Organizational Overview

Rural Opportunities, Inc.
ROI History

- Founded in 1969
- Farmworker rights advocacy organization
- Headquarters in Rochester, New York
- 54 Office Locations in six states and Puerto Rico
- 300 year round and 300 seasonal employees
ROI Programs

ROI offers a variety of programs and services to the region’s rural communities and small towns:

- Training and Employment
- Housing and Community Facilities Development
- Homebuyer Promotion Services
- Small and Micro-business Finance, training and technical assistance
- Health and Safety and Child Care Services
Rural Development Program and Strategy

- Access to Credit and Capital
- Training and Technical Assistance
- Sector Concentration
The ROI Enterprise Center

- Non-profit affiliate of ROI
- Separate Board and Loan Committee
- Certified CDFI (community development finance institution)
- Certified CDE (community development entity)

*Intermediary for:*

- Small Business Administration (SBA)
- USDA (Intermediary Relending Program)
- Private Banks
Sources of Capital

Private Banks Providing Loan Capital include:
- HSBC
- Citibank
- Upstate National Bank
- Key Bank
- Chase Bank

These are CRA qualified investments
They are part of the Economic Justice Campaign (Nat’l Community Reinvestment Coalition)

Private Corporations Providing Support:
- Kodak $1 Million Loan Fund
The ROI Enterprise Center

Accomplishments:

- Closed 307 loans totaling over $7 MM
- Leveraged over $18 MM
- Created or retained over 1,866 jobs
Trading Cooperatives Program
Employment Situation

- Over 20% of all employed people in NYS are employed by microenterprise businesses
- 8-10% unemployment rate in rural counties
- If every business could “Grow by One” - no unemployment problem
- Solution: Focus on growing our small businesses
Technology as Solution

- Discussions with Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton on how to overcome the obstacles of small market, low incomes, lack of capital, led to possibility of using eBay and e-commerce to grow business and spur employment in rural areas
Four Critical Elements

- Technology
- Training
- Access to Capital
- Access to Internet
Senator Clinton’s Office

- Asked HP to provide technology - HP gave us 17 laptop computers and digital cameras

- Invited eBay to join us in a demonstration project and provide training—eBay agreed to run eBay University as part of program

- Convinced HSBC to put up $100,000 and Upstate National Bank to add $250,000 in micro loan funds for participants and other rural businesses
Businesses

- First group – Anyone who made product in area and wanted to try to incorporate eBay in their business.
- 15 began with products like fishing rods, vintage doors, herbal soap, horse fencing and teddy bears. Later group added wood products, clothing, maple syrup.
Partners

- Clarkson University, Paul Smith College, SUNY Canton and SUNY Geneseo
- The Eastman Kodak Company
- SCORE
- Small Business Development Centers
- HSBC and Upstate National Bank
- HP, Microsoft and AEO
- Livingston and Wyoming County
- St. Lawrence County Chamber of Commerce
Lessons Learned From 1st Class

- Needed better screening of products and participants
- Had to assess commitment of participants
- Needed basic business training in addition to eBay training
- One of most important aspects of program was networking among businesses
- Needed to hire full-time director
Formalizing Project

- Applied for USDA RBEG grant
- Received a HUD EDI grant (Through Clinton)
- Hired full time director, Ruby Sprowls
- Established criteria and an application process to ensure quality participants
- Began to operate the program on a larger scale with an eye towards replication to other areas
Outcomes

- 47 businesses trained in e-commerce and basic business principles
- 23 New jobs created by participants
- $500,000 added to the bottom line of participating businesses
- Collaborations between businesses
- An ability to replicate the program to other areas
Success Stories

- Damon Rods – from back shop producer to global seller
Success Stories

- Yesteryear’s Vintage Doors – 3 new hires and major increase in web sales
Stories

- Sunfeather Soaps – Oprah Show sale and major bug spray sale
- Expanded operations by adding store in the Caribbean
Replicating the Program

- ROI has established a similar program in the Finger Lakes region of NYS. (17 businesses have received training to date)
- NATC is running two programs simultaneously in the High Peaks area and the St. Lawrence River Valley doubling annual output to 30 participants
- ROI is working with three new partners in rural NY to establish additional Co-ops
The Future

- Continue to expand the program throughout NYS
- HP has just awarded ROI with a $163,000 grant of equipment to establish an “incubator without walls” to expand the program and HP’s e-commerce inclusion efforts in the North Country.
- Adding a microenterprise training class to the mix to further support our businesses
- Staff obtaining eBay University training so we can offer better service to our clients
- From 2007-2009 areas of expansion will include the Southern Tier of NYS and the mid-Hudson Valley
2007-9 Future Expansion Areas

Appendix 2
Map of New York State
Questions?