

R E P

STATE OF SMALL BUSINESS

O R T

**PARTNER
TULSA**

2025

Growing an economy with opportunity for all.

A proud partner of the City of Tulsa



The City of Tulsa and PartnerTulsa are working to ensure that no matter what ZIP code or country you’re from, there is opportunity for economic mobility in a new generation of innovation and entrepreneurship.



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Introduction

Tulsa would not be the thriving city it is today without entrepreneurs and small businesses. With more than half of Tulsa’s jobs coming from small businesses, PartnerTulsa recognizes the need to support the entrepreneurs who start and run these enterprises. Tulsa can be a space where Tulsans from all walks of life can start, manage, and grow their businesses with as few barriers as possible. As a result, PartnerTulsa has analyzed the city’s small business ecosystem and is excited to present the progress that has been made as well as recommendations for how Tulsa can improve in the coming years. With a changing economic environment, new industries emerging overnight, and a renewed interest in shopping local, small business is now bigger than ever.

“If you want to be an entrepreneur, this is the best entrepreneurial city that I know in America.”

MIKE BAUSCH, OWNER OF ANDOLINI’S WORLDWIDE RESTAURANT GROUP

PartnerTulsa is pleased to present the next in its annual series of State of Entrepreneurship Reporting. To analyze successes and shortcomings in Tulsa’s entrepreneurial ecosystem, this report examines the growth in physical infrastructure and services, engagement and promotion, as well as local policy. In each area, the report will document new developments, successes, areas for improvement and what the City and PartnerTulsa can do to improve the small business environment.



Small businesses account for more than half of all jobs created in Oklahoma.



PARTNERTULSA FOOD TRUCK EDUCATION SEMINAR

Progress in Entrepreneurship

Working with stakeholders over the past years, three recommendations on how Tulsa’s entrepreneurial ecosystem can improve have come up again and again: assist immigrant entrepreneurs, support mid-stage businesses, and expand the scope of entrepreneurship services. With these recommendations in mind, the City and other entrepreneurship support organizations have worked to improve the ways Tulsa supports its entrepreneurs.

In the past year, PartnerTulsa began working more intensely with immigrant support organizations in Tulsa to make it easier for new Tulsans to start and manage a business. Throughout the year, PartnerTulsa distributed 25 microgrants with the help of Avanzando Juntos to businesses throughout Tulsa. These funds were used to secure licenses, permits, tax IDs, and support Spanish language businesses in marketing their services in English. PartnerTulsa also presented two focused workshops on regulatory topics of concern to 25 immigrant small business owners. Beyond this, we strive to be in community, attending and hosting entrepreneurship events with interpretation to make services as accessible as possible.

“For many, entrepreneurship offers the prospect of a brighter financial future – additional income, a chance to build wealth, and becoming your own boss.”

TULSA LEASING + DESIGN GUIDE

Workforce development programs like “Small Business-Great Jobs” have also been a success in supporting mid-stage businesses keep and growing their talent pool. By offering courses on compensation, mentorship and onboarding, among others, business owners can be equipped with the skills they need to make sure their workers feel valued and committed to growing their company.

Additionally, entrepreneurship opportunities for Tulsans continue to grow no matter what area of the city they live in. The foundation and growth of affinity groups, chambers of commerce, and neighborhood organizations give essential support to new and current businesses. Reflecting on the work done in the past year, there continues to be significant progress in improving the entrepreneurial experience and ecosystem in Tulsa. This report’s analysis and recommendations demonstrate steps Tulsa can take to truly be “open” for small business.

HIGHLIGHT

Grow Academy



Grow Academy is an entrepreneurship program put on by the TCCL’s Research Center that focuses on building and expanding small businesses through resources free with your library card. Each class is split between information from industry experts about how to flourish in your business, followed by an explanation of library resources for entrepreneurs. Classes feature topics like Business Plans and Finding Funding all the way to Market Research. Last year, we had 18 people graduate from our cohort, and we couldn’t be prouder of them. Graduates represent industries like advertising, social-emotional learning, a car wrapping business, “edutainment” about growing your own food and more. This year, the cohort is five-months long and features businesses including sprinklers, construction, dissertation support, artists collectives and more. We currently have 36 members of our cohort who will graduate in July.

Applicants admitted to the cohort receive a workbook to accompany the monthly classes, and those who complete the entire program receive a certificate of completion. The cohort also provides opportunities for collaboration and networking.

Anyone can attend Grow Academy classes by registering online, even if they have not applied to be part of the full cohort.

The library continuously supports small businesses through programming like Grow Academy, but also through databases, programming throughout the year like Simply Analytics 101, Canva 101, Catering 101 and more.

For more information visit TulsaLibrary.org.



HIGHLIGHT

Pfeifer Jones Architecture



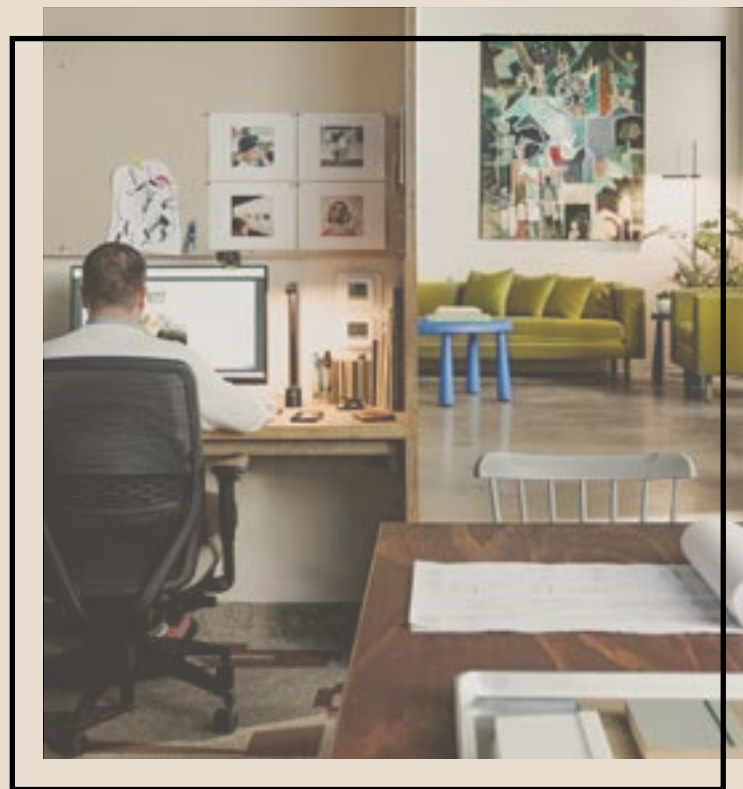
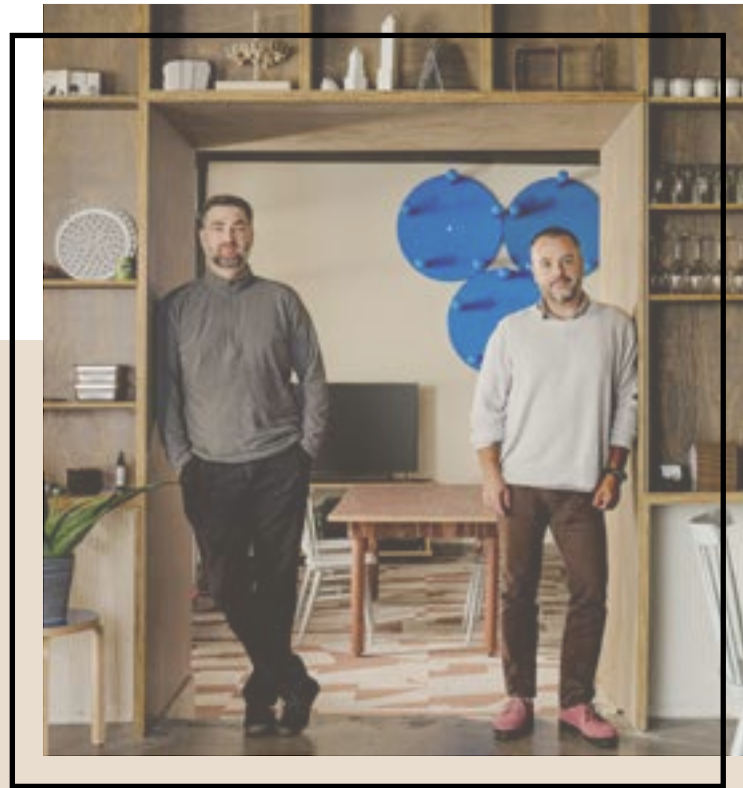
PartnerTulsa’s Main Park Plaza building plays a crucial role in fostering Tulsa’s entrepreneurial ecosystem. One of its standout tenants is Pfeifer Jones Architecture, a forward-thinking design studio dedicated to transforming how architecture interacts with the community. Their innovative approach to design and commitment to enhancing local spaces, is evident in how they converted an unconventional storefront into a dynamic, functional space that aligns perfectly with their creative vision.

“We work as a design studio – as opposed to an office – and for us that implies a type of creative production which is rooted in making things,” said Aaron Jones, Owner and Lead Architect at Pfeifer Jones Architecture. “We often develop concepts through physical models, hand drawings and art objects – and believe these items allow for a more meaningful and varied exchange of ideas.”

Drawn to the Plaza’s role in supporting Tulsa’s entrepreneurial ecosystem, Pfeifer Jones saw the potential in transforming a street-level storefront at 409 S. Boulder into a functional, inspiring space. Located in the heart of Tulsa’s Deco District, their choice of location reflects their desire to directly engage with the city’s architecture and contribute to the district’s character.

“We’ve chosen this little storefront to directly engage with the city and its architecture, and to also demonstrate our playful and accessible attitudes toward studio practice,” added Jones. As Tulsa’s retail and commercial markets continue to grow, Pfeifer Jones Architecture offers a key insight: good design can unlock potential in even the most unconventional spaces.

PHOTOS: TONY LI



Explore Pfeifer Jones Architecture’s journey and their unique approach to architecture in downtown Tulsa, as they continue to blend creativity, community and growth in everything they do. Learn more about their work at pfeiferjones.com.

Entrepreneurs in Context

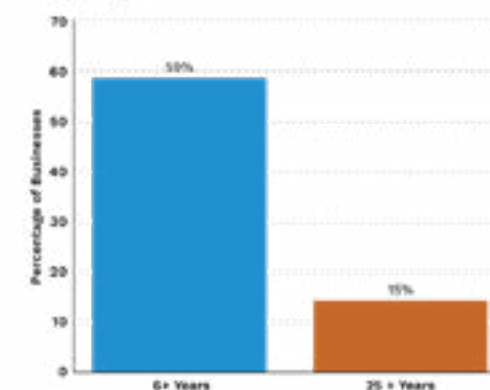
Entrepreneurs have passion, drive and excitement to share their creations and culture with the world. With new and innovative ideas, they have the potential to grow the economy, but also improve their communities, provide high quality jobs and be a point of pride for their friends and families. The past few years have shown the grit and determination it takes to run a small business while facing challenges like inflation, labor shortages, supply chain disruptions or other roadblocks; entrepreneurs have not just carried on but grown. Entrepreneurs have also managed to hold onto their current businesses despite the changing business environment as a majority of small businesses (59%) have been operating for at least six years, with 15% of that number being more than twenty-five years.

“As we reflect on the numbers, it’s crucial not to lose sight of the bigger picture. Behind every impressive data point is a shopkeeper balancing rising costs and fierce competition—all while facing burnout.”

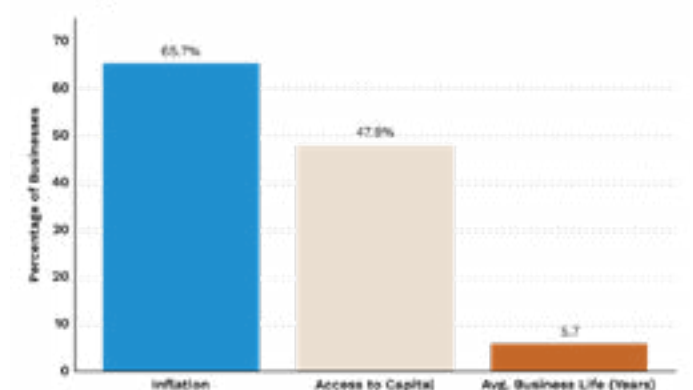
CLEO NASH, INDEPENDENT SHOPKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

However, there remain challenges to owning and operating a business. Inflation remains a stubborn effect of the pandemic that continues to hurt entrepreneurs’ bottom line, with 65.7% of Oklahoma shop owners calling it a top concern as they feel the need to lower costs to compete with national chains. Access to capital is also an ongoing concern, as almost half of all Oklahoma shops (47.9%) rely on credit cards to finance their debt (ISA Report). Oklahoma is also below the average in terms of small business life expectancy, with most Oklahoma small businesses lasting 5.69 years. With these challenges in mind, Tulsa has plenty of opportunities to help lower the barriers to entry and help support existing businesses in the long term.

Longevity of Oklahoma Small Businesses



Top Concerns for Oklahoma Small Businesses



Physical Infrastructure and Services

A decade after the first coworking spaces were established, Tulsa continues to crank out entrepreneurship spaces and services at a surprising speed with no signs of slowing down, what started as a small group of six coworking spaces in 2016 is now a community twenty seven spaces strong. With each passing month there are new co-working spaces, incubators, accelerators, and other services dedicated to growing the City's entrepreneurial class. Services are improving on recommendations given by shareholders with greater geographic diversity and focus on business of all types and stages of development. The demand for these services is so high that this growth is spreading to the suburbs with brand new coworking spaces and incubators opening in Broken Arrow, Owasso and Bartlesville.

This drive to start a business has also presented opportunities to educate potential entrepreneurs on strategies to improve how they take their first steps. This past year the Tulsa Neighborhood Association worked with &Access to create the Lease + Design Guide for Tulsa, a comprehensive manual detailing how exactly to navigate commercial leases, the design process and regulation compliance. Covering the basics like lease terms to complicated topics like zoning and property maintenance, business owners have more resources than ever before to make sure their business gets off on the right foot. With all these exciting developments, it has never been a better time to be an entrepreneur in Tulsa.



CO-WORKING SPACES. It would be a mistake to talk about coworking spaces and not mention Gradient. Formally known as 36 Degrees North, Gradient opened their brand new, 115,000 square foot entrepreneurship hub in January, unveiling a space that could rival any in Silicon Valley. With a host of amenities and a variety of services offered, Gradient continues to work to be a one-stop-shop for anyone interested in starting, managing or growing their business. While Gradient understandably attracted considerable attention for their new headquarters, other coworking spaces have grown and received accolades of their own. The Bridge Coworking, one of the oldest running coworking spaces in town, was listed as one of the best coworking spaces in the United States, competing with spaces in Austin, New York, San Francisco and other startup hubs. One of the most exciting announcements came with the Black Wall Street Chamber of Commerce announcing that its Business Center had reached full capacity. With Tulsa's first minority focused coworking space finding so much success so quickly, other like-minded coworking spaces are sure to take off, especially as GEM (Greenwood Entrepreneurship at Moton) is set to open in 2026.



BUSINESS INCUBATORS help entrepreneurs refine business ideas and build their company from the ground up as well as provide tax benefits for participants completing a State-certified incubator, and Tulsa's incubator space continues to grow. The past year continues to build off past accomplishments, mainly in the continued development of Eastside Rise's business incubator at 21st & Garnett and GEM at Pine and North Greenwood. Kitchen 66 also showed significant growth with more than 200 businesses completing their incubator program, some of whom will take part in the Mother Road Mini Market inside the BOK Center, drawing attention to Tulsa's innovative chefs to guests from around the world. Gradient actively contributes to this space as well, with the Gradient Incubator program introducing entrepreneurs to investors, developing skills and providing investment connections.

“What you can say about Tulsa is, ‘If you can’t make it anywhere, you can make it here.’”

STEVEN BRIGGS, REMOTE WORKER

ACCELERATORS. With so many promising entrepreneurs and potential small business owners in Tulsa, there remains a need for mentorship, capital and training to help scale these businesses quickly and effectively. One of the most exciting developments in this space is with Build In Tulsa's collaboration with Successment, a global revenue operations firm. This partnership aims to streamline sales, marketing, and client retention and help founders make \$1 million a year, enabling business owners to have revenue generation down to science.

Rose Rock Bridge has also presented important developments in the past year, when they introduced 15 energy startups to large scale investors who would then go on to receive mentorship, funding and office space, bringing the next wave of energy technology to Tulsa. Four of these were awarded \$100,000 each in funding and are currently growing in Tulsa.

Other headliners in this space include Builders and Backers whose Pebble Fund, smaller amounts of capital maintained by crowdfunding, is a crucial way for entrepreneurs to bridge personal finance gaps after participating in the accelerator space. Additionally, the W.E. Build Program from Build In Tulsa has shown success in empowering Black women led startups by providing them with grant funding, cost of living stipends, financial education and other resources. With both established programs and newcomers pouring resources into scaling Tulsa's most exciting businesses, accelerators continue to proliferate.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT: Although Tulsa continues to see products and services grow, that is not to say that all kinds of entrepreneurs have resources they need to grow and thrive. Support organizations have made progress in the past year, but growth opportunities remain when it comes to what services are available and where they are available.

Physical Infrastructure and Services

(CONTD.)

► **Diversity of Support Structures.** Tulsa is more than the energy and aerospace industry town that it used to be twenty years ago. Cybersecurity, IT, healthcare and logistics have taken off as key sections of the local economy; however, there are fewer support services focused on these services. While there is support for energy and technology focused startups, support to industries that make up Tulsa's new economic core lag. Tulsa's model of culinary entrepreneurship support offers a unique opportunity for replication. Organizations like Kitchen 66 and Avanzando Juntos have created a pipeline of current and future culinary entrepreneurs starting restaurants, food trucks and catering companies. These cohort based, small scale programs provide a template for retail, home healthcare or other industries. Additionally, groups like Build In Tulsa specialize in supporting industries that typically do not receive much startup support, like the cosmetics industry. This could even be spun out of Hemphill Create, the manufacturing incubator that thinks outside the box when it comes to the types of entrepreneurs that can be supported by an incubator program.

Additionally, entrepreneurs also need assistance from organizations that can advocate on their behalf. While most chambers of commerce are effective in advocating for their members, membership can often be out of reach for most startups due to prohibitive costs or their smaller size. Instead, a chamber of commerce focused on smaller scale businesses, or an independent business association could fill this gap and advocate for their members to legislators and consumers.

► **Geographic Distribution.** The groundbreaking at GEM and ongoing work on creating East Tulsa's immigrant incubator are steps in the right direction; however, most entrepreneurial services are still clustered around midtown and downtown. Clustering remains an important aspect of small business development. Replication of cluster-based supports will be needed to continue growing opportunities for diverse communities. Establishing satellite offices in areas like the Phoenix District, Red Fork or the Global District could go a long way towards improving access. Even holding office hours or occasional events outside of downtown would likely bring in business owners that may not have heard of the services offered by Tulsa's many support organizations. There is ample room for new services to emerge or current service providers to expand into these areas, especially considering those areas' rate of entrepreneurship.

► **Mid-Stage Business Assistance.** Currently, most entrepreneurial support organizations are focused on launching and assisting scalable businesses. These services are greatly needed in Tulsa, but now, there are few resources for mid-stage businesses and even fewer for businesses on the decline. This lack of support structures is common nationally and is a key reason why 20% of businesses close in 2 years and 45% close in the first 5 years across the country. Many of the main reasons a business fails can be traced to mistakes made in the beginning of their business like with market research, undercapitalization or a flawed business plan. However, assistance with marketing, rapid expansion and awareness of market trends would also be of vital importance for many mid-stage or struggling businesses. Finding ways to assist businesses that are unsure of their next steps or are facing difficulties should be a priority going forward.

Engagement and Promotion

Tulsa is a great place to be an entrepreneur, and the world agrees. Remote workers continue to come to town to take advantage of the City's many amenities, coworking spaces receive international attention and the economic development ecosystem remains primed to help support a new generation of small business owners. Additionally, Tulsa start-ups continue to receive international attention, like becoming finalists in SXSW's pitch competition. With all the ecosystem partners working together, the City and all its partners can continue to provide services and community unlike any other in the United States.

PROMOTIONAL EVENTS. If a Tulsan wants to engage in the world of entrepreneurship, all they need to do is go outside. For example, the Tulsa Ideas Challenge continues to be at the forefront of pitch competitions in Tulsa, bringing Tulsans of all stripes together to solve pressing issues. By bringing together new and current Tulsans and training these teams in how to make and sell innovative ideas, people who would have never considered being entrepreneurs now have a chance to make their dreams a reality. Similarly, the Tulsa City County Library's Grow Academy takes local entrepreneurs and provides them with months' worth of free training and advice on how to start, scale and manage their future businesses.

These events also take place in clusters, with week-long celebrations of small business bringing attention to the hard work that entrepreneurs put in to make their business viable. Tulsa hosted the 6th best Global Entrepreneurship Week in the United States where 33 events took place ranging from pitch competitions to networking sessions to popups and seminars dedicated to bringing the small business community together.

COLLABORATION. With dozens of entrepreneurship support organizations throughout the City, all the relevant parties need to work together to make the life of an entrepreneur as easy as possible. Luckily, these organizations continue to break down silos and now collaboration is easier than ever. One of the year's biggest announcements was the State Department of Commerce revealing its Business Hub. Bringing together business guides, state officials to contact and a list of frequently asked questions, this guide serves as a way for entrepreneurs to cut through some of the red tape that bogs down any business. PartnerTulsa also continues to update their business guides and maps, summarizing the work of dozens of organizations and connecting businesses to the resources they need to thrive.

Educational institutions like the University of Tulsa also continue to partner with entrepreneurship support organizations to great effect. Previous successes have led to the creation of a second AcceleratHER cohort, a partnership between the Cherokee Nation and the University of Tulsa designed to empower and accelerate the growth of ten Cherokee women-led businesses. This comes with the news that TU's Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship was named Outstanding Emerging Entrepreneurship Center by the Global Consortium for Entrepreneurship Centers.





OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT:

The past year has shown much improvement in terms of distributing information about entrepreneurship, though there are still more opportunities for improvement.

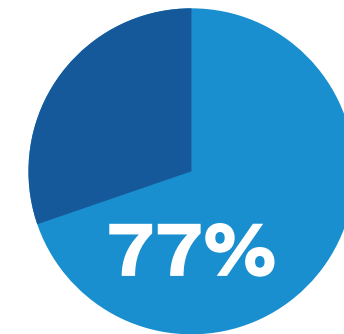
- ▶ **Centralized Calendar.** Tulsa has no shortage of events for entrepreneurs, almost too many to keep track of for most entrepreneurs. One suggestion to make navigation easier would be to create a shared calendar of events on a centralized website. The entrepreneurship ecosystem would benefit from every entrepreneurial service provider creating a list of every event in the coming month and one service provider or even PartnerTulsa could add these events to their calendar and publicize upcoming events for current or potential entrepreneurs. An example could be Startup Atlanta's event calendar which can be filtered by date, industry and business stage.
- ▶ **Opening Communication.** Removing silos is always a priority for every kind of business and organization, and Tulsa's entrepreneurial ecosystem is no different. With events like Collab Breakfasts and First Friday get-togethers slowing down, the Tulsa entrepreneurship space is at risk of becoming segmented to the detriment of current and future business owners. While re-establishing these kinds of events would be a great starting point, the types and frequency of these events can be altered. For example, having a space for neighborhood or business organizations to get together to discuss developments in their small business environment, or having speaker events to educate service providers on new trends in entrepreneurship would go a long way towards driving small business growth.
- ▶ **Tulsa as a Small Business Destination.** Tulsa is a great place to start a business but there can still be work done to brand Tulsa as a city made by small businesses, for small businesses. Tulsa gets shoutouts for its quality of life, entertainment scene and novel workforce attraction strategies. However, these boons are built on having a healthy environment for small businesses. Having tourism focus on the services provided to entrepreneurs will not just bring in potential visitors and residents from out of state but also show Tulsans the variety of ways their City is supporting people in making their dreams of owning a business come true. Shop local initiatives like TulsaGo is a great start, encouraging Tulsans to buy from a mom-and-pop business as opposed to Walmart or Amazon, and perhaps a small business chamber could take the extra step of advocating for greater recognition for the businesses that make Tulsa the thriving town it is today.

“Local businesses are what make our neighborhoods feel vibrant. They reflect the character of our communities. Local retail is key to the vitality of our places and economy.”

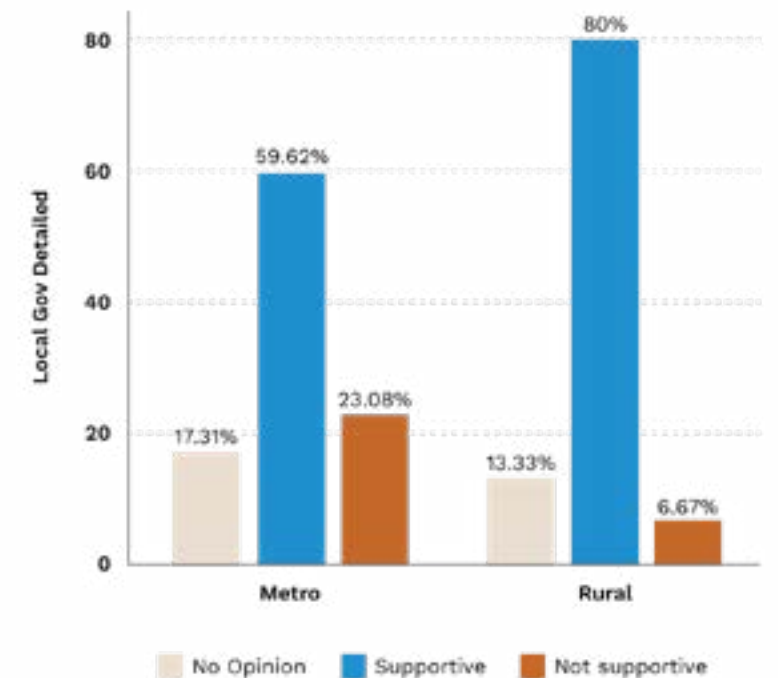
MICHELLE BARNETT, SVP OF ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT, PARTNERTULSA

City Policy

City officials and policy makers know that small businesses make up the foundation of Tulsa's economy, that's why entrepreneurs continue to get support from City Hall. 77% of entrepreneurs feel neutral or supported by their local government according to the Independent Shopkeepers Association, signaling a widespread agreement that the City should do anything in its power to lower barriers for entrepreneurship. Whether it's helping streamline permitting processes, educating on business practices or navigating resources, Tulsa city leaders need to continue to assist small business owners, fostering growth among local businesses and encouraging other entrepreneurs to move to the City.



of entrepreneurs feel neutral or supported by their local government



EDUCATION. When entrepreneurs can focus on their passions as opposed to having to navigate rules and regulations by themselves, small businesses can thrive. One way to support these entrepreneurs has been food truck education workshops. With the variety of requirements set by city officials, health department, fire marshal office and other bodies, city leaders came together to host the first of many food truck education seminars. These seminars allow regulatory bodies to present the necessary steps needed to operate a food truck efficiently and within the law. These seminars also served to lower any barriers between inspectors and business owners, fostering an environment of understanding and open communication.

“Small businesses are essential to a commercial corridor, playing a vital role in strengthening the neighborhoods around them...When small businesses thrive in a commercial corridor, they help create a diverse, locally driven economy that keeps money circulating with the community.”

TULSA NEIGHBORHOOD ALLIANCE, IN THE TULSA LEASING + DESIGN GUIDE

ACCESS TO CAPITAL. The City continues to find creative ways to finance small businesses that may not be able to receive funding from most banks. PartnerTulsa continues to support small businesses by working with Avanzando Juntos on microgrant programs. With these microgrants, twenty-eight businesses have been able to receive assistance with permitting, licensing and marketing, enabling these businesses to operate more efficiently and with greater reach to potential consumers. The City and PartnerTulsa also works to promote its Retail Revitalization Revolving Loan Fund, providing businesses with up to \$200,000 at zero percent interest if they operate along the Bus Rapid Transit Corridor or a target commercial district. Finally, the City continues to work on providing funds to revitalize business, especially those along Route 66. With the Route 66 Façade Grant, the City of Tulsa provides \$10,000-\$40,000 to businesses along the historic highway to help cover the costs of restoration work.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT: Too often, business owners think of government as a barrier to starting a business rather than a supporter. Just in the last year, 23% of urban business owners have indicated that they do not feel supported by their city government, a 15% increase in the last year (ISA Report). With economies in flux and uncertainties regarding new rules, regulations and barriers, entrepreneurs need to be supported by their governments to success. The following outlines a few of the steps that the City can take to make running a business easier.

- **Communication.** The City of Tulsa and PartnerTulsa are hubs for small businesses, each outlining dozens of ways that they can support small businesses and entrepreneurs, but without proper communication methods, potentially massive announcements and support mechanisms get lost on folks that could benefit from that knowledge the most. For example, there is still a need to provide more resources in non-English languages, while the language access plan, hiring interpreters to be at events and website translations are a start, more work can be done. Social media announcements can be translated and other methods of getting the word out like billboards, radio announcements and print media to ensure that as many people as possible can access important information.

Holding more in-person meetings would also serve as a benefit to community members, especially in discussing city road construction where small businesses are often cut off from the flow of traffic with little in the way of abating these changes with work crews. These in-person meetings would also be crucial in announcing new ordinances, rules and regulations. As an example, when there were discussions around increasing enforcement of ordinances surrounding food trucks, entrepreneurs became distrustful of the City. While hosting education workshops can help limit the uncertainty and connect business owners to their inspectors and regulators. Surveying the City's communication policy and auditing the current strategies would be one way to examine which methods engage the most members of the public, especially small businesses.

- **Procurement.** While Tulsa is a haven for small businesses, there are relatively limited ways that the City can directly hire and contract with small business owners. The Small Business Enterprise (SBE) Program applies to all levels of procurement, but it focuses almost exclusively on engineering and construction contracts and could easily apply to professional services, catering and office supplies, sectors that are easier for entrepreneurs to start new businesses. The current SBE Program has already shown great success in creating opportunities for companies to participate, expanding it has the potential to change many entrepreneurs' lives for the better. If the program were to reach out to all sectors of the economy, small businesses could use the opportunity to expand their reach, hiring new employees, buying more equipment and further supporting the local economy.

HIGHLIGHT

Retail Revitalization Revolving Loan Fund



In 2018, the City of Tulsa took a proactive approach to address shifting retail and consumer trends by assessing its commercial centers. This study paved the way for innovative programs developed by the City of Tulsa and PartnerTulsa, focused on revitalizing neighborhood commercial districts, particularly in key corridors.

A standout initiative is the Retail Revitalization Revolving Loan Fund, a flexible financing program designed to help small businesses and property developers expand in vital commercial areas across the city. In partnership with the Tulsa Economic Development Corporation (TEDC), the fund offers loans of up to \$200,000 at 0% interest, serving businesses in corridors from Pearl to S. Peoria and beyond.

To date, the Commercial Revitalization Revolving Loan Fund has supported redevelopment of Decopolis, ACT House, and Silk Salon with a combined \$451,000 in zero-interest loan funding to support investments in commercial corridors.



Recommendations and Conclusions

Entrepreneurs continue to receive great support from support services throughout Tulsa, and it is important to capitalize on the momentum made over the course of an exciting year. While there are still improvements to be made, the opportunities look better for entrepreneurs in 2025 than any other year before. While it would be easy to rest on the laurels of last year’s success, service providers and entrepreneurs know that there is always more work to be done in the endless pursuit for entrepreneurial perfection. Three overarching themes have appeared in our analysis which are summarized below:

- **Establishing a Small Business Association.** Small Businesses have great products, inspiring owners and a commitment to providing the best possible service for their customers, and they need an organization that can bring them together to advocate on their behalf. The regional chamber of commerce and local trade groups are great for existing businesses but often are more established, larger and able to afford higher dues. When a business is just starting out and must worry about day-to-day costs, these larger organizations may be out of reach. Instead, there should be an organization to cater to these underrepresented businesses.

This organization could take a variety of forms or could potentially be multiple organizations to fill the gap. One option could be an expansion of the Independent Shopkeepers Association to focus more on the Tulsa market as most of its retailers are clustered around Oklahoma City. The ISA, which brings together over 80 independent retailers to create retail incubators, shop local initiatives and celebrate business successes, could be a valuable addition to the small business space.

“ISA’s mission is to support, educate, celebrate, and encourage the growth of local retail in Oklahoma by providing a platform for independent shopkeepers to grow, support one another and maximize their individual contributions to our unique local culture.”

[ISAOK.ORG](https://isaok.org)

There is also the potential of encouraging neighborhood associations and destination districts to expand meetings and organizational events to mobilize small businesses and activate exciting districts throughout the city.

- **Supporting Food Trucks.** Tulsa is a culinary city on the rise, with James Beard awards and nationally syndicated restaurants. The world is starting to see the valuable contributions that restaurants, caterers and food trucks offer. Unfortunately, running these kinds of businesses are rarely easy, especially food trucks and calls for greater enforcement of existing regulations as well as proposals to create new legislation can lead to an environment of fear and lack of willingness to work with authorities. More and better communication is needed.



The City and nonprofits are starting to work to fill previous gaps in information. Collaborations between Kitchen 66 and Avanzando Juntos do wonders to educate business owners about the necessary rules and regulations regarding operating a food truck. Additionally, the City and PartnerTulsa have worked together to start to offer food truck education workshops and publish guides on how to operate a food truck effectively and within the law. Too often, food truck owners meet with enforcement agencies in adversarial ways but bringing in these decision makers into rooms with entrepreneurs, an understanding can be made. Especially with new regulations, having frequent forums can help lessen the confusion and help mitigate the potentially adverse effects that they can have on small businesses.

- **Emphasizing Local Business.** The charms of Tulsa’s small businesses are obvious, and while the City and other bodies do support these businesses, there is always more than can be done. One way to do this is to open City contracting and the SBE program to more types of businesses. The construction companies to maintain the City’s roads and make sure utilities are provided are a crucial part of keeping the City running, but other types of entrepreneurs can benefit the City as well. The businesses that do take part in the program report widespread satisfaction and benefits . It would be logical to extend these benefits to caterers, professional services, architects and other types of businesses that the City hires out for on a regular basis. Having these types of businesses in the SBE program as well as holding networking events and educational seminars on how to secure more contracts will likely bring plenty more sales to local businesses.

Additionally, more “buy local” events and marketing would be beneficial to keep the momentum around recent interest in local small businesses. Events like 918 Day and training programs like SavvyTulsa do a good job of promoting small businesses, but as always, there is more that can be done. Small retail businesses already have a good amount of press, but where ecosystem partners could step in could be in boosting other companies in industries facing rapid growth like logistics, IT and healthcare. Plenty of Tulsa large businesses need these industries to operate, and advertising high quality local small businesses could help create connections and new sales opportunities, boosting economic growth.

Reflecting on the work done in the past year, there continues to be significant progress in improving the entrepreneurial experience and ecosystem in Tulsa. The analysis and recommendations of this report demonstrate the steps that Tulsa can take to be a more equitable city.

Economic & Workforce Development Team

E ECONOMIC & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT TEAM



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