



City of
OAKLAND
California

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News from: **Economic & Workforce
Development Department**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 28, 2022

**Minority Contracting, BIPOC-owned
Business Support Programs Launched**
Federal grant supports new programs for two years

Oakland, CA – Today, the City of Oakland announced the launch of two new business support programs funded by a \$1 million grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce’s Economic Development Agency (EDA).

Half of the funds will support a training program for minority-owned small construction contractors with the balance supporting technical assistance for BIPOC-owned small businesses. These programs anticipate delivering services to more than 1,110 small businesses and up to 50 small construction contractors over the next two years. The City has engaged three trusted community partners with the technical expertise and cultural and linguistic competency to assist Oakland’s diverse small business community.

“Through the minority contractor support program, Oakland will reduce barriers that have historically prevented small BIPOC-owned contractors from successful bids on City RFPs,” said Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf. “Removing these systemic barriers will result in more equitable outcomes while leveraging public contracting dollars to help our diverse business community grow and thrive.”

Minority Contractor Support

To help small minority-owned contractors bid on and win City contracts, Merriwether & Williams Insurance Services will provide technical support for BIPOC-owned construction firms. One-on-one business assistance and training will prepare contractors to navigate the requirements of construction contracts for City [Capital Improvement Projects](#). Focus areas in the public contracting process will include pre-qualification, certification with City social policies, online bidding, bonding and insurance requirements, and labor reporting requirements.

Merriwether & Williams will work with representatives from the departments of Workplace and Employment Standards, Transportation, Public Works, and Economic & Workforce Development to identify specific training needs. Among the challenges to be addressed are bonding access and cash flow bridge financing.

Contractors interested in receiving support should contact Merriwether & Williams at (510) 740-6922 or email CTAP@imwis.com.

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Technical Assistance Support for BIPOC-owned Small Businesses

To advance the City’s equitable economic development and recovery goals, staff from partner organizations – The Unity Council and Black Cultural Zone CDC – will conduct in-person outreach to BIPOC-owned small businesses along low-income commercial corridors from East to West Oakland including 30 census tracts designated as Opportunity Zones, and the “Better Neighborhoods, Same Neighbors” project area in East Oakland where 51% of the area is within the top 5% of disadvantaged communities in California.

In addition to providing financial, workforce and tech resources, the outreach teams will identify unmet business training needs. The partners anticipate providing 12 new workshops and trainings per year.

Businesses interested in receiving support should contact Karen Gordon Brown with the Black Cultural Zone at (510) 470-0183 or karen@blackculturalzone.org; or Mayra Chavez with The Unity Council at mchavez@unitycouncil.org or visit unitycouncil.org/biz.

Beyond the added support to businesses, the two partners will benefit from trainings that build organizational capacity.

“The EDA Grant advances our goals of support and expansion of local small businesses to retain and create good jobs in Oakland,” said Alexa Jeffress, Director of the City’s Economic & Workforce Development Department.

About the EDA Grant

City staff from the Economic & Workforce Development Department and Public Works Department crafted a grant proposal in response to the EDA’s 2020 Economic Adjustment Assistance Program competitive grant, with The Unity Council and Black Cultural Zone CDC as co-applicants. After a multi-step federal review, the Oakland proposal was awarded \$1 million in funding in July 2021. A competitive RFP process in late 2021 led to the selection of Merriwether & Williams as the community partner for the minority contractor support program. In January 2022, [City Council passed a Resolution accepting and appropriating the grant award](#). Contract negotiation and execution concluded last month.

The mandated match for the EDA grant funding is being met by the Black Cultural Zone through the “Better Neighborhoods, Same Neighbors” [Transformative Climate Communities \(TCC\) grant](#) that funds business assistance in far East Oakland and by in-kind support from The Unity Council and City of Oakland.

Ongoing Business Support Resources

To keep Oakland businesses informed of resources to help them recover from the pandemic and grow, the City sends out **periodic business updates**. Businesses are encouraged to [subscribe to receive these updates](#).

The **Neighborhood Business Assistance** program allows entrepreneurs and business owners to schedule 1-on-1 appointments with City support staff at seven different locations throughout Oakland. Appointments can be booked online at oaklandca.gov/BizHelp or by calling (510) 238-7398.

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About Merriwether & Williams Insurance Services

For over the past 25 years, Merriwether & Williams has worked to remove barriers for contractors, enabling small, minority, women and disabled veteran-owned companies to bid on over \$1.05 billion in public works construction while providing over \$20 million in contract savings to their sponsor-partners. Participating contractors have successfully completed work with a less than 1% default rate, compared with a much higher construction industry average.

About The Unity Council

The Unity Council promotes social equity and improves quality of life by building vibrant communities where everyone can work, learn and thrive. Business assistance is provided at the Business Assistance Center in the Fruitvale Transit Village and woven with offerings and resources from the EDA grant, Onward Oakland program and various partners.

About the Black Cultural Zone Community Development Corporation

The mission of the Black Cultural Zone CDC is to unapologetically center Black arts, culture and economics as they collectively design, resource, transform and build collective power for our communities. The long-term impact of the BCZ CDC's Vision and Mission is the disruption of the community and economic development model where only limited benefits have accrued to the most vulnerable communities in our country, particularly legacy Black communities like East Oakland.

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