



International Aid 2010 Grant Nominee Assessment

AGORA PARTNERSHIPS

www.agorapartnerships.org

Overview:

Agora Partnerships is dedicated to providing talented entrepreneurs in developing countries with the tools, networks, and financing necessary to launch successful, socially responsible businesses - the kind that can fight poverty, provide needed goods and services, and help build a sustainable society. The organization is headquartered in Washington, DC, and its operations are now focused in Nicaragua. Agora is now preparing to scale its programs throughout Central America.

Agora Partnerships works with small and medium entrepreneurs (SMEs), whose businesses are important engines of economic and social development in developing countries in Latin America. These businesses are often referred to as “the missing middle” – those that fall in between the cracks of existing financing methods; they are too big for micro-finance institutions, but too small for loans from commercial banks. Agora works with entrepreneurs on the front lines of this work, and connects them to financing, technical advice, and a support network of professionals and other entrepreneurs.

In addition, Agora created the Agora Venture Fund (AVF), a for-profit, micro venture capital fund that provides long-term capital to socially responsible small and growing businesses. The fund is used to capitalize select SMEs and seeks both social and financial returns. AVF seeks social impact in four areas: job creation, base of the pyramid (a term for the poor in developing countries) products and services, environmental impact, and corporate social responsibility.

Mission and Theory of Change:

Agora is working to incubate and catalyze a network and culture of entrepreneurship in Latin America, and hopes to change how people in the developing world access opportunity and create income and wealth for themselves and their communities. The organization’s approach is holistic; the strategy focuses on four pillars: developing leadership and management talent, building community and networks, creating and celebrating a culture of entrepreneurship, and providing access to capital for growth.

Track record:

Agora was founded in 2005, and has tracked a number of metrics to monitor and evaluate its impact. Since its inception, the organization has worked with 48 small and medium businesses in Nicaragua. These businesses have created more than 600 full-time jobs, increased in sales of 112%, and raised wages and benefits by 15%. Agora has also provided training to 3,600 current or aspiring business owners through workshops and classes.

In addition, Agora works with MBA candidates who volunteer to provide business advice and mentorship to clients. Over 250 volunteers have taken part in this program.

Use of proceeds:

A grant from OPF would be used by Agora to fund its new LiderES initiative, which selects, trains, and supports promising impact entrepreneurs.



International Aid 2010 Grant Nominee Assessment

Financial, staffing, and project summary:

In 2008, Agora had revenues of \$446,895 (up from \$228,288 in 2007) and expenses of \$96,975 (\$198,842 in 2007). The significant rise in revenue is a result of two large grants from The Rockefeller Foundation and The Draper Richards Foundation in 2008.

Agora has a staff of 3 people in Washington DC and 9 people (2 of which are MBA volunteers on stipends) in Nicaragua. They intend to open an office in El Salvador by the end of 2010 and in Mexico soon after that.

Working Group analysis:

Agora Partnerships is helping the poor to create income and opportunity for themselves through mobilizing capital for SMEs and educating and supporting entrepreneurs. In addition to providing technical assistance and financing, the organization has broader goals of creating a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship in Central America. This groundswell change is an ambitious undertaking, and the organization's market-based approach has the potential for sustainable change by empowering local talent.