



KING COUNTY SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORT AUDIT

2025

A Service Provider Review



Letter from the Seattle Metro Chamber's Associate Development Organization

Funded in part by the Washington State Department of Commerce and local partners, the Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce is the designated King County Associate Development Organization. ADOs work closely with local and regional partners to deliver business retention and expansion services, coordinate business recruitment, promote Washington State, respond to site selector requests for buildable sites, and enrich trade and economic relationships worldwide.

Dear King County Business Community,

Small businesses are the backbone of King County's economy, driving job creation, innovation, and community growth. However, many business owners—especially those in underserved communities—struggle to access the resources, funding, and support needed to thrive. The King County Small Business Support Audit provides key insights into these challenges and highlights opportunities to improve business resource navigation and ecosystem development.

Through the Community Business Connector program, we have engaged directly with non-profit, public, and private service providers to assess how well our support network meets local business needs. This report outlines gaps in specialized technical assistance, marketing and technology, and culturally responsive support services, emphasizing the importance of coordinated, community-driven solutions.

The findings in this report will inform technical assistance programs, funding strategies, and business support initiatives aimed at creating a more inclusive and resilient ecosystem. By aligning resources, outreach, and enhancing service coordination, we can better equip urban, rural and home-based businesses for long-term success.

I invite you to review the report, engage in the conversation, and collaborate on solutions to bridge resource gaps and expand opportunities for all entrepreneurs in King County. Thank you for your continued commitment to strengthening our local business community.

Sincerely,

Vaughn Taylor

Vice President of Economic Development
Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce

Community Business Connector Audits Business Support Services

The Community Business Connector (CBC) program, managed by the Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce, undertook a project to create a resource directory for the two-year pilot. This report summarizes the responses collected from local service providers during this project.

To optimize searches when a business registers for the CBC program, this project categorized organizations into a directory with five service areas and asked each organization to self-select its primary service area.

The review also highlights specific outcomes after small businesses receive assistance and recognizes the racial and ethnic diversity among program leaders.

CBC identifies potential links between program services and specialized assistance within King County's small business support ecosystem, offering valuable insights for service providers and funders in the Greater Seattle Region to strategically align resources and maximize impact.



Drawing from directory lists, online searches, and local partner recommendations, our project includes 53 nonprofits along with 32 private businesses and public agencies.

King County small businesses can now search for specific help to meet their needs and receive referrals from an organization serving their community.

The CBC directory currently excludes private local companies to ensure that only verified nonprofit organizations offering free services are listed.





Business Assistance Gaps and Linkages

Organizations offer significant support for startup formation (pre-revenue), revenue growth (planning), industry connections (peers), and capital access (loans and grants), but fewer organizations deliver marketing strategies and long-term planning, including wealth protection and succession planning.

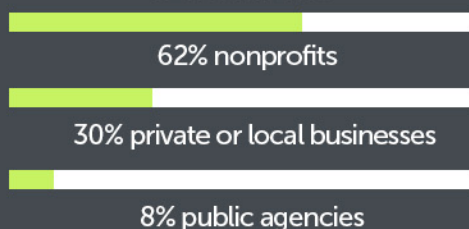
PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Community Business Connector is designed to foster a more inclusive small business support ecosystem, providing the necessary assistance and resources to launch and grow businesses successfully.

Recognizing the cultural, linguistic, and geographical barriers for business owners, CBC simplifies access to resources, support services, and expert guidance with help from trusted advisors deeply rooted in the community.

During the two-year CBC pilot, we scanned King County's service provider landscape. This project involved developing a website with a small business help desk and service provider directory. Out of 170 organizations on our list, nearly 50% responded to our questionnaire, and 53 nonprofits were included in the final service provider review.

RESPONDENTS



LINKS TO SERVICE NEEDS

Marketing & Technology assistance can expand coaching to include tactical marketing strategies and digital tools.

More coaching for specific industries, leading to improved business planning and operational efficiency.

More cohort-based and business builder workshop series with a mix of language and cross-cultural community groups.



Key Highlights

Our review of service providers in King County, Washington reveals a shortage of specialized assistance for specific business needs and industries, limited peer-cohort business programs for diverse populations, and gaps in marketing support and long-term business planning for small businesses.



43%

BUSINESS ASSISTANCE

Business planning is the top technical assistance priority among service providers.



SERVICE CAPACITY

Service providers support about 23 businesses monthly with coaching, in-person meetings, and workshops.



INDUSTRIES SERVED

The most common industries assisted are business or professional services, food services, retail, hospitality, and arts/entertainment.



PROGRAM RESULTS

Startup formation is the most expected outcome after delivering technical assistance. Others include access to capital, increased revenue, and networking with advisors and business owner peers.

43%

BIPOC-LED SERVICES

A notable portion of organizations and programs are BIPOC-led according to the respondents.

The graphics displaying 43% are coincidental and not due to miscalculating service provider responses.



Primary Services

Among the service providers, the largest portion (43%) self-selected 'Business Planning' as their primary service area, followed by 'Marketing and Technology' (24%), 'Social Services' (16%), 'Regulatory' (9%), and 'Capital Access' (8%). The providers who primarily deliver social services are community-based organizations offering a range of community services and referrals to individuals and families.

Our findings highlight organizations' primary focus or core offerings based on five service categories derived from the CBC program.

Capital Access: Loans, Grants or Investment

Business Planning: Business Growth, Workforce/HR, Legal, Tax or Accounting

Marketing & Technology: Sales, Social media, Tools/Solutions or E-Commerce

Regulatory: Licenses, Forms, Permits or Government Information

Social Services: Family, Community, Advocacy or Wellness

With most organizations providing business planning in King County, we believe there is potential for customized business coaching based on industry or specialized business assistance.

Furthermore, most programs are designed for pre-revenue to early-stage businesses, with insufficient support for second-stage companies generating over \$1 million in annual revenue.

We also asked providers if they engage in planned outreach to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) groups. While only a small percentage of organizations do not offer language interpretation services, 36 respondents do emphasize making cultural community connections in their outreach to small businesses.

| SERVICE PROVIDERS | CULTURAL COMMUNITY OUTREACH |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 10 | BLACK/AFRICAN AMERICAN |
| 9 | HISPANIC/LATINE |
| 6 | ASIAN |
| 3 | AMERICAN INDIAN/ ALASKA NATIVE |
| 1 | MIDDLE EASTERN |



BIPOC Leadership and Language Accessibility Among Service Providers

Forty-three (43) service providers, or about half of the respondents, are BIPOC-led at a program or management level. Among all respondents, 24 offer language interpretation in Spanish, 8 in Vietnamese, 5 in Somali, 4 in Korean, 4 in Mandarin, and 3 in Amharic and Tigrinya. Additionally, 16 providers offer interpretation services in other languages, but only 6 providers use Language Line for on-demand support.

A 2018 King County report identified Spanish, Vietnamese, Somali, Russian, Mandarin (Chinese), Korean, Amharic, Arabic, and Ukrainian as top-tier languages recommended for translating the agency's public communication materials, where applicable and practicable. More service providers must be interviewed to fully represent the cultural diversity and accessibility of language support services in King County. Seattle Metro Chamber's small business support audit builds on recent work in the region and helps improve resource access by addressing linguistic barriers.





Service Delivery and Workshop Accessibility for Small Businesses

Another important inquiry is understanding where small business assistance is delivered in the community. According to our survey respondents, over 60% of service delivery occurs through in-person workshops, online workshops, and individual coaching sessions. However, it is not surprising that workshops, meetings, and events not held in program offices will often take place in coffee shops, restaurants, libraries, and community centers within King County.

We found that business workshops, events, and meetings typically happen during the daytime, and fewer weekend services are available. Some business owners are likely unable to access these services during the day, so offering more evening and weekend options could encourage their participation.

Developing a program that provides incentives for local businesses to open up their spaces for workshops, meetings, and events may prove beneficial. This is one way to engage businesses in neighborhoods and business districts.

Thirty-nine (39) service providers typically offer workshops, meetings, and events in Seattle. Based on survey responses, the next most common service areas are Bellevue and Tukwila, with seven providers in each city. Providers have an opportunity to expand their reach to other cities, towns, and unincorporated areas across King County. More nonprofit organizations need to be accounted for to accurately identify all service delivery locations throughout the region.



Business Support Assessment and Service Opportunities in Marketing and Long-Term Planning

Right now, providers offer assistance to help businesses start, increase revenue, make industry connections and partnerships, connect with business peers and mentors, and access capital.

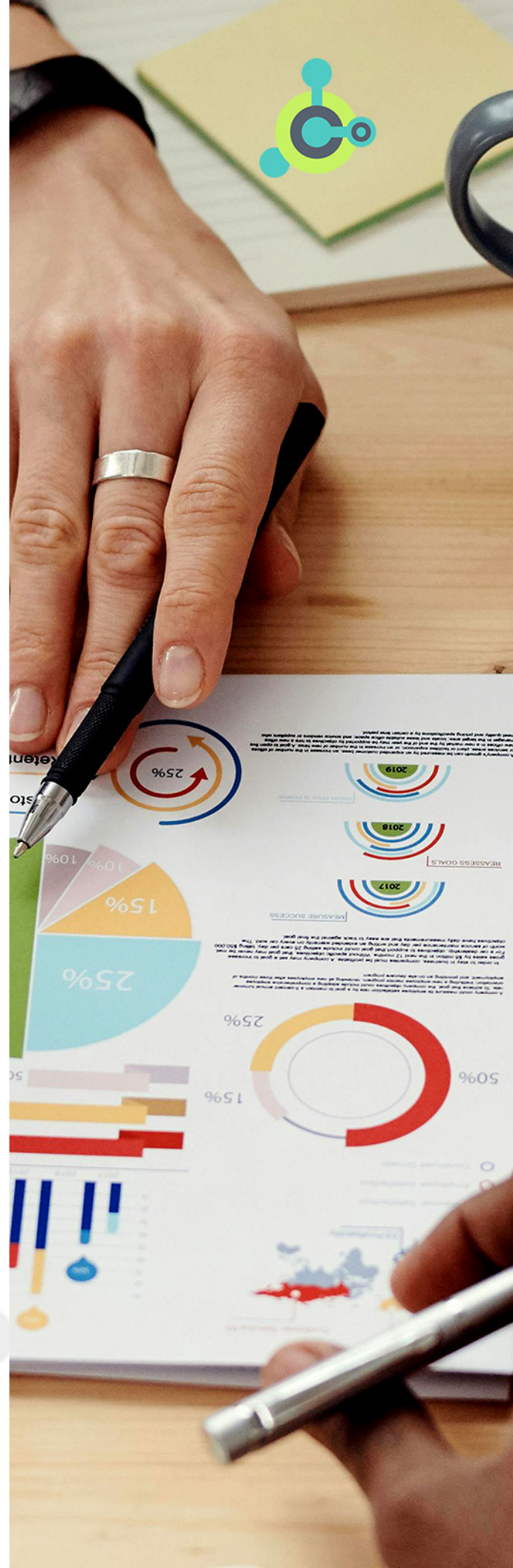
While many providers report that they offer support with marketing and technology, their services are usually centered on helping businesses navigate technology, such as using the Internet and social media in practical ways, rather than developing marketing strategies and tactics. Fewer free services focus on traditional and online marketing training, highlighting an opportunity to address a potential gap in marketing and technology assistance.

To address this, providers could pair capital access support with customized business coaching tailored to specific industries, provided organizations can make appropriate program adjustments.

What stands out is that organizations mainly support startups and growing businesses by helping them lower overhead costs and coaching them through business operations and financial projections.

Other business retention needs, such as maintaining staff capacity, managing workforce and personnel, and planning for sustainability, are offered less frequently. Long-term goals, including wealth protection and succession planning, are rarely addressed in conversations with business owners, especially by nonprofit service providers.

Our assessment also highlights a secondary need for expanded services to address business retention challenges and support continuity planning.





King County Small Business Support Needs

1

Organize a Business Resource Network.

2

Develop a county certified core business planning program.

3

Develop a set of simple questions to detect business retention challenges.

4

Pair capital access with industry-specific business coaching, including grants and funding competitions.

5

Teach simple key performance indicators to help businesses monitor revenue drivers and manage overhead.

6

More cohort-based workshops rather than increasing the number of businesses assisted only.



7

Expand marketing and technology assistance programs.

8

Develop service partnerships with reputable local consultants and corporations invested in the community.

9

Offer incentives for local businesses to host resource meetings, workshops, and events.

10

Allocate funding for cultural community outreach and language interpreters in program budgets.

11

Sponsor small business and economic development training for BIPOC program managers.

12

Create small business programs for the service industries currently receiving the most support.

See page 3, INDUSTRIES SERVED.



King County

Special Thanks

- Chamber President & CEO, Rachel Smith
- Port Executive Director, Stephen Metruck
- Port Commissioners, Sam Cho, Toshiko Hasegawa, and Hamdi Mohamed
- King County Executive, Dow Constantine
- REACH King County city and county economic development leaders
- Local chambers, minority and immigrant-centered organizations, and business assistance providers

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