
CALENDAR YEAR 2023 EQUITY IMPACT PLAN

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Department Name: Department of Economic Initiatives (DEI)

Equity Lead(s): Theresa Benincasa

Date: 12/18/23

EQUITY IMPACT PLAN REPORT

Goal 1: Implement the THRIVE Small Business Technical Assistance program that includes serving underrepresented small businesses and entrepreneurs.

Goal 1 Progress:

In 2023, the Department of Economic Initiatives (DEI) began implementation of the THRIVE Small Business Technical Assistance Grant Program (THRIVE). THRIVE will provide approximately 600 local small businesses with up to \$10,000 in business counseling and consulting services to help them continue their post-pandemic recovery and meet their individual business goals. The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors authorized \$7,000,000 in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to establish and implement the THRIVE program.

THRIVE program implementation is a two-phase process. In Phase 1, the goal was to recruit business coaches and consultants to provide technical assistance services in marketing, financial planning and business operations. To accomplish this goal, in CY 2023, DEI issued four Requests for Proposals (RFPs) in partnership with the Latino Economic Development Center (LEDC) to recruit qualified business coaches and industry experts to provide THRIVE services in marketing, financial planning and business operations. In phase 2, to be implemented largely in CY 2024, DEI will open applications to the THRIVE program to eligible small businesses that seek to utilize business coaching and consulting services.

At every stage in the planning and execution of THRIVE, DEI has focused on strategies to engage and serve racially and ethnically diverse business owners and underserved small businesses. Below are examples of how this effort was operationalized:

Message/Marketing Materials Development: DEI enlisted a minority-owned firm to develop social media advertisements and marketing materials for THRIVE that reflect the diversity of the county's small business owners. Materials noted that translation services are available to those who need it. DEI relied heavily on social media to reach individual owners, including advertising through the County's LinkedIn.

Marketing/Outreach: As part of its standard approach, DEI promotes county opportunities to a curated list of 60+ organizations that include multicultural chambers, nonprofit organizations, and economic development organizations that specifically target or represent diverse business owners, including African

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American, Latino, Asian-American, and ethnic groups such as Korean, Vietnamese, and Ethiopian business owners. DEI initiated personal contact with chamber CEOs and nonprofit leaders, economic development officers, and other gatekeepers to ensure that their networks were apprised of the THRIVE opportunities. In addition, DEI offered a contract opportunity to these organizations to creatively market THRIVE to small, and minority-owned businesses and subgroups.

Partnerships: DEI partnered with the Department of Procurement and Material Management's (DPMM) supplier diversity team to reach out directly to local businesses, including SWAM-certified businesses, that provide marketing, business operations, and financial planning services using platforms such as Tealbook. DEI worked with the Virginia Department of Small Business & Supplier Diversity and eVA to ensure that the opportunity to serve as a THRIVE coach and/or consultant was also promoted statewide.

DEI consulted with the Health Department to adopt best practices that they have used to reach local businesses and diverse communities.

Response to the THRIVE RFPs was positive, with 152 organizations competing to provide services in 17 high-demand areas such as brand consulting, website development, graphic design, e-commerce, payroll and bookkeeping set-up, commercial lease negotiation, human resources consulting, and financial planning services such as tax advising and financial health assessment. In addition to their overall expertise, the RFPs solicited information from offerors on their experience serving small and diverse businesses, local businesses and their ability to speak in languages other than English. Finally, a majority of the RFP respondents were themselves small businesses with diverse business ownership, further supporting the objectives of the THRIVE program.

In 2024, THRIVE will focus on recruiting county small businesses to participate in THRIVE, and match them to business coaches and business consulting services, and will use some of the same approaches as described above to reach racially and ethnically diverse business owners.

Goal 1 Highlights

60 firms selected for business coaching and consulting, including multiple SWAM firms.

Consultant and Coach firms' language capacity identified across 8 frequently spoken languages.

An online application portal for small businesses, with 24/7 technical and language support.

Promotion to 60+ multicultural chambers, business support organizations, nonprofits.

Direct outreach to 100s of businesses through DPMM supplier diversity and eVA vendors.

To Learn More: [THRIVE Small Business Application | Department of Economic Initiatives \(fairfaxcounty.gov\)](#)

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Goal 2: Improve access to capital and technical expertise for diverse founders, with a focus on economic growth in technology product industries in Fairfax County.

Goal 2 Progress:

The Fairfax Founders Fund (FFF) is a new grant and technical assistance program that provides grants of up to \$50,000 to early-stage innovative Fairfax County-based startups that are on a high-growth trajectory. FFF is a pilot program, with \$1 million in support from the Economic Opportunity Reserve Fund.

Fairfax Founders Fund outreach and marketing included intentional and extensive engagement with under-represented founders and the start-up network. DEI created partnerships with and recruited advisors through organizations that support underrepresented founders such as Marathon Fund, Black Girl Ventures, Halcyon, DataTribe, Minwo, the Northern Virginia Black Chamber, Citrine Angels, and the BFM fund.

In spring 2023, FFF held its inaugural countywide competition. FFF received 40 applications from a diverse set of local founders including proposals across a range of industries including advanced manufacturing; energy; environmental technology; communications; cybersecurity; autonomous systems; and ag-tech. A committee of more than 15 industry and academic experts reviewed the applications, provided feedback to the emerging companies and then invited 12 companies to “pitch” their proposals in person.

Five (5) Fairfax-based companies were selected. The grant recipients are [NearStar Fusion](#), [BloomCatch](#), [3D Orthobiologic Solutions](#) (3DOS), [Healp](#) and [Anapact](#) / The Smart Headgear. Awardees will receive \$50,000 in grant funding to implement proposed activities including, for example, prototype or product development, market research, and technology validation as well as mentoring and access to venture capital networks in the region.

The metrics below indicate how applicants identified themselves or a founding team member. The Founders Fund utilized the Small Business Administration’s definition of socially disadvantaged businesses, to inform its breakdown of racial and ethnic categories. [eCFR: 13 CFR 124.103 -- Who is socially disadvantaged?](#)

Applications from under-represented founders including women, veterans, founders with disabilities, and founders of color are over-represented in nearly every category as compared to data on census business ownership in Fairfax County, indicating targeted outreach may have contributed to increased applications from these groups.

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Goal 2 Highlights

40 applicants for Fairfax Founders Fund; Of these, 53% identified as woman-owned; 10% were veteran-owned and 13% were persons with a disability.

70% of applicants identified as minority owned.

- 17% Black American
- 5% Hispanic American
- 26% Asian Pacific American
- 12% Subcontinent Asian American
- 10% Black African; Middle Eastern; Afghan American; or Armenian
- 25% identified as having no minority founding team members and 5% opted not to respond.

To learn more, <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/economic-initiatives/fairfax-founders-fund>

Goal 3: Develop a business development and entrepreneurial center at Original Mount Vernon High School (OMVHS) that includes serving underrepresented entrepreneurs and workforce.

Goal 3 Progress:

Construction and building rehabilitation schedules at Original Mount Vernon High School are not likely to support commercial lease interest in 2024. As progress is made toward the conversion of the physical building to a usable and commercially available property, (expected by 2026), entrepreneurial opportunities for private sector tenants will continue to be explored.

However, in 2023 DEI continued to engage in conversations with potential future tenants that support community and local economic development, with a focus on business incubation. This included tours and discussions with a local black-owned furniture design and maker company; a tour and discussions with a culinary arts training and entrepreneurship education institution; and discussions with federal partners on interest in a collaboration and innovation center. These discussions are in the early stages.

Goal 4: Structure a platform to help entrepreneurs, home-based and small businesses, including minority-owned businesses connect to available resources.

Goal 4 Progress:

DEI's Small and Local Business Development Division continues to innovate and expand services and resources for locally owned businesses (including minority-owned firms), entrepreneurs and home-based businesses to connect them with information and opportunities to meet their goals. In 2023, DEI engaged a third-party consultant to develop an online portal that will promote free and very low-cost assistance available to start, grow and expand a business in Fairfax County. This platform, known as Fairfax CORE (Connecting Opportunities and Resources for Entrepreneurs) is due to go live in spring 2024. Fairfax CORE

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aims to be the go-to resource for aspiring entrepreneurs and business owners who need help establishing, expanding, or evolving their business in Fairfax County, including the towns and City of Fairfax. Through extensive research, DEI has identified more than 100 nonprofit, or publicly funded organizations, entities, and/or programs for promotion. The online portal will include the option to translate into multiple languages. The resource navigator on the platform can be filtered by specialized resources and services for ‘opportunity populations’ so users can select resources for specific communities (including race, ethnicity and other groups).

DEI created an advocacy team for Fairfax CORE to ensure a broad view of the needs of the business community, geographically, economically, as well as demographically. The advocacy team includes representatives from entrepreneurship support organizations whose clientele range from individuals focused on creating financial stability, economic development professionals with geographically targeted services, and state-funded small business educators.

In other work, DEI also partners with DPMM on the promotion for the Vendor Pitch Portal (VPP), now in its second year. VPP offers a single point of access for businesses who want to raise awareness of their business to potential County agency customers.

DEI works with county partners to provide education and increase awareness of opportunities for the business community, and in 2023 partnered to provide more than 20 education events and programming to 355 participants. For the second year, DEI cohosted *Ignite!* a five-part education series for small businesses and entrepreneurs. Cosponsored by the Patrick Henry Library and the Town of Vienna Economic Development Department, this year’s event focused on Digital Marketing.

Finally, as part of its daily work, the Small Business and Development Division provides direct one-on-one assistance through the BizEx program. Biz Ex answers technical questions from emerging entrepreneurs and small business owners on a wide range of topics, including how to navigate the county’s licensing and permitting requirements, and connects them to resources.

DEI’s BizEX services are provided upon request. Outreach promoting this service occurs as part of regular education events where we share information about many county entrepreneurship-focused resources. This includes presenting at the Economic Development Authority’s Entrepreneurship 101, the Central Fairfax Chamber of Commerce’s Starting a Business webinars, and other groups as requested. While these efforts aren’t necessarily targeted toward any specific audience, DEI strives to capture the demographic information shared voluntarily by the people who contact BizEX. The data below shows that DEI’s Small and Local Business Development is reaching the county’s racially and ethnically diverse business community, and increasing their access to free and low-cost resources, training and knowledge to help them grow.

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Goal 4 Highlights

340 customers connected with BizEX via an online inquiry. Of those reporting, 58% identified as women, 18% Asian, 18% African American, 21% two or more races; 20% Hispanic; 3% other minorities; 10% as veterans and 10% as persons with a disability.

106 businesses submitted their business information via the Vendor Pitch Portal. Of these, 90% identified as small, minority and/or veteran owned.

79 businesses participated in Ignite! workshops; Of these, 58% identified as woman-owned, 37% as African American, 16% as Asian, 3% as Hispanic, 8% as multi-ethnic, 10% as veterans and 1% as persons with a disability.

100 educational events and networking opportunities events were advertised on the Entrepreneurial Education Events Calendar, a BizEX initiative to promote opportunities sponsored by the County and our partners.

To Learn More: [Starting a Business in Fairfax County? | Topics](#)

Goal 5: Lead place-led economic development efforts, utilizing the unique assets within communities to nurture economic activity, engage local stakeholders/ residents, and support economically competitive places.

Goal 5 Progress:

To establish a baseline understanding of the County's unique place-based assets, DEI piloted the creation of commercial profiles at two locations: University Mall Shopping Center (Braddock District) and Bailey's Crossroads Community Business District (CBD) (Mason District). These economic assessments present an overview of these commercial centers, through a variety of economic and community metrics. This data can be used by stakeholders to support the business community, inform planning, and provide insights that leverage community and economic assets.

University Mall and Bailey's Crossroads CBC were selected for a variety of factors and pilot needs (e.g., geographic scale, location, types of businesses present, area demographics, etc.) while DEI iteratively figured out what data would be meaningful. The profile template includes Vulnerability Index data, demographic data, and insights on businesses and local consumer spending. These points, plus others, help provide a better quantitative and qualitative picture of the commercial area, its consumers, businesses and nearby residents.

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DEI engaged with several community-based economic development organizations to develop and refine place-based economic development efforts. The Bailey's Crossroads Seven Corners Revitalization Corporation (now Crossroads and Corners Coalition) engaged in developing the Bailey's Crossroads commercial profile, including leading tours of the area, reviewing the draft profiles, and engaging with local businesses to provide guidance on information that would benefit their community. The next phase of this work will utilize Vulnerability Index ratings and the presence of Opportunity Neighborhoods as one of the factors for consideration in choosing new locations for the next round of commercial profiles.

As part of other place-led economic development efforts, DEI staff participated in the Springfield Market Study Coordination team to help prioritize and establish a plan for market study strategy implementation. This important work includes diverse county and community partners and will help realize community development and revitalization goals.

Goal 6: With Department of Family Services (DFS), develop and Implement a Work-based Learning (WBL) Initiative.

Goal 6 Progress:

In 2023, DEI, in partnership with the Department of Family Services (DFS) and the SkillSource Group, Inc., launched the Talent Up Fairfax Fund, a pilot project to establish work-based learning opportunities for job seekers in high demand occupations. The Talent Up Fairfax Fund will work with employers that are interested in providing temporary work-based learning opportunities to previously overlooked job candidates from diverse backgrounds. Talent Up seeks to be an on-ramp for Fairfax County jobseekers seeking to improve their economic mobility, as well as expanding talent pools in the county for employers and promoting more inclusive hiring practices.

Eligible jobseekers that are selected to participate in the program will be paid wages from the Talent Up Fairfax Fund during short-term employment placements, to gain work experience and skills. Participating employers will sponsor approximately 185 temp-to-perm internships to create or expand the use of internships as a low-risk and high-return method of filling hard-to-recruit jobs in gateway occupations.

Talent Up aims to attract employers with entry to midlevel job-openings in high demand, in fields that have been demonstrated to lead to economic mobility and growth for workers (including IT, healthcare, program assistants/management, finance, service industries) and pay at least \$20 hour. Talent Up is recruiting jobseekers from wide variety of sources, including nonprofits that serve immigrants, STARs (workers skilled by alternative routes), refugees, and educational institutions such as FCPS Adult and Community Education and NOVA community college – workers who may not have a four-year degree, but have transferrable skills and experience.

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The Board of Supervisors authorized \$2.5 million in American Rescue Plan Act funding to support the Talent Up Fairfax Fund in July 2023. Since that time, DEI and its partners have focused on establishing the Talent Up Fairfax Fund. The following highlights activities accomplished in the third and fourth quarters of 2023.

Goal 6 Highlights

Contracted with SkillSource Group, Inc. (SSG) as the Program Administrator through subrecipient agreement.

SSG hired program staff, established website and communications and outreach plan, and initiated eligibility screening for job seekers and employers.

Established program milestones and metrics for employer engagement and program success including the number of internships established and job placements.

Initiated partnerships with EDA, NOVA Chamber of Commerce, INOVA and NOVA Community College to attract employers and jobseekers to Talent Up.

To Learn More: [TalentUp Fairfax | Elevating Opportunities, Empowering Talent](#)

Describe other equity-related work completed in CY 2023 (efforts that advance racial and social equity that your department was involved in within the department or countywide) not in the department's Equity Impact Plan.

DEI supports One Fairfax equity goals through research, policy analysis and program operations. These efforts are frequently done in collaboration with other county agencies and external partners and form the basis for future equity goals and programs.

Equity Impact Statements

In 2023, DEI staff researched and developed four equity impact statements to demonstrate equity related impacts of Board Actions. These include:

1. Authorization to Establish the Fairfax Talent Up Fund - A Work-Based Learning Program Demonstration (Board Action, July 11, 2023)
2. Approval of a Memorandum of Understanding between Fairfax County and the Tysons Community Alliance (Board Action, July 11, 2023)
3. Approval of License Agreement with Hands on Harvests for Outdoor Space Use at the Eileen Garnett Civic Space (Board Action, September 26, 2023)
4. Authorization of Economic Opportunity Reserve Funding to Establish the Accelerate Entrepreneur-Investor Forum Program, (Board Action, November 21, 2023)

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Accelerate Entrepreneur- Investor Forum Program

In 2023, DEI staff, in partnership with the George Mason University (GMU) Accelerate Program and the Economic Advisory Commission, conducted research and interviewed leaders in the regional venture capital community to determine strategies to bolster Fairfax County's entrepreneurial ecosystem to drive investment. The work informed a Board action to establish a new GMU Accelerator entrepreneur and investor forum series that will educate both founders and potential future investors, showcase existing programs, and to ultimately connect local firms with investment to grow.

This initiative will strengthen the Fairfax Founders Fund program by both engaging FFF applicants to present, but also by using the program as a tool to diversify the investor pool in the county. Similar to FFF, inclusive and intentional outreach and marketing will provide a more robust pipeline and provide opportunity to access both the diversity of entrepreneurial talent and, importantly, nascent investor talent, in the County.

Eileen Garnett Civic Space

In 2023, DEI along with the Department of Planning and Development, the Fairfax County Park Authority and many partners, coordinated the grand opening of the Eileen Garnett Civic Space in central Annandale. The park offers a civic plaza, a vibrant demonstration garden, a playground and is capable of hosting pop up community events. The civic space creates a community gathering space in a county neighborhood that lacked such amenities, due in part to a legacy pattern of land use development. The park offers a positive example of how economic revitalization and place-based economic development can foster inclusive and equitable access to a more livable, healthy and vibrant neighborhood.