

# ***The Micro Enterprise Reentry Investment Trust (MERIT)***

***Entrepreneurship Program for People with Criminal Backgrounds***

## **APPLICATION PACKET**

**Applications are now being accepted through December 20, 2011  
Space is limited so please be encouraged to submit application before the deadline.**

### **Program Dates**

**The 10 week program will be offered at 2 times. Class dates are below.**

Mondays, January 24, 2011 through April 11, 2011 from 1pm to 4pm and

Mondays, January 24, 2011 through April 11, 2011 from 5:30pm to 8:30pm

***\*Please note class times are subject to change.***

Application will be considered **INCOMPLETE** if the following documents are not submitted.

- MERIT Application**
- Statement** (In a one page statement, answer the question why you would like to attend the MERIT program? – MUST be in your own handwriting)
- Letter of Recommendation** (One letter of recommendation from a case manager, teacher, counselor, minister, or any individual that can attest to your character.)
- Copy of Photo ID** (Drivers License or State ID)

### **Mail or drop off applications to:**

**MERIT Program  
Linda Spooner  
Safer Foundation  
571 W. Jackson  
Chicago, IL 60661**

For questions, please contact Kim Casey, MERIT Program Manager  
**Office: 773-723-5383 Email: [kcasey@ameritech.net](mailto:kcasey@ameritech.net)**

***\*Contents include Fact Sheet, Application Guidelines, Application and Course Syllabus***

*A criminal record, combined with a poor credit history resulting from economic inactivity during incarceration, can effectively keep people with criminal records outside of the job market. By providing an opportunity to develop entrepreneurial skills and microenterprises, ACCION Chicago's and Safer Foundation's Micro Enterprise Reentry Investment Trust (MERIT) Program will enable these individuals to invest in their futures and participate productively in the local economy.*

## Overview & Methodology

In May 2010, ACCION Chicago and Safer Foundation launched the MERIT Program, which relies on the expertise of existing programs focused on prison reentry and entrepreneurship. ACCION and Safer are collaborating with community-based organizations (listed below) to implement the program and to identify and sponsor program participants. Under the program, people with criminal records will complete an entrepreneurship class and receive one-on-one counseling to assist them with coursework and business concepts. ACCION Chicago will provide 50 successful graduates with a Credit Builder microloan to start their microenterprise and will work with these individuals to formalize their business by linking them with business mentors, lawyers, insurance agents, and bankers.

## Goal

To create a comprehensive Entrepreneurship Program model for people with criminal records in the United States.

## Objectives

ACCION Chicago expects the following outcomes over the course of 6-months: 50 formerly incarcerated individuals will receive business development training in an 10-week course to develop entrepreneurial skills and design business plans. These 50 individuals will have their business plans reviewed by a third party and will receive recommendations for next steps to strengthen their business concept. Graduates of the class will receive an ACCION microloan to fund their business.

## Partner Organizations

ACCION Chicago in collaboration with Safer Foundation is the lead agency in implementing the MERIT Program. ACCION has already received funding from the City of Chicago and Congressman Danny K. Davis - US SBA for the program, and is also collaborating with the following organizations to launch this initiative: DePaul University Coleman Entrepreneurship Center, · Chicago Police Department, · The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, · Prim Lawrence Group, · and SCORE

## Meet a Formerly Incarcerated Client

After serving his five-year prison term for selling controlled substances, Karlton Harris is committed to reaching out to other former inmates to facilitate successful transitions back into the community. This commitment led him to author a book titled "I'm Free! Now What—a 12-step prisoner guide to reduce recidivism." Wanting to reach out to his target population, Karlton approached ACCION Chicago for a microloan in 2008 to establish his New Beginnings Publishing to market his book. Karlton was approved for a \$4,000 loan to market his book and support his business. 200 copies of Harris' book have already been requested, and Harris plans a first printing of 2,000 with a sale price of \$19.95 per copy.

### Expected Formerly Incarcerated Client Profile:

**\$10,000**  
Average Income

**2**  
Jobs Created or Maintained per Business Funded

**90%**  
Low-Income Clients

**496**  
Average Client Credit Score

**90%**  
Minority

# **ACCION Chicago and the Safer Foundation Presents**

## ***The Micro Enterprise Reentry Investment Trust (MERIT)***

### **APPLICATION GUIDELINES**

**GOAL:** The goal of the MERIT initiative is to assist people with criminal records who have or who want to start their own business and these businesses will have a positive impact on the City of Chicago.

**ELIGIBILITY:** You must meet **ALL** the eligibility criteria listed below to be eligible for selection and program participation.

- A person with a criminal record
- A person who has a stable living environment
- A person who has stable financial support
- A person who can commit to the extensive 10 week business development course of study
- Interested in starting a business in Chicago
- Any business structure is eligible (sole proprietor, partnerships etc.)

### **APPLICATION PROCESS:**

The Application Process begins with a person who has a criminal background who wants to pursue entrepreneurship and who would benefit from participating in a 10 week extensive business start up program.

**SELECTION PROCESS:** Application and Oral Presentation

**Applications are due no later than Monday, December, 20 2010 at 2pm. Space is limited so please be encouraged to submit application before the deadline.**

Applications will be accepted at anytime for all future classes. The completed application for MERIT, along with any other documentation and letters of support, will be submitted the application panel review board for consideration. Each member of the committee will review the materials and make a recommendation. All recommendations will be considered.

Selected applicants will participate in an intensive 10 week Business course.

Applications will be judged on the following:

- Overall concept/idea
- Perceived viability and growth potential
- Personal Statement No longer than 500 words

Applications will be judged by a committee of local business professionals and successful entrepreneurs. Applications will be reviewed based on the business concepts viability, customers, competition and market potential.

### **Oral Presentation:**

Selected applicants will be required to present a 3 minute oral presentation of their business idea and answer questions for a panel of judges. Judges will score the presentation; their scores will be combined with scores from the applications and will be selected to participate in the Center for Urban Planning 10 week business course.

### **JUDGING CRITERIA**

A panel of judges will evaluate the applications based on the following criteria:

- Business concept ideally will be a value added product or services that will be sold locally, as well as to markets outside the local market area
- Finalists are required to give an oral presentation of their business and answer questions of the judging panel.
- Application and Oral presentation will make up 100 points (25 points for oral presentation and 75 points for application).

### **Program Dates**

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Mondays, January 24, 2011 through April 11, 2011 from 5:30pm to 8:30pm

*\*Please note class times are subject to change.*

### **APPLICATION CHECKLIST**

- MERIT Application**
- Statement** (In a one page statement, answer the question why you would like to attend the MERIT program? – MUST be in your own handwriting)
- Letter of Recommendation** (One letter of recommendation from a case manager, teacher, counselor, minister, or any individual that can attest to your character)
- Copy of a Photo ID** (Drivers License or State ID)

Applicants will be notified in writing once a decision is made. Again, thank you for your interest and we look forward to receiving your application.

**Mail Application to:** MERIT PROGRAM  
Linda Spooner  
Safer Foundation  
571 W. Jackson  
Chicago, IL 60661

# ACCION Chicago and the Safer Foundation Presents

## *The Micro Enterprise Reentry Investment Trust (MERIT)*

### PARTICIPANT APPLICATION

Please complete each section fully and accurately. Please print clearly or type, and remember to sign the application in the space provided at the end of the form. *Safer Foundation does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, color, disability, national origin, religion, creed age, marital status, sexual orientation, citizenship or authorized alien status, or veteran status.*

Application will be considered **INCOMPLETE** if the following documents are not submitted.

- MERIT Application**
- Statement**  
(In a one page statement, answer the question why you would like to attend the MERIT program? – MUST be in your own handwriting)
- Letter of Recommendation**  
(One letter of recommendation from a case manager, teacher, counselor, minister, or any individual that can attest to your character)
- Copy of a Photo ID** (Drivers License or State ID)

<b>Name:</b>		<b>Work Phone:</b> (    )	
<b>Name of your Business:</b>		<b>Home Phone:</b> (    )	
<b>Title:</b>		<b>Fax Number:</b> (    )	
<b>Cell Phone:</b> (    )		<b>E-Mail Address:</b>	
<b>Address:</b>	<b>City:</b>	<b>State:</b>	<b>Zip:</b>
<b>Emergency contact name</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>City/State/Zip</b>	<b>Phone</b>

**Preferred Class time** (please check all that apply)

- 1:00pm – 4:00pm
- 5:30pm – 8:30pm

### Section I. Personal Profile

**1. Which category best describes your formal years of education? (Check one.)**

- |                                 |                                     |                              |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Elementary/secondary school  | 4. Vocational/trade school graduate | 7. A 4-year college graduate |
| 2. High school graduate         | 5. Some college                     | 8. Post graduate college     |
| 3. Some vocational/trade school | 6. A 2-year college graduate        |                              |

**2. Are you the primary income earner in your household?**    1. Yes    2. No

**3. What was your gross annual income last year from all sources?** Annual Income: \$ \_\_\_\_\_.00

**4. What is your present occupation?** \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Have you previously owned/operated a business?**    1. Yes    2. No

**6. Are you a Chicago Resident?**    1. Yes    2. No

**7. What is your criminal background status?**

- Parole
- Probation
- Electronic Monitoring
- Other (please explain): \_\_\_\_\_

## **Section II. Your Business Concept**

**1. What is your business idea?** May attach additional paper

(Describe product/service in plain language, identify unique features and benefits of the product/service, who is your competition, who is the intended customers, why will customers need/pay for such a product and why will there be an extremely high demand in the near future?)

## Section II. Your Business Concept (continued)

### 2. Based on your business idea, how are you thinking about starting your business? (Check one.)

1. Home-based Business      3. Purchase a franchise      5. Purchase an existing business      7. Enter into a business partnership
2. Expand part-time activity      4. Enter a family business      6. Start a business from scratch

### 3. Were any of your previous jobs related to your current business idea? 1. Yes 2. No

If yes, please explain:

### 4. How soon do you want/plan to be in business? (Check one.)

1. 0-3 months      2. 3-6 months      3. 6-12 months      4. more than a year

### 5. What is the main activity of your proposed business? (Check one.)

- |                  |                          |                           |  |                            |
|------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|--|----------------------------|
| 1. Ag services   | 5. Catering-food service | 9. Health Services        | 13. Restaurant/Bar                         | 17. Wholesale/Distribution |
| 2. Ag production | 6. Construction          | 10. Manufacturing         | 14. Retail/Merchandising                   | 18. Other (Specify): _____ |
| 3. Arts/crafts   | 7. Consumer Services     | 11. Mechanical Repair     | 15. Transportation                         |                            |
| 4. Assembly      | 8. Financial Services    | 12. Professional Services | 16. Value-added processing (food products) |                            |

### 6. Why are you interested in starting a business? (Check all that apply.)

- |   |  |   |                              |
|---|--|---|------------------------------|
| 1. Want to be wealthy famous, or powerful | 5. Couldn't find a suitable job            | 9. Bored or frustrated with current job         | 13. Want to work with family |
| 2. Stay at home to operate business       | 6. To have an outlet for unused energy     | 10. Want to follow the lead of someone I admire | 14. Other (Specify): _____   |
| 3. Interested in specific business area   | 7. Want to be my own boss                  | 11. Supplement income                           |                              |
| 4. Want job security                      | 8. Want financial security for self/family | 12. Increase retirement income                  |                              |

## Section III. Optional

1. Gender      1. Male      2. Female

2. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_ years old

### 3. What is your ethnic background?

- |                     |                    |                           |
|---------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. African American | 3. Hispanic        | 5. Caucasian              |
| 2. Asian American   | 4. Native American | 6. Other (Specify): _____ |

## Section IV. Your Class Expectations

1. With what Re-Entry program are you participating

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2. Please list the top three (3) reasons for enrolling in the MERIT Program:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

3. Please list your top three (3) things you want to be able to do after the MERIT Program:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

By submitting this application for the MERIT program, the Applicant hereby understands and certifies that:

- the information submitted herein is accurate, true and correct, to the best of his or her belief
- all application materials submitted will not be returned
- any information that should be treated as confidential, a trade secret or otherwise proprietary must be clearly and individually identified as such by the Applicant within his or her application
- he or she may be required to provide a oral presentation
- he or she recognizes that the MERIT Program is a competitive process and that not all applications will be approved

I hereby acknowledge that I have read and understand the preceding statements.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

***Mail Application to:***

Attention Linda Spooner  
MERIT Program  
Safer Foundation  
571 W. Jackson  
Chicago, IL 60661

**ACCION Chicago and the Safer Foundation Present**  
***The Micro Enterprise Reentry Investment Trust (MERIT)***

**Entrepreneurship Training Program**  
**Session Outline**

Monday's, January 24, 2011 through April 11, 2011

Class Times: 1:00pm – 4:00pm or 5:30pm – 8:30pm

Class Location:

DePaul University, Egan Center, 1 E. Jackson Blvd., Lower Level or  
 ACCION Chicago, 1436 W. Randolph St., Suite 300

#	Date Monday	Main Topic	Sub-topic	Guest Speaker	Things to Do
1	1/24/11	Orientation	Understanding Entrepreneurship	ACCION Loan Officer	
2	2/07/11	Marketing Plan	Evaluating Business Opportunity *Group Coaching last 30 minutes of class		
3	2/14/11	Marketing Plan	Knowing customers & Competition	Panel (marketing experts)	
4	2/28/11	Marketing Plan	Crafting the Product/Service **This class will take place at the Harold Washing Library		
5	3/07/11	Marketing Plan	Understanding Sales & Marketing		
6	3/14/11	Organizational Plan	Building the Team & Organization *Group Coaching last 30 minutes of class	Panel (insurance agent, attorney, lender)	
7	3/21/11	Financial Plan	Learning Entrepreneurial Finance		
8	3/28/11	Financial Plan	Managing the Money *Group Coaching last 30 minutes of class	Panel (tbd)	
9	4/4/11	Financial Plan	Growing the Business ***Student Presentations		
10	4/11/11	Plan Integration	Implementing The Plan ***Student Presentations		

***Session order and content subject to change***

\* The last 30 minutes of class time is used to provide counseling in small groups.

\*\* Class will be held at The Harold Washington Library

\*\*\*Student presentations will be split over 2 weeks; everyone will be required to make a final presentation