

City of Oakland

Economic Recovery Advisory Council

**Final Report and
Recommendations**

February 2021

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Introduction

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Mayor Libby Schaaf and then-Vice Mayor and Chair of the City Council Community & Economic Development Committee Larry Reid convened Oakland community and business leaders to participate in the Oakland Economic Recovery Advisory Council.

The Advisory Council was charged with giving immediate recommendations to local policymakers to support Oakland workers and help Oakland's businesses and non-profits reopen safely, informed by State and County Orders to ensure public health. Members collaborated to explore solutions for how Oakland can rebuild its economy centered on equity. The Advisory Council led with race and other known biases and disparities to identify actions that both local policymakers and private sector leaders can take to ensure Oakland's economic recovery is just and equitable for the long term.

The Advisory Council was facilitated by Michael McAfee from PolicyLink and Micah Weinberg of California Forward, in partnership with Jose Corona, Eat. Learn. Play Foundation; Barbara Leslie, Oakland Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce; and James Head, East Bay Community Foundation, with Mills College and the Bay Area Council Economic Institute. The Advisory Council consisted of representatives from business, non-profit, and intergovernmental partners representing key sectors, as well as staff from City departments.

Since its convening in May, the Advisory Council helped the City through fast-paced administrative and policy changes. It has elevated the urgent needs of Oakland workers, undocumented families, and businesses forced to close, and revealed where regulations are having unequal impacts. As the crisis continues into 2021, the original slate of stimulus programs and unemployment benefits have ended, and businesses and jobs are becoming harder to restore. There is an urgent need to sustain the businesses and workers that are still here. Recovery begins with relief.

Advisory Council Roster

The Advisory Council was broken into three working groups to focus more deeply on specific aspects of Oakland's economic recovery.

WORKING GROUP OVERVIEW



Health and Safety

Prioritizing safe and healthy workplaces and public spaces, including information and personal protective equipment (PPE) distribution, signage, assisting businesses with Site-Specific Protection Plans, safe Flex Streets designs, and online marketplaces.



Business Support and Equity

Focusing on both the immediate survival needs of Oakland businesses and a long-term recovery that removes the additional barriers faced by Black, Latinx, Native, Asian and other POC business owners.



Arts and Cultural Organizations

Maintaining Oakland's cultural organizations and other businesses and their workers who will wait the longest for a return to regular operations and may need to change most to survive.

PARTICIPATING CITY DEPARTMENTS

- Economic & Workforce Development Department
- Planning & Building Department
- Office of the Mayor
- Workforce Development Board
- Department of Transportation
- City Administrator's Office
- Department of Race and Equity

QUESTIONS, COMMENTS, INQUIRIES?

For additional information regarding the OERAC, its prior actions and ongoing efforts, please contact

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ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS

Advisors

Amber Curley Native American Health Center/ Indigenous Red Market	Jay Banfield All Home	Liz Ortega Alameda County Labor Council
Andreas Cluver Alameda County Building Trades	Jennifer Tran Vietnamese Chamber of Commerce	Mark Everton Visit Oakland
Ari Takata-Vasquez Oakland Indie Alliance	Jeff Bellisario Bay Area Council Economic Institute	Michael Bush Great Place to Work
Carolyn Johnson Black Cultural Zone	Jessica Chen Chinatown Chamber of Commerce	Robert Ogilvie Ogilvie Labs (formerly SPUR Oakland)
Chris Iglesias Unity Council	Joe Partida Latino Chamber of Commerce	Robin Raveneau Oakland Private Industry Council
Chris Pastena Chop Bar; Calavera	John Brauer California Labor Federation	Saru Jayaraman One Fair Wage
Claudia Arroyo Prospera	Josh Simon Community Arts Stabilization Trust (formerly EBALDC)	Savlan Hauser Oakland BID Alliance
David Jackson Evolve (formerly Oakland Impact Hub)	Julina Bonilla Port of Oakland	Shonda Scott African American Chamber of Commerce
Darcelle Lahr Mills College	Kat Taylor Beneficial State Bank	Susan Muranishi County of Alameda
Debra Gore-Mann The Greenlining Institute	Kate O'Hara EBASE	Yvette Radford Kaiser Permanente
Egon Terplan California Governor's Office	Kellie McElhaney UC Berkeley	

Business Sector Reps

Ahmed Ali Bob Tech/Fintech Square	Jean Marie Durant Visual Arts Oakland Art Murmur	Maria Alderete Bars & Restaurants Luka's Tap Room
Ali Obad Local Groceries ShopRite	Jim Macksood Healthcare Sutter Health	Mieko Hatano Cultural Arts Oakland Symphony
Angela Tsay Retail Oaklandish	Ke Norman Nail Salon & Beauty Nailphoria Day Spa	Patrick Hayes Large Employer Clorox
Archie Nagraj Performing Arts Destiny Arts Center	Lea Redmond Restaurant Oeste	Regina Davis Real Estate Development SUDA
Atticus Wolf Makers Moxy	Linda Grant Small Business Restuarant Pop-up & Cannabis Entrepreneur	Stephen Baiter Regional Economy East Bay Economic Development Alliance
Greg Feldman Security Allied Universal	Lydia Tan Sports Oakland A's	Trevor Parham Co-working/ Workspace Oakstop
Jason Dreisbach Transport & Logistics Dreisbach Enterprise	Lynn Vera Manufacturing Mettler-Toledo Rainin	Yusef Wright Barbers & Hairstylists Benny Adem Grooming Parlor

City Relief Efforts

Summary of the City's immediate relief measures

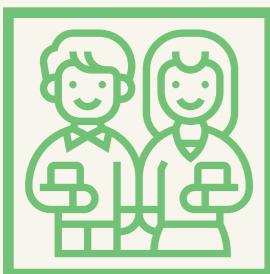
The City recognized the urgent need to address the acute economic stresses that COVID-19 created for businesses, workers and other vulnerable communities. From the onset of the crisis, the City provided a range of technical, financial, and other types of support. The Oakland COVID-19 Relief Fund was also established to provide private philanthropic dollars in the areas of food safety, homelessness, community health and economic security. Once the Advisory Council commenced, it provided real time input and direction on ongoing and new relief measures.

Below are highlights of key initiatives the City has undertaken since the beginning of the pandemic. This is not intended as a comprehensive list.



Technical Support

- Online information portal to share current information and resources with businesses and workers – accessed by more than 30,000 unique users (March 1 - December 31). www.OaklandBusinessCenter.com
- Direct, one-on-one, multilingual staff assistance to hundreds of small businesses to help them navigate resources and apply for stimulus funds.
- COVID-19 safety posters distributed to local businesses, led by the Oakland Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce.
- More than 800 PPE starter kits to small businesses with face masks, hand sanitizer, and gloves, and sneeze guards.
- Legal advice and assistance to help small businesses renegotiate rent and commercial leases, in partnership with the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights.
- Technical assistance to help arts and culture organizations pivot to new revenue and business models in the face of COVID restrictions.
- Oakland Digital Small Business Week to help local small businesses get online
- Financial support to Oakland's ethnic chambers and other community-based business organizations to conduct outreach to hard-to-reach businesses about recovery resources.
- Weekly email blasts to more than 8,500 businesses, non-profits and others with information about the resources available for businesses and workers.



Support for Displaced Workers

- \$1.3 million from the State Employment Development Department (EDD) for job services for displaced workers in hospitality and other sectors.
- Virtual job fairs to connect unemployed residents with in-demand job opportunities.
- Emergency ordinance guaranteeing laid off hotel, restaurant, and airport workers priority if their former employers begin rehiring.
- Emergency Ordinance extending Oakland's Paid Sick Leave laws to those needing to quarantine or care for a family member due to COVID.



Financial Support for Small Businesses, Artists and Non-Profits¹

- \$5.375 million in emergency grants to Oakland small businesses with CARES Act funds and the Oakland COVID-19 Relief Fund. Low-income business owners and businesses in Oakland's Opportunity Zones prioritized.
- \$500,000 in emergency grants to micro, home-based businesses with CARES Act funds.
- Deferred rent payment plans for small business and non-profit tenants located in City-owned commercial properties.
- Cap on fees that delivery companies can charge local restaurants for delivering food.
- \$850,000 in emergency grants to non-profit organizations providing services to low-income residents throughout Oakland with CARES Act funds.
- Commercial eviction moratorium.
- \$60,000 in emergency grants to 18 street vendors to help them recover from the impacts of COVID-19 on their businesses.
- \$2 million in grants to business owners along the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) corridor through the BRT Business Assistance Fund, including \$10k emergency grants to cover operating costs for businesses impacted by COVID-19.
- Waiver of late fees for small businesses that failed to pay business taxes due March 1, 2020.
- More than \$1.7 million in emergency grants to Oakland artists and arts organizations with funds from the CARES Act, the Oakland COVID-19 Relief Fund and the City's Cultural Affairs Division.



Permitting and Public Space Changes to Support Businesses

- Flex Streets Initiative to streamline permitting and eliminate fees for business use of outdoor space such as parklets and closed streets.
- Materials and support for businesses to complete street closures and take advantage of the Flex Streets program.



Support for Vulnerable Individuals and Families

- \$3.3 million for one-time financial assistance to low-income renters and homeowners for residential rent and mortgage relief using CARES Act funds.
- \$2.27 million in CARES Act funding to implement Oak WIFI, a public broadband access plan to help bridge the digital divide.
- Residential eviction moratorium.
- Advocacy for a guaranteed income.
- One-on-one wellness phone calls to vulnerable seniors and other residents as part of the Great Oakland Check-in.
- An alternative, safe location created for street vendors to remain in business while minimizing crowding at Lake Merritt and protecting public health.
- Administrative extension of existing zoning approvals for two years.
- \$2.9 million from the Oakland COVID-19 Relief Fund to Centro Legal de La Raza, Keep Oakland Housed, Head Start, One Fair Wage, Oakland Public Education Fund, Oakland REACH and others to support the immediate needs of Oakland's most vulnerable individuals, workers, and households.
- Safe childcare for essential workers through Oakland Parks, Recreation & Youth Development (OPRYD).
- Free meals to Oakland seniors made by local restaurants in partnership with FEMA, the State of California, Meals on Wheels, and World Central Kitchen.

Data & Equity Goals

Identifying & addressing longstanding systemic failures

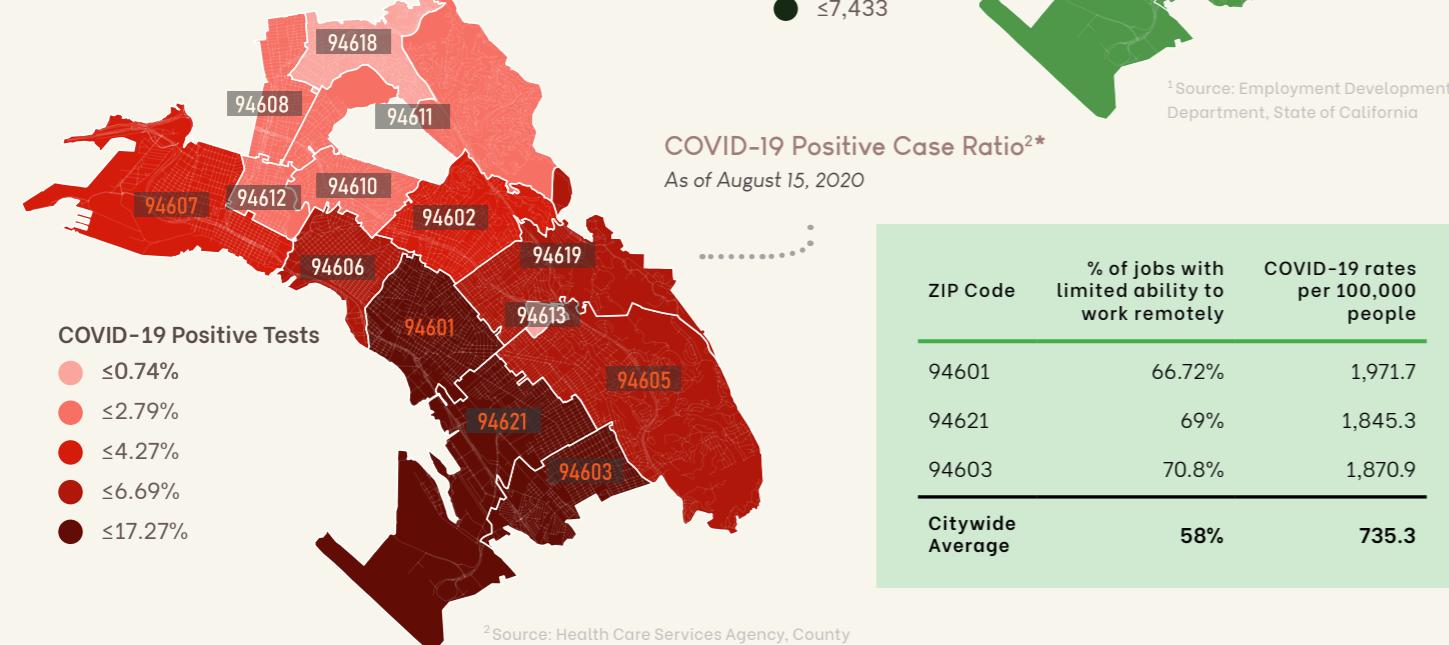
While the work of Advisory Council has underscored the urgent need for short-term solutions to help businesses reopen safely, the discussion has also raised longer-term ideas for systemic change to help Oakland rebuild a more equitable economy and avoid returning to “business as usual.” The overarching equity goals below are reflected throughout the recommendations, while the data here illustrates just a few ways these inequities play out.

1 Regulate Conscientiously and Thoughtfully

There is an ecosystem of micro-enterprises that regulations do not effectively reach. In the current crisis, connecting with those businesses is more important than ever. Government should look at the cumulative impacts of layers of regulation on businesses and workers across City departments and between levels of government (City, County, State) to align goals and outcomes. This coordination is essential to manage consistent health and safety messaging and build public faith in government.

2 Empower the Community to Drive Development

Current community-led initiatives in response to the crisis have knit together smaller local efforts to increase their impact - we should learn from this model and imagine what government support for such a framework would look like.



*ZIP Codes highlighted in red are areas with the highest unemployment rates.

3 Name the Disparities and Gather Quantitative and Qualitative Data to Understand Root Causes

Government should invest resources in gathering real time qualitative and quantitative race and ethnicity data related to this crisis and use the Racial Equity Analysis methodology to center those who are most impacted to effectively target recovery policies.

4 Recognize that Government Cannot Solve these Problems Alone

We must all understand the role of the private sector and philanthropy in this recovery and work to provide culturally competent financial and legal pro bono work to build the capacity of smaller organizations within the community.

Percentage Change in Monthly Total BART Station Entries June 2019 vs June 2020

% CHANGE IN STATION ENTRIES

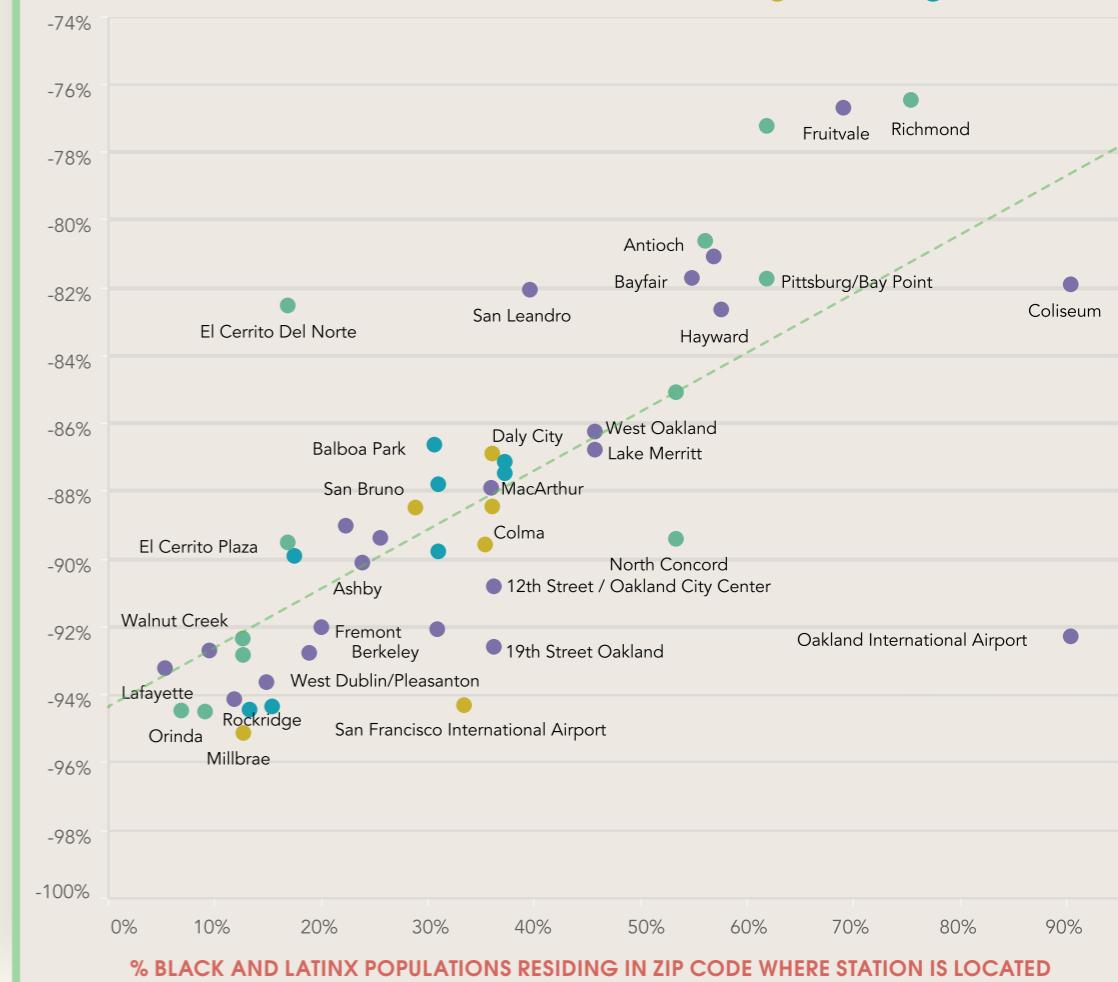
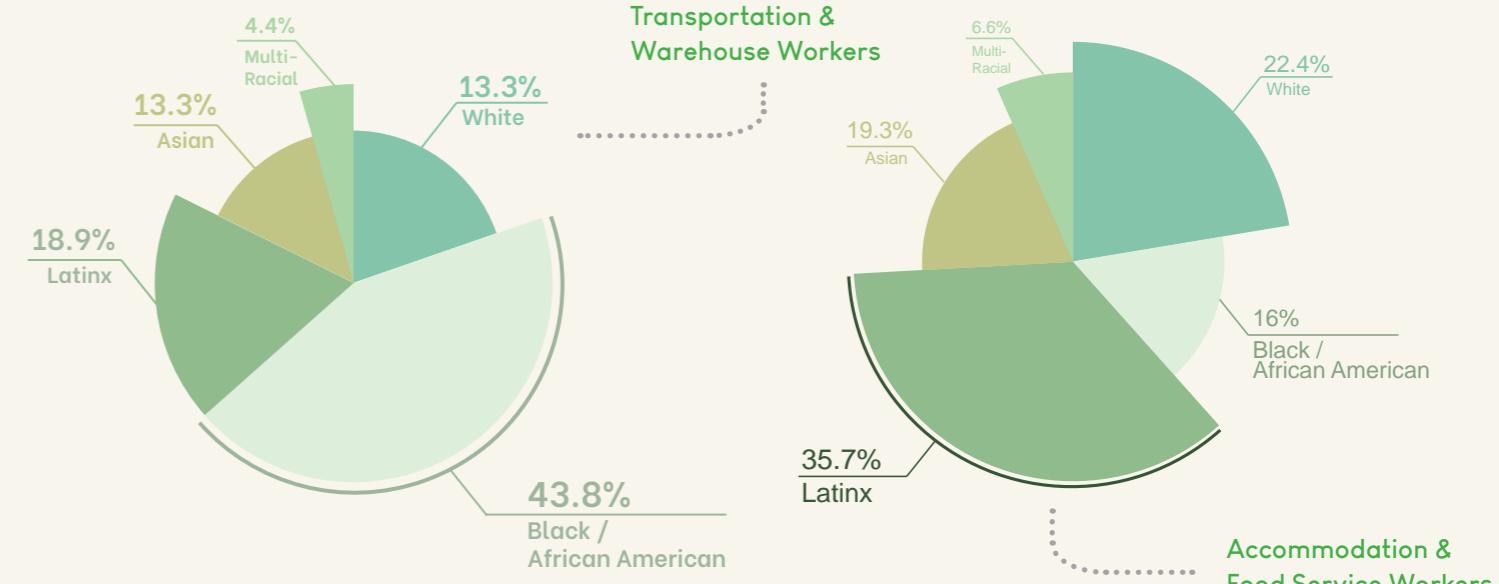


Chart excerpt from [Racial Disparities in BART Usage During COVID-19 Pandemic](#) (Bay Area Council Economic Institute)

Oakland's Essential Workforce by Sector: Racial & Ethnic Breakdown³



1 Financial Support & Technical Assistance

Provide financial and technical support for small businesses, prioritizing BIPOC business owners



1.1

PROVIDE SUPPORT TO BUSINESSES IN COMMERCIAL LEASE & RENT NEGOTIATIONS

Small businesses that have been closed or partially closed since March cannot keep to the terms of pre-pandemic leases. Many Oakland emerging small businesses that were not yet profitable have already gone out of business due to the crisis and inability to pay commercial rent. While some small businesses have worked with their landlords to create flexible arrangements to continue operations, many others have not, or their landlords are unwilling or unable to make modifications.

ACTIONS COMPLETED

COMMERCIAL EVICTION MORATORIUM EXTENSION

On March 27, 2020, the Oakland City Council passed a [moratorium on commercial and residential evictions](#), which was extended on July 21, 2020. The commercial eviction provision will align with the Governor's Executive Order (currently set to expire on March 31, 2021) or any extensions.

ROLES & TASKS →

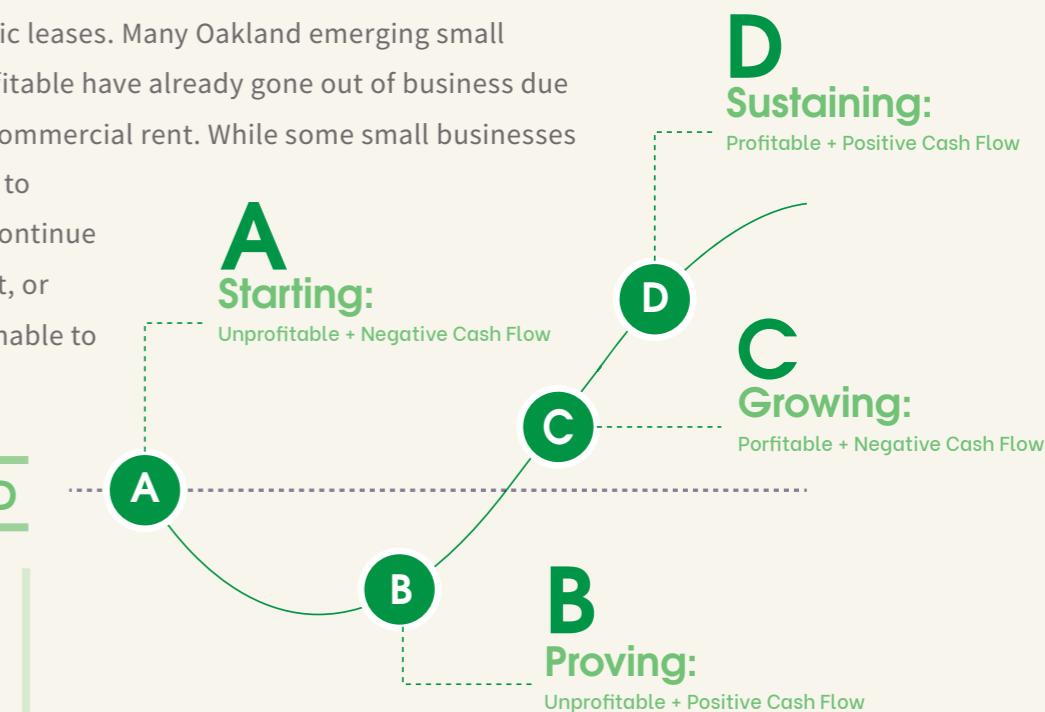


CITY GOVERNMENT



STATE &
REGIONAL
GOVERNMENT

- Continue partnering with a non-profit organization to provide tenant-landlord workshops and subsidized representation for small businesses who need support negotiating commercial lease terms
- Continue working with the ethnic Chambers of Commerce and community organizations to ensure that these resources reach BIPOC-owned businesses throughout Oakland
- Negotiate and create forbearance policies and tax guidance with banks and lenders
- Change bankruptcy rules for small businesses to remove the threat of lawsuit for unpaid rent
- Consider allowing property owners to finance unpaid rent through a property tax credit similar to the PACE program



Stages of Early Business Development

Chart excerpt from [Presentation to Council by Michael C. Bush](#) (CEO, Great Place to Work)

COMMERCIAL RENT CONVENING

The Advisory Council has convened small business owners, property owners, and investors on restructuring leases. The Advisory Council recommends that landlords work with businesses to develop terms that include a combination of forgiveness, deferral, and elimination of fixed monthly payments, replaced by percent of sales. Some members of the group have already successfully negotiated these arrangements. In some cases, the lease term has been extended to accommodate the deferrals with quarterly review to allow for real time adjustments.

1.2

PROVIDE FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR SMALL BUSINESS RECOVERY, PARTICULARLY BIPOC BUSINESSES

The City, Advisory Council members and many volunteers conducted multilingual phone outreach to assist hundreds of Oakland's small businesses in applying for state and federal stimulus funds, however, the City's recovery survey data shows that many did not apply or were unsuccessful. Historically, BIPOC businesses have had difficulty accessing private and public funding. According to a recent national report, as of April 2020, 441,000 black-owned businesses (41%) had closed permanently; 658,000 Latino-owned businesses (32%), and 1.3 million woman-owned businesses (25%) had also closed⁴.

The City distributed its new CARES Act funding allocation to small businesses to provide immediate relief across Oakland, with a focus on businesses in Oakland's Opportunity Zones and other low-income census tracts. Additional funding through private partners should continue to be directly targeted to Black, Indigenous, and people of color owned businesses to reduce the disparities in stimulus access[†].

⁴ Source: The impact of COVID-19 on Small Business Owners: Evidence of Early-Stage Losses from the April 2020 Current Population Survey; National Bureau of Economic Research; Working Paper 27309, June 2020

[†] See Appendix B for more details about the CARES Act grant programs for small businesses (page 31)

ROLES & TASKS →



CITY GOVERNMENT

- Disbursed CARES Act funding for small businesses, with a focus on businesses in low-income census tracts, to help with fixed costs, such as rent
- Capped fees on delivery services like Doordash
- Consider fee deferrals in 2021, if necessary



NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

- Oakland's ethnic chambers, OCCUR, the POC Small Business Network, Black Cultural Zone, East Oakland Entrepreneurship Forum, the Unity Council, and others are working to connect small businesses to recovery resources

- Eat.Learn.Play. led an investment of over \$10M into 130 Oakland restaurants, producing millions of meals for seniors, OUSD families, and the unhoused. 70% of participating restaurants were Black-, Latinx-, or women-owned

OAKLAND SMALL BUSINESS EMERGENCY GRANT PROGRAM

With input from the City, the Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) Working Solutions issued \$5,000 grants to 275 low-income small business owners with philanthropic funds from the Oakland COVID-19 Relief Fund. 80% of the grants went to BIPOC-owned businesses.

PRIVATE FUNDS

Advisory Council members have sponsored multiple funds for BIPOC-owned small businesses:

Keep it Caring, Keep it Oakland Fund

The Oakland Indie Alliance's COVID recovery fund that provides up to \$10,000 grants for small businesses, prioritizing BIPOC-owned businesses

Oakland Chinatown Chamber of Commerce

Recovery and relief fund targeting Oakland's Chinatown business community

FEES WAIVERS

The City has waived late fees on renewing business tax licenses in 2020.



BUSINESS COMMUNITY

- Partner in the recovery of BIPOC-owned businesses through purchasing, contracts and equity investment

ACTIONS COMPLETED

OAACCF Resiliency Relief Fund

A \$1 million relief grant fund created by the Oakland African American Chamber of Commerce Foundation

Unity Council Business Relief Fund

The Unity Council's emergency cash assistance and relief for Fruitvale District businesses

Oakland Black Business Fund

OakStop, Alliance for Community Development, Community Bank of the Bay and other partners are administering a \$10M fund and growing a venture and real estate investment fund to support Black entrepreneurs



STATE & REGIONAL GOVERNMENT

- Waive or defer other business fees, such as ABC liquor license fees for closed restaurants

1.3

SUSTAIN OAKLAND'S ARTIST AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS

The delayed reopening of concerts, performances and other large gatherings presents a unique challenge for the arts and culture sector. Cultural organizations must develop innovative ways to sustain their existence while maintaining safe practices. In addition, this sector may need to raise significant funds to reopen in modified safely distanced formats when allowed under State and County guidance.

“

Outdoor performance venues that serve food could open their outdoor stage for recording sessions under specific guidelines. But, if they were to have both the outdoor restaurant and the recording session happening simultaneously, that is then rejected because it is considered an event.



Dr. Mieko Hatano

Executive Director, Oakland Symphony

ROLES & TASKS →



CITY GOVERNMENT

- Explore flexibility in permit and public safety fees for cultural organizations to reopen using outdoor space safely
- Continue to work with partners to provide technical assistance to help organizations adapt to new models for revenue and space



NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

- Provide technical assistance and fee-less fiscal agency/sponsorship to arts organizations
- Provide guidance on digital and distanced cultural gatherings



BUSINESS COMMUNITY

- Corporate stakeholders and institutional lenders can sponsor or donate to recovery activities



STATE & REGIONAL GOVERNMENT

- Ensure that Workers Compensation Insurance companies do not cancel or increase policy prices due to State mandates

2 Local Leadership

Empower the community to drive development



2.1

PARTNER ON RECOVERY INVESTMENTS WITH COMMUNITY-LED AND SERVING ORGANIZATIONS

Grassroots organizations delivering both health services and entrepreneurship support in Oakland's most impacted neighborhoods are a crucial recovery resource. Often under-funded, these groups are best positioned to understand community needs and distribute resources. With the right coordination and support, they can bolster the responses of government and of larger, more established non-profits. Recovery investments should support their ongoing collaboration with each other and build long-term capacity to continue to partner with the City and County and lead recovery work over the coming years.

ACTIONS COMPLETED

CARES ACT FUNDING TO COMMUNITY-SERVING ORGANIZATIONS

The Oakland City Council distributed CARES Act funding to community-serving organizations in East and West Oakland, including to the Oakland Community Frontline Healers, an alliance of 20+ organizations that are providing a holistic suite of services to Black and brown communities during the pandemic.

CARES Act funding also went to Oakland's ethnic Chambers and other business support organizations.

The City has also designated CARES Act funding to support non-profits that provide services to low-income residents in the following areas:



Economic &
Workforce
Development



Food
Security



Housing



Health &
Human Services



Legal
Support



Education

“ [Smaller local organizations] are running out of funds as demand for services grow. Many are not operating in coordination with City/County service infrastructures and are often behind the curve in receiving critical information, resources, and PPE. Without reliable support, services will be scaled down at a time when they need to be ramped up.

Oakland Frontline Healers

ROLES & TASKS →



CITY
GOVERNMENT

- Expand outreach networks to foster deeper partnerships



BUSINESS
COMMUNITY

- Offer partnerships and pro bono legal and business support to help small, community-based organizations scale their operations

3 Health & Safety Guidance

Create and distribute consistent, culturally competent business reopening guidance and PPE



3.1

ENSURE UNIFORM SAFETY GUIDANCE AND PPE USE IN BUSINESSES ACROSS OAKLAND

Safety practices and PPE availability are not evenly implemented across the city. Every publicly accessible Oakland business should have a safety plan for their operations, consistent, culturally-competent and multi-lingual public signage on mask usage, PPE for their workers and other management practices to eliminate workplace-based COVID transmission. Given that Oakland is the most ethnically diverse city in the U.S. with more than 125 different languages spoken in the city, it is essential to provide health messaging in multiple languages.

ACTIONS COMPLETED

CITYWIDE PPE DISTRIBUTION AND ASSISTANCE

The City has purchased 800 PPE kits for East and West Oakland businesses through CARES Act funding the Opportunity Zone program.

m0xy, It Takes a Village, and other local partners have produced over 32,000 masks and 11,000 face shields. Local manufacturer Mettler-Toledo Rainin also pivoted to produce face shields, including the 2,000 distributed through the City's CARES Act-funded PPE Kits.

ROLES & TASKS →

CITY GOVERNMENT

- Continue to fund and distribute PPE while exploring bulk purchasing options with local suppliers

BUSINESS COMMUNITY

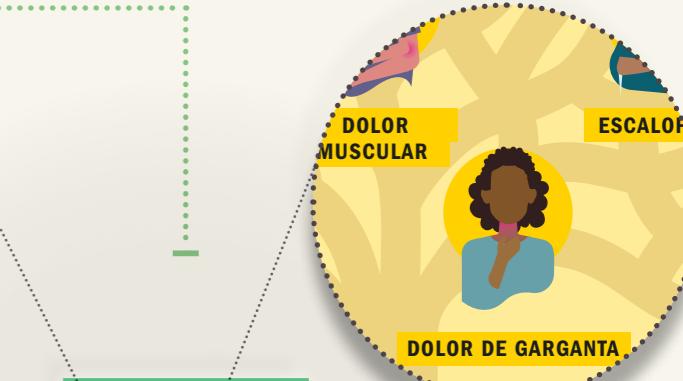
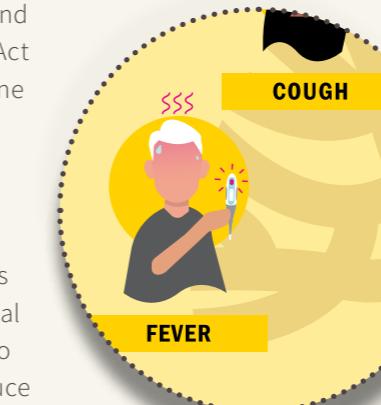
- All businesses need to create a Site-Specific Protection Plan and understand procedures for COVID-positive workers

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

- Ethnic chambers and other organizations that received CARES Act funding will assist businesses with re-opening plans

SAFE REOPENING POSTER

The Oakland Metropolitan Chamber, Oaklandish, and FastSigns produced and distributed safety posters in partnership with Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and ethnic Chambers.





4 Capacity Building

Build business resilience through technical support

THOMAS HAWK/Flickr

ROOZBEH ROKNI/Flickr

4.1

INCREASE SPACE FOR BUSINESSES AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES



ROLES & TASKS →



CITY GOVERNMENT

- Continue to support parklets and Flex Streets usage, including in areas outside of BIDs
- Explore options to allow more flexible zoning during the pandemic and ease requirements for some uses until the end of the health restrictions
- Consider a temporary use category in the City Planning Code to allow ongoing flexibility and prevent long-term vacant storefronts
- Continue to support technical assistance for cultural orgs in order to pivot to new business models, online platforms, and/or outdoor venues

The Flex Streets program streamlines permitting for the creative and flexible business use of public sidewalks, parking lanes, traffic lanes and private outdoor space. The City should expand on Flex Streets to make public space available for cultural activities when safely allowed under County and State guidance. Businesses outside of Business Improvement District (BID) areas, especially those traditionally underserved, need additional support to take advantage of Flex Streets. As an extension of this flexibility, and to reach larger audiences, public radio and television should carry local arts performances.

Current commercial tenants should also be allowed to pivot their business models to related activities with reduced regulatory burdens. Longer term, the City should allow zoning flexibility on vacant ground floor spaces to include pop-up retailers as well as cultural and community-serving organizations.

ACTIONS COMPLETED

FLEX STREETS

In June 2020, the City launched Flex Streets to streamline permitting and eliminate fees for use of outdoor space and City-owned outdoor property. City staff conducted door-to-door outreach in commercial corridors that have been most impacted by COVID-19 to inform businesses about the program and distribute safety information and signage.

MOBILE FOOD VENDING

The City is providing permits for vending on City streets or private property in commercial or industrial zones. City permit fees have been waived and applications are no longer limited.



COUNTY GOVERNMENT

- Align with the State's home-based kitchen laws and work with local food vendors to legalize operations

4.2

EXPAND EQUITY PROGRAMS AND SUPPORT INDUSTRY EFFORTS TO REDUCE DISPARITIES

Just as the 2008 recession fell heavily on homeowners of color, thousands of whom lost their chance to build wealth through homeownership in the foreclosure crisis, the pandemic threatens to eliminate recent Black and Latinx gains in business ownership through mass business closures.

Oakland has an innovative Equity Permit Program designed to minimize barriers to opening a cannabis business for those who have been the most victimized by the war on drugs. Cannabis Equity Permit holders receive real estate incubation space, technical assistance, and access to a loan fund. Data on unequal access to stimulus funding, loan capital and business assistance support replicating this model in other industries in a post-COVID economy, with a focus on closing racial disparities.



ROLES & TASKS →



CITY GOVERNMENT

- Gather data and conduct racial impact analysis to name disparities in industry sectors
- Determine the City's role and create targeted assistance with industry partners



BUSINESS COMMUNITY

- Consider joining ROC United/ One Fair Wage's Safe and Just Reopening program to improve workplace safety and close racial wage gaps



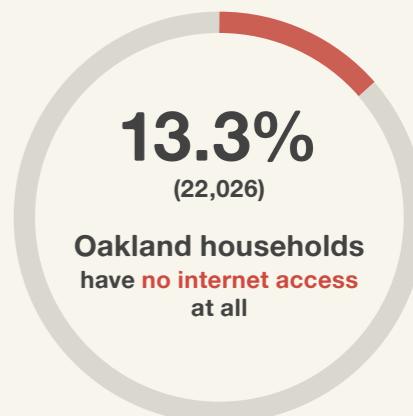
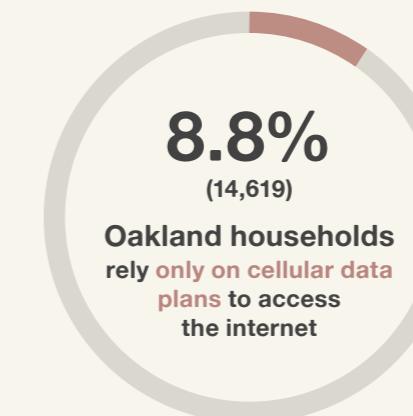
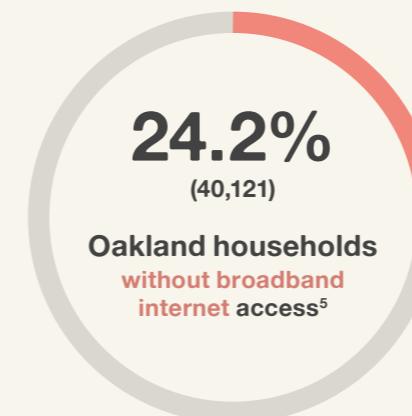
STATE & REGIONAL GOVERNMENT

- Prevent predatory operations that exploit financially vulnerable business operators and property owners

4.3

CLOSE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE FOR BUSINESSES AND WORKERS

Oakland's workers and small businesses need resources, training, and technical assistance to succeed online. From March to June, City staff, business technical assistance providers and community members worked to help hundreds of business owners who do not use computers apply for stimulus funds online, especially senior business owners. These efforts revealed that training and digital support were as important as internet access. In addition to the computer access and support that workers can get at Oakland's three America's Jobs Centers, workers and individuals need more online support for job searches, accessing safer remote work opportunities, benefits, support services, and telehealth. Opportunities for youth, ages 18 to 24, should also be a priority.



⁵Source: "A Case for Digital Inclusion: Systematically Bridging the Digital Divide", City of Oakland, 2020.

ACTIONS COMPLETED



OAK WIFI

CARES Act funding was the catalyst to launch Oak WiFi, a public broadband access plan to help close the digital divide.



~94,000
Oakland residents have no internet connectivity or computing device

OAKLAND STARTUP NETWORK

In partnership with the City of Oakland, Kapor Center, ICA/Fund Good Jobs and The Town Experience hosted Oakland's first Digital Small Business Week in June, with resources to help businesses sell online and scale using digital tools.

ROLES & TASKS →



CITY GOVERNMENT

- Build on the successes of #OakWiFi and #OaklandUndivided, which secured over \$15M to provide Oakland students with computers and internet access, by raising funds to close the digital divide for workers, small businesses, and out-of-school youth



NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

- Identify business owners and workers who lack an online presence/ internet access and connect to resources

4.4

BUY LOCAL CAMPAIGN AND ONLINE MARKETPLACE/ B2B PLATFORM



Businesses are transitioning online to sustain sales but need an online marketplace and Buy Local movement to generate customers. The City has an adopted goal to increase revenues for businesses owned by people of color by 40%. For businesses that supply to other businesses, the creation of a Business-to-Business (B2B) Exchange would encourage large purchasers to buy from local and BIPOC-owned businesses, offering partial pre-pay to help businesses scale and creating a sustainable long-term network. The long-term benefits of investing in an online marketplace include support for pop-up businesses in high poverty areas to grow into storefronts, and growing customers for existing storefronts.

PHIL MURPHY/Flickr

ROLES & TASKS →



CITY GOVERNMENT

- Foster an ongoing B2B platform to go beyond one-time contracts
- Forge consensus on a single, customer-facing platform and support local business efforts to develop their listings



BUSINESSES & PHILANTHROPY

- Provide funding and support efforts to create a comprehensive, connected single platform for B2B connection that enables large businesses to procure supplies from local and BIPOC-led companies

ACTIONS COMPLETED

Fruitvale is Open

[The Unity Council](#)

Oakland's Open

[Oakland Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce](#)

Keep it Oakland

[Oakland Indie Alliance](#)

Spend.Stay.Love.

[Visit Oakland](#)

4.5

SUPPORT ONGOING PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH ON THE NEEDS OF BLACK-OWNED BUSINESSES

One well-documented means of addressing wealth disparities in Black communities is by creating new economic opportunities through employment, specifically business ownership within these communities. Historical and persistent structural, systemic, and institutional biases, however, undermine prosperity for small, disadvantaged businesses in Black communities. These biases lead to, and compound, three frequently cited key obstacles to the economic mobility of Black-owned businesses:

- (1) lack of access to capital,
- (2) lack of access to leadership education, and
- (3) a lack of access to market.

If recovery efforts mean to remove these barriers, we need focused, ongoing and participatory research to assess the immediate survival needs of businesses, their post-crisis stabilization, and the impact of new programs on their revenues.

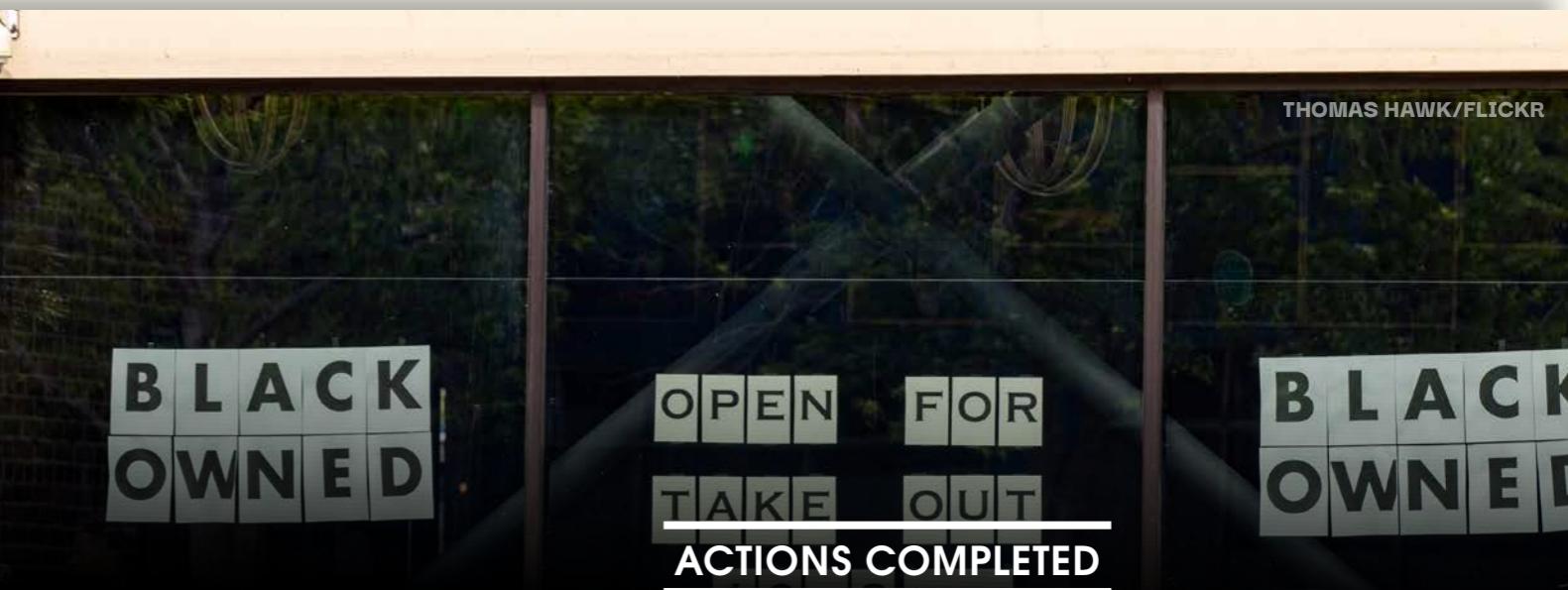
452
Black-owned
businesses



⁶Source: American Economic Survey, 2007

3,172
Oakland Jobs
generated in 2017⁶

THOMAS HAWK/Flickr



ROLES & TASKS →



CITY GOVERNMENT & PHILANTHROPY

- Support research on the needs of Black, Indigenous and other POC-owned businesses owners during and post-COVID
- Commit resources to gathering the quantitative and qualitative data needed to center equity and target resources effectively



STATE & REGIONAL GOVERNMENT

- Recognize the structural barriers to capital for Black-owned and other POC-owned businesses and design programs to address them

CITY PARTNERSHIP WITH EAST OAKLAND RESEARCH EFFORTS

The East Oakland Entrepreneurship Forum has been supporting business owners in East Oakland and collecting their insights on additional efforts to create a healthy growth environment for local business. POC Small Business Network is collecting ongoing data on the needs of participating businesses.

5

Social Safety Net

Guaranteed Income, Individual Support for Workers, and Home-based Entrepreneurs, and a Return to Work



5.1

IMMEDIATE CASH ASSISTANCE AND GUARANTEED INCOME

Unemployment assistance may not be enough for individuals to cover basic necessities like rent, especially after the lapse in the \$600 pandemic unemployment supplementary payment. In the years prior to the pandemic, 40% of Oakland residents did not have enough liquid assets or readily available savings to survive three months without income.

For Latinx and Black residents, that percentage is much higher at 61% and 57%, respectively. Black and Latinx workers are also disproportionately represented in low-wage work and in jobs still on pause or unlikely to resume in recovery. Many Black-, Latinx- and Indigenous-owned businesses are home-based, and may not pay commercial rent, so residential rent relief also sustains these businesses. A guaranteed income has been advocated to end poverty since the Civil Rights era. The pandemic has shown that the current social safety net has been expensive and overwhelming to administer without providing enough protection.

Financial Assets and Income in Oakland Prior to the Pandemic⁷

Outcome Measure	Overall	White, NH	People of Color	Black	American Indian	Asian	NHPI	Latino
Income Poverty Rate	14.5%	2.9%	19.7%	21.0%	20.8%	16.2%	17.1%	20.4%
Liquid Asset Poverty Rate	40.6%	18.7%	53.7%	56.8%	-	41.7%	-	60.6%
Asset Poverty Rate	33.0%	20.1%	41.4%	46.9%	-	26.7%	-	46.8%
Households with Zero Net Worth	22.2%	16.5%	25.7%	31.3%	-	12.9%	-	29.1%
Unbanked Households	9.7%	1.7%	13.9%	16.3%	-	6.7%	-	17.1%
Underbanked Households	20.6%	13.0%	24.7%	29.1%	-	18.1%	-	24.0%

⁷Source: Prosperity Now Sourcecard

ACTIONS COMPLETED

COVID-19 RELIEF FUND

The Oakland COVID Relief Fund directed \$2.9 million directly to households through Centro Legal de La Raza, Keep Oakland Housed, HeadStart, One Fair Wage, Oakland Public Education Fund, Oakland REACH and others.

RENT & MORTGAGE RELIEF

The City Council allocated \$3.3 million in CARES Act funds for Residential Rent and Mortgage Relief. Keep Oakland Housed and other rent relief programs help both workers and home-based businesses, many of which are Black-, Latinx- and Indigenous-owned.

MAYORS FOR GUARANTEED INCOME

In July 2020, Oakland and ten other cities led a unanimous national call from the US Mayors Conference to support a guaranteed income.

ROLES & TASKS →



CITY GOVERNMENT

- Continue to advocate for a Guaranteed Income and work locally to set up the infrastructure to distribute cash assistance
- Rent relief can be combined with landlord-tenant mediation and access to City housing services to leverage assistance into longer-term stability

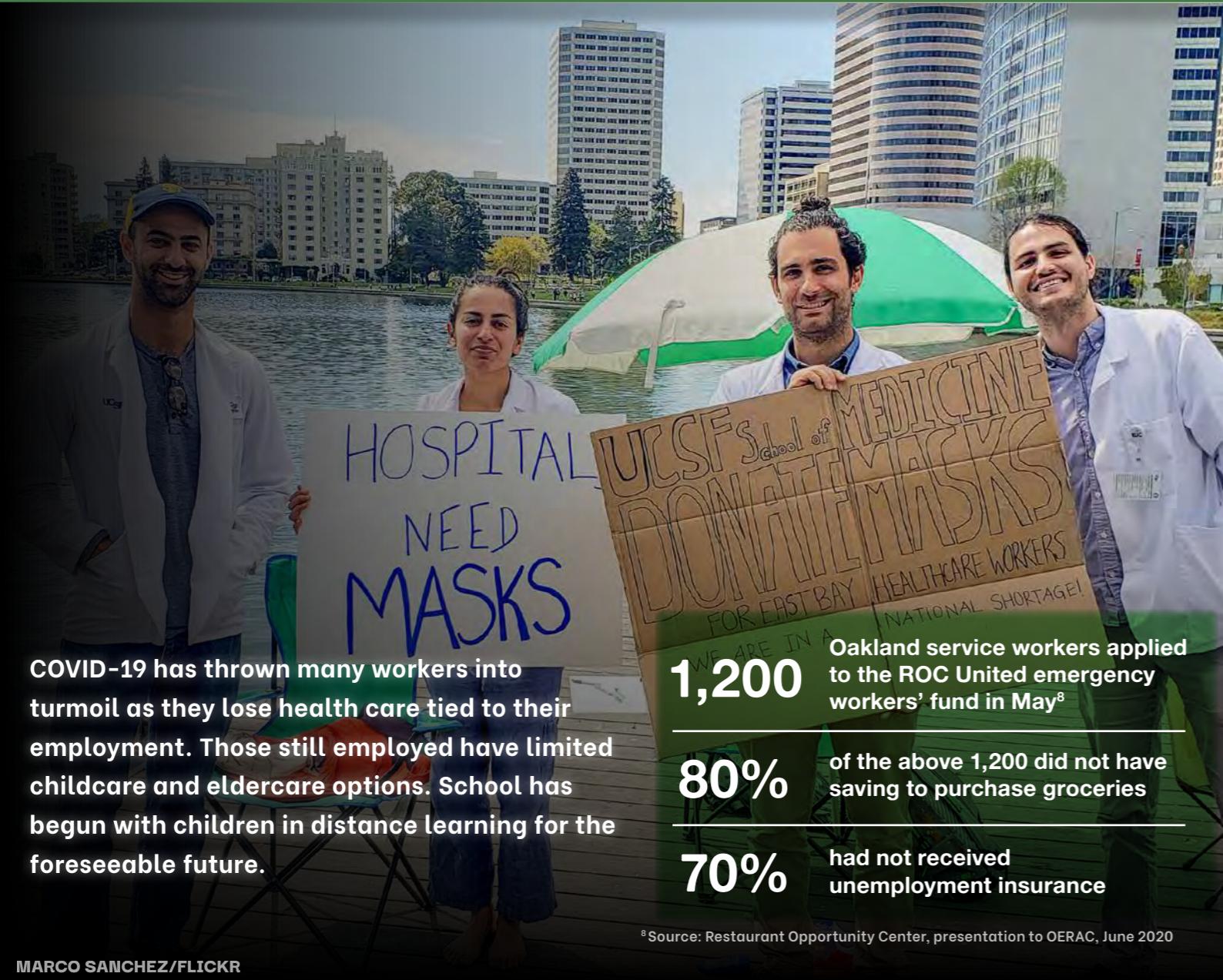


PHILANTHROPY

- Support Guaranteed Income demonstrations that prioritize those most in need

5.2

DEVELOP AND SUPPORT POLICIES FOR HEALTHCARE, CHILDCARE, AND ELDERCARE FOR LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYED



ACTIONS COMPLETED

ROLES & TASKS →



CITY GOVERNMENT

- Expand safe childcare and learning options for Oakland youth



STATE &
REGIONAL
GOVERNMENT

- Ensure unemployed workers have continuous health coverage
- Advance advocacy for universal healthcare

CHILDCARE AND MEALS FOR ESSENTIAL WORKERS AND SENIORS

Oakland Parks, Recreation & Youth Development's Town Camp provided safe childcare for essential workers. Since May 2020, the City has partnered with FEMA, the State of California, and World Kitchen Central Kitchen to provide free meals to hundreds of Oakland seniors.

COVERED CALIFORNIA EXTENSION

Covered California opened the health insurance exchange to any eligible uninsured individuals who needed health care coverage amid the COVID-19 national emergency.

5.3

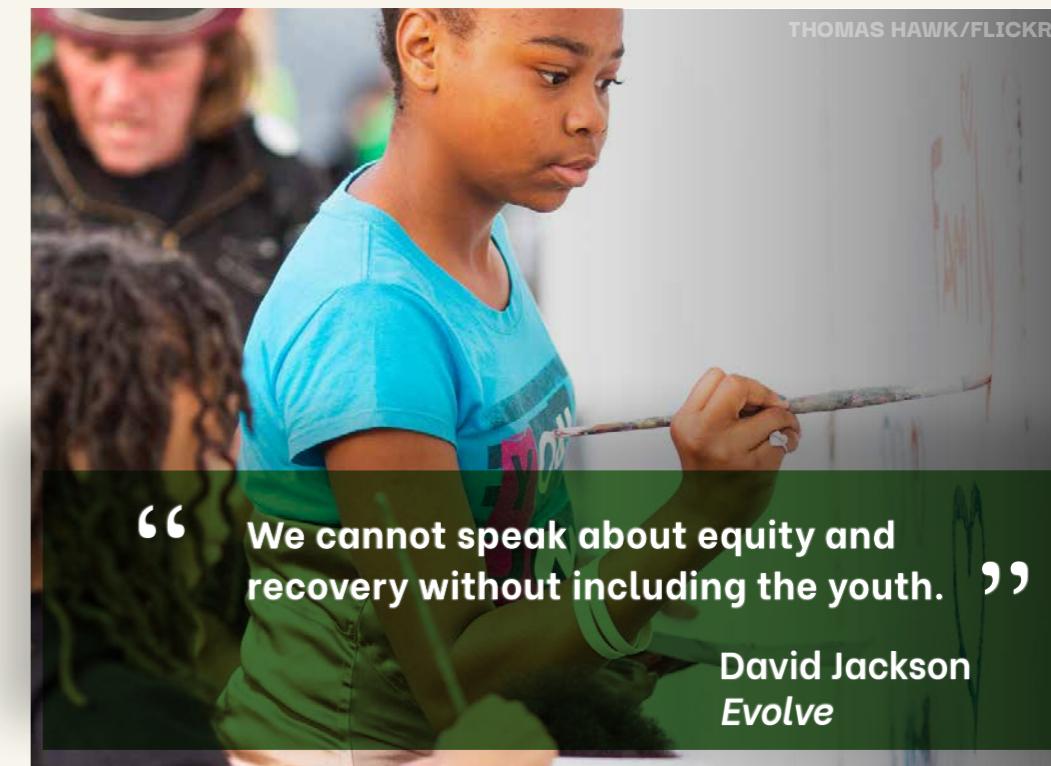
ENGAGE YOUTH, UNEMPLOYED WORKERS, AND THE REGION ON A RECOVERY STRATEGY

There is an urgent need for retraining and job placement for laid-off, low-wage workers in retail, hospitality and tourism, industries that employ more than 25,000 Oakland workers. The City applied for and received funding from the State Employment Development Department (EDD), but this only served approximately 350 workers. Training programs can connect clients to other asset building areas such as banking, credit building and homeownership. In the longer term, industries such as manufacturing may see growth post-pandemic, and along with remote work possibilities, may provide opportunities for stable and higher wage work. Each industry should address the racial disparities in its workforce and work with the City to remedy, rehire and train workers to equal employment. Finally, Oakland's youth are at protests making a clear call for justice and equitable investment in their communities and futures. Economic recovery and rebuilding efforts must engage and include Oakland youth to share their survival stories and hopes for the future.

ACTIONS COMPLETED

SUPPORT FOR HOSPITALITY WORKERS

The City successfully applied for training funds from State EDD to support hospitality workers and partnered with One Fair Wage to support training for restaurant workers.



RIGHT TO RETURN LEGISLATION

The Oakland City Council passed an emergency ordinance that guarantees laid off hotel, restaurant and airport workers priority should their former employers start hiring again. The legislation will affect more than 10,000 Oakland workers.

HIRING SERVICES

Job opportunities, hiring support, and virtual job fairs are available through Oakland's three America's Job Centers: Lao Family Development, Oakland Private Industry Council, and The Unity Council.

ROLES & TASKS →



CITY
GOVERNMENT

- Engage Oakland youth in the economic recovery
- Identify sectors with growing hiring needs
- Target workforce services to Oakland ZIP Codes with the highest unemployment
- Invest in gathering racial disparity data by sector



BUSINESS
COMMUNITY

- Analyze and report on wage and hiring disparities
- Take action to close training and wage gaps



STATE &
REGIONAL
GOVERNMENT

- Analyze and project how Bay Area employment in the recovery will change from pre-COVID times
- Consistent with both regional and local Economic Development Plans, coordinate with cities on recovery planning that names disparities and focuses on increased mobility, security and wealth for low-wage workers

Appendices

Appendix A

Policy Recommendations Summary Table

Appendix B

CARES Act Emergency Grant Programs

Appendix C

Flex Streets Initiative

Appendix A: Policy Recommendations Summary Table

Policy Recommendation / Next Steps	Lead Agency / Key Partner	Timeframe
1. Financial Support		
1.1 Provide support to businesses in commercial lease and rent negotiations.		
Partner with a non-profit to provide tenant-landlord workshops and subsidized representation for small businesses who need support in commercial lease terms using CARES funds	City EWD	Complete
Work with the ethnic chambers and community organizations to ensure that these resources reach BIPOC-owned businesses	City EWD	Underway
Negotiate and create forbearance policies and tax guidance with banks and lenders	State of CA/Alameda County	Longer term
Advocate for/ change bankruptcy rules for small businesses to remove the threat of lawsuit for unpaid rent	State of CA/Alameda County	Longer term
Consider allowing property owners to finance unpaid rent through a property tax credit similar to the PACE program	City EWD/Alameda County/State of CA	Short term
1.2 Provide financial support to small business recovery, particularly BIPOC businesses.		
Disburse CARES Act funding for small businesses, with a focus on businesses in low-income census tracts, to help with fixed costs such as rent	City EWD	Complete
Extend waivers of late fees on business tax bills, and consider fee deferrals in 2021.	City Finance Dept	Short term
Foster business partnerships to boost the recovery of BIPOC-owned businesses through purchasing contracts and equity investments	City EWD/Oakland chambers of commerce	Short term
Waive or defer other business fees such as ABC liquor license fees	State of CA/Alameda County	Underway
1.3 Sustain Oakland's artist and cultural organizations.		
Explore flexibility in permit and public safety fees for cultural organizations to reopen using outdoor space safely	City EWD and Planning Dept/ Alameda County	Short term
Distribute CARES Act funding to support artists and non-profit arts organizations and provide technical assistance to help organizations adapt to new models for revenue and space	City EWD	Complete
Fund and provide guidance on digital and distanced cultural gatherings and fiscal agency/sponsorship to arts organizations	City EWD/Cultural Non-profits	Short term
Sponsor or donate to recovery activities	Corporate and Institutional leaders	Short term
Ensure that Workers Compensation Insurance companies do not cancel or increase policy prices due to State mandates	State of CA	Short term

Appendix A: Policy Recommendations Summary Table

Policy Recommendation / Next Steps	Lead Agency / Key Partner	Timeframe
2. Local leadership		
2.1 Partner on recovery investments with community-led and serving organizations.		
Distribute CARES Act funding to non-profits providing frontline services	City EWD/HSD/HCD	Complete
Expand outreach networks to foster deeper partnerships	City EWD	Ongoing
Offer partnerships and pro bono legal and business support to help small, community-based organizations scale their operations	City EWD/Oakland chambers of commerce/Other Business Partners	Longer term
3. Health and Safety Guidance		
3.1 Ensure uniform safety guidance and PPE use in businesses across Oakland.		
Fund and distribute PPE kits using CARES funds and explore bulk purchasing and working with local suppliers	City EWD/CAO	Complete
Create a Site-Specific Protection Plan and understand procedures for COVID-positive workers	Oakland chambers of commerce/ Other Business Partners	Underway
With CARES fund support, assist businesses with re-opening plans	Oakland chambers of commerce/ Other Business Partners	Complete
4. Capacity Building		
4.1 Increase space available for businesses and cultural activities.		
Fund parklet materials in areas outside of BIDs using CARES funds	City EWD	Complete
Explore options to allow more flexible zoning during the pandemic and ease requirements for some uses until the end of the health restrictions	City EWD/Planning Dept	Short term
Consider a temporary use category in the City Planning Code to allow ongoing flexibility and prevent long-term vacant storefronts	City Planning Dept	Longer term
Align with the State's home-based kitchen laws and work with local food vendors to legalize operations	City EWD/CAO/ Alameda County	Short term
4.2 Expand equity programs and support industry efforts to reduce disparities.		
Gather data and conduct racial impact analysis to name disparities in industry sectors	City EWD	Longer term
Determine the City's role and create targeted assistance with industry partners	City EWD	Longer term
Consider joining ROC United/ One Fair Wage's Safe and Just Reopening program to improve workplace safety and close racial wage gaps	Restaurants	Underway
Prevent predatory operations that exploit financially vulnerable business operators and property owners	State of CA	Short term
4.3 Close the digital divide for businesses and workers.		
Build on the successes of #OaklandUndivided and #OakWIFI by raising funds to close the digital divide for workers and small businesses	City EWD/ITD/Mayor's Office	Short term

Appendix A: Policy Recommendations Summary Table

Policy Recommendation / Next Steps	Lead Agency / Key Partner	Timeframe
Identify business owners and workers who lack an online presence/ internet access and connect them to resources		
4.4 Buy local campaign and online marketplace/B2B Platform.		
Provide funding and support efforts to create a comprehensive, connected single platform for B2B connection that enables large businesses to procure supplies from local and BIPOC-led companies	City EWD/Contracts/Partners	Longer term
Forge consensus on a single, customer-facing platform and support local business efforts to develop their listings	City EWD/Visit Oakland/Other Business Partners	Underway
4.5 Support ongoing participatory research on the needs of black-owned businesses.		
Support research on the needs of Black, Indigenous and other POC-owned businesses owners during and post-COVID	City EWD/Oakland chambers of commerce/Other Business Partners	Underway
Commit resources to gathering the quantitative and qualitative data needed to center equity and target resources effectively	City EWD	Underway
Recognize the structural barriers to capital for Black-owned and other POC-owned businesses and design programs to address them	State of CA/Alameda County	Longer term
5. Social Safety Net		
5.1 Immediate cash assistance and guaranteed income.		
Continue to advocate for a Guaranteed Income and work locally to build the infrastructure to distribute cash assistance	City	Underway
Combine rent relief with landlord-tenant mediation and access to City housing services to leverage assistance into longer-term stability	City HCD/Keep Oakland Housed	Underway
Support Guaranteed Income demonstrations that prioritize those most in need	Philanthropy	Underway
5.2 Develop and support policies for healthcare, childcare, and eldercare for long-term unemployed.		
Expand safe childcare and learning options for Oakland youth	OUSD/City OPRYD/Alameda County	Underway
Ensure unemployed workers have continuous health coverage	State of CA	Longer term
Advance advocacy for universal healthcare	City/State of CA	Longer term
5.3 Engage youth, unemployed workers, and the region on a recovery strategy.		
Engage Oakland youth in the economic recovery	City EWD	Short term
Identify sectors with growing hiring needs	City EWD	Short term
Target workforce services to Oakland ZIP Codes with the highest unemployment	City Workforce Development	Underway
Analyze and report on wage and hiring disparities	Businesses and Non-profits	Short term
Take action to close training and wage gaps	Businesses and Non-profits	Longer term

Appendix A: Policy Recommendations Summary Table

Policy Recommendation / Next Steps	Lead Agency / Key Partner	Timeframe
Analyze and project how Bay Area employment in the recovery will change from pre-COVID times	Regional Recovery Effort	Longer term
Consistent with both regional and local Economic Development Plans, coordinate with cities on recovery planning that names disparities and focuses on increasing mobility, security and wealth for low-wage workers	Regional Recovery Effort	Longer term

Appendix B: CARES Act Emergency Grant Programs

Appendix B: CARES Act Emergency Grant Programs

Overview of Local Grant Programs

The City allocated nearly \$7 million in federal CARES funds for direct financial assistance to Oakland's small businesses, arts community, and non-profit organizations, based on OERAC's input on both economic hardships due to COVID and the need to invest in community partners. In each case, the City partnered with an intermediary with expertise in grant giving to administer the grants.

As described below, the funding supported six distinct grant programs to capture a wide variety of businesses and organizations, including artists, non-profits, food vendors, and home-based businesses, and to prioritize support for Oakland's most vulnerable communities and economic sectors. EWD targeted its CARES dollars to businesses who were least likely to have accessed other forms of Federal business and worker support. In all cases, grant applications and supporting materials were available in multiple languages and through local community-based organizations who outreached to Oakland's low-income communities to ensure equitable participation in the programs.



Oakland CARES Act Small Business Grant Program

The City partnered with Main Street Launch on the Oakland CARES Act Small Business Grant Program, which distributed \$4.02 million in CARES funding to small businesses across Oakland, focusing on businesses in Oakland's Opportunity Zones and other low-income census tracts. The program provided 402 small businesses with grants of \$10,000 each.

To be eligible, businesses were required to have less than \$2 million in gross revenues, at least one but not more than 50 employees, and demonstrate adverse business impacts from the pandemic, among other criteria. \$2 million was specifically earmarked for businesses located in Oakland's Opportunity Zone census tracts, which are federally designated lower-income areas located in Oakland's flatlands. Grants could be used to cover day-to-day operating costs, such as worker payroll, rent and fixed debts.

Of the 402 grants provided, 80% were given to businesses owned by people of color, including 25% to Black-owned businesses and 20% to businesses owned by Latinx proprietors. More than half of the grants were given to businesses located in Oakland's designated or eligible Opportunity Zones. A majority of grants went to businesses in ZIP Codes 94601 and 94606 in the Fruitvale/East Lake/San Antonio districts, 94612 in the Downtown/Uptown business district, and 94607 in West Oakland.

Consistent with the OERAC recommendation on commercial leases, the City also used CARES Act funds to provide small businesses legal and technical assistance on commercial lease negotiations and rent renegotiation. The City partnered with the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights of the San Francisco Bay Area (LCCRSF) to provide legal assistance through commercial leasing webinars, one-hour consultations, and longer-term legal assistance. Oakland's ethnic chambers of commerce and other business organizations promoted these services to their members.

Oakland CARES Artists and Arts Organizations Grant Fund

The City partnered with the non-profit Center for Cultural Innovation (CCI) to launch the Oakland CARES Fund for Artists and Arts Non-Profits. More than \$1.4 million in CARES Act funding was used for grants to help individual artists and local arts and culture non-profits address the impacts of COVID. 349 individual artists received grants of \$2,600 on average to cover basic living expenses, while 51 arts non-profit organizations received grants of \$10,000 on average to cover operating expenses. Of the individual artists that received grants, more than 70% went to artists of color and 18% went to non-binary or transgender artists.

To complement this direct financial support, an additional \$200,000 in CARES funding was used to provide technical assistance to help arts organizations pivot to new revenue and business models to help sustain them through the COVID-19 crisis.

CCI conducted a post-award survey of grantees. Most of the 247 respondents used grants for groceries, rent, and other monthly expenses, as well as art supplies. For most respondents, the grant covered two to four weeks of expenses. Nearly 27% of grantees had not received any other form of financial support during the pandemic, including unemployment benefits. While 28% had transitioned to some online classes and programming, and 33% had started new projects or commissions, almost 30% had not found new income during the pandemic.



Oakland CARES Home-Based Grant Fund

To target resources to businesses that are frequently underserved by traditional financing, the City also launched a Home-Based Business Grant Program. Administered by local CDFI Working Solutions, the program provided \$500,000 in CARES funds for emergency grants to owners of home-based, for-profit businesses. Priority was given to businesses located in low-income areas or otherwise historically vulnerable communities and those with annual gross business revenue under \$150,000.

The inclusion of a home-based grant program resulted in more funding to businesses in Deep East Oakland. Grants ranging from \$2,000 to \$4,000 were awarded to 159 home-based businesses. Of these, more than 70% were given to business owners of color, with 46% going to Black-owned businesses. 67% were given to businesses owned by women. The home-based business grants were distributed widely throughout Oakland's diverse communities, with a higher share than other grants going to ZIP Codes 94605 and 94621 in the Eastmont/Millsmont and Coliseum/Elmhurst neighborhoods in East Oakland.

Oakland CARES Non-Profit Grant Fund

The City partnered with local CDFI Community Vision to launch the Oakland CARES Non-Profit Grant Fund. More than \$850,000 was provided to support non-profits that were required to provide COVID response services to low-income residents in the areas of health, economic and workforce development, legal support, food security, housing and education.

The program awarded 41 grants of up to \$25,000 to community-serving non-profits with annual budgets of less than \$1 million. The grants went to support a wide array of organizations providing direct support to communities, including immigrants, refugees, seniors, families, veterans, the formerly incarcerated and others.

Community Vision also provided technical assistance to non-profit organizations to assist them with planning and stabilization to sustain their organizations throughout the pandemic and into the future.

Oakland CARES Food Vendor Fund



Working with Feed the Hunger Fund (FTHF), the City deployed \$60,000 in CARES Act funds for emergency grants to 18 street vendors to help them recover from the impacts of COVID-19 on their businesses. Vendors ranged from pushcart operators to owners of multiple food trucks, former restaurant owners and chefs laid off during COVID, and vendors at Lake Merritt.

Of these grants, 70% were given to Latinx business owners, 20% to Black business owners, and 67% to women. FTHF also provided comprehensive business assistance to 20 applicants and connected food vendors to their low-interest loan program, with 5 loans made or in process. Many vendors used funds to pay for County Health permit fees or equipment as well as to make up for lost revenue.



Oakland CARES Outreach and Support Fund for Oakland's Most Vulnerable Businesses



Finally, the City used CARES Act funds to support Oakland's ethnic chambers and other community-based organizations to do direct outreach about these grant programs and other COVID resources to local businesses to ensure more equitable participation and funding.

Many Oakland business owners report a lack of trust in public and private funding programs. These organizations helped encourage businesses owned by immigrants, non-English speakers and people of color to apply for the grant funds, including assisting with translation as needed.

Altogether, the Oakland African-American Chamber of Commerce, Latino Chamber, Chinatown Chamber, Vietnamese Chamber, Unity Council, East Oakland Community Development Corporation, and OCCUR engaged more than 1,600 businesses to connect them to COVID response services.

Appendix C: Flex Streets Initiative

Flex Streets Initiative Overview

An early priority of the OERAC was to help small businesses viably reopen or remain open in ways that were safe and consistent with Alameda County health orders. With health orders requiring social distancing and limiting indoor activities, allowing businesses to operate in outdoor public spaces provided a safe solution.

So in June 2020, informed by input from the OERAC, the City launched the Flex Streets Initiative to make it easier for small businesses to use outdoor public space for their operations. The program allows neighborhood businesses to use portions of the public right-of-way, including sidewalks, parking lanes, and traffic lanes, for seating, outdoor dining, food and retail pick-up, music and performances, and other activities allowed by the County health orders.

The program also makes it easier to use private outdoor spaces to support business activity. In order to take advantage of the program, businesses are required to self-manage safety and accessibility requirements like ensuring a clear path for pedestrians.

Flex Streets also includes an option for business improvement districts and other merchant organizations to apply for a complete or partial street closure to support commercial and cultural activities.

The Flex Street Program is managed by a partnership of the Department of Transportation, the Economic & Workforce Development Department, the Planning & Building Department, and the City Administrator's Office.



Equity Considerations



A priority of the Flex Streets Initiative was to ensure as many businesses as possible could access the program, including those in traditionally underserved communities. All applications and program materials were provided in multiple languages, including Spanish, Chinese and Vietnamese.



The Flex Streets team recognized that businesses outside of established business improvement districts or traditional merchant associations needed additional support to take advantage of Flex Streets. Many of these businesses are located in parts of east and west Oakland, the parts of the city with the highest COVID-19 rates. To assist these underserved businesses, city staff conducted door-to-door outreach in these areas to inform businesses about the Flex Streets program, offer help applying, and distribute safety information and signage in multiple languages.

Using Federal CARES Act funds, the City also offers businesses and organizations located outside traditional business districts and in DOT Equity Priority Neighborhoods free access to the materials they need to safely take advantage of Flex Streets, such as traffic barricades, safety cones, wheel bumpers and signage.

The Flex Streets Initiative also includes an expedited permitting process for mobile food vendors to help some of Oakland's smallest businesses, often owned by low-income people of color, operate safely during COVID-19. Flex Streets removed the limit on the number of mobile food vending permits available, allows vending from multiple locations, and eliminates the mobile food vending permitting fee. This aspect of the program helps some of Oakland's most vulnerable business owners remain open and viable during the pandemic.

Appendix C: Flex Streets Initiative

Implementation

Right-of-way Permits

To date, the Flex Streets Initiative has issued nearly 120 Flex Streets permits to allow businesses to operate on sidewalks, in parking lanes (parklets), and on City-owned property. A breakdown of issued permits by type is shown in the table to the right.

Of the eleven permits for full street closures, five closures received materials and equipment support from the City of Oakland using federal Cares Act funding or other sources, including two sites in West Oakland, one in Chintatown, and two in the Downtown/Lake Merritt area.

Type of Permit	Total issued
Sidewalk & parking lane	104
City-owned property	2
Street closure	11
Total	117



Vending Permits

As part of Flex Streets, the City approved 31 new mobile food vending permits. In addition, a pilot program to support and regulate merchandise vendors selling goods and wares specifically at Lake Merritt was implemented to help with overcrowding and health concerns at the Lake, while also allowing these small businesses to continue to operate legally.

More than 100 merchandise vendors, mostly businesses owned by people of color, set up socially distanced vending on street closures and City land near Lake Merritt for two months in the fall of 2020. The Flex Streets program provided materials and equipment for the street closures and set-up, and the City also provided support for the costs of business licenses for the vendors. The City is currently analyzing the program to consider extending or making the Lake Merritt Vendor Pilot Program permanent.