



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2024.** Please include this submission form with the electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

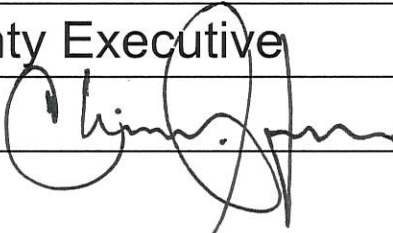
PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Prince William County
Program Title: Business Barriers Study and Action Plan
Program Category: 2

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Christina Winn
Title: Executive Director
Department: Economic Development & Tourism
Telephone: (703) 792-5510 Website: pwcded.org
Email: cmwinn@pwcgov.org

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Christopher J. Shorter
Title: County Executive
Signature: 

Executive Summary

In February 2020, Prince William County Department of Economic Development and Tourism (PWCEDT) launched its first Small Business Development program for more than 9,000 small businesses in the second largest county in Virginia.

Over the next two years, the program pivoted to meet the needs of the COVID-19 public health crisis and resulting economic disruption. Yet despite strong efforts from the department and community organizations to promote programs and develop helpful methods to guide owners, some small businesses still missed out on the available support.

In 2022, the team strategically examined our county's majority-minority community's specific challenges for small businesses and how our programs' requirements and access to those programs inadvertently added challenges to small independent owners.

PWCEDT engaged Camoin Associates in the fall of 2022 to conduct a deeper study to better address the barriers for small business owners who may lack the knowledge, networks, or capacities to access resources available to support further development.

By taking the approach of engaging established community champions and identifying brand ambassadors, including the foundation of the Small Business Advisory Council, the PWCEDT team and the consultants promoted the study within individual communities using a "hub-and-spoke" promotional strategy. The results were two-prong: better results in study participants and an immediate boost in on-going programmatic engagement.

In October 2023, PWCEDT staff delivered the 85-page Business Barriers Study and Action Plan study to Prince William Board of County Supervisors (the Board). The study

- Identified and assessed barriers for diverse small business owners and entrepreneurs
- Recommended actions to improve economic equity in areas such as access to capital, capital investment, revenue growth, technical assistance, professional networks, customer growth, etc.
- Developed an action plan to expand our services to under-supported entrepreneurs.

By meeting businesses where they are and taking the time to consider their diverse voices, the Business Barriers Study and Action Plan gave the Prince William County community an invitation to participate in prioritizing the implementation of programs they want and need to grow their businesses.

As the same time the study was presented to our Board, our department also presented a comprehensive staffing and resource plan for the next five years to expand services and programs. The Board recognized the long-term vision and affirmed the necessity to enhance these services to support businesses effectively. Consequently, the Board approved an additional FTE for the small business program to implement the initial recommendations from the study.

With a data-driven and clear direction supported by the community, the Board gained the confidence to allocate additional resources critically needed for the department's small business program.

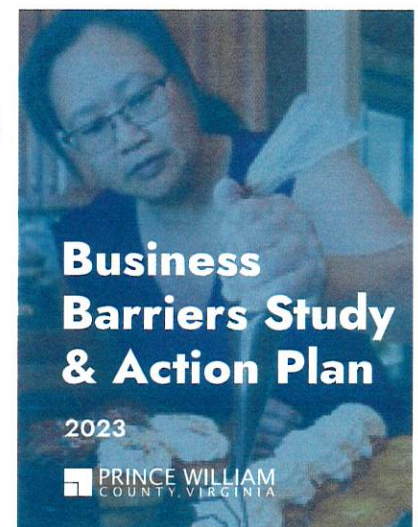
Business Barriers Study & Action Plan

Background

In February 2020, Prince William County Department of Economic Development and Tourism (PWCEDT) launched its first Small Business Development program for more than 9,000 small businesses in the second largest county in Virginia.

Over the next two years, the program pivoted to meet the needs of the COVID-19 public health crisis and resulting economic disruption. Yet despite strong efforts from the department and community organizations to promote programs and develop helpful methods to guide owners, some small businesses still missed out on the available support.

In 2022, the team strategically examined our county's majority-minority community's specific challenges for small businesses and how our programs requirements and access to those programs, inadvertently added challenges to small independent owners.



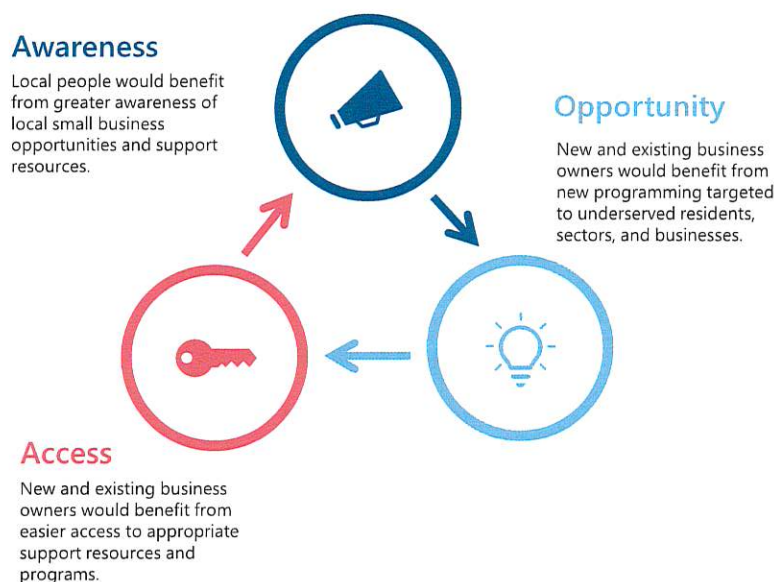
The PWCEDT team that spearheaded the Business Barriers Study and Action Plan project and brought it from idea to fruition over the 18 months included:

- Christina Winn, Executive Director
- Tom Flynn, CEcD, Deputy Director (retired)
- Clarice Grove, EDP, Small Business Development Manager
- Allisha Abraham, Research Manager

After a competitive RFP process, Camoin Associates was hired in the fall 2022 as the department's consultant to use data to define the current state of the county's diverse community and provide a demographic profile of the county's existing small businesses. Camoin facilitated focus groups throughout early 2023 and conducted interviews with identified small business owners for candid and confidential discussion.

Finding Trust in Community Leaders

Due to lack of familiarity with the PWCEDT program, the greatest challenge was getting stakeholders to trust the Business Barriers Study and Action Plan methodology, which relied on participants to share their diverse perspectives and commit time to the focus group discussions and interviews. The department was met with skepticism and hesitation from small business owners who had previously not engaged with the department in any way.



As part of the initial recommendations from the Camoin consultants in approaching the study, the PWCEDT department created the department's first 14-person Small Business Advisory Council, comprised of diverse county-based business owners to advise PWCEDT through the consulting study process.

- Minnie Agtuca, RareTea
- Mariah Bailey, Black American Market
- Radhika Bajaj, Bookworm Central
- Dial Burum, All Assured Solutions
- Crystal Carfagno, Showcase Dance Studio
- Jim DiModica, APT Impact
- Dennis Furr, RMA Consultants
- Damien Madison, Prominent Athletes
- Maria Martin, BeVida Beverages
- Jinnae Monroe, Professionals By Design
- Doris Piccariello, Vita Nova Medical Spa
- Sarah Seligman, Bakefully Yours
- Becky Waldman, Becky's Pixie Kitchen
- Yaqub "Jake" Zargarpur, Bering

With the help of the council, the PWCEDT staff and Camoin compiled and completed a comprehensive list of interviews and focus groups with more than 65 community stakeholders and small business owners, including women, minority, veteran-owned businesses as well as business representatives from chambers of commerce and business support and service organizations (e.g., SBDC, CDFI organizations, etc.)

The Results

In October 2023, PWCEDT staff delivered the 85-page Business Barriers Study and Action Plan study to Prince William Board of County Supervisors (the Board). The study

- Identified and assessed barriers for diverse small business owners and entrepreneurs
- Recommended actions to improve economic equity in areas such as access to capital, capital investment, revenue growth, technical assistance, professional networks, customer growth, etc.
- Developed an action plan to expand our services to under-supported entrepreneurs.

By meeting businesses where they are and taking the time to consider their diverse voices, the Business Barriers Study and Action Plan gave the Prince William County community an invitation to participate in prioritizing the implementation of programs they want and need to grow their businesses.

When the study was presented, the Small Business Development program had not only 13 final recommendations for a strategic action plan, but also a notable increase in level of trust and pride from the community participants.

The established Small Business Advisory Council identified five projects as the highest priority for addressing the identified challenges and worked with PWCEDT staff to garner support and funding from county leadership and the Board to begin work on the following:

- Retain and expand the advisory council: Continued to engage diverse business owners in the ideation and implementation of ongoing services and programs.
 - Completed. The Small Business Advisory Council was formally created with a charter and order of business.
- Develop and launch a business information website: Funding approved to develop a user-friendly comprehensive website to help entrepreneurs start and scale small businesses with a goal to launch in October 2024.
 - In progress: With the website work 85% developed and expected to launch in early 2025.
- Building resource awareness: Ongoing efforts include
 - In April 2024, the department launched nine-week radio and digital campaign featuring 12 authentic small business voices from our community, targeting startups and aspiring small business owners.
- Growing professional networks: Ongoing efforts include
 - Developed and hosted the first-ever Prince William County business education conference on April 29, 2024, called the Calibrate Conference. More than 150 attendees learned about access to capital, revenue growth, technical assistance, customer growth and building professional networks.
- Connecting with underrepresented owners: Ongoing efforts include
 - Forged partnership with Prince William County Libraries to redesign existing space into a “one-stop” business hub, strategically located to meet entrepreneurs in diverse neighborhoods.

Implementation Plan

The implementation matrix summarizes the recommendations included in this plan and identifies a timeline, relative cost, leads and partners, and priority projects. As indicated below implementing the plan will be a multi-year process across many projects working with many partners.

Recommendation	Description	Lead & Partners	Relative Cost	Timeline	Priority Project
Project 1: Enhance and expand marketing and communications	Improving awareness of existing support programs and training	County-lead messaging, partners amplify	\$\$ Medium	Year 1	★
Project 2: Organize a business success network	Partnerships with key business service providers under a common umbrella	County-lead coordination of organizational strategy, Advisory Committee support	\$ Low	Year 1	★
Project 3: Develop a website for small business resources	Ecosystem outreach efforts anchored by a focused website	County-lead, Advisory Committee review/test	\$\$ Medium	In-action	★
Project 4: Meet entrepreneurs where they are	Engaging in their communities, with their preferred program partners, and in venues where they are comfortable	County-lead, Partners Champions support	\$ Low	Year 1-2	
Project 5: Form a network of small business resource champions	Individuals who help ensure businesses are aware and have access to resources	County-coordinated initial organization with support from Partners and Advisory Committee	\$ Low	Year 2-3	
Project 6: Include small businesses in BRE efforts	Proactively connect with under-represented founders, build relationships, and expand resource access	County-lead, partners and champions support with outreach	\$ Low	Year 1	★
Project 7: Establish a physical hub	Establishment of a physical "home" for ecosystem resources	County-lead, partners provide technical assistance onsite, champions amplify awareness	\$\$\$ High	Year 2-3	
Project 8: Form a small business advisory group	Engage local entrepreneurs in improving existing programs and designing new initiatives	County-lead	\$ Low	On-going	★
Project 9: Develop new sector-specific microenterprise programs	Programming targeted to needs of microenterprise	County-lead, Advisory Committee support	\$\$ Medium	Year 2-3	
Project 10: Support a focused business accelerator program	Curated mentoring program, business owners matched with coaches based on their needs	County-lead	\$\$ Medium	Year 4-5	
Project 11: Develop new capital sources for local business owners	Creating a new funding pool to support small businesses with small grants and loans	County-lead with Advisory Committee support	\$\$ Medium	Year 3-4	
Project 12: Nurture the next wave of entrepreneurs	Systematic focus on getting the county's young people excited about entrepreneurship	County-lead with support from partners	\$\$ Medium	Year 3-4	
Project 13: Collect and analyze better business data	Unlock business information collected by county departments so it can be utilized by the economic development team	County-lead	\$ Low	Year 1-2	

As the same time the study was presented to our Board, our department also presented a comprehensive staffing and resource plan for the next five years to expand services and programs. The Board recognized the long-term vision and affirmed the necessity to enhance these services to support businesses effectively. Consequently, the Board approved an additional FTE for the small business program to implement the initial recommendations from the study.

With a data-driven and clear direction supported by the community, the Board gained the confidence to allocate additional resources critically needed for the department's small business program.

Lessons Learned and Transferability

Effective economic development is not monolithic. Instead of cherry-picking a program based in diversity, our Small Business Development programmatic goals are rooted in the intention to reach underrepresented populations, which have resulted in expanded partnerships with key business service providers to increase coordination, collaboration, and grow the overall entrepreneur ecosystem.

By taking the approach of engaging established community champions and identifying brand ambassadors, including the foundation of the Small Business Advisory Council, the PWCEDT team and the consultants promoted the study within individual communities using a “hub-and-spoke” promotional strategy. The results were two-prong: better results in study participants and an immediate boost in on-going programmatic engagement.

This project model for collecting qualitative and quantitative information can certainly be adapted for use in other communities. Our department would also recommend it to communities as a method for building collaboration within the entrepreneurial ecosystem and building stronger relationships to remove barriers collectively.

By meeting businesses where they are and taking the time to consider their diverse voices, the Business Barriers Study and Action Plan gave the Prince William County community an invitation to participate in prioritizing the implementation of programs they want and need to grow their businesses.

Finally, if other communities are looking to add staff positions, we believe this data-driven approach can result in compelling and community-centered planning to present to governing boards, authorities, and councils.

Brief Overview

The Prince William County Department of Economic Development and Tourism (PWCEDT) engaged Camoin Associates in 2022 to conduct a deeper study to better address the barriers for small business owners who may lack the knowledge, networks, or capacities to access resources available to support further development.

In October 2023, PWCEDT staff delivered the 85-page Business Barriers Study and Action Plan study to Prince William Board of County Supervisors (the Board). The study

- Identified and assessed barriers for diverse small business owners and entrepreneurs
- Recommended actions to improve economic equity in areas such as access to capital, capital investment, revenue growth, technical assistance, professional networks, customer growth, etc.
- Developed an action plan to expand our services to under-supported entrepreneurs.

By meeting businesses where they are and taking the time to consider their diverse voices, the Business Barriers Study and Action Plan gave the Prince William County community an invitation to participate in prioritizing the implementation of programs they want and need to grow their businesses.

With a data-driven and clear direction supported by the community, the Board gained the confidence to allocate additional resources critically needed for the department's small business program.