

ST. PETERSBURG, FL

COVID-19 RESPONSE:

RAPID COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT # 2

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MAY 2020

OVERVIEW

Grow Smarter aims to reduce gaps by race and place in St. Petersburg by introducing equity to economic development efforts. The COVID-19 pandemic has made this vision more relevant than ever.

In early April, Grow Smarter conducted our first community needs assessment, which guided our initial 90-day COVID-19 response. That response is ongoing, and will conclude in July 2020.

We recognize that needs continue to evolve quickly as the economy begins to reopen. The following document is a second snapshot of community needs, identified in June 2020 by the Grow Smarter Steering Committee and guests. Participants are listed below and include community leaders and subject-matter experts in the business, government, and nonprofit sectors. The assessment is also informed by data gathered as part of the Business Resiliency Team: a rapid-response effort created as part of Grow Smarter's initial COVID-19 response.

We want to emphasize the ongoing, overarching need for rapid, equitable communication to the community: for policy updates and implications, public health information, and business resources.

In keeping with our vision of inclusive prosperity, we also encourage all relief efforts and community leaders to consider how they are supporting underserved community members and minority- and women-owned businesses as we recover and reimagine business in St. Petersburg.

GROW SMARTER NEEDS ASSESSMENT PARTICIPANTS

Tashika Griffith | St. Petersburg College, Grow Smarter Chair, 2020

Sridhar Sundaram | USF St. Pete

Jessica Eilerman | City of St. Petersburg

Sean King | Habitat for Humanity

Veatrice Farrell | Deuces Live

Brother John Muhammad | Community Development & Training Center, One Community

Carl Lavender | Foundation for a Healthy St. Pete

Chris Steinocher | St. Pete Chamber of Commerce

Stephen Ponzillo | Regions Bank

Meiko Seymour | Pinellas Community Church

Michael Jalazo | PERC

Julie Rocco | Foundation for a Healthy St. Pete

Jason Mathis | St. Pete Downtown Partnership

Leah McRae | City of St. Petersburg

Gypsy Gallardo | 2020 Plan, One Community

Dana Hill | Florida Blue

Ryan Griffin | Johnson Pope, St. Pete Chamber

Alison Barlow | St. Pete Innovation District

Alan DeLisle | City of St. Petersburg

J.P. DuBuque | St. Petersburg Economic Development Corporation

GROW SMARTER'S INITIAL COVID-19 RESPONSE

The following is a high-level description of Grow Smarter's initial 90-day COVID-19 response, guided by the needs assessment document from April. Implementation of this response is in progress. You can read more details about our response at growsmarterstpete.com/response.

Business Resiliency Team (BRT) program

- The BRT serves as advocates for local businesses, identifying needs and helping connect them to resources and subject-matter experts
- BRT members will focus their outreach on minority and women-owned businesses and sole proprietors throughout St. Petersburg, with a focus on South St. Petersburg.
- Partnerships and ongoing check-ins with other organizations leading business navigation programs (Urban League, One Community) will be crucial throughout this effort.

Resource Support in South St. Pete

- Grow Smarter will fund one year of GoZone Wi-Fi connectivity on the Deuces Live corridor, as well as two additional GoZone Wi-Fi hotspots in South St. Petersburg.
- Grow Smarter will support a Resource and Resiliency Hub located at the Warehouse Arts District Association to support residents who are affected by COVID-19 in partnership with Feeding Tampa Bay, Bay Area Legal Council, Deuces Live, One Community, and other organizations.
- Grow Smarter will provide funding to St Pete Arts Alliance to support their efforts to alleviate COVID-19 hardships endured within the arts and culture community.

Community Investment

- Grow Smarter will contribute \$25,000 to One Community's #InThisTogether COVID Support program, to be distributed to businesses and residents of South St. Pete in the form of microgrants.
- Grow Smarter will create an endowed Grow Smarter Scholarship Program at SPC, of which \$25,000 will be distributed this year. The scholarship will be for certification programs in the Grow Smarter targeted industry areas. Grow Smarter will aim to amplify this investment through soliciting additional donations from other partners.

RELEVANT COMMUNITY DATA

• Unemployment in St. Petersburg

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, St. Petersburg had historically low unemployment rate estimates at about 5.5% and below, depending on the source and age specification. However, even in pre-COVID times employment rates varied considerably among race/ethnicity groups. The most recent Census estimates show Black unemployment (8%) was nearly double that of White residents (4.5%).

As of April 2020, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) is estimating a national unemployment rate of 14.7%. The BLS estimates that White unemployment (14.2%) remains considerably lower than Black unemployment (16.7%). These numbers are likely to increase as May numbers begin to roll in, and the gap between White and Black unemployment will likely widen as county and city data become available.

- **One Community's #InThisTogether COVID Resiliency Program**

The One Community Microgrants Program has gathered funding from individual donors, the Foundation for Healthy St. Petersburg, Grow Smarter, the City of St. Petersburg, and the St. Petersburg Downtown Partnership to disburse among local Black-owned businesses that have been negatively impacted by the shutdown. The assistance is in the form of microgrants, which are targeted to the following groups: commercial artists; barbers, stylists, and nail techs; and early childhood education providers. One Community is also providing free tools and technology as well as business navigation services. As of June 10, 2020, One Community has approved over 60 applications and dispersed a total of \$59,000.

- **Business Resiliency Team (BRT) data**

With the help and cooperation of the Greenhouse, the City of St. Petersburg, the St. Petersburg Area Chamber of Commerce, One Community, Deuces Live, Warehouse Arts District Association, the St. Pete Arts Alliance, and others, Grow Smarter's Business Resiliency Team has contacted 221 businesses and has completed 85 intakes as of June 10, 2020. The following data is from the 85 completed intakes.

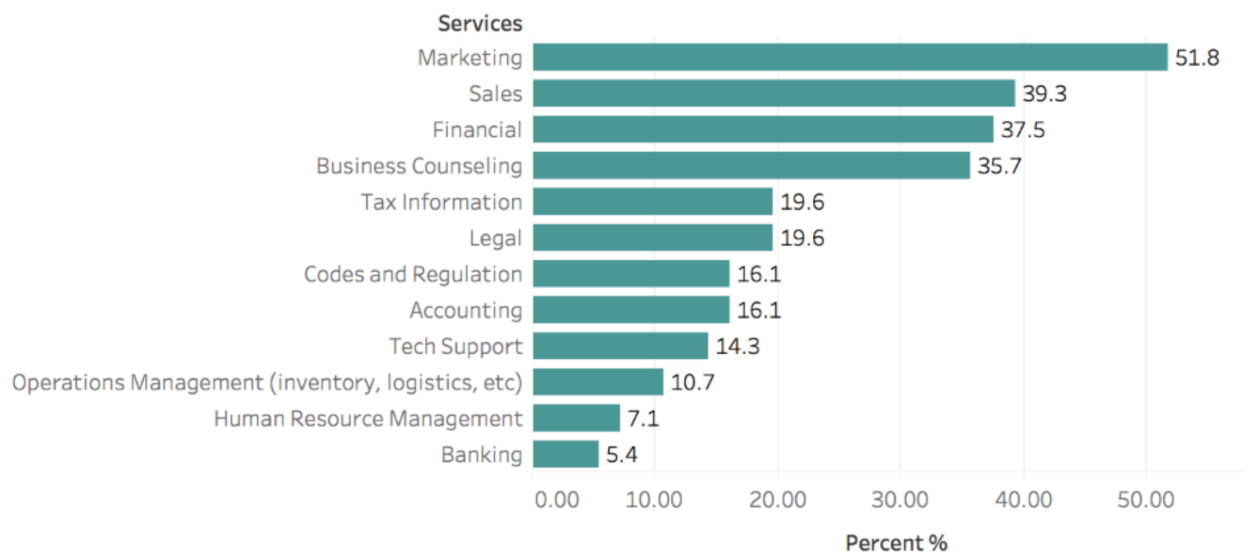
As of early June, nearly 10% of BRT participants identify as Black, and 9% Latinx/Hispanic. Further, 56% of all participants are women-owned businesses.

The BRT has worked with mainly smaller brick and mortars (52.3%), and home-based businesses (13.4%). Breakdown of the businesses' structures include LLC's (53.8%), Corporations (20%), S Corporations (12.3%), and Sole Proprietorships (8%).

Only 14% of participating businesses have business interruption insurance. On average, participating businesses have lost 40% of their revenue. The same businesses have laid off a total of 154 employees, leading to an average of 9 jobs lost per business.

Most businesses have cited some type of immediate decrease in customer base as one of their biggest concerns, followed by access to capital. When asked what services would benefit them most at this time, most respond that marketing and pivoting to online sales/strengthening online presence are their biggest needs.

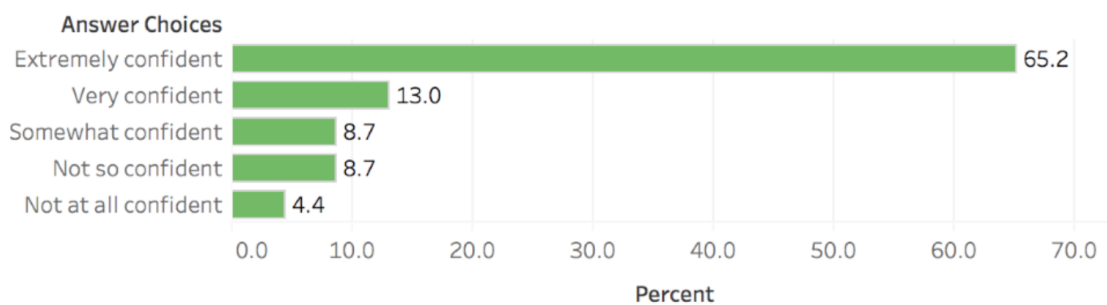
What services would benefit you at this time? (%)



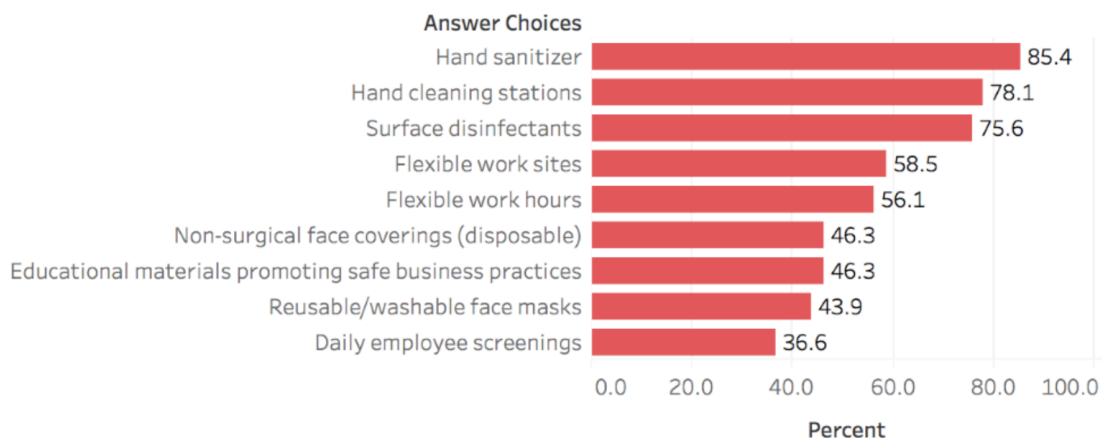
BRT data also indicates a disconnect between perceived business preparedness towards reopening and actual access to PPE and related supplies. When asked if they felt confident their business could provide safe practices and/or have access to sanitation materials during the reopening process, 65% of participants claimed they are “extremely confident”. However, when subsequently asked how many materials they currently have and/or can provide for their business, confidence dropped significantly.

Business owners believe they are equipped to provide things like hand sanitizer (85%), hand cleaning stations (78%), and surface disinfectants (76%) but they are far less confident in their ability to provide non-surgical face coverings (46%), reusable or washable masks (43%), and daily employee screenings (37%).

Do you feel confident that your business can provide safe practices and/or has access to sanitation materials during the reopening process?



If applicable, what safe practices or sanitation materials do you currently have or can provide for your business?



The top financial relief programs applied for by our sample in order were the Paycheck Protection Program, the Economic Injury Disaster Loan, the Fighting Chance Fund, and the Pinellas CARES Small Business Grant—the number of accepted applications follow the same order.

However, both Grow Smarter and One Community have found that many local businesses may be slipping through the cracks due to issues with basic business infrastructure like problems with tax registration, size or type of business (i.e., sole proprietors have been left out of most relief programs), and/or simply being unaware of opportunities.

PRIORITY NEEDS IDENTIFIED BY STEERING COMMITTEE:

Based on the data outlined above, as well as the experience and observations of the community leaders on Grow Smarter's steering committee, the following set of priority needs were identified by our steering committee during this second rapid needs assessment process. These needs are not exhaustive, but they are issues that cut across focus areas and are important for both Grow Smarter and St. Petersburg overall to consider as we enter the reopen phase. As of the creation of this document, Florida has just entered Phase 2 of reopening. We know that needs will continue to evolve, and we continue to encourage a focus on equity in resources, processes, and decisions pertaining to relief, recover, and reimagining.

- **Employment and training**
 - High unemployment rates mean a need to re-train sections of the workforce
 - Need to publicize available jobs and industries that are thriving
- **Technology**
 - This includes an ongoing need for access to computer hardware and reliable WIFI, especially for students in South St. Petersburg
 - Businesses have an urgent need for technology tools for e-commerce/moving sales online as well as virtual work
- **PPE**
 - As businesses reopen, they lack access to appropriate PPE and sustainable supply chains
 - Specifically, it's difficult to identify local supply chains who are selling PPE and associated materials
- **Capacity Building and Resource Management**
 - Both the BRT and One Community's #InThisTogether COVID resiliency initiative have noted the need for helping businesses build basic infrastructure, specifically financial systems
 - There's a need for navigation and "triage" for the firehose of resources and regulations being released
 - This includes housing/eviction information, business resources, and reopening guidance for houses of worship
- **Early childhood education**
 - Many early childhood workers have been let go, and many existing childcare businesses need financial assistance
 - Many teachers may decide not to return during opening and cause a supply shortage