



COUNTY OF MENDOCINO

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Mendocino County's Microenterprise Technical Assistance Program (21-CDBG-ED-10007)

California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) encourages economic development activity with its Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG) that provides funding for eligible activities that meet the needs of the local community, including business technical assistance, grant and loan programs.

In 2021, the County create a Microenterprise Technical Assistance Program. The CDBG Microenterprise Technical Assistance Program was funder with \$250,000 in County awarded CDBG Grant funds. Of this amount \$17,500 was used for general administration, and \$232,500 was allocated for program activities and activity delivery by the contractor West Business Development Center for the performance period of April 2023 to August 30, 2025.

The purpose of the microenterprise technical assistance program was to provide free technical assistance to qualifying microenterprises and entrepreneurs through one-on-one consulting and workshops, to assist businesses with succeeding in today's competitive business environment.

The following is a summary of the program provided by West Business Development Center during the performance period.

Program Overview

West Business Development Center (West Center) successfully implemented the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Microenterprise Technical Assistance Program for the County of Mendocino under contract UB-B23-029. Through this initiative, West Center provided comprehensive support to low- to moderate- income (LMI) entrepreneurs and small business owners, including one-on-one counseling, business training, outreach, and program administration in alignment with the approved scope of work. Technical assistance was provided in both English and Spanish to ensure inclusive access across all communities in the County.

Between April 2023 and August 2025, West Center delivered more than 499.99 hours of business advising and support, serving 232 individual clients, 101 businesses, and 120 new entrepreneurs who entered the program through the Ascertain Readiness process. A total of 120 individualized service plans were developed to help clients establish, strengthen, or expand their microenterprises.

Direct Program Administration

West Center maintained full compliance with all CDBG administrative and reporting requirements throughout the grant term. Each quarter, staff:

- Entered client and demographic data into the CDBG Demographic Spreadsheet and Neoserra database
- Processed client self-certification and income eligibility forms

- Submitted quarterly activity reports and supporting documentation to the County of Mendocino
- Coordinated closely with County staff to ensure timely invoicing and contract compliance

Administrative staff contributed approximately 366 hours to data management, fiscal tracking, and reporting over the two-year program period, ensuring accuracy, transparency, and adherence to CDBG requirements.

Outreach Development

In alignment with Exhibit A of the CDBG contract, West Center implemented a bilingual marketing and outreach strategy focused on engaging LMI and Latino/Hispanic-owned businesses across Mendocino County.

Outreach activities included:

- Spanish-language campaigns through Centro de Negocios West on Facebook, and e-newsletters
- Advertisements in local newspapers and community publications
- Collaborations with Mendocino College, local Chambers of Commerce, and workforce partners
- Continued enhancement of the West Center website to improve accessibility
- Graphic design support for digital and print materials promoting LMI and Latino/Hispanic-focused programs
- Social media campaigns highlighting client success stories and small business initiatives

These efforts expanded West Center's visibility and accessibility, bringing essential business resources to underserved rural and minority communities.

Contracted marketing professionals Baqi Kopelman, Zack Sampsel, Cassandra Young, and Daniela Tallman contributed to content creation, photography, and video production that showcased local business success stories. In addition to these contracted partners, Aspen Logan, a West Center staff member, played a key role in facilitating marketing and outreach development, ensuring consistent coordination, bilingual messaging, and strategic alignment with CDBG goals.

These combined efforts elevated West Center's presence countywide and led to measurable growth in bilingual and first-time business clients throughout the grant cycle.

Marketing and Outreach Narrative

Under this CDBG-funded program, West Business Development Center strategically used marketing funds to design and execute targeted outreach campaigns aimed at increasing awareness and engagement among low-to-moderate income (LMI) business owners and entrepreneurs throughout Mendocino County. The primary goal was to expand participation in West's complimentary and low-cost business programs and ensure equitable access for both English- and Spanish-speaking entrepreneurs.

Marketing activities were intentionally multi-channel and bilingual, designed to reach business owners where they live and work. Campaigns were implemented through:

- Social media: Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn
- Local radio: KZYX FM
- E-newsletters and website updates
- Community partnerships and event-based outreach

Key messaging emphasized empowerment, access, and growth -highlighting West's no-cost advising and training programs. Campaigns featured real client success stories and culturally relevant imagery to build trust and demonstrate tangible community impact.

These efforts produced measurable results, including:

- Increased engagement and awareness among LMI and Spanish-speaking business owners
- Higher participation in bilingual workshops and one-on-one advising sessions
- A 25% increase in social media reach and a 10% increase in bilingual newsletter subscriptions
- Positive feedback from community partners such as the Chamber of Commerce and City of Fort Bragg, citing greater visibility and awareness of West's programs among underserved communities

By directing CDBG marketing resources toward inclusive and equitable outreach, West Business Development Center significantly expanded access to essential business support services for low-income and Spanish-speaking entrepreneurs and strengthened the visibility of programs that foster community resilience and economic vitality.

Workshops and Group Trainings (Expanded Details)

West Center also delivered workshops designed to meet the needs of rural and low-to-moderate-income (LMI) entrepreneurs. These sessions focused on building digital skills, online business development, and awareness of emerging technologies relevant to small business owners. Below are the descriptions of the workshops offered through CDBG Microenterprise Technical Assistance Program.

Workshop 1 – Unlocking the Power of Online Sales

Selling online presents a powerful opportunity for businesses to boost sales and expand their customer base. Whether you're a small startup or an established company, many businesses have successfully embraced e-commerce strategies to operate virtually. This includes integrating tools such as social commerce, delivery services, virtual consultations, online networking events and even hosting health and wellness classes.

However, getting started can feel overwhelming. From choosing the right platform to juggling both physical and digital storefront, the challenges are real. In this webinar, we helped participants move forward by covering:

- How to begin shifting some or all of your business online
- An overview of popular e-commerce platforms and how to evaluate them
- A step-by-step guide: the 10 essential steps to successfully launch your e-commerce strategy

Workshop 2 – The Pitfalls of Artificial Intelligence – The Importance of Cybersecurity

AI is more than a buzzword-it's a transformative technology that is changing the way we do nearly everything, including cybersecurity. With far-reaching implications for how personal and sensitive information is handled, it's important for business owners to understand what AI is and isn't, what it can and can't do, and how it is already impacting daily operations.

This webinar examined how to use popular Generative AI (GenAI) systems responsibly, highlighting privacy and security considerations, as well as ethical and legal questions surrounding AI use in business. Participants gained practical knowledge about protecting their data and integrating secure digital practices into their operations.

These sessions reached both English- and Spanish-speaking participants, emphasizing practical applications for LMI and rural business owners, and contributed to digital literacy and business resilience across Mendocino County.