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## Newsletter

July 2012

# Market Studies: A Key Tool in CDFI Decision Making

Making decisions based on reliable information is a vital component of strategic management. Conducting market studies to obtain such data is a strategy that is supported by funders and other key stakeholders. Funders such as the CDFI Fund, the NEXT Award, and private foundations encourage this practice by providing funding to complete this type of strategic research.

FUND Consulting has extensive experience in designing and implementing market studies for CDFIs. To date, the FUND team has delivered over 50 market studies nationwide. One recent example is a market feasibility study for Pathway Lending, a CDFI headquartered in Nashville, TN.

FUND Consulting designed and implemented a study to assess the feasibility of a proposed lending product in Pathway Lending's expansive state-wide market. The team used a comprehensive set of primary research tools including key informant interviews with a diverse set of stakeholders, and a survey of Pathway Lending clients. The research resulted in a rich data set which, after analysis, determined the feasibility of the lending product, identified potential markets for expansion, and included strategic recommendations for Pathway Lending to consider during implementation. According to Hank Helton, Pathway Lending's Senior Vice President, "The work completed by FUND Consulting helped us gain board approval to launch this new product, and gain confidence of its potential for success and impact in the market."

The final deliverable was a comprehensive report which provided a framework for future planning efforts.

For more information on FUND's strategic research services, please email [lserleas@fundconsulting.com](mailto:lserleas@fundconsulting.com) or call us at 773.281.8845.

## Community Advantage Program Highlighted at OFN Small Business Lending Forum

On June 18 FUND Consulting staff attended the [OFN](#) Small Business Forum held in our hometown of Chicago. The forum was an excellent opportunity to catch up with a number of our clients and industry colleagues as well as to learn more about the opportunities that exist for CDFIs to better serve entrepreneurs and small businesses.

One such opportunity was the SBA's [Community Advantage Program](#). The program was launched early last year as a pilot program with the express goal of increasing the number of SBA 7(a) lenders in underserved communities by targeting community-based and mission-focused lenders, including CDFIs, who were previously unable to offer these loans. In her remarks at the forum, SBA Deputy Administrator Marie Johns outlined several upcoming changes to the program that should make it easier for more CDFIs to take advantage of the program. Most notably, the pilot program has been extended through 2017. Other potential changes include expanded access for lenders to the secondary market for the sale of the guaranteed portion of SBA loans, the establishment of lower loan loss reserve requirements, and more flexibility in interest rates. With these program changes, the Community Advantage Program has the potential to become an important tool for helping CDFIs to expand their reach and impact among small businesses.

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## FUND Consulting Launches Blog

We are excited to announce the launch of our blog, [Smart Decisions, Reliable Data: A blog dedicated to community and economic development issues](#). We see the blog as a dedicated space to reflect on our work and to explore the opportunities, challenges, ideas, and trends that are shaping CDFIs and the community and economic development fields. We hope that you will check in with us regularly and join the conversation at <http://fundconsulting.wordpress.com>.

[Visit our blog](#)

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