

**JOB TRAINING INCENTIVE PROGRAM  
MONTHLY BOARD MEETING**

**Virtual Meeting**

**Summary of August 9, 2024, Meeting**

**ATTENDEES:**

**Board Members**

Sara Gutierrez, EDD Deputy Division Director  
Kelley Allen, OPEIU Local 251  
Monica Sandoval-Johnson, STEM Boomerang  
Marcos Martinez, Department of Workforce Solutions  
Kathleen Sena, HED

**Board Members Absent**

Mark Roper, EDD Acting Cabinet Secretary, Board Chair  
Marc Duske, NM PED

**JTIP Staff Present**

Patrick Gannon, JTIP Program Manager  
Lynette King, JTIP Program Administrator

**Guests**

Alex Marucci – Higher Cultures, Owner  
Robert Bellemare – Gridworks, CEO  
La Primera Tortilla Factory, Inc. – Juan Carlos Favela, Secretary and Treasurer  
BlackVe, Inc. – Peter Wegner, CEO  
Sceye, Inc. – Shurette Neuman  
Emerging Technology Ventures, Inc. – Cliff Hudson, CEO  
Sasquatch Campers, Inc. – Kass Kremer

**I. Introductions**

The meeting convened at 9:02 am. The introduction of the board and staff followed.

**II. Approval of the Agenda**

A motion to approve the agenda was made by Kelly Allen and seconded by Marcos Martinez. Motion passed unanimously.

### **III. Consideration of Proposals and Amendments**

#### **a) Higher Cultures, LLC - (Amendment) –**

*The company requested a total of \$8,000.00 for 1 trainee.*

Higher Cultures started in Grants Pass, Oregon, in 2017 which began primarily as an extraction lab. As things quickly grew, they found themselves in need of more products to process, so they expanded on the production front -- first with one production license, then two more the next year and then two more the following year. Fast forward to 2024, Higher Cultures is one of the largest producers and processors in the state of Oregon. For the company, expansion into New Mexico was the next natural progression. It is an area that the company is familiar with, has key contacts on the retail and production sides of cannabis, and have processes and procedures in place that allow them to produce some of the highest quality cannabis products on the market. Their goals are pretty simple; to provide the best quality cannabis products to the state of New Mexico, to run a responsible and profitable business and to create quality jobs in the communities in which they operate. Since their first JTIP application, Higher Cultures has grown a presence in the local markets by being present in community events and outreach. The company has won multiple awards for their cartridges since their last JTIP award, which has increased visibility with retailers and producers looking for extraction services throughout the state. Higher Cultures is starting to gain serious traction in many key territories in New Mexico and is looking forward to substantial growth in the coming months.

*A motion to approve this request was made by Monica Sandoval - Johnson and seconded by Marcos Martinez. Motion passed unanimously.*

#### **b) Gridworks, Inc. – (Amendment)**

*The company requested a total of \$101,340.88 for 6 trainees and 2 apprentices.*

Gridworks began life as Affordable Solar in 1998, a New Mexico enterprise with a passion for renewable energy and strong community; selling retail solar systems online. Quickly becoming a residential solar leader, the company developed a utility-scale division in 2014. As of March 2022, this division now operates independently as Gridworks.

Gridworks provides turnkey solar and energy storage solutions for developers and utility clients through engineering, procurement, and construction (EPC) as well as operations and maintenance (O&M). The company's proprietary technologies streamline the EPC process, saving time and money. Gridworks is also sought after for their ability to engage in creative problem solving for early-stage renewables development.

*A motion to approve this request was made by Marcos Martinez and seconded by Kelly Allen. Motion passed unanimously.*

**c) La Primera Tortilla Factory, Inc.**

*The company requested a total of \$143,001.12 for 21 trainees.*

La Primera Tortilla Factory was founded in 1984 by Jose and Aurora Favela, starting as a small operation selling fresh tortillas locally. The business expanded to manufacture and produce corn and flour tortillas, tostadas, and corn dough for tamales. The company is located at 102 Palomas Pl. in Sunland Park, NM, and has added another expansion to support increased production. Over the years, the company has grown to employ 48 people, operating two shifts to meet demand.

Clients include retail stores such as Walmart, Food King, Albertson's, and local small grocery stores across El Paso, Texas, and Doña Ana counties. La Primera Tortilla Factory also supply large chain restaurants like TacoTote, Carnitas Queretaro, Carlos and Mickies, Corralitos, and other small restaurants. Over the past three years, the company has experienced consistent growth, with revenue increasing from \$3.5 million in 2019 to \$4.7 million in 2020, and \$5.3 million in 2021, and reaching \$6.7 million in 2022. The company has projected revenue to reach \$7.7 million in 2023. The recent acquisition of the flour tortilla production line is expected to significantly boost growth and market preference, with projected revenue of \$10 to \$11 million dollars in 2024.

This is La Primera Tortilla Factory's first JTIP application.

*A motion to approve this request was made by Marcos Martinez and seconded by Kathleen Sena. Motion passed unanimously.*

**d) BlackVe, Inc.**

*The company requested a total of \$301,306.40 for 7 trainees.*

BlackVe was started in January 2024 with the intention of applying cutting edge design, manufacturing and production technologies to the process of designing, manufacturing and operating satellites. The company is establishing design, manufacturing and operations capabilities and facilities in Albuquerque, NM. BlackVe, Inc is a dynamic and innovative national security-focused space company dedicated to pushing the boundaries of technology and engineering excellence for their exceptional customers. Target markets are US Government customers in the National Security Space Sector and emerging commercial space operations companies. BlackVe is currently operating out of 8,000 sq.ft. high-bay manufacturing space leased from CNM Workforce Training Center at 5600 Eagle Rock Ave NE, Albuquerque NM. This facility is being outfitted with class 100K clean rooms for satellite assembly, integration, and test. This facility also houses their engineering team. The company expects to grow from three full time employees today (with 10 consultants) to ~25 additional new hires by mid-2025.

This is BlackVe's first JTIP application.

*A motion to approve this request was made by Monica Sandoval- Johnson and seconded by Kelly Allen. Motion passed unanimously.*

**e) Sceye, Inc. -**

*The company requested a total of \$91,019.68 for 2 trainees.*

Sceye, founded in 2014, is a manufacturer of High-Altitude Platform Stations (HAPS) for the stratosphere at 65,000 feet. From here, Sceye connects directly to mobile devices and observes the Earth in real-time at resolutions never before possible. Sceye stations are an excellent solution for instant infrastructure in an era where broadband access has become an essential element of everyday life.

Sceye's HAPS design, in the form of an enhanced balloon, can lift a variety of payloads for connectivity, earth observation, and scientific research. Its hull fabric can manage the extreme environment of the stratosphere, and optimizes strength, helium retention, and thermal management. High-performance batteries and solar panels close the power loop: enough power storage to last until sunrise, and efficient solar cells to collect energy during the day. The milestone test launch, which used patented solar and battery power, puts Sceye on track to expand internet access to remote populations, monitor greenhouse gasses down to individual emitters, and detect natural disasters as they begin.

Sceye is actively expanding its operations in NM to include engineering, production, operations, and services for a fast-expanding customer.

*A motion to approve this request was made by Monica Sandoval – Johnson and seconded by Marcos Martinez. Motion passed unanimously.*

**f) Emerging Technology Ventures, Inc.**

*The company requested a total of \$35,570.00 for 2 trainees.*

Emerging Technology Ventures Inc.(ETV) was formed February 2014 in Alamogordo, New Mexico and is an Economically Disadvantaged, Woman-Owned and HUBZone Small Business.

ETV focuses on the development of cross-cutting autonomous systems technology startups in applications including precision agriculture, critical infrastructure protection, public safety, and environmental management.

EVT's core product, KeenAI's extensible core architecture provides end-to-end autonomous workflow services (sense-understand-decide-act) to conduct multi-modal sensing and fusion; AI/ML driven predictive analytics; hybrid computing (edge/cloud); and multi-echelon mission planning/execution in complex environments with scalable Human(x)-Autonomy(x) Teaming (H(x)A(x)T).

ETV has expanded its operations in January 2023 to the New Mexico State University's Arrowhead Center Genesis B facility. The 1,100 square feet of leased R&D area is designated for interns employed.

*A motion to approve this request was made by Kelly Allen and seconded by Marcos Martinez. Motion passed unanimously.*

**g) Sasquatch Campers, Inc.**

*The company requested a total of \$66,814.80 for 5 trainees.*

SasquatchXC, dba: Sasquatch Campers founded in early 2022, is dedicated to redefining adventure through innovative and rugged camp trailers, designed for explorers who seek to escape crowded RV parks and immerse themselves in the wilderness. Operating from their headquarters in rural Silverton, CO, the company introduced two flagship products: the Highland 60, featuring luxurious in-cab sleeping arrangements with a queen bed, advanced storage solutions, and amenities like heating and air conditioning, and the Smuggler, a versatile cargo trailer with a rooftop tent. The trailers, known for their lightweight aluminum construction and premium suspension system, cater to the growing overlanding market—a sector that emphasizes self-reliant travel to remote destinations. Since their launch, the company has faced high demand and maintained a significant order backlog, demonstrating the strong market interest in their products. Sasquatch Campers uses a direct-to-consumer model, bypassing dealers to build closer relationships with customers and foster a community of engaged owners. Their commitment to detailed craftsmanship and customer experience positions them as a leader in the overlanding industry.

Operations are currently based in Silverton, CO, where the company handles all aspects of product design, engineering, and manufacturing. The company is planning to move to Farmington, NM, to access better facilities and a larger workforce, which will enable Sasquatch to scale operations effectively, meet customer demand, and address their \$612,000 backlog of orders. In Farmington, the company has established relationships with vendors for services such as powder coating and bed lining. The company plans to expand their vendor network in the area to enhance production capabilities further. The production processes have been optimized to reduce backlog from 16 to 8 months and achieve a 166% increase in production in 2023. This efficiency allowed the company to deliver 8 units against a forecast of 7, generating \$450,000 in revenue during the first full year of operations.

This is Sasquatch Campers first JTIP application.

*A motion to approve this request was made by Kelly Allen and seconded by Kathleen Sena. Motion passed unanimously.*

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**IV. Approval of Minutes**

- a. JTIP Board meeting July 9, 2024 - a motion was made by Monica Sandoval - Johnson and seconded by Kathleen Sena. Motion passed unanimously.

**V. Next Board Meeting**

- i. September 13, 2024; 9:00 am -12:00 pm; Virtual

**VI. Adjourn**

A motion to adjourn was made by Madem Chair. The motion passed unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 11:13 am.