

**OMAHA, Neb.** -- A meeting brought federal officials and local entrepreneurs together on Thursday to help small business owners navigate the stormy economy.

Local business owners said that while they're doing better financially than counterparts in other cities, they acknowledge having thin profits and having trouble getting loans.

Todd Fishback said that his upstart document management firm was just starting to reach new heights when he had to scale back his plans.

"When the financial markets started their downturn in September, it became very difficult to find investment capital," he said.

He said that his company is booking more business than ever, but that tight credit markets are applying other pressures.

"We can't find the debt financing," he said. "We have had difficulties finding equity financing."

Representatives from the Small Business Administration and Rep. Lee Terry met with business owners to discuss ways to modify programs designed to help them.

"Small business is our economy," Terry said.

He said the stimulus package, which provided \$730 million for the SBA, will help provide new loans to assist small businesses with meeting debt payments, will offer higher loan guarantees and reduce loan fees.

Attendees at the meeting said they welcomed that news, including Nebraska auto dealer Ron Schmidt. He said credit is getting tighter as the economy gets worse.

"GMAC has been our financier in the past, but they're no longer interested in taking the risk," Schmidt said.

Fishback said he's hopeful that the SBA's programs will help him solve his money problems and grow his company.

"We've got a tremendous opportunity now, even in this economy, because our solution is a very cost-effective one," he said.

