

Proposal Summary
Meeting Date: 6/9/2015

Aspiritech NFP
Request # 114943

Project Title:	Strengthening Aspiritech's Infrastructure to Enable Expansion
Duration:	24 months
Request Date:	5/11/2015
Request Amount:	\$280,000
Recommended Amount:	\$280,000
Program Area:	Human Services\Jobs program (not E)
Population Served:	Developmentally Disabled
Type of Support:	Salary Support, Capital Support, Program Support
Grantee Location:	Highwood, IL
Primary Contact:	Ms. Brenda Weitzberg

Project Abstract

The proposal is to develop a robust and scalable infrastructure that will support Aspiritech's continued growth and future geographic expansion in order to provide meaningful employment to more adults on the autism spectrum in software testing and related quality assurance and technology support services.

Organizational Background

Annual Revenue Sources

Grants	31%	Government	0%	Earned Income	58%
Fees	0%	Private Support	11%	Other	0%

Finances

	Budget	Actual	Actual
	12/31/2015	12/31/2014	12/31/2013
Revenues	\$779,409	\$463,801	\$271,070
Expenses	676,335	362,943	248,928
Surplus (Deficit)	103,074	100,858	22,142
Net Assets		\$214,281	\$155,185

Aspiritech was founded in 2008 to identify and provide appropriate employment opportunities for individuals on the autism spectrum (ASD). Aspiritech was the first enterprise in the U.S. to train and employ individuals with high functioning autism (HFA) in software testing. Currently, 24 software test engineers are on payroll. Three others used Aspiritech as a stepping-stone to employment in the tech field. Several others returned to school to pursue further education in technology-related fields. Aspiritech has a waiting list of several hundred individuals with HFA who seek to join the organization.

To date, it has provided software testing and other quality assurance (QA) services to more than 35 companies. Aspiritech tripled its revenue from software testing in FY14 and is on track in FY15 to double it yet again.

Program Description

Aspiritech's office space can no longer accommodate the current workload, let alone the addition of a major increase in projects anticipated from a key client. The organization lacks adequate space for software testing staff to take sensory and lunch breaks to help them return to work refreshed and focused. Currently, most test engineers are only able to work at most 4-5 hours a day. According to a renowned local occupational therapist, having better break room areas with sensory and other activities could be the key to helping engineers be able to work a fuller schedule.

Also lacking is sufficient space for test engineers' social and development activities that help to enhance critical soft employment skills such as communication, teamwork, handling of stress, etc. that so often hinder staff with ASD from performing to their best abilities in the workplace. Moreover, there is no office space to accommodate a second autism specialist or the organization's executive director and future business and technical staff that will need to be hired as the organization grows.

Aspiritech's core business is software testing and while it has developed strong manual testing capabilities, to be more competitive in the marketplace, it needs an immediate investment in an automated software testing package. Providing the full range of QA services will make Aspiritech more attractive to potential clients, particularly larger companies that typically need concurrent manual and automated testing services.

Additionally, Aspiritech is in need of an improved accounting system, payroll system, and employee management program. An automated system will allow the organization to better track and manage tester's time as well as allow employees to have visibility into time spent on training, autism employment support, and testing services. The system would enable better client budget management and better visibility into client utilization time versus general support time. Such a system would tie directly into Aspiritech's accounting system to improve financial reporting. Additionally, there is a need to outsource basic IT infrastructure; including data storage and backup, cloud-based file sharing, and remote desktop needs to allow better adaption of remote-based work.

In response to these needs, Aspiritech proposes the following:

- Move to larger office space to provide:
 - Individual, designated workspaces in addition to team workspaces for software test engineers that will reduce overcrowding and better meet their sensory needs.
 - Expanded work areas and secure storage space to increase Aspiritech's capability for hardware testing (such as large audio devices).
 - Office space for an executive director and to employ at least one individual with ASD in an administrative support role. Additional office space for a second autism specialist to support the larger team and be able to privately meet with individuals who have challenges and/or are in crisis.
 - Furniture and equipment to support and increase in tester staff from 24 to 34.
 - Create a multipurpose room for tester staff to take breaks and socialize after work hours.

- Hire and train an IT Manager to help oversee Aspiritech's software testing services. The IT Manager will assist in providing project oversight to the expanded team, help plan for program expansion to a second geographic location, and be groomed to manage one of the two offices after expansion.
- Train test engineers in automated testing to increase their testing portfolio. This will allow Aspiritech to expand its QA capabilities, reach a larger client base and be more marketable. It will also benefit software testers who want to move on to competitive employment as it will greatly expand their skill set and make them more attractive to potential employer companies.
- Purchase an improved back-office system with appropriate tech and implementation support
- Contract with a digital media consultant to develop social media marketing plans to increase clients and associated business.
- Purchase or lease a highly sophisticated software testing program that allows the use of automation to test client software.

Expected Outcome

Building out a more robust and scalable infrastructure will enable Aspiritech to increase the number of software testers it employs with ASD. The enhanced infrastructure will position Aspiritech to open a satellite office, most probably in downtown Chicago, in program year three. A Chicago location will greatly increase visibility to the Chicago tech community and expand access to a wider customer base. A more central location will also provide improved accessibility to the office for potential test engineers with autism. In addition to the 10 testers Aspiritech expects to add to its flagship office in program year one, it expects to employ 10 more test engineers from a satellite office in Chicago in the first year of geographic expansion.

Outcomes from this proposed grant include:

- Secure a larger office space in suburban Chicago by July 2015
- Design, furnish and upgrade the space to meet the needs of our test engineers and management team by September 1, 2015
- Move into new space by October 1, 2015
- Purchase or lease an automated software testing package and train test engineers to use automated testing software
 - Research, select and purchase or lease the most appropriate automated testing software package by August 1, 2015 (two main options are presented in Attachment B)
 - Conduct six successive month-long individualized staff training programs to teach a total of six test engineers with ASD how to conduct automated testing by March 1, 2016
- Train and then employ 10 new test engineers with autism by June 30, 2016.
- Secure a best-in-class back office system with implementation and tech support
 - Complete research and choose a package of basic service business systems to include accounting, payroll, HR and employee management that will support Aspiritech as it expands by October 1, 2016
- Purchase, train on and implement the back-office systems by December 31, 2016

Program Budget

Major budget elements include:

- Incremental rental cost over 24 months for an expansion to a larger office space of \$96,000 (34% of request).
- Salary for Technology Manager position to help provide staff oversight and project management to the larger staff of test engineers at \$77,000 (28% of request).
- Build out of the new office space as well as the cost of buying new furnishings and facility equipment at \$49,000 (18% of request).
- Acquisition of a new integrated back-office accounting, HR and payroll system along with an enhanced IT infrastructure; including data storage and backup, cloud-based file sharing, and remote desktop needs at \$25,000 (9% of request).
- Partial support for contracted digital marketing work at \$19,000 (7% of request)
- One seat license of automated testing software as associated training at \$14,000 (5% of request).

Prior Grants

Last Grant Date: 5/30/2012
Last Grant Amount: \$100,000.00
Number of Prior Grants: 1
Total Amount Granted: \$100,000

Recommendation

As we learned during our March BOD Meeting site visit, Aspiritech does impressive work under imperfect conditions. It is creating a pathway to employment for individuals with ASD and has accelerated its growth in terms of number of employees as well as client work volume. It projects very significant increases in its work from Bose Corporation which has recently committed to a large increase in testing work.

Meeting this request would aid the organization in scaling up its physical infrastructure, its management systems as well as its technical capabilities. It would enable improved work spaces for current testers as well as pathways to more opportunity for additional individuals.

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Strengthening Aspiritech's Infrastructure for Expansion

May 11, 2015

Program Year One: July 1, 2015 - June 30, 2016

REVENUE	Funds Needed	Funds Requested	Funds Committed
Coleman Foundation	130,000	130,000	-
Grandy Foundation	25,000	-	25,000
Organizational contribution	196,675	-	196,675
Revenue Total	351,675	130,000	221,675

EXPENSE	Project Budget	Coleman Funds	Other Sources
<i>Personnel</i>			
Executive Director	75,000	-	75,000
Business Development Director	75,000	-	75,000
Payroll taxes	11,475	-	11,475
<i>Facility</i>			
Rent	67,200	48,000	19,200
Buildout, furnishings	74,000	49,000	25,000
<i>Technology</i>			
Automated software program w/ staff training	14,000	14,000	-
<i>Digital Marketing</i>			
Data analytics, content planning and development	35,000	19,000	
Expenses Total	351,675	130,000	205,675

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Strengthening Aspiritech's Infrastructure for Expansion

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Program Year Two: July 1, 2016 - June 30, 2017

REVENUE	Funds Needed	Funds Requested	Funds Committed
Coleman Foundation	150,000	150,000	-
Private donations/grants	-	-	-
Organizational contribution	191,948	-	191,148
Revenue Total	341,948	150,000	191,148

EXPENSE	Project Budget	Coleman Funds	Other Sources
<i>Personnel</i>			
Executive Director	75,000	-	75,000
Business Development Director	80,000	-	80,000
Technology Manager	77,000	77,000	-
Payroll taxes	17,748	-	17,748
<i>Facility</i>			
Rent	67,200	48,000	19,200
<i>Technology</i>			
Back-office systems	25,000	25,000	-
Expenses Total	341,948	150,000	191,948

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Strengthening Aspiritech's Infrastructure for Expansion			
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Total Project Budget			
REVENUE	Funds Needed	Funds Requested	Funds Committed
Coleman Foundation	280,000	280,000	-
Grandy Foundation	25,000	-	25,000
Organizational contribution	388,623	-	372,623
Revenue Total	693,623	280,000	397,623
EXPENSE	Project Budget	Coleman Funds	Other Sources
<i>Personnel</i>			
Executive Director	150,000	-	150,000
Business Development Director	155,000	-	155,000
Technology Manager	77,000	77,000	-
Payroll taxes	29,223	-	29,223
<i>Facility</i>			
Buildout, furnishings	74,000	49,000	25,000
Rent	134,400	96,000	38,400
<i>Technology</i>			
Automated software program	14,000	14,000	-
Back-office systems	25,000	25,000	-
<i>Digital Marketing</i>			
Data analytics, content planning and development	35,000	19,000	
Expenses Total	693,623	280,000	397,623