasin Path Productions to produce an award-winning documentary film series called “My Ancestor’s Voice”, which preserves the traditions of Native American culture by documenting elders on film.

As the founders of *Circle of Nations* participated in these projects, they became acutely aware that, while these innovative projects were helping members of the Native American community to improve their lives in specific areas, there was also a need to help other community groups, including start-up nonprofits that were addressing community needs, and a particular need to address housing for special needs and other disadvantaged populations as a first step toward self-sufficiency.

To the *Circle of Nations* founders, this discovery became a call to action based on the core values outlined in The Native American Commandments:

Show great respect for your fellow beings
Work together for the benefit of all mankind!
Give assistance and kindness wherever needed
Do what you know to be right

**Look after the well-being of mind and body
Dedicate a share of your efforts to the greater good..¹**

Thus, in 2007, it was a natural progression to expand the organizational vision to include additional populations and community groups with a special focus on housing as the first step toward creating a life of self-sufficiency and paying it forward to help others. The Board decided to adopt the d/b/a name of *Homes That Change Lives™ (HCL)* in line with its new and expanded vision.

Since that time, *HCL* has adopted several nonprofit community benefit projects as a fiscal sponsor. All of these projects are engaging in life-changing community work, and *HCL* was thrilled to provide the administrative umbrella to support their efforts. Since 2008, *HCL* has fiscally sponsored nine projects, addressing a wide range of community needs such as housing, community development, sustainable development, youth development, job creation, health, and cultural preservation.

The National Institute for Civic Enterprise (NICENetwork), the project for which we are seeking funding, was established in 2007 as a result of Debra Berg's aforementioned eight-year, self-funded trek to interview 100 "civic entrepreneurs" in over thirty cities – everyday people doing amazing things in their local communities.

Debra's trek forged dozens of lasting relationships. Since then, she's had multiple opportunities to share their innovative solutions and inspiring successes with live audiences, the *Chicago Sun Times*, eighty radio and TV stations across the nation, as well as through social media. Debra first reached the internet audience by hosting an interview talk show, "The Power of One: What's Your Mission?" on *VoiceAmerica.com* in 2006 which drew thousands of listeners.

Out of much activity, Debra's efforts serendipitously inspired new connections and joint-efforts between civic entrepreneurs. Simply as a result of being juxtaposed in the same book and featured together on her radio show, they witnessed each other's challenges, successes, and visions for the first time. After dedicating more than a decade of her life to this quest, Debra is now committed to creating an infrastructure to foster replication of successful civic entrepreneurial ventures around the United States and internationally.

2. Organizational Goals and Objectives

The overriding goal of *Homes That Change Lives™ (HCL)* is to serve as a community development network that empowers economically disadvantaged and special needs individuals and families, nonprofit organizations and small businesses in areas of housing, business development/entrepreneurship, career development and education by developing and supporting a wide variety of projects and innovative partnerships, providing access to a wide range of information, educational materials, business opportunities, and related services.

¹ Excerpt from "Native American Commandments" <http://www.indigenouspeople.net/tencomm.htm>

HCL continually develops programs and services that promote self-sufficiency and giving back to the community based on the following core objectives:

1. Conduct research to identify and assess the needs of target constituents in the areas of housing, business development/entrepreneurship, career development, and education.
2. Develop and support projects that are identified as result of this research.
3. Increase access to high quality educational materials, opportunities and services that promote affordable housing, small business and nonprofit organizational development, personal development and entrepreneurship.
4. Offer programs and materials that inspire constituents to feel empowered to apply what they have learned and to *pay it forward*.
5. Stay connected to its Native American roots by preserving and promoting the positive aspects, values and rich legacy of Native American culture.

3. Programs and Services

Nonprofit and Special Project Incubation: One of the most effective ways to promote community solutions across the country is to support the growth of community-based start-up nonprofit organizations. Toward this end, *HCL* serves as a nonprofit incubator, providing creative partnership and project development, fiscal sponsorship and other support services for small start-ups focused on disadvantaged populations and their various needs. Current *HCL* fiscal sponsorship projects include:

- National Institute for Civic Enterprise (NICE Network) – Eustis, FL: To promote a network of innovative human service nonprofit leaders / civic entrepreneurs, donors, and volunteers for the purpose of speeding up assistance to America’s needy.
- Green Beginnings Institute – Boston, MA: To support green construction job training for youth, veterans and small businesses in inner-city Boston neighborhoods.
- Ezra Community Development – Mattapan, MA: A community development network that is providing housing counseling and loan modification to homeowners at risk of foreclosure in Boston.
- YouthBuild, Lynn – Lynn, MA: A local chapter of a national youth development program that trains young people in building trades and provides them with projects to develop skills and help the community.
- Source Newport – Newport, RI: Focused on the future of historic cities and the processes that are stimulating business, greater energy efficiency, and stronger communities - sustainably.
- International Medical Interpreters Association (IMIA) – Boston, MA: To promote and increase quality health care by improving language communication.

- Green Karma – Allen, TX: To promote affordable housing and elderly housing programs with a focus on green housing.
- Threshold of Life Collaborative – Atlanta, GA: To sponsor sustainable housing and financial literacy programs in disadvantaged Atlanta neighborhoods.
- “The Lost Tribe” Documentary Film Project: Project to document and preserve the culture of the Tomaraho Indians of Paraguay, an indigenous tribe that suffered near extinction in the 1950s.

HCL also outreaches to real estate investors and other high net worth individuals who are interested in setting up projects that support the community, but may not have the expertise or the desire to access the necessary public funding and partnerships, or to develop a non-profit arm. *HCL* will sponsor a wide range of creative and worthy community benefit projects that these individuals are interested in developing and implementing.

Matt’s Place: Founded in 2006, *Matt’s Place* works to improve the lives of people with disabilities by building accessible housing, broadening community awareness and education, and providing personal care staff assistance and help with the transition from health-care facility to home. The inspirational 27-year old young Matt, although wheelchair bound and ventilator dependent due to muscular dystrophy, cofounded this organization saying that “self sufficiency has been the key” to his “health and happiness”. To prove his point, in 2008 Matt, with Respiratory Therapist Ron Steenbruggen at his side, rode his wheelchair 3335 miles from Boston to Long Beach, California promoting the power of quality housing and independence to literally transform the quality of life of individuals with special needs.

HCL paved the foundation, brokered the partnership with the Lynn Housing Authority and identified funding to ensure that Matt could maintain his retrofitted home – a home that changed his life. *HCL* is honored to continue its work with *Matt’s Place* to create a community housing project that will provide accessible apartments for other technology dependent individuals like Matt.

Promoting Individual and Community Transformation Through Partnerships: A particular strength of *HCL* is its ability to research, conceptualize and develop a range of mutually beneficial partnerships with individuals and businesses to create solutions, resources, knowledge and skill bases to develop and provide housing for special needs populations, and offering access to programs and services that help them adopt a mindset of abundance. In this program, *HCL* seeks to partner with:

National Real Estate and Personal Growth Speakers and Trainers: Real estate speakers and trainers bring a plethora of specialized knowledge and experience in various niches within the personal development and real estate industries. Many successful speakers and trainers are interested in supporting and “giving back” to the community, and special needs housing is a logical choice for their philanthropic activities. *HCL* will also work with speakers and trainers to offer some of their personal growth and development products and services to our constituents in the form of educational seminars, home-based business opportunities, and real estate products that they would be willing to donate as housing for those with special needs. In 2008 and 2009, more than \$60,000 worth of training was provided to 12 individuals through these efforts.

Banks: The current foreclosure crisis bombarding our country has left many banks holding large numbers of real-estate owned (REO) properties. Bank owned properties will often sit for months, sometimes years, vacant and deteriorating, negatively impacting the community and draining bank resources, while families in need of homes remain unaware of how to access them. *HCL* will work with bank REO gifting programs to explore strategies for transforming these currently underperforming assets into valuable community assets that benefit special needs populations, which, in turn, provides overall help to the community at large.

High-Net Worth Individuals and Corporate Philanthropists: High-impact philanthropy is an emerging trend in which individuals, giving circles and corporations that have generated significant wealth during the past few decades are seeking to support innovative, strategically-focused, and well-managed nonprofit organizations that address compelling community needs. *HCL* will explore strategies to partner with high-impact philanthropists to identify compelling special needs housing projects to support.

4. Organizational Structure

HCL is incorporated as a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization. Our organizational structure includes a seven-member volunteer Board of Directors and a volunteer staff of one. This multi-disciplinary team provides *HCL* with extensive, relevant experience in real estate and institutional development, outreach, program and partnership development, public funding research and access, and professional management. *HCL* is led by Dawn Duncan, President, Founder and Executive Director. Dawn oversees the overall management and strategic direction of *HCL*. Dawn holds a Master's Degree from Harvard University in Public Health; a Master's Degree in Social Work from Boston University; and has served as a board member of numerous Boston area nonprofits, and continues to serve on the Board of Directors of the Massachusetts Center for Native American Awareness. As owner of Dawn Duncan Consulting, past President of Pioneer Fundraising Resources, and President of the Grant Connection, consulting firms specializing in providing grant-writing services to nonprofit organizations, Dawn has raised over \$27 million dollars for a variety of causes.

HCL fiscally sponsors several community-based projects, including the NICE Network. In this role, *HCL* is responsible for financial management of funds raised by NICE Network as well as providing technical assistance and support around administrative duties related to fundraising, public relations and other tasks.

5. Population Served By the Organization

HCL serves individuals with special needs as well as nonprofit organizations that can benefit from fiscal sponsorship of their projects. The NICE Network is one such project that is supported by *HCL*. NICE Network, in turn, is designed to serve the target population of civic entrepreneurs. Civic entrepreneurs are everyday individuals representing all age groups, backgrounds, political persuasions, and motivations who have sacrificed personal lives, personal income, and wealth to invent a solution to a service deficiency in their community. Typically, their solution acquires a 501c3 nonprofit status. The book, *The Power of One*, documents forty individuals whose missions have solved everything from cybercrime to graffiti and poverty to school violence. Many solutions have become successful to the

point that they have replicated, or “civic franchised” into multiple cities, with a significant number having replicated to other parts of the world.

Following are the types of human service social challenges civic entrepreneurs are addressing in cities across America.

Civic Entrepreneur Identified Solution Categories		
Poverty	Housing shortages	Crime
Neighborhood decay	Domestic violence and abuse	School shooting violence
Drug abuse prevention	Elderly issues	Physically challenged
Cybercrime	Bullying	Child abduction
Jobs programs	At-risk youth	Gangs
Graffiti	Education	Homelessness
Disaster relief	Hunger	Racial discrimination
Families in transition	Disabilities	Individuals in transition

Civic entrepreneurs have generated thousands of cost-effective human service social solutions in cities throughout the United States over the past three decades. This trend is a purely spontaneous, non-political, and un-orchestrated one. It has scarcely been studied by the academic community. However, what we do know is that many of these initiatives have succeeded at filling in gaps not met by local, state, or even the federal government. Several have also replicated, sometimes as many as 300 times, throughout the U.S. Based on independent research conducted from 1994-2004 (with results reported in *The Power of One: The Unsung Everyday Heroes Rescuing America’s Cities*) and in interviews with nonprofit founders during “The Power of One: What’s Your Mission?” radio show (*VoiceAmerica.com*, Jan. – May 2007), Debra Berg, the author and host, learned that interest in these solutions by the public, business, and even the government sector is growing because of their effectiveness in communities across the country.

Characteristically, these innovative grassroots initiatives were found to be:

- Entrepreneurial in their methodology
- Launched by one person or a small group of individuals
- Supported and funded heavily by local businesses and citizens
- Fostering citizen participation and volunteerism
- Highly cost-effective, operating with an average 10% overhead
- Responsive to local needs
- Servicing clients from diverse population groups
- Inclusive in their volunteer recruitment
- People-focused and compassionate

- Focused on building self-reliance in clients
- Involving the faith community's resources, in some way, in more than half of those surveyed.

The practical knowledge that civic entrepreneurs have accumulated over the past thirty years is of considerable value since the proof exists that it can be replicated to other locations. Street knowledge shouldn't be dismissed as non-academic or unworthy of documentation simply because it is acquired experientially. Valuable lessons for how to build sustainability and grow an initiative to scale can be readily transferred via mentoring, training, and resources, both online and offline. This valuable base of knowledge can even be considered the new civic template for addressing communities' social crises, as they occur, across the nation.

While the most direct population served by the NICE Network is the civic entrepreneurs solving problems in their communities, the Network is ultimately designed to benefit multiple audiences, including:

1. Civic/social entrepreneurs/founders at all stages of mission development
2. Nonprofit staff
3. Potential donors, philanthropists, and foundations
4. Grants personnel
5. Nonprofit volunteers
6. Nonprofit leaders
7. Foundation leaders
8. Nonprofit service providers
9. Human service leaders
10. College-age students interested in nonprofit administration and social causes
11. The academic community/teachers
12. Those interested in social policy

Building a knowledge base is only important if it provides accurate information and provides a valuable service. NICE believes there is valuable information to be gleaned from seasoned civic entrepreneurs across America. The goal is to make that information accessible, online and offline, to offer a place for interaction with other civic entrepreneurs who address a wide range of social challenges.

Grant Request

1. Project Summary

HCL is seeking a grant to support start-up costs to establish the National Institute for Civic Enterprise (NICENetwork) and build Phase I of the project. The mission of the NICENetwork is to engage and network creative civic and social entrepreneurs across the nation for the purpose of sharing and replicating successful innovations into more communities, which accelerate help to the disadvantaged. We accomplish this through a state-of-the-art web-based platform that provides an emergent knowledge base, forums, nonprofit visibility, online training, and leadership mentoring. NICE also hosts

Central Florida and national leadership training events to “cross-pollinate” civic entrepreneur innovations. And it spotlights the annual “NICE Civic Entrepreneur Awards” in the media to engage businesses, donor, and volunteer support of these outstanding initiatives.

The NICENetwork is a scalable model project based on empirical research illustrating that motivated citizens can bring self-reliance to hundreds of thousands of the disadvantaged through entrepreneurial-style innovations. The main focus of Phase I is to create a unique online knowledge base (NICENetwork.org) of innovative grassroots human service nonprofits and foster replication of their effective solutions that address human need and suffering in America. There has never been a more critical time for America's communities to locate the best answers to address the needs of the disadvantaged and hurting. Our project will identify, spotlight, and help replicate the best, most cost-efficient human service causes into more communities across America.

In total, we are seeking to raise \$250,000 to cover first year start-up expenses, including staffing, administrative costs, website development and hosting, social media development, marketing/advertising, small grants, events and a fund to support selected nonprofits interested in participating in the NICE Network.

2. Description of Need

In 2010, economic and social crises are challenging communities across the nation. Despite high volumes of social spending by federal, state, and local governments, and an economic bailout, there remain the issues of housing shortages, high unemployment, immigration issues, special needs of the disadvantaged and transitional, and an aging population with mounting health care demands.

The most recent statistics on nonprofit growth in the United States revealed that the number of civic entrepreneurs is growing each year. In the 1990's, the impressive statistic of a 90% increase in the number of new nonprofits established during that decade demonstrates the strength of this innovative trend. More recent statistics indicate that this growth trend is not dissipating despite the troubled economy. In fact, 46,000 new nonprofits were formed in 2009 up from 40,000 in 2008 (*Chronicle of Philanthropy*, April 22, 2010). Over half of the nonprofits newly formed could be categorized as human service initiatives.

Grassroots nonprofits are a large subset of nonprofits in the United States. Despite their apparent success rate, grassroots nonprofits are frequently overlooked and undocumented by America's academic institutions and the press. No one institution has diligently chronicled the myriad of human service solutions, their strategies for success, or the populations they've served. While this citizen trend is a more recent one in U.S. history, there is a sufficient track record in cities of all sizes to tell us that it is a trend that warrants greater research. This is especially true given the desperate need for new innovation in the overburdened social service sector.

We believe the reason for a lack of documentation and research of this trend stems from a type of Catch-22 scenario. It's common for government statistics on these groups to be sketchy or missing,

especially since many will not meet the \$25,000 donation IRS reporting threshold in the initial years of start-up. Universities typically fail to study these organizations because two types of data are missing: a lack of IRS financial data and a lack of membership statistics. (These groups are typically volunteer organizations and not membership service clubs.) The lack of data makes justification for research grant appropriations challenging.

Our research shows that citizen-driven solutions to a wide array of human service social challenges are working exceptionally well at the nation's grassroots. However, a focused, inter-disciplinary approach to sharing and replicating these ground-breaking ideas is presently unavailable. We believe there has never been a more important time than now to:

- (1) promote innovative human service initiatives,
- (2) minimize duplication of effort in the nonprofit sector, and
- (3) respond to the projected retirement of some 600,000 nonprofit executives by helping train the next generation of human service leaders in the methods of seasoned civic and social entrepreneurs.

Based upon a study of the current nonprofit climate and interviews with nonprofit leaders, we've uncovered five basic issues which nonprofits are facing that the NICENetwork is designed to address:

1. The number of nonprofits has been steadily growing in the human services sector for the last 15 years and expansion is expected to continue with the myriad of social issues confronting the nation in this economy. This means competition for funding will only intensify. Nonprofits will have to become more creative about how they become visible to those with the most resources (philanthropy, individual donors, and corporations).
2. Human service nonprofits (HSNP) typically have limited web resources, a lack of trained staff in search engine optimization (SEO), and limited time to keep up with social media to maximize their mission's visibility. These deficits keep them behind the growing donor curve on the web. Clearly, the web is also becoming the "go to" source for nonprofit information.
3. People interested in launching new human service initiatives are increasingly contacting successful HSNPs to learn how to replicate their solutions. This is placing a heavier burden on already staff-starved HSNPs.
4. More and more web vendors are offering discounted services or "freebies" to nonprofits. Most nonprofits do not have the time to locate these cost-saving opportunities. Having this information at the ready could help keep overhead costs down.
5. Many solutions being invented by social and civic entrepreneurs are highly successful but this knowledge is generally fragmented or unavailable to the nation's human service nonprofits. As a result, founders and staffs operate in a vacuum and find themselves reinventing the wheel by default. Our research shows that many would be willing to learn from others who have "been there done that" to improve their nonprofit's effectiveness.

The philosophy of the NICENetwork says that placing effective human service nonprofit initiatives in proximity, on the same highly optimized site, by employing topic forums invites mentoring and valuable knowledge-sharing. This environment more readily attracts people "on the same page" and chronicles

information in one place without having to wade through “advertising noise” on social media. Discussion forums aren’t enough ... the knowledge doesn’t get stored. It ends up in the Ethernet without providing a history that can be referenced later.

A highly searchable knowledge base will:

- 1. create a place where leaders are more likely to find and converse with one another,**
- 2. generate a willingness to knowledge-share about what has made their initiative effective,**
- 3. build an atmosphere that encourages members to mentor one another in their topic area.**
- 4. create a place where future non-profit leaders can learn without reinventing the wheel.**

Helping human service nonprofits solve the challenges facing them in 2010 and beyond are daunting. The NICENetwork is positioning itself to bring greater visibility as well as training and knowledge-sharing to budget-strapped initiatives.

3. Goals and Objectives

The vision of NICE Network is the creation of a nationwide networking environment for civic and social entrepreneurs, business professionals, donors, and volunteers, committed to successfully expediting solutions to the nation's most pressing human service social challenges.

Short and Long-range Goals for the Institute

It is the primary and first goal of NICE to provide promotional resources to civic enterprise initiatives through its online venue to drive donor and supporter interest. *NICE* also intends to implement educational webinars, downloadable resources, and nonprofit discounts for members. Webinars will feature seasoned civic entrepreneurs, foundation and fund raising experts, and promotional expertise.

Our short-term goal for the first year is to develop and offer resources and assistance to civic enterprise initiatives based on the following objectives.

Objectives for Phase One

1. Construct a highly optimized website, NICENetwork.org, to promote 40 human service nonprofit grassroots solutions to the broader audience of donors, citizens, and the press.
2. Provide participating nonprofit initiatives with a dynamic display page to spotlight and chronicle their past and present accomplishments.
3. Work with their staffs to feature digital podcast interviews, video, and ebooks designed to educate future donors, volunteers, supporters, potential nonprofit start-ups, and the media.
4. Promote NICENetwork by hosting a BlogTalkRadio.com interview show of civic entrepreneurs and their successes. Chronicle their stories in podcast format. Bring together founders with similar interests on each show to help foster alliances.
5. Promote NICENetwork.org and the radio show by advertising in social media and print publications.

6. Build a NICE forum on NICENetwork.org to engage civic entrepreneurs, potential donors, potential replicators, and future nonprofit leaders.
7. Invest in human service nonprofits in Lake County, Florida, an economically depressed county, where the National Institute for Civic Enterprise project is headquartered. Offer an annual nonprofit training symposium for human service nonprofits and a NICE Award grant each year to one outstanding human service nonprofit.
8. Award two other \$5,000 “NICE Awards”, annually, to selected innovative human service nonprofits across the nation.
9. Plan for a corporate-sponsored annual symposium in Central Florida in 2013. Invite leaders from around the country and encourage them to cross-pollinate their innovative strategies.
10. Become a less grant-reliant and more revenue-sustainable project over time (through product sales, ad fees, member dues, webinar fees, and affiliate revenues.)

4. Activities

The major priority for the first year is the development of the virtual community – NICENetwork.org. Much can be done to accelerate the start-up process and to grow civic enterprise initiatives to scale through an online format. Like many small business entrepreneurs who are typically busy and overworked, most civic entrepreneurs would consider college coursework a luxury and valuable time spent away from their 24/7 missions. The good news is that, over the last decade, most of these founders and their staffs have become increasingly Internet savvy. A system that provides convenient and quick access to online information would fit their entrepreneurial personality, lifestyle, and scheduling.

We believe that most human service nonprofits would avail themselves of a “go-to” portal website that provides information about similar initiatives’ experiences and current efforts, collegial support through forums and social media, technical assistance resources, low-cost/no-cost online services, and other useful information.

The development of this virtual supportive community is targeted to assist civic enterprise individuals, and those who support them. NICE will launch a highly visible state-of-the-art web portal that will help them feature current information, events, and successes of their nonprofits. NICE knows that it’s important for funders to have facts, measurable data, and IRS compliance verification; however, we feel that it is as or more helpful to grantors and supporters to know what’s going on daily with a given nonprofit cause. NICENetwork.org will give nonprofits a chance to offer a unique up to the minute perspective in a friendly Web 2.0 community. NICENetwork.org will comprise a highly search engine optimized “sticky” site which attracts the visitor who has either a short attention span or who desires to dig further into what makes an initiative successful. NICENetwork is an online location distinct from the initiative’s .org web site (often a low traffic site with dated information) and will be highly promoted and advertised to engage a broad audience.

From our random surveys of civic entrepreneurs in 2010, it's apparent that they would be willing to avail themselves of online webinars with other civic entrepreneurs and nonprofit experts. Our research also shows that they would find benefit from a highly optimized website promoting their cause to potential donors and volunteers in a Web 2.0 format. The nonprofit market, while it has lagged behind the more tech-oriented business market, is increasingly interested in online training, resources, and knowledge-bases. We believe we can offer nonprofits the services to help them build visibility to donors and valuable information not otherwise available (or at the least more conveniently located) which can take their initiatives to scale and replication.

The NICENetwork site will add features and services free, or at minimal charge, that cannot be found through other nonprofit promotion sites such as Charity Navigator, GiveWell, GreatNonprofits, and others. NICENetwork.org will be a site that:

1. Offers mentoring forums and webinars for start-up and seasoned initiatives.
2. Offers a place for civic entrepreneurs to cross-pollinate their ideas and successes.
3. Chronicles the history of member initiatives with a free podcast and video.
4. Offers free or reduced price nonprofit/business services through participating vendors.
5. Allows volunteers, donors, and supporters to post reviews on the site.
6. Assists with setup and copywriting of a nonprofit's free web page and hosts the site.
7. Allows the nonprofit to sell its services and products on their page.
8. Offers Web 2.0 technology for each initiative to promote itself through social media.
9. Features selected initiatives each month.
10. Sponsors the annual "NICE Awards" grants to 3 selected participating nonprofits. NICE promotes the NICENetwork site online, in the press, and offline to drive traffic to the site.
11. Offers free interviews of founders and nonprofit leaders via BlogTalkRadio.com, another online promotion venue to build traffic.
12. Brings credibility to human service nonprofit leaders by implementing a low-cost membership, the Association of Human Service Nonprofits (AHSNP) in Phases II and III.
13. Promotes and features outstanding initiatives in its *NICENetwork Heroes* online newsletter. This newsletter currently has over 600 subscribers.

Funding for this work will support the launch and start-up expenses as outlined in the attached budget and support the following major activities:

- ✓ Website creation and maintenance, including installation of a dedicated web server and a back-up web server, proprietary and secure membership site software, hosting and other web maintenance
- ✓ Website support to assist 40 nonprofits with set up of their promotion page
- ✓ Video/podcasts/graphic/web design expertise to promote NICE and its members
- ✓ Social media outsourced promotion/marketing assistance
- ✓ On and off-line media advertising in nonprofit periodicals, social media, and nonprofit-related web sites

- ✓ Nonprofit Promotion and Funding one –day Symposium for 100 nonprofits
- ✓ “NICE Awards” – grants of \$5,000 each to 3 selected nonprofits
- ✓ Attendance at conferences to engage donors, new nonprofit innovators, and community leaders, including Council on Foundations – Leadership Summit; Social Enterprise Alliance; and International City Manager’s Association.
- ✓ Promotional speaking trips to events and travel for research and interviews of grassroots nonprofit leaders.

5. Staff and Volunteer Qualifications

Debra Berg, Project Director: NICE Network will be administered by Debra J. Berg, Project Director, who is the founder of the project, after devoting fifteen years of her life to the topic of America’s new social problem-solvers, civic entrepreneurs. Debra brings a unique combination of business experience combined with a decade of public service to the establishment of the NICE Network. This life experience helped Debra form her vision for greater promotion and research of the highly innovative and compassionate citizens changing the face of civic America.

A native of East Central Illinois, Debra studied at the University of Illinois, earning a B.A. in political science and master’s degree in public administration (M.P.A.). Recognized there as a Charles E. Merriam Scholar on Illinois local government, she also served in Washington, D.C. on an Illinois congressional staff during the 1974 Watergate hearings and in 1975 as an editor for the U.S. Treasury.

From the mid-seventies to the early eighties when few women were employed on legislative staffs, Debra held positions in three states. She served as finance analyst for the Illinois Senate Appropriations and Local Government Committees and as a budget and program analyst for the Kentucky Legislative Research Commission and the Minnesota Legislative Audit Commission. In those posts, she authored studies on welfare, education, special education, and chemical dependency. In addition, she served in Kentucky as a legislative budget analyst in the area of human services.

Debra ventured into the not-for-profit arena when Minnesota’s largest HMO recruited her as a senior finance analyst. At the same time, she applied her financial skills to launch TeamNet International, a training and marketing company and a top two percent micro-enterprise business in 1992. In 1997, she was recruited by the wireless and protocol industries by Amdocs, Inc. and Gcom, Inc. From 1994 to the present, she conducted research on the efforts of dozens of civic entrepreneurs in over thirty cities across America.

Debra is an active volunteer and a speaker to colleges, businesses, and nonprofit organizations on the topic of volunteerism and civic entrepreneurs. She is the author of two books, *The Power of One: The Unsung Everyday Heroes Rescuing America’s Cities* and *Living in Abundance*, a BarnesandNoble.com bestseller. Debra and her husband, Paul, reside in Eustis, FL and have two grown daughters.

Lee Owen, Communications Strategist: Lee Owen's mix of industry experience has given her a rare set of talents to help the NICENetwork bring visibility to the missions of civic entrepreneurs. As an organizational/marketing strategist and skilled editor of twenty years in the corporate and nonprofit worlds, Lee has logged an impressive collection of accomplishments.

She helped to manage a \$35 million commodity group for *CSX Transportation*, a Fortune 500 business-to-business services corporation, and assisted with an extensive export sales program for *E.I.L. Instruments, Inc.* of Baltimore, Maryland, a \$40 million company. Also, along the way, her passion for the missions of faith-based social services organizations led her to invest her portfolio of marketing and writing skills as a volunteer in the future of several Florida nonprofits: *Oasis Compassion Agency*, *Divine Debutantes /Building Our House*, *Gateway Community Outreach*, and *Boynton Beach Community Church*. She is an active board member of *Divine Debutantes* and a former board member of *Oasis Compassion Agency*.

Lee is presently the owner and President of *WritePointMedia, Inc.* She has helped clients such as *Pinsly Railroad*, *The Beaches Leader*, and the *Providence School* with several copywriting/marketing projects. With a special heart for writers, Lee has more recently helped authors map their book campaigns and polish their manuscripts. Now, as a volunteer/consultant communications strategist for *NICENetwork.org*, her editing and marketing talents are getting a workout in the updated version of *The Power of One* as well as oversee the editing and copywriting of NICENetwork publications.

Lee graduated from Goucher College, Towson, Maryland, with a B.A. in economics. She resides in Eustis, Florida with her husband, Tom, and their two boys.

Mike Maine, Technology/IT Director: Mike Maine is the co-owner and operator of *Christian Computer Consultants*, a *GHSI* company. As a 28-year resident of Lake County Florida and prior to *CCC*, he was the owner of *Grasshopper Software International*. Mike and his current partner, Kent White, are experts in DSL, dialup, hosting, web site design, data backup, network consulting, and custom computer building. In addition, they provide Voice-over-IP services to private homes and businesses throughout the nation. *CCC* boasts big-name clients including *Resorts Condominiums International (RCI)*, several national banks and municipalities, the theme park industry, small businesses, and physicians' offices located in the "lightning capital of the world" of Central Florida.

Mike has been a friend to the nonprofit community in Lake County, Florida for some time, being responsible for setting up the private *Blue Lake Academy* computer lab as well as systems for churches and other schools, often at his own expense. He's been an active *NICENetwork* volunteer for over two years.

One of the reasons NICE selected Mike's business is their 27 server back-up system which was developed especially for the mission-critical medical and legal industries heavily dependent upon secure and record-ready access. *CCC* also holds the distinction of being the only systems back-up service to make it through the 2005 Florida hurricane without a glitch. *GHSI* is proud to say that, if there's a problem, they will determine a way to fix it even if an outside consultant is needed.

Mike has designed a special server package for NICENetwork to bring security and reliability to its proposed Web 2.0 site, www.NICENetwork.org. Mike's commitment to NICE is expressed this way: "Being granted the honor of working with Debra Berg to make the *NICENetwork* a reality is a joy. The value I put on working with her cannot be put into words."

6. Collaborations

NICENetwork is a highly collaborative model by design, thus collaboration is built into the project on every level. Key collaborators include our fiscal sponsor *HCL* as well as the 40 civic enterprise initiatives that will participate in the launch of the NICENetwork. NICE will continue to identify additional collaborators on an ongoing basis.

7. Evaluation

NICE Network considers evaluation an important part of the successful development, implementation and scaling of the NICE Network as a local, regional, and ultimately national model. Thus, the network is building in specific milestones and evaluation mechanisms from the beginning of the project.

During its first year, NICE Network seeks to achieve the following milestones:

1. NICENetwork.org web site beta tested and operational by the end of the grant period.
2. Have researched, identified, promoted at minimum 40 successful nonprofit participants, across all human service categories.
3. Completed 40 nonprofit informational site page set-ups with participating nonprofits
4. Interviewed at minimum the 40 nonprofit founders/leaders on BLogTalkRadio.com with interviews podcasted and transcribed. Video tape geographically available nonprofit leaders.
5. Promoted NICENetwork at three conferences with booth exposure to help identify and recruit successful human service nonprofits and promote the mission of NICENetwork to city leaders.
6. Scheduled speaking engagements at 5 regional or national forums/conferences.
7. Hold a day-long NICENetwork-sponsored training symposium for human service nonprofits in Lake County, Florida. Feature funding and promotion topics and speakers from area universities. Video-tape the event for webinar rebroadcast on the NICENetwork web site.
8. Determined the criteria and awarded 3 NICE grant awards to selected NICENetwork participating nonprofits. Promote these awards in the national media.
9. Interviewed by 30 radio talk shows
10. Established and promoted "Civic Entrepreneur Day" in the press on the day the NICE Awards are announced.

8. Conclusion

The NICE Network is a model initiative that our world now needs. As our society has become more and more technology-driven and specialized, we have certainly expanded in many positive ways, but we have also lost some of the human connection and community spirit that have always been a core foundation of American culture. The NICE Network is a brilliant way to utilize today's technology to bring together the resources of local communities to solve community problems and to generate more

civic enterprise, based on a model that can be replicated on a national scale. The model has been developed through extensive research in the young field of civic enterprise at the policy level as well as by gathering dozens of case studies documenting civic entrepreneurs in action - making a difference in their communities. It is truly bridging the large chasm that often exists between policy and daily community life. The NICE Network is a “cutting-edge” program that is seeking partnership support from all levels – individual, community, local, and regional and national foundations. We hope that you will join us as a partner in this exciting endeavor!