



City of  
**OAKLAND**  
California

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

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

September 3, 2020

**City of Oakland, Working Solutions Announce \$1.375  
Million in COVID-19 Relief Grants Made to Small  
Businesses**

**275 Emergency Grants Awarded to Small Businesses in Three  
Rounds; More Small Business Grants Coming**

*Oakland, CA* – Today, the City of Oakland and Working Solutions, a nonprofit Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI), announced the disbursement of \$1.375 million in emergency grants to 275 low-income small business owners in Oakland to help them weather the COVID-19 crisis, as part of the *Oakland Small Business Emergency Grant Program*. The grants were made in three rounds beginning in April and ending this week. The City of Oakland also recently received new Federal CARES Act dollars, and will be launching another small business grant program later this month.

The *Oakland Small Business Emergency Grant Program* was administered by Working Solutions, with private philanthropic dollars from the [Oakland COVID-19 Relief Fund](#), as well as donations from Union Bank and many generous individual donors. Demand was overwhelming; more than 900 individual businesses applied within six days.

All 275 grants went to low-income business owners, earning 80 percent of [Area Median Income](#) (AMI) or less. Other characteristics of the grantees:

- 75% of the business owners are extremely low-income, making less than 30% of AMI
- 20% of the business owners are very low-income, making less than 50% of AMI
- 85% of the businesses are owned by people of color
- 60% of the businesses are owned by women
- 85% of the businesses generate less than \$250,000 in annual revenue
- 15% of the grants went to business owners applying in Spanish, Vietnamese, or Chinese
- 89% of the businesses rent their space

[A detailed demographic and geographic breakdown of the grant recipients is attached.](#)

Grants went to businesses throughout Oakland, with a majority going to businesses located in East Oakland, Chinatown, West Oakland, Fruitvale, and Downtown neighborhoods. A detailed demographic and geographic breakdown of the grant recipients is attached. The grants will support a wide range of businesses, from retail shops, nail salons, and bakeries to fitness, car repair, and arts-related businesses.

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“Thanks to generous private philanthropic support, two additional rounds of grants have helped more vulnerable Oakland small businesses through these devastating economic times,” said Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf. “City staff recognize the need remains great, and will be launching a new small business grant program supported by CARES Act funds later this month.”

The grants have helped business owners cover costs such as rent, utilities, worker payroll, outstanding debt, and other immediate operational costs. To qualify, a small business owner had to be low-income, with priority given to extremely low- and very low-income individuals. Businesses also had to be based in Oakland and have suffered financial loss due to the COVID-19 crisis. Targeted outreach about the grant program was conducted jointly with partner organizations to businesses owned by people of color, non-English speakers (with the application available in four languages), immigrants, and other vulnerable populations that may have trouble accessing other forms of relief capital.

Also [attached are testimonials](#) from select grant recipients to share what the emergency support means to them.

“Working Solutions has been proud to partner with the City of Oakland to get emergency relief grants into the hands of 275 low-income small business owners quickly and efficiently,” said Sara Razavi, CEO of Working Solutions. “The pandemic is having a profound and devastating effect on local small businesses, and we will continue to work with our partners to provide support in any way we can.”

**Future CARES-Funded Small Business and Nonprofit Grant Programs Coming Soon**

While this third round closes the *Oakland Small Business Emergency Grant Program*, the City will be launching a new small business grant program later this month thanks to State of California funding from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. A complementary program will offer grants and technical assistance to nonprofit organizations also suffering business interruption.

**Details and applications for the new grant programs are anticipated to be announced in mid-September.** Oakland business owners and nonprofit leaders are encouraged to [subscribe to the City’s business update emails](#) to receive grant program details.

**Additional Resources for Small Businesses**

A list of up-to-date resources, including information about worker benefits and public and private sources of funding for small businesses, can be found on the City of Oakland’s [Business & Worker Resources website page](#). The site is updated regularly as more information becomes available, so please check it often. All small businesses are encouraged to pursue other resources, including financial products and technical advice from local nonprofits such as Working Solutions, AnewAmerica, Pacific Community Ventures, Main Street Launch, KIVA.org, and the Alameda County Small Business Development Center.

**About Working Solutions**

[Working Solutions](#) is a nonprofit microlender and the *First to Believe* in start-up and early-stage businesses. As a U.S. Treasury-certified Community Development

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Financial Institution (CDFI), Working Solutions provides diverse entrepreneurs with affordable capital, customized business consulting, and community connections to increase economic opportunity in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Founded in 1999 as a workforce development program, Working Solutions launched its lending services in 2005. Working Solutions complements its lending and grant-making with business consulting support focused on financial and risk management. To date, Working Solutions has made \$27 million in microloans and grants to over 1,300 local small businesses and provided over 14,000 hours in business consulting services.

**About the Oakland COVID-19 Relief Fund**

The [Oakland COVID-19 Relief Fund](#) was launched earlier this year to support nonprofits working directly with Oakland’s most vulnerable community members – including seniors, children, limited-English speakers, small businesses, and people experiencing homelessness as well as our first responders. The Relief Fund provided immediate grants to nonprofit organizations working on the frontlines in four priority areas: food, homelessness, community health, and economic security.

The fund raised over \$5.7 million dollars in private funding through the generosity of major foundations and corporations as well as more than 150 community members who made individual gifts.

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