



Designing Inclusive Entrepreneurship Ecosystems: A three-city landscape scan

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1. Introduction

An inclusive entrepreneurship ecosystem effectively connects people, programs, institutions, and policies, while removing barriers, to provide equitable access to the tools and resources entrepreneurs need to successfully create, build, and scale new businesses.

As defined by ecosystem champions Dell Gines and Rodney Sampson, an inclusive ecosystem “intentionally engages the dis-engaged and under-resourced entrepreneurs” and creates equal access to opportunities for entrepreneurs to build wealth and economically strengthen their local communities through business creation while adjusting for existing gaps and perpetuated barriers that reduce successful outcomes for minority entrepreneurs.¹ Prior work on this topic, including the Kauffman Foundation’s *Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Building Playbook* (3.0), emphasizes the importance of a connected and inclusive system that promotes entrepreneurship, economic development, and collaboration in underserved communities and empowers overlooked minority entrepreneurs to create sustainable, high-impact business opportunities. The playbook and additional research identify the following common challenges for minority entrepreneurs: inaccessible networks, lack of education and technical support, limited capital and talent, and misaligned policy support.² For our nation’s economy to reach its full potential, all entrepreneurs—despite their race, ethnicity, gender, age, and location—must be able to access the tools, networks, and resources needed to thrive.

To create inclusive and equitable entrepreneurship ecosystems, city, state, and local leaders must define their goals collaboratively to create, measure, and maintain inclusive and equitable ecosystems. It is critical to ask who is defining inclusion and equity goals and does this group include minority stakeholders.

As this research on inclusive entrepreneurship ecosystems expands, it is critical to explore this nascent area of research to address the lack of economic mobility and wealth gaps that

¹ SSTI. (2019, June 6). *Focus on inclusive ecosystems to build entrepreneurship and growth*. <https://ssti.org/blog/focus-inclusive-ecosystems-build-entrepreneurship-and-growth>

² Kauffman Foundation. (2019) *Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Building Playbook 3.0*. <https://www.kauffman.org/ecosystem-playbook-draft-3/>

Black families experience.³ Entrepreneurship, an opportunity to increase upward mobility and wealth generation, relies on an intentionally and collaboratively designed system to improve entrepreneurial success for all current and inspiring entrepreneurs, including those disproportionately disadvantaged by policies and limited access to resources.

This report focuses on identifying opportunities to build inclusive entrepreneurship ecosystems for Black entrepreneurs. By focusing on the Black community, a community that has experienced documented historical and present-day disadvantages, our report identifies equity-based activities that promote and support all dreamers, makers, and doers. Using an exploratory case-study analysis, we describe how three cities are working to create inclusive entrepreneurship ecosystems. This report is intended to inspire and encourage cities across the nation to consider and implement strategies that will improve economic opportunities for all entrepreneurs.

This report will help state, city, and local stakeholders, including policy makers, champions, organizations, and entrepreneurs, identify and understand pathways for incorporating equity into entrepreneurial ecosystems to improve social outcomes and economic development.

To assess the common opportunities and challenges experienced through inclusive entrepreneurship ecosystem building, our team identified three cities that are aiming to create inclusive entrepreneurship ecosystems as economic development strategies: Atlanta, Georgia; Durham, North Carolina; and Detroit, Michigan. These case-study cities were identified due to their legacy of Black entrepreneurship and present actions to combat economic and entrepreneurial inequities. Although these cities share a common legacy of strong Black entrepreneurship, their pathways and progress toward equitable economic vitality are different, as highlighted through the stories told in the ecosystem assessments (Section 4). The assessments provide examples of cities across the United States that are seeking ways to accelerate entrepreneurship for economic development broadly and to generate greater economic mobility for Black communities. The differences in the assets, culture, and growth of the individual cities highlighted provide diversity in our sample set and show that no singular set of resources or programs results in creating an inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem; rather each city must first identify its own gaps and goals and then determine

³ Washington Center for Equitable Growth. (2020, February 18). *Race and the lack of intergenerational economic mobility in the United States*. <https://equitablegrowth.org/race-and-the-lack-of-intergenerational-economic-mobility-in-the-united-states/>

what it needs to move forward. The goal of this research is to provide examples of how three cities are approaching the journey of building an inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem for their residents.

Entrepreneurs shape communities and industries alike. In cities and towns across the country, observers can identify the small and large players that drive innovation and economic vitality. This push to improve systems and traditional ways of operating defines the entrepreneur and makes them a vital part of any ecosystem. However, despite the rapidly growing acceptance of entrepreneurship as an essential mechanism for regional economic development, not all entrepreneurs have an equal opportunity to launch their own ventures. Black entrepreneurs are thoughtful, innovative, and enterprising, but far too often they face visible and hidden barriers to entry that make the actualization of their ideas even more challenging. From navigating the funding and regulatory landscape to obtaining the mentorship and support necessary for scaling, the journey to becoming a thriving entrepreneur is tedious. Those challenges, compounded by legacies of inequality stemming from institutional and systemic racism, make it inherently difficult for historically marginalized entrepreneurs to start, maintain, and grow businesses.

While acknowledging the many challenges that Black entrepreneurs face, we must also acknowledge how, despite the challenges, there are countless examples of individuals launching successful ventures. These success stories over the years are the result of not just individual excellence, although that cannot be dismissed, but also ecosystems that embraced equity and ensured that entrepreneurs could fully access the people, programs, and networks that would allow them to compete.

Atlanta, Durham, and Detroit each offer a unique lens into how these inclusive ecosystems can be cultivated. Whether it is leveraging the intellectual power of local institutions to support entrepreneurs

Question to Consider: How can cities play a role in fostering equity for their entrepreneurial ecosystems?

or creating advisory councils with the explicit purpose of being networks for Black business leaders, these cities have demonstrated what is possible for entrepreneurs and cities alike. Certainly, there is more work to be done in the push for full equity and inclusion, but hopefully the examples and snapshots of initiatives in these three cities can provide a framework for advancing policies and programs across the country.

A note from the authors: Although this report studies Atlanta, Durham, and Detroit, we would like to call attention to another researched city, Tulsa, Oklahoma, where innovative new programs have been launched with the intention of cultivating a more inclusive and equitable entrepreneurial ecosystem and restoring the historical significance of Black entrepreneurship. Like the featured cities, Tulsa has a long and storied history of Black entrepreneurship as the city's Greenwood District once stood as an epicenter for Black wealth and innovation and was one of the nation's wealthiest Black communities. One hundred years after the massacre that killed an estimated 300 Black people and resulted in an estimated loss of \$200M in property damages and stolen assets, the city is collectively facing a reckoning and implementing reconciliation efforts.⁴ In recent years, stakeholders in Tulsa have worked to raise the profile of the city as a community for diverse entrepreneurs and a technology hub, in a move to diversify its historically oil-fueled economy, by launching programs such as [Black Tech Street](#), [Tulsa Remote](#), and [Atento Capital](#) to attract new tech talent to Tulsa. Many programs include elements that are designed to promote a more inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem, including [Build in Tulsa](#), the [Youth Entrepreneurship Program](#), [Urban Coders Guild](#), and [Tulsa Innovation Labs](#). Although it is too soon to include Tulsa in this report, the authors will be monitoring these efforts as they mature to understand the impact they have on creating an inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem in Tulsa and what other cities might learn from their approach to diversify their economy and build equity in the city.

⁴ Brookings. (2021, May 28). *The True Costs of the Tulsa Race Massacre 100 Years Later*. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-true-costs-of-the-tulsa-race-massacre-100-years-later/>

2. Research Approach

To shape the research for this report, our team was guided by the following questions:

- How can cities create inclusive entrepreneurship ecosystems for Black entrepreneurs that provide a foundation for equity?
 - How can cities at different stages of entrepreneurial ecosystems evolutions design policies and programs that create more inclusivity?
 - What unique considerations are important for citywide governments, foundations, and entrepreneurial support organizations to understand how to partner with and support Black entrepreneurs?
-

Although each city's history, approach, and key players that influence entrepreneurial activities vary, each city demonstrates opportunities to support and improve outcomes of Black entrepreneurs. We initiated research with an environmental scan to identify how each of our case-study cities currently approach inclusive entrepreneurship ecosystem building. As we focused on current initiatives shaping these environments, we also reviewed the history of Black entrepreneurship in each city and the external historical context that has affected Black entrepreneurs. The assessment consisted of primary research from more than 30 local stakeholders. Stakeholders interviewed include policy makers, entrepreneurs, entrepreneurship support organizations, community development organizations, foundations, investors, think tanks, and other leaders invested in building inclusive ecosystems. Finally, we measured our case-study cities by employing the [Forward Cities Equity for Every Entrepreneur \(E3\) Scorecard](#), which provides a comprehensive analysis tool to understand the multifaceted elements that must be assessed to work toward viable and feasible solutions. Although we used the Forward Cities E3 Scorecard, other viable frameworks for assessing the inclusiveness of an entrepreneurship ecosystem are available. Part of the journey to inclusion includes leveraging multiple resources to determine ecosystem gaps and strengths. We encourage all ecosystem leaders to take a holistic approach to assessment and identify the frameworks that best meet their current state.

2.1 Forward Cities Equity for Every Entrepreneur (E3) Scorecard

The Forward Cities E3 Scorecard categorizes its assessment of inclusive entrepreneurship ecosystems into four categories: people, programs, networks, and narratives. Our team interviewed Forward Cities leadership and received helpful insights on applying the scorecard to assess the visible and hidden components of inclusive entrepreneurship ecosystems. Below, we describe how the research team applied the scorecard to uncover key findings to help design inclusive entrepreneurship ecosystems.

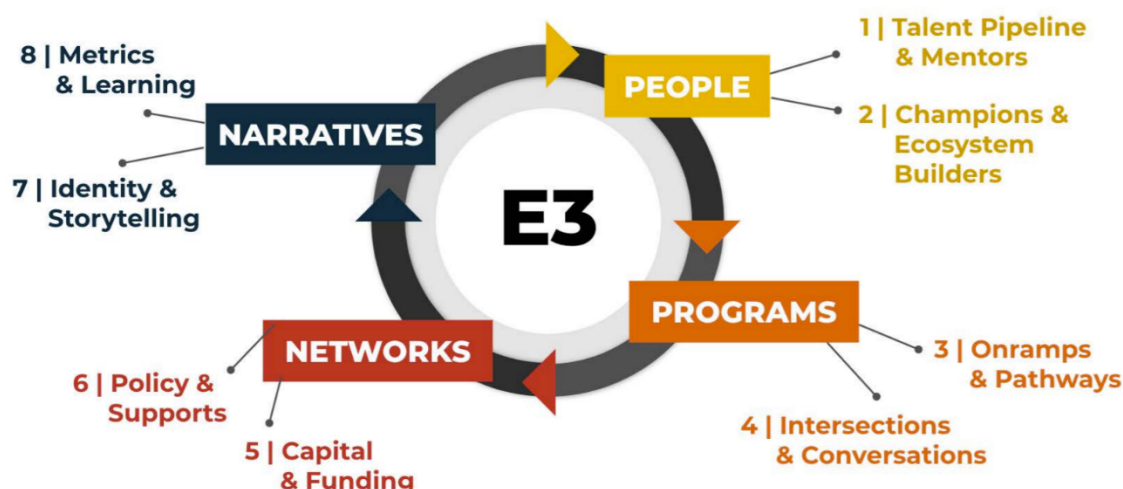


Figure 1: Forward Cities E3 Scorecard⁵ [Forward Cities](https://forwardcities.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/E3-Scorecard.pdf), a nonprofit equipping communities to design equitable entrepreneurship ecosystems, developed an eight-part scorecard that can guide cities that want to assess their entrepreneurial ecosystems for equity. This research applied and built on that scorecard to explore efforts in Atlanta, Durham, and Detroit.

2.1.1 People

At the core of every entrepreneurial ecosystem is its people. Entrepreneurs, community members, politicians, employees, and many more all contribute to the ecosystem's growth through idea and business development, investment, and policy. As we consider entrepreneurial ecosystems through an inclusive lens and the people in that ecosystem more broadly, it is important to identify the **talent pipelines and mentors** that contribute to sustained efforts for equity, provide support systems, and offer the human capital necessary for scaling. Additionally, within each ecosystem, often individual (and sometimes collective) **champions** advocate for more



⁵ Forward Cities. (2020, September) *How Do You Measure The Health & Equity Of An Entrepreneurial Ecosystem?* <https://forwardcities.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/E3-Scorecard.pdf>

inclusive spaces and help create the infrastructure for inclusive entrepreneurship. Recognizing these people to ideate and build from their work provides a helpful foundation for transferring equity across various entrepreneurial ecosystems.

2.1.2 Programs

The programs within an inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem should facilitate businesses at multiple stages of the life cycle, including launch, growth, and scale. Ensuring that programs are **accessible to and cognizant** of the unique needs of Black entrepreneurs is critical. The programs themselves must emphasize providing business development and funding **resources**, facilitating **connections** for network growth and emotional support, and valuing the diverse perspectives of entrepreneurs. Extending access to these programs through intentional outreach and serving multiple sectors and industries further expands equity within the ecosystem.



2.1.3 Networks

Critically examining funding sources to ensure that they are **accessible** (widely available and open and have an inclusive application process) and **diverse** (in terms of both the capital itself and those making the funding decisions) is a foundation of networks in an inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem. For early-stage businesses in particular, this capital is essential, and it must be available for Black entrepreneurs to fund their work.



Beyond capital, policies within an ecosystem should ensure that Black entrepreneurs have access to **real estate**, are considered in **regional development plans**, and have the **support of local institutions**. Identifying the through lines between the capital and the policies further propels and aligns this work across an ecosystem's key stakeholders.

2.1.4 Narratives

While creating and developing inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystems, it is important to share the story of that work with a larger audience to influence change. Whether it is through **marketing campaigns** that highlight diverse entrepreneurs, ventures, and communities or **media coverage** focused on



efforts to create equity in innovation and entrepreneurship, painting the larger equity narrative validates those within the ecosystem and helps attract others to invest in and continue to advance the work.

Additionally, having clear metrics to support the narratives is critical. Stakeholders across the ecosystem should prioritize **data that measure growth and success for businesses** and intentionally assess the relative measurement for Black entrepreneurs. Supplementing this entrepreneurship data with information on demographics and more qualitative analysis (e.g., ecosystem mood, perceptions) helps identify strengths and pain points for future initiatives. Finally, the ecosystem must work to facilitate the open sharing of this information, both within and outside of the ecosystem, to further promote and support ideation and critical analysis.

No ecosystem exists that can perfectly capture the people, programs, networks, and narratives that create inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystems. Even the most exemplary systems have gaps. However, assessing these gaps and adapting what other ecosystems are doing to a city's unique needs can help shrink those gaps and address systemic issues for a more equitable future. It is necessary, to keep probing, seeking feedback, and improving. Our team applied the scorecard to three case-study cities: Atlanta, Durham, and Detroit. A description of each ecosystem follows.

3. Inclusive Ecosystem Research Key Findings and Themes

Through use of the Forward Cities E3 Scorecard, we were able to identify consistent themes, across the researched cities, which serve as thought starters and motivators for emerging ecosystems. While each element of the scorecard (i.e., people, programs, networks, and narratives) play a crucial role in creating inclusive ecosystems, they are not each individually sufficient. Rather, ecosystems should assess the intersections of these elements and take a holistic approach to development. Our summations below include high-level takeaways from our observations across the three case-study cities and highlight some of the connections that can be applied to design ecosystems in the future.

- Community-driven perspectives and influence create inclusive entrepreneurship ecosystems.
- Support offerings for varying stages of the business lifecycle create opportunities for diverse entrepreneurs.
- Intentional and thoughtful talent pipelines increase the diversity of entrepreneurs and investors.
- Tailored education and resources are needed to address diverse needs and improve awareness and utilization.
- Leaders and decision makers should reflect the diversity of the entrepreneurs served for programs and networks to thrive.
- Inclusive policies and resilience strategies strengthen ecosystems and encourage equitable outcomes.
- Trust and confidence in an inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem can drive positive business outcomes.
- Quality of life and wellness needs for minority entrepreneurs must be prioritized.

Community-driven perspectives and influence create inclusive entrepreneurship

ecosystems: Inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystems require community representation and influences in the form of both individuals and institutions/organizations. When these influencers

are diverse, understand the needs of the communities they serve, and act as support systems and networks for entrepreneurs, they operate as powerful drivers of equity. A common challenge across cities includes incorporating the perspectives of the community members served at the onset of program development. Local academic institutions, corporations, and

Who is influencing the entrepreneurship ecosystem in the city and how are they shaping opportunities for entrepreneurs?

governments should consider the local preferences and attributes of the communities served as they provide human capital, incubators, capital, business development trainings, and policy support. There are opportunities to incorporate community voices into business development plans via innovation and entrepreneurship. For ecosystems that lack the robustness of the influencers mentioned above, integrating and leveraging existing relationships with local entrepreneurs may help bridge the gap. While this action may require a radical shift in current processes and mindsets, including community voices will lead to increased innovation and community buy-in for initiatives.

Support offerings for varying stages of the business lifecycle create opportunities

for diverse entrepreneurs: A consistent theme that alters the success of inclusive entrepreneurship ecosystems is the diversity of programs supporting early-stage, small, medium,

Does the ecosystem support a diverse set of industries and cater to the needs of small, medium, large, and high-growth businesses?

and high-growth Black businesses. Programs that support entrepreneurs at all stages of the business development process increase inclusive outcomes but require extensive support resources. The assessment identified two different approaches cities have taken when it comes to supporting a continuum of startups—focusing on high-growth or small businesses and focusing on industry-specific business, including tech and healthcare. These approaches create gaps by omitting support for new ventures that do not fall within the selected industries or that have different growth objectives. Cities can increase inclusivity in their ecosystems by creating programs that address a variety of business stages and industries.

Intentional and thoughtful talent pipelines increase the diversity of entrepreneurs

and investors: National and local organizations are recognizing the need to invest in diverse talent across entrepreneurship ecosystems. Industry

Are there mechanisms in place to build diverse entrepreneur and investor talent pipelines?

leaders, including the National Venture Capital Association, indicated that minority entrepreneurs are needed to drive innovation and increase the competitiveness of the U.S. business sector.⁶ Although ongoing efforts continue to encourage entrepreneurship and the development of entrepreneurial skill sets, there is also a simultaneous need to build diverse investor talent pipelines. Interviews indicated that the lack of investor diversity contributed to poor investment outcomes for Black entrepreneurs. The gap inspired Black entrepreneurs

⁶ National Venture Capital Association. (2016, July). *Building a More Inclusive Entrepreneurial Ecosystem*. <https://nvca.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Final-NVCA-Diversity-Report.pdf>

to start their own investment vehicles to address funding gaps in underserved communities.⁷ Development programs and events aimed at inspiring Black talent to consider investing careers are driving new opportunities to diversify investor outcomes. There are opportunities to encourage diverse talent to enter and improve the investment space.

Tailored education and resources are needed to address diverse needs and improve awareness and utilization:

Equipping Black entrepreneurs with the tools, knowledge, and resources to successfully launch and sustain businesses is a crucial element of inclusive

Do entrepreneurs and funders have the proper training and support at each stage of the entrepreneurial journey?

entrepreneurial ecosystems. Although general entrepreneurship resources may be available, research demonstrated that the resources were not created to serve the unique needs of Black and other minority entrepreneurs.⁸ From securing early-stage financing to business development training for scaling efforts, educational support that speaks to and supports diverse entrepreneurs yield improved equitable outcomes. Although training and supporting entrepreneurs is important, it is also imperative that funders are educated on supporting diverse companies. When considering the power dynamics of a funder–recipient relationship, ecosystems must ensure that funders are aware of the unique needs of Black entrepreneurs, are cognizant of implicit biases in funding, and are prepared to consider the different support needs of these entrepreneurs.⁹

Leaders and decision makers should reflect the diversity of the entrepreneurs served for programs and networks to thrive:

In inclusive ecosystems, minority entrepreneurs have support systems and networks that reflect the diversity of the entrepreneurs and their pursuits.

How are we attracting, retaining, and promoting diverse leaders and decision makers?

These systems and networks provide the space for ideation and shared learning that bolster the work of Black entrepreneurs.¹⁰ As observed in our case-study cities, these networks can

⁷ Forbes. (2020, December 10). *51 VCs Who Want to Invest in Women, Black And Latinx, and LGBTQ+ Founders*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/allysonkapin/2020/12/10/51-vcs-who-want-to-invest-in-women-black-and-latinx-and-lgbtq-founders/?sh=1824feb0a642>

⁸ Brookings The Hamilton Project. (2015, March). *Minority and Women Entrepreneurs: Building Capital, Networks, and Skills*. https://www.brookings.edu/wpcontent/uploads/2016/07/minority_women_entrepreneurs_building_skills_barr.pdf

⁹ Techonomy. (2019, October). *How to Fix Tech's—and Venture Capital's—Diversity Problem*. <https://techonomy.com/2019/10/how-to-fix-techs-and-venture-capitals-diversity-problem/>

¹⁰ UNC The Well. (2020, September 4) *Bolstering Black Entrepreneurship*. <https://thewell.unc.edu/2020/09/04/bolstering-black-entrepreneurship/>

also give the larger community ecosystem the opportunity to engage with and spotlight Black businesses. Following the 2020 calls for racial justice, organizations across the board sought out diversity in assembling leadership teams and sharing the larger stories and narratives. As ecosystems continue to grow, it is important to ensure that all stakeholders and influencers maintain equity as a priority, engage in consistent and open dialogue, and identify the through lines and commonalities that can make their work more efficient and effective. To do this, diverse leaders and decision makers must be present at the table.

Inclusive policies and resilience strategies strengthen ecosystems and encourage equitable outcomes:

The impact of local economic policies can shape the tone of business creation and business sustainability in a region.

Are existing policies and resilience strategies providing equitable leverage and support?

Our interviews demonstrate that long-standing policies to encourage diverse entrepreneurship support can create a precedent for encouraging diverse business creation and partnerships. Policies also affect the funding and tax structures that benefit entrepreneurs and can lead to unequal playing fields. COVID-19 demonstrated the need for city resilience strategies that support all business owners and provide resources to Black business owners. As a result of COVID-19, twice as many Black businesses as white businesses shut down because of decreased financial stability before the pandemic and limited support received during the pandemic.¹¹ Although the full impacts of COVID-19 and resulting economic downturns have not been assessed, early signs demonstrate the importance of building the resilience of Black businesses to avoid disparate business outcomes across racial groups.

Trust and confidence in an inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem can drive positive business outcomes:

Interviews showed that confirmed and perceived exclusionary and discriminatory behaviors decrease entrepreneur confidence, which results in a lack of support and

Do current and future entrepreneurs trust the resources, stakeholders, and policies within the ecosystem?

access to resources for Black business owners. Our interviews illustrated stories of Black entrepreneurs who struggled to build their confidence in existing systems to apply for and seek support resources. These stories align with research found in the National Bureau of

¹¹ Federal Reserve Bank of New York. (2020, August). *Double Jeopardy: Covid-19's Concentrated Health and Wealth Effects in Black Communities*. https://www.newyorkfed.org/medialibrary/media/smallbusiness/DoubleJeopardy_COVID19andBlackOwnedBusinesses

Economic Research’s “Black and White: Access to Capital Among Minority-owned Startups.”¹² The paper determined Black entrepreneurs experience increased challenges raising funds as a result of access constraints. Research showed that Black business owners apply for less credit because they fear being denied. This finding was consistent with McKinsey & Company’s report on building supportive ecosystems, which highlighted that the historic lack of trust of financial and business institutions diminishes the potential and growth of Black-owned businesses.¹³ The lack of trust also pushes Black entrepreneurs to seek resources within their own communities, limiting entrepreneurial outcomes. Within any ecosystem, intentional, community-rooted strategies that address unique city trust gaps should be prioritized as a means of driving equity.

Prioritized quality-of-life and wellness needs create sustainable opportunities for entrepreneurs to reach holistic success:

Not to be omitted is the importance of quality of life and wellness for Black entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurship champions shared that a

Is the ecosystem affordable and attractive to diverse entrepreneurs and are well-being initiatives in place?

reasonable cost of living and access to health resources are critical during the challenging entrepreneurship process. Ecosystems with lower costs of living are attracting talent that supports business development and innovation because entrepreneurs are better able to take care of themselves and their families.¹⁴ Interviews indicated that Black entrepreneurs are also looking to open their businesses in areas that they feel they will receive strong levels of community support. Interview findings from entrepreneurs and entrepreneur support organizations indicated the prevalence of unaddressed well-being needs for entrepreneurs, who may experience intense pressure and varying levels of access to health resources.

¹² National Bureau of Economic Research. (2020, November). *Black And White: Access to Capital Among Minority-Owned Startups*.

https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w28154/w28154.pdf

¹³ McKinsey & Company. (2020, October 29). *Building Supportive Ecosystems for Black-owned US businesses*. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/building-supportive-ecosystems-for-black-owned-us-businesses>

¹⁴ Area Development. (2014). *The Regional Impact of Quality of Life on Entrepreneurial Decisions*. <https://www.areadevelopment.com/business-climate/Q2-2014/quality-of-life-impacts-entrepreneurial-decisions-28827151.shtml>

4. Ecosystem Assessment

The following section includes the detailed findings from applying the Forward Cities E3 Scorecard to each case-study city. Each city's story and characteristics lead to varying approaches to designing inclusive entrepreneurship ecosystems. The similarities noted in Section 3: Inclusive Ecosystem Research Key Findings and Themes demonstrate that while each city varies in size, capabilities, and industries, common challenges span each city and can help other cities determine pathways to design inclusive entrepreneurship ecosystems. Within each ecosystem assessment, we characterize each city and summarize the city's key takeaways. We then deep dive into each city in alignment with the Forward Cities E3 Scorecard criteria—people, programs, networks, and narratives—described in Section 2: Research Approach.



4.1 Atlanta, Georgia

4.1.1 Ecosystem Description

Growing Black tech hub with influential Black city leaders, growing technology investments, and large corporate presence.

4.1.2 Key Takeaways

- Fortune 500 companies, technical talent from universities, and community organizations are creating talent, partnership, and investment opportunities.
- Atlanta's successful Black entrepreneurs are leading grassroot initiatives to address the challenges that they previously faced and create more inclusive systems for the next generation.
- Diverse city and economic development leaders help support the needs of Black business owners, but evident economic and income disparities remain to be addressed.

4.1.3 People

Atlanta's Black entrepreneurship presence stems from leaders and key players who laid the foundation for a Black entrepreneurship-focused community and continue to encourage minority business ownership. As opportunities increase due to job creation and a relatively low cost of living, Black people are migrating to Atlanta, increasing the number of Black talent and entrepreneurs.¹⁵ Atlanta has the largest number of Black-owned firms, following New York City, but consistent with national averages, many of these firms are non-employer firms.¹⁶



The Atlanta talent pipeline, a contributor to the success of the city's entrepreneurship ecosystem, is cultivated by the extensive number of colleges and universities that continue to grow diverse skilled talent and efforts to increase entrepreneurship offerings for K-12 students. The Atlanta metropolitan area has 57 colleges and universities, including five technical colleges and four Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Importantly, Atlanta is one of the largest urban centers for engineering, computer science, math, health, and business degrees, and the city's ability to attract and retain that skilled talent—77% of local college graduates stay in the metro Atlanta area following graduation¹⁷ and college-educated 25- to 34-year-olds continue to relocate to the city¹⁸—serves as a robust talent pool feeding the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Attracted by this strong base of talent, large technology companies, including Google, Microsoft, and Amazon, continue to open offices in Atlanta, creating jobs and establishing learning centers at local universities and HBCUs to build technical talent and support local Black entrepreneurship.¹⁹ This virtuous cycle—technology companies migrate to Atlanta, creating jobs and allowing the City of Atlanta to promote job opportunities— encourages more talented and technically skilled people to move to Atlanta. **The educational systems have also established programs to support local entrepreneurs, develop local talent, and influence the entrepreneurship ecosystem.**

¹⁵ Bloomberg City Lab. (2019, February 28). *Black Cities Ain't Going Nowhere*. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-02-28/black-majority-cities-are-increasing-in-number>

¹⁶ Atlanta Small Business Network. (2020, February 17). *Programs and Initiatives that Support Black Owned Businesses in Metro Atlanta*. <https://www.myasbn.com/small-business/entrepreneurship/programs-and-initiatives-that-support-black-owned-business-in-metro-atlanta/>

¹⁷ Indeed Hiring Lab. (2018, May 10). *The Cities Attracting the Most College Graduates*. <https://www.hiringlab.org/2018/05/10/graduate-jobs-2018/>

¹⁸ Atlanta Convention and Visitors Bureau. (2021). *Colleges and Universities*. <https://discoveratlanta.com/explore/colleges-universities/>

¹⁹ Propel Center. (2021). *Global HBCU Campus for Innovation + Learning*. <https://propelcenter.org/>

For example, Georgia Tech manages the [Minority Business Development Agency Business Center](#), which partners with the U.S. Minority Business Development Agency to offer local Black entrepreneurs consulting, process improvement resources, and capital support. For K–12 entrepreneurship pipeline development, Junior Achievement recently began coordinating with the Atlanta Public School system, where 70% of enrolled students identify as Black,²⁰ to develop entrepreneurship and business skills.²¹ The strength of the university systems and efforts to increase young Black entrepreneurship talent create an environment to improve inclusive entrepreneurship outcomes by filling the talent funnel early in the pipeline.

Local mentorship and workforce development initiatives support Black business owners and increase the likelihood of inclusive entrepreneurship in the city through knowledge sharing and support. Formal mentorship opportunities, including [The Entrepreneurship Center](#) hosted by the Urban League of Greater Atlanta and the [Atlanta SCORE Program](#), are available for budding business owners to build relationships with coaches and experienced Black entrepreneurs. Informally, entrepreneurs connect with mentors during grassroots events at coworking and collaboration spaces. Atlanta mentorship programs support K–12 students, college students, and other current and aspiring business owners. Citywide workforce development initiative leaders collaborate with business leaders to help recruit and develop talent through skills trainings and job connections supporting Black entrepreneur skill development.²²

Increased support for Black entrepreneurs was sparked by Atlanta’s first Black mayor, Maynard Jackson, who served as mayor from 1974 through 1981. Jackson created a friendly environment for Black entrepreneurs, expanded citywide business opportunities for minority businesses through supplier diversity programs, and set a precedent of championing Black businesses. This city leadership trend continues today as Atlanta elected its fifth consecutive Black mayor, Keisha Lance Bottoms, who articulates the city’s priority to decrease racial wealth gaps and support minority business owners.²³ **Atlanta’s largest entrepreneurship support organizations and programs intended to support Black entrepreneurs**

²⁰ Georgia Department of Education. (2021). *Enrollment by Ethnicity/Race, Gender and Grade Level (PK-12)*. https://app3.doe.k12.ga.us/ows-bin/owa/fte_pack_ethnicsex.entry_form

²¹ INC. (2017, February 17). *These Nine Organizations are Turning Kids into Entrepreneurs*. <https://www.inc.com/tom-foster/how-kids-become-entrepreneurs.html>

²² City of Atlanta, GA. (2021). *WorkSource Atlanta Projects and Initiatives*. <https://www.atlantaga.gov/government/mayor-s-office/worksource-atlanta>

²³ City of Atlanta, GA. (2020, August 20). *Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms and Invest Atlanta Board Announce the Adoption of the One Atlanta Economic Mobility, Recovery and Resiliency Plan*. <https://www.atlantaga.gov/Home/Components/News/News/13430/672>

consist of and are led by Black leaders, which helps build trust and prioritize solutions that address the needs of Black entrepreneurs. [Opportunity Hub](#), founded in Atlanta by Atlanta native Rodney Sampson, is the nation's largest Black-owned coworking entrepreneurship and tech hub.²⁴ The majority of the executive leaders of [Invest Atlanta](#), Atlanta's city-sponsored economic development program that aims to increase economic prosperity for all Atlantans, are women or people of color.

Although Atlanta's community development organizations and mayor's office are diverse, other ecosystem stakeholders, including financial institutions, corporations, universities, and nonprofits, still need to address diversity gaps in leadership to build a more inclusive entrepreneurship ecosystem.²⁵ In 2020, the Atlanta Committee for Progress, comprising business and city leaders, prioritized increasing diverse representation in leadership positions across the region, which can increase support for Black and minority business owners and improve overall community engagement support to address the needs of Atlanta's diverse population.²⁶ Even though Atlanta has a strong set of champions leading entrepreneurship and economic development support organizations, there is an opportunity to increase the diversity of leaders across other key stakeholder groups who also influence the entrepreneurship ecosystem.

4.1.4 Programs

Atlanta's Black entrepreneurs have options for business skills training and technical assistance through state, city, and local private and public programs. Although community organizations make their entrepreneur and business support resources open to all Atlanta residents, stakeholder interviews identified that a lack of awareness and lack of transportation prevent businesses deriving from and often located in underserved Black neighborhoods, particularly Atlanta's Southside, from tapping into the resources. Entrepreneur and business support resources are also concentrated within more financially developed areas, and key



²⁴ Brookings. (2020, July 23). *An Atlanta Organization's Mission to Bring Racial Equity to the Tech Ecosystem*. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/an-atlanta-organizations-mission-to-bring-racial-equity-to-the-tech-ecosystem/>

²⁵ The Atlanta Journal Constitution. (2020, November 14). *Dearth of diversity in leadership at Georgia's top colleges*. <https://www.ajc.com/education/dearth-of-diversity-in-leadership-at-georgias-top-colleges/VRZJRDMJP5DQBAUWT6SEVSGUBQ/>

²⁶ Saporta Report. (2020, October 12). *We Can Do Better Atlanta by Adding More Diversity to our Corporate Ranks*. https://saportareport.com/we-can-do-better-atlanta-by-adding-more-diversity-to-our-corporate-ranks/columnists/maria_saporta/

players, including Invest Atlanta, are **extending their resources to underserved Black neighborhoods to decrease Atlanta’s economic inequalities**. During the onset of the 2020 pandemic, Atlanta organizations created relief funds and grants for Black business owners.²⁷ To support businesses negatively affected by the pandemic, the city allocated \$1.5M to create the business continuity loan fund. The fund, managed by Invest Atlanta, shared that 48% of recipients were minorities whose businesses were disproportionately affected by COVID-19.²⁸

National and local incubators and accelerators are present in Atlanta, and minority-focused incubators and accelerators, often created by successful Black Atlanta entrepreneurs, are **increasing opportunities for Black entrepreneurs to receive mentorship, expertise, investor access, and workspaces**. [Ascend Atlanta](#), an accelerator launched by JP Morgan Chase in partnership with Morehouse College Entrepreneurship Center and TechSquare Labs, specifically supports technology startups led by minority founders in Atlanta. [Vertical404](#), a Venture Capital Firm in Atlanta, provides mentorship, educational resources, and capital support to Black and Latinx business owners.²⁹ [OHUB](#) provides coworking spaces, mentorship, education, and networking opportunities alongside incubator and accelerator programs.³⁰ Challenges for local programs include acquiring the financial capital, human capital, and technology resources needed to support the success of Black businesses and create more inclusive entrepreneurship ecosystems. Collectively, the national, local, and grassroots entrepreneurship support organizations are nurturing Black entrepreneurs through capability, confidence, and relationship building.

4.1.5 Networks

Access to capital in Atlanta follows national trends for Black Americans and Black-founded businesses in the city. Prior to the pandemic, which led to national closures of Black businesses, Atlanta ranked as one of the worst US cities facing income inequality and disparities, which contributes to



²⁷ Atlanta Business Chronicle. (2020, December). *Amid a Year of Heartache, a Story of Resilience*. <https://www.bizjournals.com/atlanta/news/2020/12/17/sbbm-atlanta-business-chronicle-year-of-heartache.html>

²⁸ Invest Atlanta. (2021). *Business Continuity Loan Fund*. <https://www.investatlanta.com/business-continuity-loan-fund>

²⁹ Georgia Tech Student Innovation Program. (2021). *Business Accelerators*. <https://innovation.cae.gatech.edu/business-accelerators>

³⁰ ICIC. (2021). What Works: Opportunity Hub Fosters Inner City Entrepreneurship in Atlanta. <https://icic.org/blog/works-opportunity-hub-fosters-inner-city-entrepreneurship-atlanta/>

inequities for Black entrepreneurs.³¹ In Atlanta, the median household income for Black families is \$28,000 compared with \$80,000 for white families.³² The implications of financial disparities affect the success trajectory of Black businesses as business owners lack funding and assets available to financially support their businesses. Interviews indicated that Black-owned businesses have experienced challenges applying for and receiving funding. **To bridge this gap, local entrepreneur support organizations (ESOs) and economic development organizations are closing funding gaps for business owners deemed “unbankable.”**

Mayor Maynard Jackson instituted a policy that required city officials to award 35% of city contracts to Black-owned businesses. Efforts to diversify suppliers and help Black-owned businesses reach their first customers are supported by policies. Tax credit programs were initiated to drive private investments in low-income neighborhoods and allow companies to receive tax reductions by investing in local businesses.

[Prosperity Now](#), the National Wealth Building Initiative, is shedding light on inequities affecting Atlanta’s Black business owners. Invest Atlanta provides loans and directs entrepreneurs to financing institutions that can provide capital. Financial support initiatives are now targeting Black and underserved neighborhoods, historically Atlanta’s Southside neighborhood. Some major firms have proposed financial commitments to address racial inequities and grow Black businesses, including the Atlanta Hawks National Basketball Association (NBA) Team, which donated \$5 million to support the [Russell Innovation Center for Entrepreneurship](#), an innovation center for Black entrepreneurs, and another \$35 million to support additional Black business and racial equity initiatives.

4.1.6 Narratives

Community organizations, including [Atlanta Black Chambers](#), **create community identities that encourage Black entrepreneurs to support and start businesses in Atlanta.** Black-owned businesses are promoted and celebrated during open markets and pop-up shops, like [The Village Market](#), originally an online marketplace for Black businesses, which



³¹ Statista. (2019, November 27). *Atlanta Has the Worst Income Inequality in the U.S.*
<https://www.statista.com/chart/20097/worst-income-inequality-us/>

³² Atlanta Wealth Building Initiative. (2020). *Racial Wealth Gap*.
<https://www.atlantawealthbuilding.org/racial-wealth-gap>

now hosts weekend pop-ups for Atlanta’s Black businesses to showcase their products and access new customers. Additionally, various governmental and local stakeholders create directories to promote Black-owned businesses and encourage financial support of Black-owned businesses. [Startup Atlanta](#) compiles [a list](#) of entrepreneurship resources, including media and news sources that promote Black entrepreneurs and support relationship building.³³ The city’s diversity in leadership, businesses, and communities, alongside the community’s affordable living, are points of pride that the City of Atlanta frequently promotes as an asset to attract new residents and employers.

Using data to measure progress and regression is critical to ensure the city continues to cultivate an inclusive and equitable entrepreneurial ecosystem. Organizations and institutions, including Invest Atlanta and Georgia Tech, track and measure demographics of Atlanta’s business owners and outcomes. Data tools in Atlanta that are making the community aware of business needs and measuring impact of programs include, small business trackers and loan impact reports. Following national trends, data show that Atlanta’s Black businesses are valued less than businesses owned by other racial groups and that many of businesses aren’t prepared to grow with new capabilities or employees.³⁴ Data helps paint the picture for the necessity of entrepreneurship in Atlanta’s Black community to address income inequalities and build community wealth.

Atlanta, known for its civil rights roots and growing opportunities for Black business owners, has an opportunity to use its growing corporate presence, academic institutions, community organizations, innovation investments, and business friendly policies to create more pathways that address the city’s growing economic inequality and create equitable access to support networks.

³³ Startup Atlanta. (2020). *Ecosystem Guide*. <http://www.startupatlanta.com/embed-guide>

³⁴ Prosperity Now. (2017, December). *Advancing Collective Prosperity Through Entrepreneurship in Atlanta*. https://prosperitynow.org/files/resources/Advancing-Collective-Prosperity-Through-Entrepreneurship-in-Atlanta_0.pdf



4.2 Durham, North Carolina

4.2.1 Ecosystem Description

Emerging ecosystem with fast-growing and majority-minority population, diverse businesses, academic institutions, and expanding private/public-sector investment.

4.2.2 Key Takeaways

- Durham influencers and organizations are creating networks focused on learning and communal support for minority entrepreneurs across a range of industries.
- Investments in early business stages help increase entrepreneurship growth rates and intentional inclusiveness for Black entrepreneurs.
- As Durham's business ecosystem grows, the city will rely less on individual champions and more on the sustainable structures and organizations they've created.s Durham's business

4.2.3 People

In Durham's emerging entrepreneurial ecosystem, deep connections exist between the people and programs in the ecosystem. The people leading the efforts to make entrepreneurship more inclusive are heading up new organizations or innovating at existing ones to drive progress. **Durham's entrepreneurs, motivated by changing demographics and business trends, are working to ensure that everyone has a seat at the table.** As the ecosystem matures and grows, it will rely less on individuals taking the lead and more on the sustainable structures and organizations they have created. Our research captures only a snapshot of a specific point in Durham's evolution and acknowledges that there will continue to be growth and development.



Durham's talent pipeline is fueled by several local academic institutions, including Duke University and North Carolina Central University (NCCU). As a leading research institution with a globally renowned teaching hospital, Duke attracts both top-level funding and talent.³⁵ This talent and funding enable Duke to greatly contribute to Durham's overall economic landscape. Recently, there have been pushes by the university to ensure contributions to equity in the ecosystem, including a [joint pitch competition](#) with NCCU for Black student entrepreneurs.³⁶ NCCU is the nation's oldest publicly funded liberal arts college for Black Americans.³⁷ As Durham's HBCU, NCCU is a strong source of Black entrepreneurial talent in the budding ecosystem.³⁸ Its efforts to equip Black students and community members with the tools for building successful businesses are an essential element of the Durham ecosystem. A recent \$400,000 grant from the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation recognizes NCCU's role in Durham and provides the financial foundation for a clinic and lab devoted to expanding the minority entrepreneur pipeline in the city.³⁹

³⁵ Economic Modeling Specialists INTL. (2015, February). *Demonstrating the Economic Value of Duke Fact Sheet*. <https://today.duke.edu/showcase/mmedia/pdf/duke-economic-value-fact-sheet-fy1213.pdf>

³⁶ WRAL Tech Wire. (2021, April 7). *UNC, Duke, Stanford, 100 Black Angels and Allies Fund Team Up to Drive More Diverse Entrepreneurial Ecosystems*. <https://www.wraltechwire.com/2021/04/07/unc-duke-stanford-100-black-angels-and-allies-fund-team-up-to-drive-more-diverse-entrepreneurial-ecosystems/>

³⁷ U.S. News and World Report. (2021). *North Carolina Central University*. <https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/north-carolina-central-2950/student-life>

³⁸ Triangle Business Journal. (2021, March 5). *The Fight to Achieve Equitable Outcomes at HBCUs*. <https://www.bizjournals.com/triangle/news/2021/03/05/how-hbcus-are-working-for-equitable-relevance.html>

³⁹ North Carolina Central University. (2020, October 5). *NCCU School of Business Receives \$400K Knowledge Challenge Grant to Study Racial Equity in Entrepreneurship*.

Beyond these champions and institutions, the Durham ecosystem includes [numerous changemakers making vital contributions to the entrepreneurial landscape](#). As Durham and similar entrepreneurial ecosystems mature and grow, tapping into the richness of the people and leveraging their work through foundational supports will continue to generate equity within the systems and create sustainable progress that benefits not only Black entrepreneurs, but also entrepreneurs at large. The list of changemakers could continue, but these champions in the ecosystem are recognizing the need for equity and building out the frameworks and infrastructure to ensure that those considerations do not end with them.

4.2.4 Programs

Through our conversations with different Durham ecosystem leaders, we learned that gaps exist in equitable access to funding, community spaces and networking opportunities, and business development trainings/resources for Black entrepreneurs. **To address these needs, government, community organizations, and local corporations established programs and launched initiatives that could specifically support minority entrepreneurs.**



To address some of the gaps that early-stage ventures led by Black entrepreneurs face, NC IDEA, a funding organization committed to economic development in North Carolina, launched the [Black Entrepreneurship Council](#) in 2020. The council, a 20-person group of minority entrepreneurs and business leaders themselves, directed NC IDEA's ECOSYSTEM grants toward Durham and North Carolina-based organizations that offer coworking spaces, business training, and communal networks for Black entrepreneurs at the beginning of their startup journey.⁴⁰ By supporting the ESOs, NC IDEA is developing and strengthening the infrastructure that nurtures Black businesses. The [Black Founders Exchange at American Underground](#) (BFE) is also supporting early-stage entrepreneurs but with a different approach. With financial backing from Google for Startups, the BFE has created a funding pipeline and networking hub specifically for Black-led startups.⁴¹ In addition to connections and financial

<https://www.nccu.edu/news/nccu-school-business-receives-400k-knowledge-challenge-grant-study-racial-equity>

⁴⁰ WRAL Tech Wire. (2020, November 18). *NC IDEA Spells Out Aggressive Agenda for Black Entrepreneurship Council*. <https://www.wraltechwire.com/2020/11/18/nc-idea-spells-out-aggressive-agenda-for-black-entrepreneurship-council/>

⁴¹ WRAL Tech Wire. (2019, June 21). *American Underground, Google looking for startups to join Black Founders Exchange program*. <https://www.wraltechwire.com/2019/06/21/american-underground-google-looking-for-startups-to-join-black-founders-exchange-program/>

support, the program provides access to Google expertise and a platform for product development. With these intentional supports, over 50 companies across a wide range of industries have successfully launched since 2016 through the BFE. The success of this corporate incubator and other efforts has bolstered Google's presence in the region and served as a framework for other corporations looking to make inroads on supporting Black entrepreneurs.⁴²

At the intersection of entrepreneurship, business, and community development, initiatives and organizations such as Innovate Durham, the Greater Durham Black Chamber of Commerce, and Communities in Partnership have focused on creating a more inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem in Durham. In 2017, Durham's city government launched [Innovate Durham](#) to connect local innovators and entrepreneurs with city resources to make the city more efficient and encourage a culture of innovation in the city. Since then, an array of new companies has launched, ranging from ventures that address communication with communities in crisis to those providing essential HIV medication for local residents.

The [Greater Durham Black Chamber of Commerce](#) advocates for Black-owned businesses to be included in economic development plans for the city while pushing for funding and institutional supports for brick-and-mortar businesses to scale.⁴³ In an environment that continues to focus on strategically growing tech and healthcare-focused businesses, the collective work of the Chamber has been a valuable support and community for businesses serving different and less-funded industries, especially during the pandemic. Meanwhile, [Communities in Partnership](#) has worked to elevate marginalized voices in business and economic development while bringing together entrepreneurs tackling pressing issues such as representation in food systems through the [Culinary Femme Collective](#).⁴⁴

As emerging entrepreneurial ecosystems like Durham continue to grow and expand, it will be critical to ensure that equity conversations keep up with growth rates, Black voices are represented in support systems and programs, and government works with the community

⁴² Triangle Business Journal. (2021, March). *Google Unveils Major Engineering Hub Planned for Durham; Potential for 1,000+ Jobs*. <https://www.bizjournals.com/triangle/news/2021/03/18/google-plans-engineering-hub-in-durham.html>

⁴³ Triangle Business Journal. (2020, July 2). *Executive Voice: He's an advocate for Black business in Durham*. <https://www.bizjournals.com/triangle/news/2020/07/02/broderick-an-advocate-for-black-business-in-durham.html>

⁴⁴ Duke Fuqua Case. (2019, December 16). *Cooking Up Diversity, Equity and Inclusion with the Culinary Femme Collective*. <https://centers.fuqua.duke.edu/case/2019/12/16/cooking-up-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-with-the-culinary-femme-collective/>

and Black entrepreneurs to innovate for mutual benefit.⁴⁵ Focusing on these areas and using some of Durham's programmatic approaches can provide a solid foundation for more inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystems.

4.2.5 Networks

Although Durham has experienced rapid population⁴⁶ and business growth⁴⁷ and an associated influx of capital into the city, Black entrepreneurs have not proportionally benefited from this growth.⁴⁸ Our interviews and conversations with leaders of funding organizations and recipients of capital in Durham revealed that access issues extend beyond bankability, which is often discussed as a key roadblock for individuals and businesses that might lack the collateral or desired credit for traditional business loans or equity investments. Some Black entrepreneurs are experiencing challenges due to the lack of exposure or knowledge of financing ventures, and this prevents them from being able to adequately prepare and present plans that align with investor expectations. [Knox St. Studios](#) and similar ESOs have tried to break down this barrier by creating communal learning and sharing spaces for entrepreneurs of color focusing on key issues like navigating funding. Funders such as [Resilient Ventures](#) have gone beyond removing knowledge access barriers and explicitly named racial equity as a key priority in their funding vision. **This transparency and action, coupled with reimagining and redefining what successful Black businesses look like relative to evaluating their funding worthiness, are part of the equity push on the finance side of entrepreneurship in the Durham ecosystem.**



Looking past financing, Durham's ecosystem is supporting startup founders on their journey from launch to scale. As entrepreneurs grow their businesses, hiring and supporting the right staff, streamlining operations, and developing strategic plans can be challenging endeavors.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ WRAL Tech Wire. (2020, November 18). *How Do We 'Reset' Ecosystems? Empathy and Equality are Crucial, Says Fed Official*. <https://www.wraltechwire.com/2020/11/18/how-do-we-reset-ecosystems-empathy-and-equality-are-crucial-says-fed-official/>

⁴⁶ Indy Week. (2018, January 23). *Newcomers are Changing the Face of Durham's Population*. <https://indyweek.com/news/archives/newcomers-changing-face-durham-s-population/>

⁴⁷ WRAL Tech Wire. (2021, March 2) *Report: New Business Growth Soaring at Record Rate in NC Despite Pandemic*. <https://www.wraltechwire.com/2021/03/02/report-new-business-growth-soaring-at-record-rate-in-nc-despite-pandemic/>

⁴⁸ New York Times. (2018, May 1) *In a Revived Durham, Black Residents Ask: Is There Still Room for Us?* <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/01/business/durham-real-estate-growth.html>

⁴⁹ Forbes. (2019, August 2). *The Right Fit: 13 Entrepreneurs Share their Difficulties with Hiring New Staff*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/yec/2019/08/02/the-right-fit-13-entrepreneurs-share-their-difficulties-with-hiring-new-staff/?sh=28267212e661>

For Black entrepreneurs who have not had access to trainings and resources to address these scaling issues, the impacts of those challenges are particularly acute.¹³ To fill this void, [Helius NC](#) has developed a yearlong coaching and mentorship program focused exclusively on business development for primarily minority entrepreneurs. Other organizations, including the [Access Center for Equity + Success](#), are offering technical supports for minority entrepreneurs pursuing scaling contracts and business certifications. Combined, these efforts to equip Black entrepreneurs with tools and skills for growth and scaling are pushing equity forward within the Durham ecosystem.

From a policy perspective, [Durham’s Office of Economic & Workforce Development](#) has worked with organizations, including [the National Institute for Economic Development](#), focused on development for minority entrepreneurs as part of the Small Business Advisory Committee. The city has also launched the [M/WBE Program](#) to assist minority and women-owned businesses in procuring government contracts for their goods and services. Although there is no mandate or minimum requirement for contracts with M/WBEs, government ordinances have outlined policies and procedures for ensuring that businesses are given an equal opportunity.⁵⁰ Additionally, Durham has partnered with several organizations across the city, including [Made in Durham](#) and [My Brother’s Keeper](#), to ensure inclusive workforce development opportunities exist for underserved communities.⁵¹

4.2.6 Narratives

The “Bull City” ethos of Durham, originally adapted from a prominent tobacco brand,⁵² has come to represent a grit and determination that have allowed local residents to thrive and grow. **Durham’s history of Black entrepreneurship prompted several current initiatives focused on elevating the stories of Black entrepreneurs that exemplify this mindset and advance equity.** The founders of [Black Wall Street Homecoming](#), [Black August in the Park](#), and the [Art of Cool Festival](#) created events that center the Black experience, promote community bonds, and celebrate minority entrepreneurs. Not only have these events



⁵⁰ City of Durham. (2016). *Article III. Equal Business Opportunity Program*.

<https://durhamnc.gov/DocumentCenter/View/27071/Equal-Business-Opportunity-Program-Ordinance>

⁵¹ Durham County Economic Development. (2021). *Workforce Development*. <https://www.dco-ed.com/entrepreneurs/workforce-development>

⁵² City of Durham. (2021). *Welcome to the City of Durham*. <https://durhamnc.gov/1457/Welcome-to-The-City-of-Durham>

brought together Black entrepreneurs, but they have also served as platforms for the city to interact with Black businesses and for businesses to expand their reach.

For business data and metrics, Durham has leaned into an [open approach](#) after recognizing that lack of comprehensive data about business intersectionality along race and gender lines was hindering the city's ability to support all entrepreneurs.⁵³ Through general surveys across the Durham business/entrepreneurial ecosystems and more substantive conversations with entrepreneurs and business leaders, these data are informing comprehensive plans for future developments and are intended to both hold the city accountable and spur innovation. Business leaders have pushed city officials to provide them with more data as they consider development and expansion through [Durham Business 360](#). The comparison, demographic, consumer, and mapping tools within Durham Business 360 are designed to equip entrepreneurs with the necessary insights for success. For minority entrepreneurs in Durham, being able to leverage the data with other institutional supports can potentially make the ecosystem more inclusive.

As the ecosystem grows and expands, the continued availability and utilization of these data will be critical in identifying the best ways to support minority entrepreneurs and generate community development.

Durham, a city categorized known for historical Black wealth generation and strong support for small businesses, is currently experiencing new tech and healthcare industry innovation and vast population growth. While the city manages new economic growth, there will need to be simultaneous efforts to support new and existing Black businesses across industries to ensure equitable access to resources.

⁵³ (2021). *Prosperity, Equity, and Durham's Business Landscape*.
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/881eee3e3fef4a688b52f9b12a95b3ed?item=1>



4.3 Detroit, Michigan

4.3.1 Ecosystem Description

Evolving ecosystem with majority Black population, transitioning industries following economic recoveries, emerging startup scene, community-focused partnerships, and resilient business ownership.

4.3.2 Key Takeaways

- Detroit's majority Black population, once largely employed by the automotive sector and supportive industries, has increasingly turned to entrepreneurship and innovation to create economic opportunities.
- Detroit's revitalization efforts have encouraged increased investments in ventures and startups, but there are increased needs to ensure inclusive revitalization efforts that support Black entrepreneurs.
- A community-driven culture benefits Detroit entrepreneurs and contributes to collective growth and collaboration across the ecosystem.

4.3.3 People

Detroit's Black entrepreneurship community comprises resilient entrepreneurs and champions who have recovered from extreme economic downturns and are collaborating to create business opportunities as the city continues to revitalize. Black Americans comprise 77% of the population of Detroit's proper city, not including the metropolitan area. Historically, local talent and the entrepreneurial spirit have been sources of economic recovery after repeated job losses following the automobile industry and housing market declines. Today, the City of Detroit and private funders continue to invest in business startup activity and are turning abandoned buildings into coworking spaces for entrepreneurs.⁵⁴ **New waves of entrepreneurial activity in technology and healthcare are driving change in the ecosystems and challenging the city to increase talent pools to meet this demand.** Detroit's Black entrepreneurs benefit from Detroit's research institutions, community-driven culture, and low cost of living.⁵⁵ Challenges for Black entrepreneurs include limited access to financial resources, slow economic recovery and development in Black neighborhoods, and limited talent support.⁵⁶



Academic institutions, including Michigan State, University of Michigan, and Wayne State University, are creating talent pools and supporting Detroit's Black entrepreneurs. The University of Michigan launched the [Detroit Neighborhood Entrepreneurs Project](#), which uses the university's resources to create an accelerator program for Detroit businesses; 85% of the businesses served by the program were minority owned.⁵⁷ In 2019, The University of Michigan pledged to create the \$300M 190,000 ft² [Detroit Center for Innovation](#).⁵⁸ The center intends to increase citywide entrepreneurship initiatives and collaborate with Detroit Public Schools. Wayne State was an early founder of [TechTown Detroit](#), an established incubator that serves as an entrepreneurship hub for the city.

⁵⁴ CNN Business. (2018, September 30). *How Innovation Helped Save Detroit*. <https://www.cnn.com/2018/09/30/success/detroit-entrepreneurship>

⁵⁵ EntryPointMi. (2021). *2021 Detroit Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Report*. <https://entrypointmi.com/about-entrypoint/research/detroit-report/>

⁵⁶ MIT Sloan Management Review. (2020, January 16). The Detroit Hustle. <https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/the-detroit-hustle/>

⁵⁷ University of Michigan. (2021). *Detroit Neighborhood Entrepreneurs Project*. <https://detroit.umich.edu/engagement-projects/featured-projects/detroit-neighborhood-entrepreneurs-project/>

⁵⁸ University of Michigan. (2019, October 30). *New \$300 million U-M Research and Education Center to Anchor 14-acre Detroit Center for Innovation in the Heart of Detroit*. <https://detroit.umich.edu/news-stories/new-300-million-u-m-research-and-education-center-to-anchor-14-acre-detroit-center-for-innovation-in-the-heart-of-detroit/>

Talent programs, including [Choose Michigan](#), are attracting and retaining science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics talent, which will support Detroit's growing entrepreneurship ecosystem. Detroit Regional Chamber manages the [Detroit Drives Degrees](#) program, which was created to improve Detroit's talent pipeline and provide skills that will support business growth. The organization aims to use educational advancement to improve social and economic mobility and raise the percentage of postsecondary attainment to 60% by 2030, which will provide additional talent pools for entrepreneurs.⁵⁹ Efforts are not limited to training the younger population; in February 2021, Michigan's governor launched a \$30M Michigan Reconnect program that will allow over four million Michigan residents aged 25 years and older to receive tuition-free associate degrees or skills certificates to address labor gaps and create additional talent for entrepreneurs.⁶⁰ **The cultivation of this strong talent pool is a necessary component of Detroit's future economic growth.** A managing director at [EntryPoint](#), a research organization supporting Midwest-based community development and nonprofit organizations, noted that talent, alongside capital, research, and community, will contribute to entrepreneurial and business growth in Detroit.⁶¹ Increased talent development from intentional skills building will strengthen the talent ecosystem for Black entrepreneurs.

4.3.4 Programs

Michigan and Detroit programs continue to **adapt strategies to address the balance of talent development, shifting industry growth, and entrepreneurship support.** The [Michigan Economic Development Corporation's \(MEDC's\) 2020–2025 Strategy](#) includes actions that provide funding to disadvantaged areas, cultivating high-growth sectors and developing talent. MEDC also established a target funding goals to provide direct assistance to minority business owners.⁶² The New Economy Initiative launched support programs for Black business owners that include grants to address declines in business resilience due to



⁵⁹ Detroit Regional Chamber. (2021). *Detroit Drives Degrees*. <https://www.detroitchamber.com/d3/>

⁶⁰ Michigan.Gov - The Office of Governor Gretchen Whitmer. (2021, February 2). *Gov. Whitmer launches bipartisan \$30M Michigan Reconnect program*. <https://www.michigan.gov/whitmer/0,9309,7-387-90499-551139--,00.html>

⁶¹ EntryPointMi. (2019, August 4). *2019 Detroit Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Report Reveals Five-Year Economic Trends Impacting Detroit's Growing Startup Community*. <https://entrypointmi.com/2019/08/04/2019-detroit-report/>

⁶² Michigan Economic Development Corporation. (2020, October 28). *Equitable and Resilient Growth Strategy*. https://www.ncsl.org/Portals/1/Documents/fiscal/Fiscal_2020_meetings/Steve_Bakkal_Session_5_Presentation_35566.pdf

COVID-19.⁶³ Entrepreneur support programs for Black-owned businesses and startups, including [Black Leaders Detroit](#) and [ProsperUS Detroit](#), have stepped in to provide financial support to Black business owners through the development of emergency funds for companies affected by COVID-19.

[Build Institute](#) seeks to identify solutions to the gaps for Black entrepreneurs and outsources entrepreneurs to accelerator and incubator programs that will serve their unique needs. Additionally, Build Institute serves an important role as advocates and supporters of Black-owned firms as direct providers of business education and financial support. **Over the years, Detroit's growing economy and growing number of entrepreneurs have led to the creation of several incubators and accelerators.** The growth has also stemmed from investments from large corporations seeking to help develop Detroit's communities. TechTown, one of the largest accelerators, provides early-stage capital to entrepreneurs. Other incubators and accelerators include [Detroit Entrepreneurship Network](#) and the [STEM Entrepreneurial Excellence Program](#). Backstage Capital also launched a Detroit-based incubator in 2018 that exclusively supports women; Black, indigenous, and people of color; and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning founders. Corporations investing in Black entrepreneurs in Detroit include Quicken Loans, JP Morgan Chase, and American Express. Detroit's General Motors is known for spearheading supplier diversity programs, following Detroit's 1968 race riots, and efforts to diversify suppliers continue today with the [BuyDetroit](#) program.⁶⁴ BuyDetroit, managed by the Detroit Economic Growth Corporation, launched a local procurement online portal April 2021. Detroit corporations are also promoting the success of local Black businesses. Notably, Rocket Mortgage successfully launched and continues to manage an annual [Detroit Demo Day](#) for Black and women entrepreneurs across Detroit. The program is unique in prioritizing inclusion across all business categories, industries, and sectors. The program celebrates Detroit's Black entrepreneurs and provides funding based on business needs. The intentionality of the program to partner, learn, and listen to local entrepreneurs and segment efforts to each addressable population and business size, demonstrates a foundation for national programs.

⁶³ Brookings. (2020, July 23). *Grant-making to Support Small Businesses in Southeast Michigan*. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/grant-making-to-support-small-businesses-in-southeast-michigan>

⁶⁴ Harvard Business Review. (2020, August 17). *Why You Need a Supplier-Diversity Program*. <https://hbr.org/2020/08/why-you-need-a-supplier-diversity-program>

4.3.5 Networks

Detroit experienced an increase in capital funding for entrepreneurs across the metro area, and although almost 80% of the population is Black, most venture capital funding has been provided to white entrepreneurs.⁶⁵ The Capital Access report, funded and created by JPMorgan Chase, New Economy Initiative, and Eckblad Group LLC, investigated capital access for minority business owners in Detroit and concluded that “current resources are not sufficient to meet the complex, nuanced, and critical demand among underserved entrepreneurs.”⁶⁶ **Venture capital funds and community development financial institutions are a few of the players increasing capital access for entrepreneurs in Detroit.** However, the Capital Access report still demonstrates the challenges Black entrepreneurs face while attempting to tap into capital. The report identified a lack of educational resources for underserved entrepreneurs that outlined the necessary funding requirements for lending and business support.



Gaps in financial and business management skills were identified by organizations, including Detroit’s Build Institute, that are strengthening the capacity of Black entrepreneurs in Detroit to help increase funding outcomes for Black businesses and address the inequitable funding distribution. Build Institute provides online courses to increase access for Black entrepreneurs to learn how to start and manage businesses. Build institute creates long-term engagement opportunities for entrepreneurs to complete various stages of the offered programs. Course offerings decrease startup costs for entrepreneurs by providing resources to help the entrepreneurs build sustainable businesses. The Entrepreneurs of Color Fund, supported by JPMorgan Chase and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, provides business capital to businesses owned by entrepreneurs of color and business owners who primarily hire people of color.

4.3.6 Narratives

Detroit’s identity, historically shaped by the presence of the automobile industry, includes a resilience story that encourages local Detroit residents to create innovative solutions and opportunities to revitalize their communities. Detroit’s historical significance as a city of freedom for Black



⁶⁵ Detroit’s Premier Business Journal. (2021, February 4). *2021 Michigan Venture Capital Report*. <https://www.dbusiness.com/from-the-magazine/2021-michigan-venture-capital-report/>

⁶⁶ The Eckblad Group. (2018, August). *Capital Access Micro and Small Business*. <https://neweconomyinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Capital-Access-final.pdf>

Americans escaping oppression in the south created a community that values Detroit's cultural and innovative influence. Conversations with leaders in Detroit's Black entrepreneurship space emphasized the importance of community within Detroit's identity. This strong identity combined with the need for ingenuity to recover from former economic downturns sparked entrepreneurial collaborations across Detroit's Black community. Partnerships are encouraged by community organizations and are improving outcomes for Black businesses. Local organizations and news sources highlight Black-owned businesses through directories, such as [NOIR Detroit](#). Detroit pride also inspires Black Detroit natives, who originally relocated, to return and build their businesses in their hometown. Black women are strong contributors to Detroit's narrative of economic development and business growth in the Black community, which aligns with national trends that indicate Black women are the fastest growing group of US entrepreneurs.⁶⁷ Revitalization initiatives continue to form Detroit's narrative as the impact influenced rebuild efforts and much of the city's urban planning. Marketing efforts highlight Detroit's efforts to rebuild and become a hub for entrepreneurs. Among these efforts, Black community members are seeking equitable revitalization strategies that put the minority majority at the forefront of rebuild activities.

Studies show that Detroit's business creation activities have required entrepreneurs to use constrained resources to create opportunities across this ecosystem. A MIT Sloan Management Review report coincided with our development of conclusions from our interviews; it highlighted that the majority of the Black population navigated limited resources to create successful businesses in their communities.⁵⁶ Data is currently being collected to demonstrate the impact of initiatives aimed at supporting Black entrepreneurs. Organizations are also forecasting the positive impact of Detroit's Black businesses on the economic growth and advocating for increased parity for Detroit's Black entrepreneurs.⁶⁸

Detroit, a city characterized by its rich Black culture and legacy of innovation, currently seeks to expand its industries and has an opportunity to include the city's resilient Black entrepreneurs at the forefront of economic development strategies.

⁶⁷ Marketplace. (2020, August 14). *Black Women are Thriving in Detroit's Business Ecosystem*.

<https://www.marketplace.org/2020/09/14/black-women-are-thriving-in-detroits-business-ecosystem/>

⁶⁸ Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago. (2021, August 2). *What Would Detroit's Business Ownership Look Like with Racial Parity?* <https://www.chicagofed.org/publications/blogs/michigan-economy/2021/detroit-business-ownership-racial-parity>

Appendix A: Ecosystem Stories and Journeys

Every city has its own rich history, culture, and stakeholders that interact to drive change. The cities in this study are no different, each on a unique journey that led to the progress and challenges they experience today. The thread that stitches together each city's story is that of a previously thriving Black entrepreneurship community that was systematically destroyed and the ongoing reckoning with the impact of these events. Below, we outline additional background information about the unique journey the city is on, highlighting the assets, culture, and community that have allowed it to thrive.

A.1 The Atlanta Story

Atlanta's business friendly environment, combined with its long-standing priority to support minority businesses, creates an ecosystem that attracts and maintains Black entrepreneurs. Black city leaders, Black business ownership examples, and college resources have contributed to an increase in Black entrepreneurship in the city. As a hub for the Civil Rights Movement, influential leaders encouraged Black business ownership, community initiatives, and political involvement to improve economic equality, job opportunities, and additional social rights. The Sweet Auburn neighborhood, a previously segregated Atlanta neighborhood for Black residents, bred new Black-owned businesses, churches, and community organizations through the 1960s. The contributed to early wealth generation and business development for Black families in Atlanta and also hosted many Black cultural events. Similar to national incidents, Sweet Auburn suffered from highway expansion and a lack of investments. The neighborhood recently experienced revitalization efforts, including a Black business incubator, HQ Auburn. The influence of Atlanta's history of Black leadership, including Atlanta's first Black mayor, Maynard Jackson, continues to encourage Black entrepreneurship growth and inspire Black business development.

Atlanta today has been identified as the "Black tech capital" and includes the largest number of Black tech founders. Twenty-five percent of Atlanta's tech industry employees are Black (compared with 6% in San Francisco), and the high density of academic institutions continues to increase tech talent. City-sponsored programs and grassroots organizations are cultivating a community for Black entrepreneurs to convene, partner, and share resources.

A.2 The Durham Story

Durham has a strong legacy of minority entrepreneurship that exists even today. When John Merrick founded NC Mutual Life Insurance Company in 1889, he believed that a collective

pursuit of self-sufficiency could be a catalyst for pushing the community forward. This entrepreneurial mindset played a pivotal role in spurring future initiatives like Mechanics & Farmers Bank that could provide financial resources and capital to emerging Black-owned businesses in the city. This direct investment in the Black community, coupled with the founding of NCCU (formerly Dr. James E. Shepard's National Religious Training School and Chautauqua) in 1909, made Durham's Parrish Street a hub of Black entrepreneurship and helped a new Black Wall Street emerge. The resolve to sustain and thrive manifested beyond business ventures. Land that had been primarily owned by white men but worked by Black hands was repurchased as wealth grew. Soon, prominent Black churches like St. Joseph's AME and White Rock Baptist became foundations on which neighborhoods like the Hayti community were developed. During this time period, there was an increased investment in creating shared community spaces and resources to further the self-sufficiency that Merrick had in mind when NC Mutual was founded and that so many others had yearned and fought for. You could find libraries, art venues, and more throughout these communities.

However, over time, as Durham developed and became a hub for healthcare research, the landscape for Black entrepreneurship began to change. Black Wall Street and the Hayti neighborhood, once bustling scenes, were slowly dismantled through government legislation and mass land development. Funding and academic research were funneled toward the expansion of the industry in the region, and minority entrepreneurs were intentionally and unintentionally cast aside. Despite the systemic degradation of Durham's Black economic vitality, residents of the city persisted and worked to ensure that future entrepreneurs would have a foundation to build on. Today, we see emerging minority businesses across a broad spectrum of industries. From brick and mortar cafés to software companies, the area is experiencing a groundswell of entrepreneurship. This growth can be attributed to numerous individuals, programs, and initiatives driving change across the ecosystem. The force behind that change is equity and the push to ensure that opportunity is available for all. Despite the progress, more work remains to be done in Durham (and across the country), but it is certainly promising to see many key players push for a more inclusive entrepreneurial landscape.

A.3 *The Detroit Story*

Detroit's rich legacy comprises innovations that led to social and economic change throughout the city's history. Detroit continues to breed innovation and new businesses as the city revitalizes. Detroit's population composition leads to the creation of entrepreneurship support opportunities for Black entrepreneurs. Detroit's large Black population originated from Detroit's abolitionist ties and the nation's Great Migration of Blacks from the South. Detroit's

automobile innovation offered stable job opportunities and competitive wages. As Black populations grew in Detroit to support the automobile industry, Black businesses began to develop in the city. Racial tensions and riots following the decrease in Detroit jobs resulted in destruction of Black businesses during the late 1960s. Overreliance on the auto industry, growing poverty levels, racial tensions, and subpar leadership resulted in Detroit's population and economic decline. Detroit's population declined by 25% from 2000 to 2010 and the recent 2020 census indicates that Detroit's population declined by 10% from 2010-2020. Detroit is recognized as the largest municipal bankruptcy as the city filed for \$19B in 2013.

Following the fall of Detroit, private partners and foundations collaborated with the state and city on revitalization efforts. Investments into Detroit's downtown focused on building an entrepreneurship ecosystem to serve Detroit natives and attract new talent. Incentive programs were created to provide opportunities for businesses available to launch or open offices in Detroit. The Motor City Match Program provides \$500,000 quarterly to Detroit startups. Dan Gilbert's companies, including Quicken Loans, employ over 17,000 people and are the city's largest taxpayers, increasing the private influence on the city's development. The companies continue to increase investments in programs supporting Black entrepreneurs. Notably, Detroit Demo Day was launched as a pitch competition for Detroit's startups, and the event prioritizes inclusivity and led to increased investments in minority-led startups. Goldman Sachs, JPMorgan Chase, American Express, and other private organizations also continue to invest in entrepreneurship programs in Detroit. In addition, venture capital funds are relocating to Detroit following the influx of tech development. Criticisms gleaned from our interviews indicate that although Detroit continues to revitalize revitalization efforts have not been equitable for all racial and ethnic groups. Investments focused on downtown areas have left surrounding Detroit neighborhoods without economic development efforts.

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