Community Development Investors & Zelle® Launch Community-Based Entrepreneurship Through Acquisition Accelerator

Tuition-free, 12-week program aims to help aspiring entrepreneurs acquire and grow local businesses.

WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES, September 28, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Community Development Investors (CDI), in partnership with Zelle®, announced the inaugural class of its Community-Based Entrepreneurship Through Acquisition (CETA) Accelerator, as selected participants begin the 12-week program designed to prepare aspiring entrepreneurs to acquire, operate, and grow existing small businesses while creating lasting economic opportunity for communities across America.

The Fall 2026 class includes undergraduate business students, MBA candidates, and mid-career professionals who are interested in acquiring, operating, and growing an existing business. Participants were selected through CDI's competitive application process.

With support from Zelle, participants will take part in the Accelerator tuition-free and with no application fee, helping reduce barriers to accessing the training, coaching, and networks needed to pursue business ownership. Participants come from a low-income or low-wealth background or demonstrate a commitment to acquiring and growing a business that serves and strengthens a low-income community.

This comes as millions of small business owners approach retirement in the "Silver Tsunami".1 Without qualified buyers or succession strategies, many viable businesses may close, putting jobs, locally rooted companies, and community economic activity at risk. This could destroy the value owners have built over decades of work, threaten jobs, discourage local investment, and remove long-standing community institutions. At the same time, this transition creates a significant opportunity to expand pathways to business ownership for a new generation of entrepreneurs.

CDI's Community-Based Entrepreneurship Through Acquisition (CETA) model combines Entrepreneurship Through Acquisition, community development, and employee ownership strategies to help entrepreneurs think beyond the transaction itself. The model is designed to support successful business acquisitions while encouraging owners to create quality jobs, invest in employees, strengthen local institutions, and build businesses that contribute to the long-term economic vitality of their communities.

“This inaugural class represents what we hope to build through CETA—a new generation of entrepreneurs prepared to acquire and grow strong businesses while creating opportunity for employees and communities,” said Christopher Weaver, Executive Director of Community Development Investors. “As millions of small businesses prepare for ownership transitions, we have an opportunity to expand who becomes the next generation of business owners while preserving jobs that strengthen local economies.”

The Accelerator is being led by Archie Jones, Senior Lecturer at Harvard Business School and CEO of NxGen COACH Network.

The tuition-free, 12-week accelerator program will:

Provide participants with practical education, coaching, mentorship and strategic guidance.

Connect participants to experienced acquisition entrepreneurs, lenders, investors, business owners, advisers and employee ownership experts.

Guide participants through the key stages of the acquisition process, including business sourcing, financial analysis and valuation, due diligence, financing, transaction structuring, negotiation, closing, post-acquisition leadership and business growth.

Educate participants on employee ownership and other ownership-sharing strategies that can create long-term value for workers and businesses.

The partnership with Zelle supports CDI’s effort to broaden access to business ownership by providing participants with intensive education, mentorship, and connections to the broader acquisition ecosystem.

“As more small-business owners consider what comes next, preparing the next generation of entrepreneurs is critical to keeping these businesses open and rooted in their communities,” said Denise Leonhard, general manager of Zelle. “Through our partnership with CDI, we’re helping aspiring owners build the knowledge and connections needed to pursue acquisition opportunities, while continuing to support digital payments which can help small businesses thrive through transition.”

The Fall 2026 CETA Accelerator runs from September 28 through December 21, 2026, and will be primarily virtual, with select in-person meetings and events.

To learn more about the CETA Accelerator, visit cdinvestors.org/ceta-accelerator.

About Community Development Investors (CDI)

Community Development Investors (CDI) is a nonprofit initiative of the Economic Opportunity Coalition, Inc., advancing community-based Entrepreneurship Through Acquisition (ETA) and Employee Ownership (EO) as tools for inclusive economic growth. As millions of baby boomer owned businesses approach retirement, CDI is responding to this “Silver Tsunami” by connecting retiring owners with qualified entrepreneurs from underserved communities, preserving jobs, sustaining local businesses, and expanding pathways to wealth creation.

About Zelle®

Zelle® powers fast, reliable person-to-person digital payments, moving more than $1 trillion between millions of consumer and small business accounts at United States banks and credit unions. Available through a network of more than 2,400 financial institutions, Zelle® enables people to send and receive money directly – without cash, checks or third-party apps. Zelle® is owned and operated by Early Warning Services, LLC, which works with America’s banks, credit unions and government agencies to drive prosperity, deliver bold innovation and improve how payments are made. Learn more at www.zelle.com.

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