

Regional Prosperity Initiative (RPI) Grant Request

1. Summary

Urban Alliance (UA) is seeking funding for the innovative work happening through the Momentum Urban Employment Initiative (Momentum) and the Urban Alliance Technical Center (UATC). UA seeks to reshape the way marginalized populations are valued and trained in the region. Our goal is to create a region where all who seek aid are connected to the resources needed to secure the life they desire. Our work addresses all three of the themes proposed in this grant.

Through partnership, collaboration, and placement we are connecting education, employment, and community development. This work comes out of a heart for the community, to ensure all who live and work here have the resources they need. We have specifically tapped two of the higher learning institutions to lend their hands in developing systems to ensure all residents of the region have access to learning opportunities and well-paying jobs. Finally, through this collaborative effort, new career pathways are being created for a wide range of individuals, from those with no education, to those who have had prior interaction with the criminal justice system, as well as those who, because of significant barriers, were not focused on by the business community.

2. Project Description

a. Momentum is a vehicle specially designed to move individuals from poverty to self-sufficiency through the development of necessary life and employability skills and job placement assistance. Ninety-eight percent of those engaged by Momentum in 2017 were completely unemployed at the time of enrollment, most for a significant amount of time. Seventy-nine percent came from generational poverty.

Momentum is unique in that it is reaching individuals who have given up and is effectively returning them to the regional job market. Momentum presently graduates 79% of its students and places 92% of them into positions with an average starting wage of \$11.96 per hour. Of those placed, 84% maintain that employment beyond the critical first 90 days of employment. With these results, Momentum is setting the standard for employment readiness programming.

While there is a need for individuals to find meaningful occupations, there is also a significant need by employers to find productive employees. This creates a perfect environment to change the conversation about individuals who might have been overlooked before. Currently, there are over eight thousand open positions within twenty miles of Kalamazoo. About half are entry-level skilled positions that Momentum graduates would be able to perform. Part of the goal of the Momentum program is to demonstrate to employers that it is worth investing in this population. As more employers come on board, the demand for our graduates far outweighs our capacity. According to our business partners in the area, they would like to see 400 plus Momentum graduates per year. Last year (2016), we had 140 graduates.

There is something bigger happening. The Momentum program is not just transforming individuals, it is also transforming communities, especially as it pertains to engaging employers and community partners. In 2014, the Momentum program was showing some early breakthrough results and employers were starting to pay attention to this new pool of talent. Yet, despite this, many employers were still skeptical about working with this population, often asking about the specific felonies or risk factors and still viewing this population negatively. As the program has continued to develop sustaining talent with graduates excelling in their positions, this reticence has declined substantially.

Our program goals are accomplished through the use of five basic components: Pre-Employment Education, Volunteer Work Experience, Mentoring, Job Placement, and Job Evaluation with Incentives. The six-week curriculum utilizes the principles of cognitive behavioral therapy and is developed, organized and facilitated to address the following seven dimensions of wellness, which are generally regarded as being intimately connected to a person's capacity for self-efficacy: Physical, Social, Emotional, Spiritual, Mental, Environmental and Occupational. The employment readiness aspect of the program is designed around the Azrin Employment Readiness Model and

includes resume writing, cover letter construction, job search and interview techniques, online job search, and image development. Each Momentum student completes 100 hours of in-class instruction.

UA has established a Momentum Business Network (“MBN”) whose members guarantee interviews for each graduate upon completion of the program. Employer interest has increased now to the point that we are unable to fulfill their talent needs because we are not able to graduate individuals fast enough. We consider this a great challenge to face. The MBN currently consists of 53 regional employers and is increasing.

The UATC: Beginning in 2015, Urban Alliance formed a partnership with Kalamazoo Valley Community College to provide hard skills based training on the back end of Momentum. These intensive, accelerated employer-based academies have been highly successful in equipping Momentum Graduates to gain good paying jobs, as well as, position them for quick promotion. The UATC, which will be the only project of its kind in the country, is a unique partnership blending entities from the non-profit, higher education and the business worlds in order to create a streamlined avenue for career development and hands on training. The UATC includes a warehousing living lab that is a partnership with Western Michigan University’s ISM Department and L.C. Howard, Inc. This new technical center will be an incubator for the development of many new employer-driven academies such as: Warehouse Management and Inventory Control, Quality Assurance, Coding, Robotics, Etc. and will result in industry recognized certifications. All of our academies are developed in partnership with our Business Network and the local Employer Resource Network and will be driven by employer need.

The purpose of the UATC consists of the following three components:

1. Develop a world class technical education center to prepare students for a career in multiple growing and sustainable fields.
2. Establish a “living lab” for hands on practicums benefiting WMU and UATC students
3. Create a business model that will enable the UATC to be self-sustaining

The current economic and employment scenario requires innovation in meeting both current and future needs for technically trained employees. Without establishing a true pipeline of qualified, motivated employees into the workforce there will be a crisis due to an inability to fill necessary technical jobs. This will cause a catastrophic negative impact on businesses ability to grow or even sustain the current level of production and could be a harbinger of an economic downturn. Additionally, in order to create an advantage for employees not following the path of higher education, technical education and training will allow for a higher standard of living than otherwise achievable.

Most technical education currently exists in long-term apprenticeships. However, this model has too long of a feedback loop to stay consistently relevant, is expensive and does not respect urgency of the need of the individual and the nature of poverty. The UATC model proposes to address this need in an innovative tiered approach that will begin with providing initial foundational technical training that will result in employment placement. Then, as the employee proves their value to the company, they will return for additional tiered certifications that will prepare the graduate for promotions and career laddering.

Finally, one of the larger issues we see is that Management, in these fields, is usually promoted from within and receives very little training in supervisory skills or cultural competency. At the UATC, additional trainings will be offered to employers for frontline supervisors to bolster their understanding of the Momentum demographic and offer cultural insights. So, the UATC will not only be solving a huge need by providing quality employees, but will also strengthen the employer cultures where graduates will be placed.

b. Our project accomplishes each of the themes. The MBN offers a direct pipeline to meet the talent needs of 53 businesses within Region 8. Coupled with our partnerships with Kalamazoo Valley Community College (KVCC) and Western Michigan University (WMU), we are uniquely capable of connecting local education and business resources to foster community development and enhance talent. The joint efforts of our higher education institutions,

Momentum, and business partners solve regional challenges and provide training options that focus on the skill demands of the regional economy.

Since February 2016, KVCC has run six technical-skills training programs, exclusively held for Momentum graduates, including three Production Technician Academies, two Computer Numerical Control Operator Academies, and on Culinary and Sustainable Food Systems Academy. In total, 59 students have graduated from these Academies. Beyond providing incredible access to training, the partnership with KVCC is helping create a positive learning environment for individuals who previously have had poor educational experiences.

Simply funneling people into minimum wage jobs only precipitates the working poor that has become all too common in the neighborhoods we serve. Urban Alliance refuses to follow that mindset. However, we must also respect the immediate needs of those with whom we are working. For this population, a long-term training program that pays minimum wage for up to two years is not a feasible model for lasting change. We have found that building a tiered system of continued training is the better solution, including offering a solid entry level wage in the short term and wage increases following additional trainings and experience.

As an extension of this belief, we have developed the Urban Alliance Technical Center in partnership with WMU, KVCC, and CL Howard, Inc. Participants in this program can complete an academy, such as the Momentum CNC Machine Operator Academy, and immediately begin to earn between \$13 and \$15 per hour. After nine months of employment experience, they may return to the UATC to receive an additional certification in CNC set-up and increase their wage potential to \$18 to \$23 per hour. This solution respects the immediate need for sustainable income of our students and grows the needed talent pool for regional businesses.

c. The Momentum Program, as it currently exists, serves Kalamazoo, Calhoun, and St. Joseph counties by training and placing residents into businesses located in each of these counties. UA is currently working to standardize the Momentum curriculum and processes to enable its expansion into other urban communities across the country. This is anticipated to be complete by the end of 2017 with expansion beginning in 2018. Additional regional communities that have approached Urban Alliance with a desire to bring Momentum to their cities include Sturgis, Three Rivers, Battle Creek, and Benton Harbor. UA has already begun the delicate work of developing partnerships within these communities. In addition to the expected Momentum expansion, the UATC will become a regional training facility serving all of Southwest Michigan.

3. Organizational Description

The mission of Urban Alliance is to foster and promote community development programs within the inner city. Our function is to serve the most marginalized members of the Kalamazoo Community by offering employment and outreach programs to “embrace, engage and empower people” to better themselves and their community. Education and training are at the core of everything we do at UA.

Urban Alliance was formed out of a need to see urban communities transformed and a desire to create a vehicle for that to happen. Although the work of some of our subsidiaries was conceived as early as 1999, Urban Alliance, Inc. received its tax-exempt status in 2006. Along with creating, fostering and promoting community development programs within urban communities, Urban Alliance serves as a conduit for providing multiple services to marginalized residents.

Since its inception, Urban Alliance has fostered many positive programs, beginning in Kalamazoo County, through various partnerships. The goal of Urban Alliance, Inc. is not to duplicate services but rather to work with people and organizations that have creative ideas on how to fill service gaps within their community. Our target group is marginalized individuals. Our experience over the past 16 years has been that outreach, alongside social services, provides a powerful offense against hopelessness, poverty, addiction and crime.

Urban Alliance comprises the following divisions: Momentum Urban Employment Initiative and Urban Outreach Initiative.

Momentum will begin its 24th and 25th terms in the beginning of October. The program has served over 500 individuals with employment related services. One hundred fifty-four students enrolled in the Momentum programs and 128 students graduated. The outreach program has doubled its efforts within the Edison Neighborhood, reaching over 4000 individuals in 2017 alone. Outreach continues to build trust and increase the organizational credibility within the core neighborhoods of Kalamazoo.

The lead team working on this project are Brian Parsons and Joe Brown with support from the Executive Director and Administrative support staff. (See Attachment A)

Urban Alliance is uniquely positioned to carry out this project. Not only do we possess a talented and visionary team, we also are harnessing the power of partnerships, collaborations and volunteers. Since inception Urban Alliance has acted as a facilitator of the work. Our team, alongside community members, ensures this powerful work is completed at the highest level. This level of collaboration makes large innovative projects seem much more manageable because carrying the load is not entirely on the shoulders of the staff. Currently over 60% of all instruction is done by community volunteers, from University and the local colleges, to community leaders and business owners. We have even had past graduates come in and speak to the class. This set up of having volunteers instruct eases the struggles of growth. It also provides content that continues to be on the cutting edge. As the Momentum Initiative grows and the UATC takes off, instead of worrying about how to increase staff, we can tap into our large network of volunteers.

4. Partners

The Momentum Business Network includes businesses who have signed agreements to interview and potentially hire students upon graduation. This has grown from 21 partners in 2014 to 53 Southwest Michigan businesses including: Biggby Coffee, Jersey Giant Subs!, Summit Polymers, Stryker Instruments, Sigma Machine, Impact Label, Landscape Forms, Bronson Hospitals, Greenleaf Trust, Millennium Group, Continental Linen Services, Schupan and Sons, Gordon Water, American Axle, I-Supply, Denso, Senneca Holdings, Weber Specialties, Micro Machine, Miniature Custom Manufacturing, Consumers Credit Union and many more.

In addition to Momentum's employer partners, the program has also partnered with Kalamazoo Valley Community College (KVCC), Western Michigan University (WMU), Southwest Michigan First!, The W.E. Upjohn Institute, the Office of Community Corrections, and the Kalamazoo Literacy Counsel.

Bronco Force, KVCC, CL Howard, Inc., and UA partnered to develop the warehouse management academy at the UATC. Ken Jones and his team at Bronco Force brought the concept of the UATC to Urban Alliance. They had a dream about a new way to train both WMU students and the population served by Urban Alliance.

The staff at KVCC the Groves have been longstanding partners with Momentum. Together we have successfully run six different academies. Based on the incredible results and positive effect on both organizations and the community, KVCC is again joining us to push the limits of how workforce is treated and trained in the Kalamazoo. Elizabeth Bernhard has been the point person at KVCC since inception and will lead the charge. She will be assisting in running KVCC sponsored academies and be providing oversight and guidance for other efforts.

The Upjohn Institute has been a significant supporter of our efforts to support the marginalized populations as we work to provide pathways to employment. In this project, they are assisting in the evaluation and tracking of the program. Specifically, the Upjohn Institute is working to understand the social and economic effects when those who have lead a life in the fringe begin to enter mainstream society again.

5. Project Timeline

Currently, Momentum is operating 9-10 terms per year, and is looking to expand to a third location in 2018 that will allow us to host 14-15 terms per year, which means over 210 individuals will have an opportunity to join the workforce each year. These terms are hosted within the most impoverished neighborhoods in our community.

The UATC timeline includes three major stages at twelve months each, beginning October 2017. In the first stage, the academies and training process development will occur among the project partners. The second stage will expand the program to create business opportunities to help offset the cost of increasing the number of academies offered. The final stage will be the reevaluation and maximization stage where key learnings will be applied to expand the program further.

6. Budget

The budget table below indicates the requested amount for each designated area from the RPI grant, and indicates totals for each category. The total request from the RPI grant is ~6% of the total project funding requirement.

Expenditure Category	RPI Request	Funds from other Sources	Total
Wage/Salaries	\$36,390	\$145,605	\$181,995
Instructor Fees	\$7,200	\$28,800	\$36,000
Equipment	\$57,900	\$1,101,100	\$1,159,000
Facility Lease	\$5,310	\$21,239	\$26,549
Services/Utilities	\$1,200	\$4,800	\$6,000
Freight	\$2,000	\$18,000	\$20,000
Totals:	\$110,000		\$1,409,544

Project Breakdown:

The following project breakdown table indicates where the specific monies will be utilized during the initial phase of the project (year 1). Prioritization is all designated high (4 & 5) due to necessity for all aspects required to launch the UATC.

Phase	Project Component	Component Cost	Component Priority
1	Facility Preparation/Management	\$6,510	5
2	Equipment Acquisition/Installation	\$59,900	4
3	Instruction/Education	\$43,590	5
Totals:		\$110,000	

Attachment A:

Project Staff Biographies:

Luke Kujacznski, Executive Director

Kujacznski has a B.A. in Management and Leadership Development on top of extensive for profit business experience. He came to Urban Alliance after successfully starting, building, running, and then selling a business in the construction industry. He originally started at Urban Alliance as a volunteer, and then became the second Momentum Director. When the Executive Director suffered a significant medical issue, Luke stepped up and lead the organization through the crisis, first as interim director and then as the Executive Director.

Brian Parsons, Director of Momentum

Brian Parsons is an excellent communicator and motivator with over 20 years of experience in classroom facilitation and program development, specializing in serving diverse people groups. Prior to coming to Urban Alliance, Parsons worked for the past 10 years assisting individuals returning to the community after incarceration. Most recently, he ran 3 prisoner reentry programs for Life Skills, Employment and Housing. Parsons is also a certified behavioral consultant and has developed several top level employment programs.

Joseph Brown, UATC Project Manager

Joe comes to UA with 25 years working in the manufacturing industry. The majority of this time has been focused on advanced manufacturing and automation, mechanical engineering, and project management. The last 10 years has been in operations and engineering management. Brown is also a manufacturing consultant working with companies to assist in new business launches, equipment acquisition, and project management. His experience has varied and I has been allowed to work in most areas of manufacturing including quality control, logistics, sales, and others. In the management positions held, Joe has been in charge of many departments, including fabrication, tool room, engineering, quality, sales, project engineering/new product development, and others. Brown has also been involved in startup ventures in technology working with independent teams and venture capitalists.