

CNMI SBDC and CWA Celebrate Successful Women's Entrepreneurship Project Cohort 4

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The CNMI Small Business Development Center Network (CNMI SBDC) at the Northern Marianas College, in partnership with the Commonwealth Women's Association (CWA), recently awarded certificates to participants who successfully completed the 2024 Women's Entrepreneurship Project Cohort 4.

This year's program, designed to foster a focused learning environment, limited enrollment to the first 30 registrants. All participants who attended all four sessions received certificates of completion.

The four-day training series covered a range of essential topics for aspiring female entrepreneurs. Sessions included:

- **Credit and Financial Management:** Understanding credit scores, managing personal finances, and improving loan approval chances.
- **The Business Loan Application Process:** Loan types, navigating the application process, and securing funding.
- **Federal Contracting:** Demystifying the bidding and proposal process for government contracts.
- **Consignment Opportunities:** Optimizing booth spaces and product presentation at public events.

The program fostered active participation, with sessions often extending to accommodate participant questions.

Fatima Celis, Vice President of locally-owned Rice to Meat You, a catering business that prepares and delivers pre-packaged platters and food plates, shared her praises on the sessions presented by First Hawaiian Bank, Bank of Hawaii, Bank of Guam and CEDA, “For small businesses looking to expand, it was very helpful for us to find this type of training where we could come to one place to hear from banks on what small businesses need to know about the loan process and what we also need to do if we want to improve our financials to receive that approval.”

Frank Celis, President and Co-owner of Rice to Meat You, also shared his appreciation of the experience, “I enjoyed the presentation on vendor events because as a small business owner, often you’re also the one marketing your products. The tips provided on packaging and product presentation were useful. I feel those were tips we’ll apply when finalizing our packaging, something we’re currently working on to perfect. I also thought the session on the RFP process was helpful. Although that may be saved until we’re ready to expand, the information provided was all good to know, and those workshops SBDC mentioned during that session, is something Fatima and I look forward to attending.”

Polly DLG. Masga, Co-Owner of Access 670 Consulting, shared, “I most especially appreciated the presentation by Bank of Hawaii and First Hawaiian Bank. Understanding the importance of having good credit before starting a business was something I never thought about. Learning from industry experts has become more valuable than ever. These professionals offer insights that come from years of hands-on experience, giving us a clearer understanding of realistic challenges and opportunities for businesses to grow.”

Aspiring entrepreneur and Cohort 4 participant, Donna Rivera added, “It is an incredible privilege to be part of the 4th Cohort of the Women Entrepreneurship Project. Day 1 kicked off with an insightful session on Credit Ecosystem, where we had the honor of learning from esteemed professionals from Bank of Hawaii and First Hawaiian Bank. Their wealth of knowledge not only equips aspiring business owners with the tools needed to navigate the financial landscape but also provides valuable lessons in managing personal credit and finances. A heartfelt thank you to Bank of Hawaii and First Hawaiian Bank for your generosity and support in empowering future entrepreneurs through your expertise.”

The program concluded with a networking session where participants showcased their products and services.

“We are pleased with this year’s turnout of the Women’s Entrepreneurship Project, and look forward to producing Cohort 5 in this important initiative with CWA’s partnership. We are excited to work with this year’s program graduates in establishing their footprint in our economy, however big or small, as we find innovative solutions to assist in finding success in connecting them with our resource partners with whom make all of this possible for our clients and our programs,” said Nadine C. Deleon Guerrero, Network Director of the CNMI SBDC.

The CNMI SBDC and CWA extended their gratitude to the following partners who contributed to the success of the program:

- First Hawaiian Bank
- Bank of Hawaii

- Bank of Guam
- Commonwealth Economic Development Authority (CEDA)
- U.S. Pacific Air Force
- Marianas Creations

Learn More:

For more information, visit www.cnmisbdc.com or contact CNMI SBDC at (670) 237-6888 / cnmisbdc@marianas.edu. Follow them on social media for updates: Instagram @cnmisbdc and Facebook at CNMI Small Business Development Center Network.