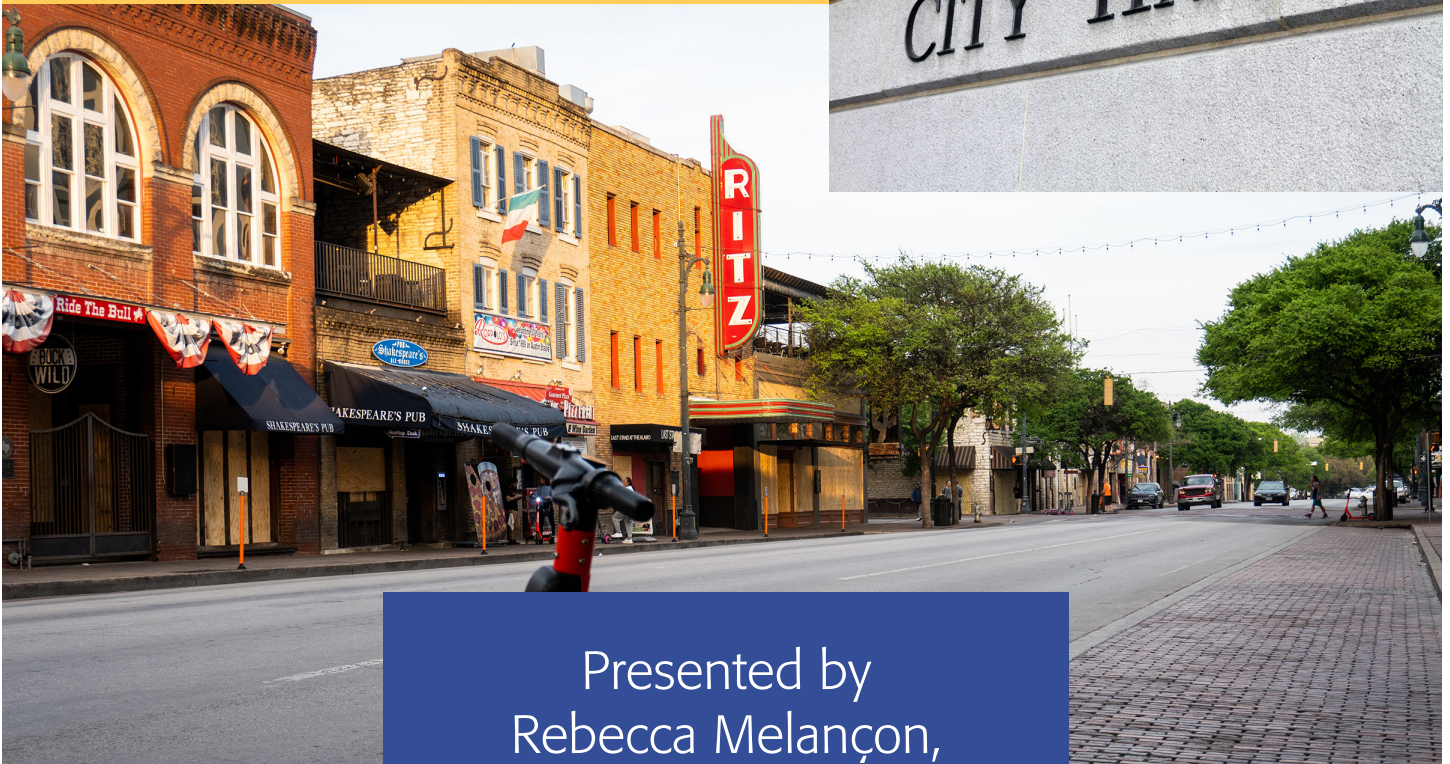


Local Economic Policy Program

Project Proposal



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Local
Business
Institute

LocalBusinessInstitute.org

INTRODUCTION

By enabling and empowering communities to pursue changes in local policies, we can change the face of economic development in America.



Economic development policies of local, state and federal government agencies focus primarily on expansion through job growth. Success is measured solely on the number of new jobs created. This has resulted in proliferation of local, state and national policies that encourage and support big businesses that promise to create high numbers of jobs or will significantly expand hiring more employees.

Small, local business provides 85 percent of all job growth and accounts for 95 percent of all businesses in the nation. Yet economic policies do not support local businesses. In fact, many of the policies created for big businesses harm local businesses by putting roadblocks in their path. The support of big business has also led to the centralization of our economic power in a select few massive companies that compete unfairly with smaller businesses.

The COVID-19 pandemic and other factors creating unrest across our nation have deepened the fault lines in economic development policies and practices by continuing to fully support big business while thousands of smaller, local businesses struggle. This pain is not only felt by the business owners but by the 100 million people employed by local businesses.

Inclusion in entrepreneurship is a pathway to economic stability and building strong communities for people of color. Through policy changes, we can help address access to capital, open institutional vendor opportunities, and clear roadblocks to success.

It is imperative that we refocus economic development in every community in America to sustain and retain existing local businesses and remove barriers to entry for new ones. Creating policies focused on local businesses will build thriving local communities and create a thriving sustainable economic ecosystem. This, in turn, builds a strong and resilient nation.

Existing Local Policies

In some communities, governmental policies exist that do benefit local business. This policy patchwork has helped some local business communities but to a limited extent because these efforts are so isolated. We believe that existing beneficial policies and programs provide a rich source of tested local policy to study and learn from.

Independent Business Alliances (IBAs) across the nation have organized to share knowledge and experience. While a good conduit for firsthand experience, not every community has an IBA and not every IBA has the capacity to move forward on its own. What we need is a comprehensive inventory of current policies, an evaluation of these policies, and a grassroots effort to enable and empower all willing communities to participate in local policymaking that benefits local businesses. That is the mission this project will accomplish.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

We will inventory all city, county, and state policies currently in place that benefit smaller, local businesses. From this data, we will create a catalog of best practices. With this understanding, we will then develop a toolbox for local leaders and act as a coaching team. Working together with established organizations and local businesses across the country, we will help local leaders enact and tailor more of these policies to benefit their communities.

The project then moves to fostering implementation of the resulting policy initiatives and measuring the results. While other groups work on legislation at the national level, this project designs and implements successful policies at local levels. This will achieve a massive impact as 50, 100, 200 and more communities proceed with improving local policies that directly promote the success of local businesses.

Nothing like this has ever been done on this scale. Now is the time. With the economy in the worst shape it's been in since the Great Depression, more than ever the country needs this project to build a better and stronger economy based on a strong foundation of local businesses.



PHASE ONE: STUDY

Action

We begin with a survey of local governments, organizations and businesses to identify existing local policies. Proceeding to interviews with both community leaders and government officials, we will evaluate the success of each policy. By creating a database of all information gathered, we will have the data needed to analyze and identify best practices. Phase One could begin immediately as all these steps can be accomplished remotely.



- Create a framework using existing relationships with national and local organizations.
- Acquire appropriate software to survey and compile data.
- Compose surveys to obtain the information we need.
- Work with organizations and local government to collect data.
- Conduct one-on-one interviews based on collected data.
- Review all data to pinpoint best practices.
- Create a website for our work and results.
- Form an Advisory Committee to review best practices and make recommendations.

Results

The study will produce a catalogue of policies from which local leaders can select. Each policy will include an assessment and data to support the policy recommendation. This should result in an estimated five to 25 model policies.

By placing some of our focus on communities of color, we expect to identify specific policies needed to create equity.

With the Phase One Study completed we will move to Phase Two to put these policies into action.

Time & Cost

Phase One would take 6 to 12 months, depending on what we find.
Cost for Phase One: \$350,000.

Potential Partners

Public Private Strategies—PPS is an important policy and communications firm in Washington, D.C. with alliances throughout the small business policy community.

The Institute for Local Self Reliance—ILSR has decades of experience in policy on the battlefield for local business.

Austin Community College—we expect to manage this project through our initiative, the Local Business Institute, and will likely partner with Austin Community College on all projects going forward. This project and the Institute will help to expand ACC's leadership role in entrepreneurship education for the nation.

PHASE TWO: TAKE ACTION

Action

Taking the catalogue of policies from Phase One, we will create a toolbox for local leaders to use. We will create a website to make all of the tools and information accessible online. Each policy will have its own toolbox section with policy information; language and messaging, data; outreach strategies; templates and graphics that can be customized for each community; success background and recommendations for implementation. All this is designed to be a “policy in a box” program for leaders of local business alliances, chambers of commerce, merchants’ associations, economic development organizations, and even individual business owners. Local stakeholders will play a key role in this phase.

It is in this phase that we pay particular attention to communities of color. This is an opportunity to change the condition and direction of the economies in these communities and bring specific issues to the forefront. Through community engagement and empowerment, we can help foster equality.



We will:

- Write policy documents that can be used and customized, adapted to accommodate local conditions.
- Review all policy recommendations and materials with Advisory Committee created in Phase One.
- Create a set of compelling facts, data and overview for each policy.
- Create visuals appropriate for presentation to local governmental bodies, to gain buy-in for creating new local policies.
- Contact our national network using existing relationships to gain traction in a set of cities and communities designated for the pilot program.
- Make adjustments as needed as the initial cities and communities begin to use the materials, share intelligence gained from the pilot program, and staying flexible to adjust as needed for factors outside of our control (i.e, demonstrations, world events, weather issues—anything that might impact the local stakeholders’ ability to manage the program).
- Produce a toolkit for all media for including print, online, audio, and video.
- Create an Advisory and Coaching Team to engage local leaders. By traveling to their communities and training them, we can bridge the gap between ideas and action. By meeting with teams, city councils, legislators, and local leaders, we will bring our overarching knowledge and experience to bear. By the time we reach this point (12-18 months), the pandemic will have declined to the point where we should be free to travel. This step makes The Local Economic Policy Project unique and effective. By enabling and empowering hundreds to pursue local policy, we can change the face of economic development in America.
- Form a team of three to five people to consult with local communities pursuing local policy improvements.
- Team members will be available to travel to communities to meet with local teams, consult on policies, and even meet with local officials.

PHASE TWO: TAKE ACTION

Results

Phase Two is so often missing from many campaigns. It is not enough to empower with information. When local leaders are at their maximum workload, they simply cannot pick up information and create the infrastructure to implement it. Imagine what we can achieve when we assist leaders all across the country to implement beneficial policies. The impact of this is more far-reaching than any other single effort.

Time & Cost

Phase Two would initially take 6 months but would continue under Phase Three. Cost for Phase Two: \$250,000.

Potential Partners

American Independent Business Alliance—AMIBA is the only national organization with the grassroots reach to ensure success in implementing this program.

Austin Community College—we expect to manage this project through our initiative, the Local Business Institute, and will likely partner with Austin Community College on all projects going forward.



PHASE THREE: MEASURE & TEACH

Action

Once we have a collective of communities pursuing these policies, we can begin to document the progress of our efforts. The work continues with an annual survey to measure our impact across the nation.

- Create an annual survey similar to the survey in Phase One.
- Maintain updates in the database so this continues to be a living program.
- In the years to come, this project would be a valuable resource for national legislation.
- Host an annual conference.



At this stage we begin to integrate into teaching the next generation of entrepreneurs to be equipped to operate within their regulatory communities from the day they open their businesses. Part business training and part civics classes, we will teach the connectivity and relationship between their success as a business and the government policies that help or hinder them. This understanding is rare in the world of local business owners.

- Create the Local Business Institute at Austin Community College.
- Create a program to integrate students into the ongoing work of the program.
- Create a curriculum for entrepreneurs and business students.

Results

The impact of the project will have profound effects on local businesses and communities throughout the nation and will lead to national policies that redirect economic development to benefit local businesses. The process will not only empower new and existing business owners to be effective leaders but also help create thriving and resilient communities.

Time & Cost

Phase Three would be an ongoing cost of maintaining the program until we have saturated local communities with more effective local policies. Cost for Phase Three: \$150,000 annually.

Potential Partners

American Independent Business Alliance—AMIBA is the only national organization with the grassroots reach to ensure success in implementing this program.

Austin Community College—we expect to house this project through our initiative, the Local Business Institute, in partnership with ACC.

THE TEAM



Rebecca Melançon, President

Rebecca Melançon has more than 35 years of experience as a business owner and local leader. She was an early architect of the buy local movement and was a founding member of the Austin Independent Business Alliance (AIBA). She initially served as board vice president and later took the helm as Executive Director from 2010 to 2020. Rebecca serves on the Board of the American Independent Business Alliance (AMIBA) and works with many national organizations focused on local business and local economies. She is an award-winning publisher and writer, former publisher of the Austin Business Journal and associate publisher of the Texas Observer. She co-founded a monthly magazine called The Good Life and was publisher for more than 11 years. Recognized as a champion of the local business movement, Rebecca is an experienced spokesperson, a vocal advocate for change, and she brings significant leadership experience to this project.

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Julie Niehoff, Vice President

Julie Niehoff is a recognized local business advocate and consultant with a background in small business education, marketing and technology. As the former Director of Education for Constant Contact, Julie helped shape the company's global small business education initiative, growing the program from 12 to more than 50,000 free classes annually, reaching millions of business owners and nonprofit professionals around the globe. Julie is a co-founder of Distance Learning Media, an education technology firm based in Austin, Texas, and is a co-founder of SkillsAfterService.com, providing career development and coaching for veterans and their families who are transitioning from the military to civilian life. She also manages a national event program called Local Biz Camp and is a regular contributor to Forbes, Huffington Post and the network of Business Journals, writing about small business, local impact, and nonprofit outreach. Julie was named a Top Small Business Influencer in America by Small Business Trends magazine and is a celebrated international speaker.

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Vicky Valdez, Secretary-Treasurer

Vicky Valdez has a wealth of experience in economic development, small business development and finance. For more than 20 years she led the City of Austin's Small Business Program (SBP), that helps current and aspiring entrepreneurs realize their dreams and existing small business owners expand and develop their businesses. Vicky has excelled in developing nationally-recognized programs that focus on education, strategic planning, marketing, financial management, business expansion and procurement opportunities. She has developed programs and curriculum that educates local business owners and students through classroom and online training, and one-on-one coaching. Vicky has owned four businesses ranging from agricultural to business services and currently teaches Business Entrepreneurship at Austin Community College. She holds an undergraduate degree in engineering from Texas A&M University at Kingsville and an MBA from the University of Texas at Austin.

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IN CONCLUSION

We have a unique opportunity. This is the right time and Austin is the right place to create the Local Business Institute. The current pandemic will pass and our economy will be rebuilt but as what? The country is mentally, emotionally and financially in the right place to shift to sustainable local economies. The pandemic is a horrific event but its appearance is already triggering a rethinking of economic development systems, on all fronts. For the first time, the return to what was normal is being questioned. We can help usher in a new normal. Through the Local Business Institute, we can define what that is and train for a better world.

As America also faces a reckoning of cultural and institutional racism, we can use the Local Economic Policy Project and the Local Business Institute to address these issues through the lens of thriving local economies. Out of chaos, we can create real opportunity for positive change that will benefit thousands of local business owners, their families, community leaders, and local business advocates.

