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

QUESTIONS, COMMENTS, INQUIRIES?

For additional information regarding the OERAC, its prior actions and ongoing efforts, please contact City OERAC Project Manager Marisa Raya.

ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS

Advisors

- Amber Curley: Native American Health Center/Indigenous Red Market
- Andreas Cluver: Alameda County Building Trades
- Ari Tukato-Vasquez: Oakland Indie Alliance
- Carolyn Johnson: Black Cultural Zone
- Chris Iglesias: Unity Council
- Andreas Cluver: Alameda County Building Trades
- Jennifer Tran: Vietnamese Chamber of Commerce
- Jeff Bellissaro: Bay Area Council Economic Institute
- Jessica Chen: Chinatown Chamber of Commerce
- Joe Partida: Latino Chamber of Commerce
- John Brauer: California Labor Federation
- Josh Simon: Community Arts Stabilization Trust (formerly EBALDC)
- Julina Bonilla: Port of Oakland
- Kat Taylor: Beneficial State Bank
- Kate O’Hara: EBASE
- Kellie McElhaney: UC Berkeley
- Liz Ortego: Alameda County Labor Council
- Mark Everton: Visit Oakland
- Michael Bush: Great Place to Work
- Robert Ogilvie: Oglivie Labs (formerly SPUR Oakland)
- Robin Raveneau: Oakland Private Industry Council
- Saru Jayaraman: One Fair Wage
- Savian Hauser: Oakland BID Alliance
- Shonda Scott: African American Chamber of Commerce
- Susan Muranishi: County of Alameda
- Yvette Radford: Kaiser Permanente

Business Sector Reps

- Ahmed Ali Bob: Square
- Ali Osbud: ShopRite
- Angela Tzvy: Retail
- Archie Nagra: Destiny Arts Center
- Atticus Wolf: Mixy
- Greg Feldman: Allied Universal
- Jason Dreisbach: Dreisbach Enterprise
- Jeanie Duran: Visual Arts
- Jim Meckes: Sutter Health
- Ke Norman: Nailphoria
- Lea Redmond: Restaurant
- Linda Grant: Small Business Entrepreneur
- Lydia Tan: Oakland's A's
- Lynn Vera: Manufacturing
- Mario Alderete: Bars & Restaurants
- Maria Alderete: Luke’s Top Room
- Melo Ho: Cultural Arts
- Flora Chino: Oakland Symphony
- Patrick Hayes: Clorox
- Regina Davis: Real Estate Development
- Brian Bowers: BUDA
- Stephen Bailer: Regional Economy
- Trevor Parham: Co-working/Workspace
- Yusuf Wright: Barbers & Hair Stylists

Phone: (510) 238-6230
Email: mRaya@oaklandca.gov
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 or
- 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 dislocated 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-Profits

- $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.

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.
- An alternative, safe location created for street vendors to remain in business face of COVID restrictions.
- Commercial eviction moratorium.

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.

- $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.
- Materials and support for businesses to complete street closures and take advantage of the Flex Streets program.
- An alternative, safe location created for street vendors to remain in business face of COVID restrictions.
- Commercial eviction moratorium.

- $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.

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.

Oakland’s Essential Workforce by Sector: Racial & Ethnic Breakdown

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

Unemployment Insurance (UI) and Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) Claims Received *
Between March 22 - May 9, 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ZIP Code</th>
<th>Total UI &amp; PUA Claims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>94601</td>
<td>≤0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94603</td>
<td>≤ 2,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94607</td>
<td>≤ 4,333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94605</td>
<td>≤ 5,398</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94612</td>
<td>≤7,433</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

COVID-19 Positive Rate**
As of August 15, 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ZIP Code</th>
<th>% of jobs with limited ability to work remotely</th>
<th>COVID-19 rates per 100,000 people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>94601</td>
<td>66.72%</td>
<td>1,971.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94603</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>1,845.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94605</td>
<td>70.8%</td>
<td>1,870.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Citywide Average 58% 735.3

*Source: Employment Development Department, State of California

2 Source: Health Care Services Agency, County of Alameda Public Health Department

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

3 Source: Bay Area Council Economic Institute
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.

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.

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.

The Advisory Council has continued partnering with a non-profit organization to provide tenant-landlord workshops and subsidized representation for small businesses who need support negotiating commercial lease terms. The Advisory Council recommends working with the ethnic Chambers of Commerce and community organizations to ensure that these resources reach BIPOC-owned businesses throughout Oakland.

The Advisory Council recommends negotiating and creating forbearance policies and tax guidance with banks and lenders. Changes to bankruptcy rules for small businesses to remove the threat of lawsuit for unpaid rent are also recommended. Consideration is given to allowing property owners to finance unpaid rent through a property tax credit similar to the PACE program.

### 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.

#### Stages of Early Business Development

- **A** Starting: Unprofitable + Negative Cash Flow
- **B** Proving: Unprofitable + Positive Cash Flow
- **C** Growing: Profitable + Negative Cash Flow
- **D** Sustaining: Profitable + Positive Cash Flow

### Roles & Tasks

- 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.
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.

‡ See Appendix B for more details about the CARES Act grant programs for small businesses.


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.

1.3 SUSTAIN OAKLAND’S ARTIST AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS

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

With CARES Act funds, City funds, and private philanthropic funds, the Center for Cultural Innovation administered several emergency grants programs to support Oakland artists and arts organizations. See Appendix B for more information about CARES Act grant programs.
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.

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:
- Health & Human Services
- Economic & Workforce Development
- Education
- Legal Support
- Housing
- Food Security

- Expand outreach networks to foster deeper partnerships
- Offer partnerships and pro bono legal and business support to help small, community-based organizations scale their operations

"[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

Local Leadership
Empower the community to drive development
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.

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

mōxy, 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.
4.1 INCREASE SPACE FOR BUSINESSES AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

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

**ROLES & TASKS**

- Continue to support parklets and outdoor retail/service spaces.
- Continue to support technical assistance for cultural orgs in order to pivot to new business models, online platforms, and/or outdoor venues.
- 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.
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.

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.

**HIGHLIGHTING DISPARITIES WITHIN INDUSTRIES**

Restaurant Opportunities Centers (ROC) United has documented the extent of racial discrimination and occupational segregation in the Bay Area restaurant industry, which revealed significant racial wage gaps, barriers to people of color to advance to living-wage jobs, and explicit and implicit biases of restaurant employers and consumers that segregate the restaurant workforce.

**ROLES & TASKS**

- 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
- Consider joining ROC United/One Fair Wage’s Safe and Just Reopening program to improve workplace safety and close racial wage gaps
- Prevent predatory operations that exploit financially vulnerable business operators and property owners
- Identify business owners and workers who lack an online presence/internet access and connect to resources
- 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

**4.2 EXPAND EQUITY PROGRAMS AND SUPPORT INDUSTRY EFFORTS TO REDUCE DISPARITIES**

**4.3 CLOSE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE FOR BUSINESSES AND WORKERS**

**OAK WIFI**

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

**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.
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.

**ACTIONS COMPLETED**

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.

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
3. 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

**3,172** Oakland Jobs generated in 2017

**Support ongoing participatory research on the needs of Black-owned businesses**

**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

- **PROMOTE LOCAL BUSINESSES**
  - The City, African-American Chamber, and others partnered with Visit Oakland on a Spend, Stay, Love promotion to capture holiday retail sales. Businesses can request listing through the Chambers and other business associations.
  - Online directories for local businesses have also been initiated:
    - Fruitvale is Open
    - Oakland’s Open
    - Keep it Oakland
    - Spend, Stay, Love, Visit Oakland

**Actions Completed**

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.

**roles & tasks**

- **CITY GOVERNMENT & PHILANTHROPY**
  - Support research on the needs of Black, Indigenous and other POC-owned businesses 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
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 Pandemic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome Measure</th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>White, NH</th>
<th>People of Color</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>American Indian</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>NHPI</th>
<th>Latino</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Income Poverty Rate</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liquid Asset Poverty Rate</td>
<td>40.6%</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
<td>53.7%</td>
<td>56.8%</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>60.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asset Poverty Rate</td>
<td>33.0%</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
<td>41.4%</td>
<td>46.9%</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>46.8%</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Households with Zero Net Worth</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
<td>25.7%</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unbanked Households</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underbanked Households</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
<td>29.1%</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: 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
COVID-19 has thrown many workers into turmoil as they lose health care tied to their employment. Those still employed have limited childcare and eldercare options. School has begun with children in distance learning for the foreseeable future.

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.

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**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.

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**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

---

1,200 Oakland service workers applied to the ROC United emergency workers’ fund in May.

80% of the above 1,200 did not have saving to purchase groceries

70% had not received unemployment insurance

*Source: Restaurant Opportunity Center, presentation to OERAC, June 2020*
# Appendix A: Policy Recommendations Summary Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Recommendation / Next Steps</th>
<th>Lead Agency / Key Partner</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Financial Support</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.1 Provide support to businesses in commercial lease and rent negotiations.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>City EWD</td>
<td>Complete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work with the ethnic chambers and community organizations to ensure that these resources reach BIPOC-owned businesses</td>
<td>City EWD</td>
<td>Underway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiate and create forbearance policies and tax guidance with banks and lenders</td>
<td>State of CA/Alameda County</td>
<td>Longer term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocate for/ change bankruptcy rules for small businesses to remove the threat of lawsuit for unpaid rent</td>
<td>State of CA/Alameda County</td>
<td>Longer term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consider allowing property owners to finance unpaid rent through a property tax credit similar to the PACE program</td>
<td>City EWD/Alameda County/State of CA</td>
<td>Short term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.2 Provide financial support to small business recovery, particularly BIPOC businesses.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>City EWD</td>
<td>Complete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extend waivers of late fees on business tax bills, and consider fee deferrals in 2021.</td>
<td>City Finance Dept</td>
<td>Short term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster business partnerships to boost the recovery of BIPOC-owned businesses through purchasing contracts and equity investments</td>
<td>City EWD/Oakland chambers of commerce</td>
<td>Short term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waive or defer other business fees such as ABC liquor license fees</td>
<td>State of CA/Alameda County</td>
<td>Underway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.3 Sustain Oakland’s artist and cultural organizations.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explore flexibility in permit and public safety fees for cultural organizations to reopen using outdoor space safely</td>
<td>City EWD and Planning Dept/Alameda County</td>
<td>Short term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>City EWD</td>
<td>Complete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fund and provide guidance on digital and distanced cultural gatherings and fiscal agency/sponsorship to arts organizations</td>
<td>City EWD/Cultural Non-profits</td>
<td>Short term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsor or donate to recovery activities</td>
<td>Corporate and Institutional leaders</td>
<td>Short term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure that Workers Compensation Insurance companies do not cancel or increase policy prices due to State mandates</td>
<td>State of CA</td>
<td>Short term</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Policy Recommendations Summary Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Recommendation / Next Steps</th>
<th>Lead Agency / Key Partner</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Local leadership</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Partner on recovery investments with community-led and serving organizations.</td>
<td>City EWD/HSD/HCD</td>
<td>Complete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Expand outreach networks to foster deeper partnerships</td>
<td>City EWD</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Offer partnerships and pro bono legal and business support to help small, community-based organizations scale their operations.</td>
<td>City EWD/Oakland chambers of commerce/Other Business Partners</td>
<td>Longer term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Health and Safety Guidance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Ensure uniform safety guidance and PPE use in businesses across Oakland.</td>
<td>City EWD/CAO</td>
<td>Complete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Create a Site-Specific Protection Plan and understand procedures for COVID-positive workers</td>
<td>Oakland chambers of commerce/Other Business Partners</td>
<td>Underway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 With CARES fund support, assist businesses with reopening plans</td>
<td>Oakland chambers of commerce/Other Business Partners</td>
<td>Complete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Capacity Building</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Increase space available for businesses and cultural activities.</td>
<td>City EWD/Planning Dept</td>
<td>Short term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Expand equity programs and support industry efforts to reduce disparities.</td>
<td>City Planning Dept</td>
<td>Longer term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 Close the digital divide for businesses and workers.</td>
<td>City EWD/CAO/Alameda County</td>
<td>Short term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Social Safety Net</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Immediate cash assistance and guaranteed income.</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>Underway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Develop and support policies for healthcare, childcare, and eldercare for long-term unemployed.</td>
<td>OUSD/OUSD/OPRYD/Alameda County</td>
<td>Underway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 Engage youth, unemployed workers, and the region on a recovery strategy.</td>
<td>State of CA</td>
<td>Longer term</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Enforcement
- Ensure compliance with public health guidelines and occupational safety standards.
- Implement robust enforcement measures to address non-compliance.
- Empower community members to report violations.

### Additional Considerations
- Explore bulk purchasing and working with local Fund and distribute PPE kits using CARES funds.
- Consider the alignment of policies with existing initiatives to maximize impact.

### caveats
- Lack of resources or personnel to fully implement all recommended actions.
- Potential opposition from stakeholders or affected parties.

## Appendix A: Policy Recommendations Summary Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Recommendation / Next Steps</th>
<th>Lead Agency / Key Partner</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identify business owners and workers who lack an online presence/ internet access and connect them to resources</td>
<td>Oakland chambers of commerce/Other Business Partners</td>
<td>Short term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buy local campaign and online marketplace/B2B Platform.</td>
<td>City EWD/Contracts/Partners</td>
<td>Longer term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support on the needs of Black-owned businesses</td>
<td>City EWD/Oakland chambers of commerce/Other Business Partners</td>
<td>Underway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support research on the needs of Black, Indigenous and other POC-owned businesses during and post-COVID</td>
<td>City EWD</td>
<td>Underway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commit resources to gathering the quantitative and qualitative data needed to center equity and target resources effectively</td>
<td>City EWD</td>
<td>Underway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognize the structural barriers to capital for Black-owned and other POC-owned businesses and design programs to address them</td>
<td>State of CA/Alameda County</td>
<td>Longer term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continue to advocate for a Guaranteed Income and work locally to build the infrastructure to distribute cash assistance</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>Underway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combine rent relief with landlord-tenant mediation and access to City housing services to leverage assistance into longer-term stability</td>
<td>City HCD/Keep Oakland Housed</td>
<td>Underway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Guaranteed Income demonstrations that prioritize those most in need</td>
<td>Philanthropy</td>
<td>Underway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expand safe childcare and learning options for Oakland youth</td>
<td>OUSD/OUSD/OPRYD/Alameda County</td>
<td>Underway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure unemployed workers have continuous health coverage</td>
<td>State of CA</td>
<td>Longer term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advance advocacy for universal healthcare</td>
<td>City/State of CA</td>
<td>Longer term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage Oakland youth in the economic recovery</td>
<td>City EWD</td>
<td>Short term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify sectors with growing hiring needs</td>
<td>City EWD</td>
<td>Short term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target workforce services to Oakland ZIP Codes with the highest unemployment</td>
<td>City Workforce Development</td>
<td>Underway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyze and report on wage and hiring disparities</td>
<td>Businesses and Non-profits</td>
<td>Short term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take action to close training and wage gaps</td>
<td>Businesses and Non-profits</td>
<td>Longer term</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 increasing mobility, security and wealth for low-wage workers.

**Appendix B: CARES Act Emergency Grant Programs**

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.
Appendix B: CARES Act Emergency Grant Programs

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 $30,000 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 businesses 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 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 94621 in the Eastmont/Millsmont and Coliseum/Elmhurst neighborhoods in East Oakland.

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 $40,000 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 Latina 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.

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.

The program streamlined the permitting process and eliminated the fees typically required for the use of public right-of-way by offering:

1. Free permits for café sidewalk seating, parklets (in parking lanes) and street closures
2. Online permit form with sample site plans and safety templates
3. Automatic permit approvals for café seating and parklets
4. A single-point-of-contact to assist with permitting across departments

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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Permit</th>
<th>Total issued</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sidewalk &amp; parking lane</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City-owned property</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street closure</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>117</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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.