



September 3, 2025

To Whom It May Concern:

It is with immense gratitude and the highest level of confidence that I recommend Jeanette Koncikowski of Thrive Community Consulting. Over the course of a year-long engagement from April 2024 to March 2025, Jeanette served as the foundational architect and strategic partner in a period of transformative growth for the East Buffalo Development Corporation (EBDC). To say her work was impactful would be an understatement; she was the catalyst that turned our vision into a viable, thriving organization.

When Jeanette began working with us, EBDC was just over a year old—rich in passion and purpose, but in need of the essential structures to support our ambitious goals. Jeanette’s approach was both methodical and deeply intuitive. She guided us through the critical process of defining our mission, vision, and values, giving us a clear and unified voice. She then rolled up her sleeves and worked alongside us to build our operational bedrock, helping develop everything from our first employee handbook and HR protocols to a formal accounting manual that prepared us for the complexities of nonprofit finance. She didn't just give us templates; she equipped us with the knowledge to become a compliant, professional, and resilient organization.

On a personal level, Jeanette’s one-on-one executive coaching was a lifeline for me as a first-time Executive Director. She created a confidential, supportive space where I could navigate the shift from an entrepreneurial founder to a nonprofit leader, providing expert counsel on everything from staff supervision to board relations. Simultaneously, she masterfully guided the evolution of our board, helping us double its size with qualified community leaders and providing the training and tools necessary to transform it from a founding group into a strategic governing body. Her facilitation between myself and our Board President was particularly crucial, fostering a relationship of transparency and trust that now forms the core of our leadership team.

Perhaps the most tangible testament to Jeanette’s value is in the incredible outcomes she helped us achieve. Her expertise in fundraising and her willingness to leverage her own professional network on our behalf were game-changing. A key introduction she made to the office of State Senator Sean Ryan directly led to EBDC being invited to apply for—and ultimately secure—\$1.35 million in state funding. This single connection dramatically altered our trajectory and capacity for impact. She also connected us with the nonprofit attorney we retained, the fundraising bootcamp that sharpened our skills, and the Society for Human Resources Management, all of which have become invaluable, long-term resources for our organization.

In one year, Jeanette took us from a startup to a professionally managed organization with a trained board, robust internal systems, and millions of dollars in new funding. She is a strategist, a coach, a connector, and a true partner in community building. Any organization fortunate enough to work with her will not only achieve its goals but will emerge stronger, smarter, and more capable than before. Please feel free to contact me if you require any further information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Essence W. Sweat".

Essence Sweat, Executive Director, essence@eastbuffalodevelopment.org