

ACTUALIZING EQUITY in Small Business & Economic Development

Drawing on the insights of the Alliance-convened Business Resource Collective, at our February 2023 Actualizing Equity event we explored: What does it look like for Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) businesses to thrive on their own terms? And what tools do BIPOC businesses need to build and grow in Minnesota?



“Our businesses are an invisible market. Recently, a study in Brooklyn Park only showed 55 small businesses with one to five employees in the city. In one building alone, I can show you a hundred of those types of businesses. The ecosystem recognizes who it wants to recognize and supports who it wants to support... My frustration is that, oftentimes, yes, we’re involved in the conversation, we’re there helping [agencies] create a program. But, once the meeting is over, somehow everything we provided gets lost and the program has none of the ingredients that we asked you for. It looks nothing like what we designed or talked about. But they’re happy because they were able to create something.” *Denise Butler, Entrepreneur and Director of Economic & Community Development, African Career, Education and Resource Inc (ACER)*



“We’re shocked when we can’t get BIPOC businesses to make it to that three-year mark, that five-year mark, when we know they didn’t start well. We do ourselves a disservice when we don’t name that there is actually a number to every sector and to every business to start well. That doesn’t mean that people of color aren’t getting it done on less, but we can choose to figure out the right products and programs for those businesses to start well — not wait three or five years.” *Tabitha Montgomery, Executive Director, Powderhorn Park Neighborhood Association*



“Beyond businesses starting well, electeds need to take this surplus as an opportunity to build the infrastructure that’s needed for those businesses to survive. We don’t have commercial kitchens. We don’t have artist incubators. We don’t have the things that will actually support these businesses to economically thrive in a creative economy... Every single department in the state has a role in creating a healthy business framework. Not just the Department of Employment & Economic Development, but Human Services, Education, every single department has a role in creating a cohesive governmental ecosystem.” *Y. Elaine Rasmussen, CEO, Social Impact Strategies Group*



“During the pandemic, money moved quickly. It was amazing how impactful that money was for ourselves and for everybody in our community. We were able to keep people on payroll. If our policies and programs really aim to make an impact, we have to remove some of the red tape that’s required and necessary to accomplish certain grants or financial obligations.” *Arun Motilall, Owner, Galaxy Foods*



“People have to remember that we have to invest in artists, who are essential for our community because they support, they celebrate, they develop creative practices, culture, traditions. They’re key contributors to healthy and equitable communities. That’s why they’re so important and we want to ensure that artists within our community who are giving back to our community are compensated for the work that they do, too.” *Wone Vang, Artist and Economic Opportunity Director, Springboard for the Arts*

KEY VALUES



Meeting basic needs with direct cash

Springboard for the Arts' Guaranteed Minimum Income for Artists pilot supported 75 artists, culture bearers, and creative workers with \$500/month for 18 months. Speakers also highlighted other Guaranteed Basic Income initiatives as tools for creating healthy business ecosystems by relieving the stress of meeting daily needs and freeing up energy and ingenuity to be more impactful in their communities. "People need more money in their homes. It's just that simple." Butler said. "Let people be comfortable first and foremost. And then you'll see how much more creative they are, how more productive they are because they're healthy."



Solidarity and shared responsibility

Montgomery elevated Midtown Global Market as an example of a healthy small business ecosystem. "You've not asked the entrepreneur to be the visionary, the bookkeeper, the social media guru, the janitor, the CPA," Montgomery said. "You've not sent them alone. At the Midtown Global Market, we've had some businesses that have been there since inception and they talk about what it means to have such wrap-around support from an institution where they've not had to figure out the build out alone, where they've not had to drive the traffic alone, and when traffic is low, they're not the only one needing to figure it out."



Connection over competition

"People think that we compete with many other ethnic businesses, whether it be Indian, Asian, or other Caribbean stores," Motilall said. "But we don't actually feel that way. We all call each other for everything. We back each other up, and we move products between each other when we don't have stuff. Especially through the pandemic, we survived because we knew that we could call on each other as a system and be there for everybody."



The Business Resource Collective

envision a Minnesota where thriving Black, Indigenous, immigrant, and people of color owned (BIPOC) businesses build and sustain the culture, wealth and economic vitality of our communities. Guided by our direct connection to BIPOC small businesses and entrepreneurs, our coalition advocates for increased financial resources, technical support and policy changes at the state and local levels to create a healthy ecosystem that invests in the specific needs and accelerates the growth of BIPOC businesses across Minnesota.

In addition to current program spending, BRC members recommend that a portion of the state's surplus be invested into the ecosystem that supports BIPOC small businesses, sole-proprietors, microbusinesses and creative businesses to achieve equitable economic recovery over the next five years. BRC continues to proactively advocate for bills that reflect material investments in resources and policies that can deepen support of the type of micro and small businesses that BRC members serve.

Our 2023 Investment Package includes:

- **Corridor Redevelopment** to build and strengthen BIPOC commercial corridors [\$176 million]
- **Infrastructure** to create spaces that match the types and sizes of BIPOC businesses [\$162 million]
- **Direct Investment** to access capital for startup and growing BIPOC businesses [\$140 million]
- **Basic Business Support** for culturally tailored services for BIPOC entrepreneurs [\$65 million]

Learn more about the **Business Resource Collective** at thealliancetc.org/business-resource-collective
Learn more about the **Actualizing Equity event series** at thealliancetc.org/actualizing-equity