

Growing
**Against
the bias.**

Black Women Entrepreneurs



About this Report

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Foreward

In recent years, the conversation around entrepreneurship and investment has intensified, with increasing recognition of the unique challenges and barriers faced by women entrepreneurs—especially Black women—in their pursuit of building and growing successful businesses. Yet, despite the growing acknowledgment of these issues, too many women continue to face obstacles in accessing capital and support systems that enable them to thrive.

At Southern Capital Project, we have long believed in the power of women to transform their communities through entrepreneurship and investment. This belief is grounded in the conviction that equitable access to resources is a cornerstone of economic mobility and generational wealth creation. Our mission is clear: to ensure that women in the South have the same opportunities to build wealth as anyone else, regardless of race, background, or geographic location.

This research report sheds light on the experiences of Black women entrepreneurs as they navigate entrepreneurial ecosystems in the cities of Little Rock and Kansas City. Through interviews, focus groups, and candid conversations, these women have shared their journeys, their challenges, and their triumphs. Their stories reveal systemic issues

that must be addressed and also highlight the resilience and creativity these entrepreneurs embody. This report serves as both a call to action and a resource for entrepreneurial support organizations (ESOs) that seek to better serve women of color.



We hope this report offers valuable insights and sparks conversations among key stakeholders about how we can all work together to create a more inclusive and supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem. The time to act is now. We envision an economy where women—especially Black women—are no longer on the margins, but at the forefront, building wealth for themselves, their families, and their communities. Together, we can ensure that women have the tools, resources, and opportunities to lead, participate, and thrive in an economy rooted in equity.

Thank you for taking the time to read this report, and for your continued commitment to supporting women entrepreneurs.

Sincerely,

Jensyn Hallett

Executive Director | Southern Capital Project

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Black Women Entrepreneurs Growing Against the Bias

Black women are starting businesses faster than any other group in the United States. They create jobs, develop innovative ideas, break barriers, and strengthen their communities. However, they face significant challenges accessing the resources needed to grow their businesses. This report examines the experiences of Black women entrepreneurs in two cities: Kansas City, Missouri, and Little Rock, Arkansas.

KC and LR Ecosystems

The entrepreneurial ecosystems of Kansas City, Missouri, and Little Rock, Arkansas, provide an array of opportunities for Black women business owners. While each city has unique strengths, both are nurturing grounds for innovation, creativity, and economic growth. This report explores how these diverse ecosystems inspire and support Black women entrepreneurs, creating positive change in their communities.

KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI:

Population: 509,247

Land Area: 314.7 square miles

Population Density: 1,618.1 people per square mile

LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS:

Population: 202,591

Land Area: 116.8 square miles

Population Density: 1,576 people per square miles

These demographic differences contribute to the variations in the entrepreneurship ecosystems between the two cities. Kansas City's larger population and economic base supports a more extensive and diverse range of entrepreneurial resources and opportunities, while Little Rock is on the brink of scaling its collective ecosystem to provide more opportunities to owners.

(Source: United States Census Bureau)

Kansas City: The Heart of Entrepreneurial Spirit

Kansas City is the heart of the mid-south for aspiring entrepreneurs. With a rich tapestry of resources and support systems, KCMO offers:

A Wealth of Opportunities: As one of the most resource-rich communities in the country, Kansas City offers a treasure trove of support for new business formation. From incubators and accelerators to educators and mentors, the city provides a nurturing environment for entrepreneurs to thrive.

Powerhouse ESOs Like The Economic Development Corporation (EDC) of Kansas City and the renowned Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation stand as support pillars, committed to fostering a strong entrepreneurial ecosystem. These organizations, along with Heartland Black Chamber of Commerce, KC SourceLink, Prospect Business Associates, and the UMKC

Innovation Center, just to name a few, create a robust network that turns innovative ideas into successful ventures.

Flowing Capital: With nearly \$1 billion in annual venture capital investment, Kansas City offers exciting funding opportunities for Black women entrepreneurs. The KCRise Fund, focusing on early-stage technology companies, exemplifies the city's commitment to nurturing local talent.

Government Backing: The city government's active support through initiatives like KC BizCare demonstrates a strong commitment to entrepreneurial success, providing free resources and microgrants to help businesses flourish.

Cutting-Edge Infrastructure: As the first U.S. city to receive Google Fiber, Kansas City boasts technological capabilities that can give Black women entrepreneurs a competitive edge in the digital age.

Little Rock: A Rising Star in Entrepreneurship
Little Rock's ecosystem is on the rise. We see Little Rock as a city of growing opportunities:
Emerging Impact: Little Rock offers an intimate entrepreneurial support community where Black women business owners can forge close connections and receive personalized support.

Local Initiatives: Little Rock hosts local organizations and initiatives that support entrepreneurs, such as the Arkansas Economic Development Commission, Little Rock BUILD Academy, ReMix Ideas, and WEM Hub, creating

a supportive network for business growth.

Government Support: Little Rock can boast of its increasing government involvement in fostering entrepreneurship tailored to the unique needs of business owners and entrepreneurs.

Weaving Experiences: A Symbiotic Relationship
While Kansas City and Little Rock may differ in scale, they share a common goal: empowering entrepreneurs to succeed. This commonality opens doors for mutual learning and resource sharing:

Cross-City Mentorship: Experienced entrepreneurs from Kansas City could mentor up-and-coming business owners in Little Rock, while Little Rock's entrepreneurs could offer fresh perspectives to their Kansas City counterparts.

Collaborative Events: Joint networking events, workshops, and conferences in both cities could foster idea exchange and create new opportunities for Black women entrepreneurs.

Resource Sharing: Kansas City's well-established organizations could partner with Little Rock's local initiatives to extend their reach and impact.

Policy Innovation: By comparing strategies and outcomes, both cities can refine their approaches to supporting Black women entrepreneurs, potentially influencing policy at the state and national levels.

Kansas City and Little Rock MSAs (metropolitan

statistical areas) were chosen as case studies because they are medium-sized areas in the Midwest. By examining these two locations, the research provides insights into how different urban environments support (or fail to support) Black women in business. The goal is to identify what works, what does not, and how conditions could be improved.



Key Findings

Black women entrepreneurs are emerging as powerful drivers of innovation and economic growth. Despite facing significant challenges, these entrepreneurs demonstrate exceptional resilience and creativity, often developing innovative solutions that address community needs and fill market gaps. They are making notable strides in technology, health, and creative sectors, leveraging strong community ties and peer support networks to overcome barriers. With their businesses showing promising growth trends and increasing revenue shares, Black women entrepreneurs are not only building thriving enterprises. Still, they also

actively mentor others, creating a multiplier effect for economic empowerment in their communities.

Main Challenges Faced by Black Women Entrepreneurs

Access to Capital emerges as the most significant barrier. Banks and investors often do not give Black women equal funding opportunities. One entrepreneur from Little Rock shared, “I’ve been borrowing from my retirement plan for ten years to make this come true because nobody will give me a chance.”

Community Responsibilities: Many Black women start businesses for profit and to benefit their communities. While admirable, this can add extra pressure and complexity to their entrepreneurial journey.

Lack of Mentorship: Many Black women report difficulty finding mentors who understand their unique experiences. A Kansas City entrepreneur explained, “There are very few mentors that look like me, and so I had to go outside of my comfort zone, seek out those mentors willing to take the time and expend the energy into me.”

Navigating Support Systems: Both cities have programs to assist entrepreneurs, but these can be difficult to access or may not meet specific needs. One entrepreneur noted, “A lot of the information that they were offering, I had already been through that and learned the hard way . . . my business didn’t operate like regular businesses.”

Systemic Discrimination: Black women often face unfair treatment due to both racial and gender biases. This can hinder their ability to enter business networks or attract customers.

Why This Matters

The success of Black women entrepreneurs has far-reaching implications. Their businesses create jobs, stimulate local economies, and inspire other Black women and girls to pursue entrepreneurship. Supporting Black women in business is a matter of equity and a smart economic strategy for communities.

Scope of the Study

This report provides a comprehensive view of Black women entrepreneurs' experiences in Kansas City and Little Rock. It combines quantitative data on business performance and representation with qualitative insights from entrepreneurs. Doing so offers a nuanced understanding of these business owners' challenges and opportunities.

The research methodology included:

In-depth interviews with Black women entrepreneurs

Focus group discussions

Surveys of local Entrepreneurial Support Organizations (ESOs)

Analysis of census data and local economic reports

Key areas of focus included:

Motivations for starting businesses

Challenges in accessing capital and resources

Experiences with local support systems

Strategies for overcoming barriers

Impact on local communities and economies

By examining these aspects, the report seeks to inform policymakers, support organizations, and community leaders on better assisting Black women entrepreneurs. The goal is to identify concrete ways to create more equitable and supportive entrepreneurial ecosystems in these cities and beyond.





Dianna Holley:

Breaking the Mold in Publishing

Dianna Holley stands out as a leader in the niche world of black-owned publishing in Little Rock. Despite challenges in balancing multiple jobs and navigating an industry where few women of color exist, this Editor-In-Chief has built a thriving business. As the founder of Urbane Magazine, Dianna has persevered through personal and professional hurdles. “It’s hard because I don’t have the same formulas and operational methods that other businesses do,” she says, reflecting on her unique path.

Despite participating in several entrepreneurial programs, Dianna found that many did not meet her specific needs. She acknowledges the value of the WEM Hub through the Women’s Foundation of Arkansas, which provided her with no-strings-attached financial support. However,

she expresses frustration with programs that enforced rigid guidelines, often irrelevant to her online and niche business. “Not every business has mass retail or a brick-and-mortar inventory,” she explains, emphasizing that her publishing model requires different forms of support. Dianna continues to push boundaries, not only within her business but also in advocating for improvements in entrepreneurial support systems. She remains determined to make her business a full-time endeavor, working to create a lasting legacy for her family. “I want to leave something for my children,” she says, reflecting on her long-term vision for growth.

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The Motivation and Drive of Black Women Entrepreneurs

What motivates Black women to start their businesses?

This section explores the driving forces behind Kansas City's and Little Rock's entrepreneurial spirit. Understanding these motivations can help create better support systems for these business owners.

Community Influence and Cultural Identity

Many Black women start businesses to improve their communities. Their cultural background often plays a significant role in this decision. One entrepreneur from Little Rock shared:

"My grandparents raised me in the South. I grew up very shy and very introverted around older people. So, I started my business for several reasons. It was for me to open up and embrace who I am, a very gifted and talented person; nobody knew anything."

This story illustrates how starting a business can lead to personal growth and cultural expression. Many Black women view their businesses as income sources and as ways to celebrate their identity and heritage.

Necessity-Driven Entrepreneurship

Sometimes, Black women start businesses out of necessity. They may face limited job opportunities or unfair treatment in traditional

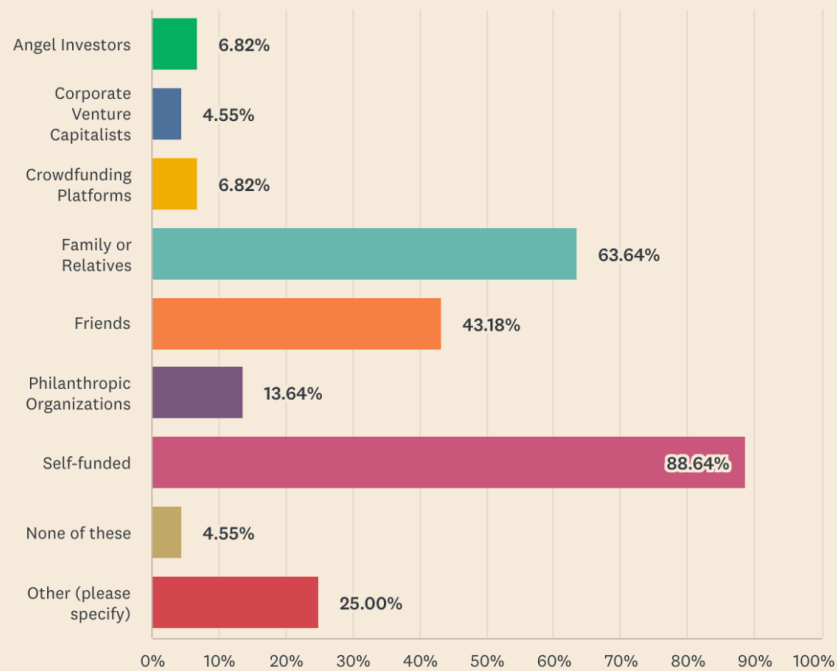
workplaces. One entrepreneur shared: "I've been borrowing from my retirement plan for ten years to make this come true. Because nobody will give me a chance."

This quote demonstrates the determination of Black women entrepreneurs. They often use personal resources and take significant risks to start their businesses.

In both Kansas City and Little Rock, many Black women reported starting businesses after facing discrimination or limited opportunities in traditional employment. For instance, despite her qualifications, a Kansas City entrepreneur started her business after repeatedly being overlooked for promotions in her corporate job. In fact, 89% of focus group participants self-funded their businesses.



Entities or Individuals who have made a financial investment in participants' businesses



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ Angel Investors (1)	6.82% 3
▼ Corporate Venture Capitalists (2)	4.55% 2
▼ Crowdfunding Platforms (3)	6.82% 3
▼ Family or Relatives (4)	63.64% 28
▼ Friends (5)	43.18% 19
▼ Philanthropic Organizations (6)	13.64% 6
▼ Self-funded (7)	88.64% 39
▼ None of these (8)	4.55% 2
▼ Other (please specify) (9)	Responses 25.00% 11
Total Respondents: 44	

BASIC STATISTICS				
Minimum	Maximum	Median	Mean	Standard Deviation
1.00	9.00	6.00	5.73	1.89

Economic Empowerment and Building Wealth

Many Black women see business ownership as a path to financial independence and wealth creation for their families. They recognize the significant wealth gap between Black and white families in America and desire to change it. A Kansas City entrepreneur explained:

“We’re not a startup. You don’t necessarily need help getting started. You don’t need to figure out what you’re doing. You got your license, your groove, and you’re making a little money, but you’re not second stage. You’re not ready to hire you haven’t made enough money. And so you get in this really awkward spot where people just don’t know what to do with you.”

This shows how Black women entrepreneurs work hard to grow their businesses, even when finding appropriate support is challenging. The desire to build wealth isn’t just about personal gain. Many of these entrepreneurs spoke about wanting to create opportunities for their children and future generations. In Little Rock, one business owner said she started her company to create a legacy for her family and provide jobs in her neighborhood.

Overcoming Personal Challenges

Many Black women use their businesses to overcome personal difficulties and create

positive change. One entrepreneur in Little Rock shared:

“I was working two jobs seven days a week. And I did it for 15 years . . . a long time. And I wanted to find something that wasn’t as taxing as my full time job without having to go and clock in somewhere.” This Little Rock participant opened her own business and has regained personal agency over her time.

In Kansas City, similar stories of resilience emerged. One entrepreneur started her business after recovering from a serious illness, saying, “I saw a gap in healthcare services for people like me, so I decided to fill it myself.”

These stories amplify how Black women often have to create their own paths in business, especially when serving specific communities or working in unique industries.

Types of Businesses

Black women in Kansas City and Little Rock start various types of businesses. Some of the most common include:

Professional Services (consulting, marketing, legal services)

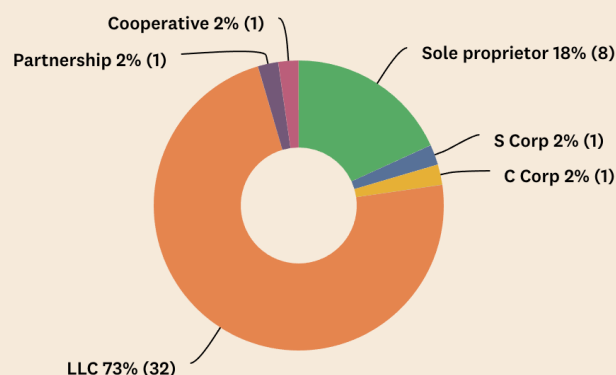
Healthcare and Social Assistance

Beauty and Personal Care

Retail Shops

Restaurants and Food Services

It’s noteworthy that Black women are also entering fields where they’ve been traditionally



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
▼ Sole proprietor (1)	18%	8
▼ S Corp (2)	2%	1
▼ C Corp (3)	2%	1
▼ B Corp (4)	0%	0
▼ LLC (5)	73%	32
▼ Partnership (6)	2%	1
▼ Cooperative (7)	2%	1
▼ Other (please specify) (8)	0%	0
TOTAL		44

BASIC STATISTICS

Minimum 1.00	Maximum 7.00	Median 5.00	Mean 4.23	Standard Deviation 1.65
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underrepresented. For example, one interviewee was developing new healthcare technology. A trend of Black women entering the tech industry was observed in Kansas City. One entrepreneur developed a software platform to reduce no-show rates for medical appointments, addressing a critical need in underserved communities.

Little Rock had a strong presence of Black women in the food industry. From catering services to specialty food products, these entrepreneurs often drew inspiration from family recipes and cultural traditions.

Strength and Creativity

A common theme across all these stories is the strength and creativity of Black women entrepreneurs. They often face significant challenges but find innovative ways to overcome them. A Kansas City entrepreneur said:

“I feel that I was faced with significant challenges...100%. This time with this business, I spent a lot of extra time going places and meeting people, which worked. The first time I started, it took us a long time to ramp up.”

This quote demonstrates the persistence of these entrepreneurs and their willingness to invest extra effort to build the relationships and networks necessary for success.



In Little Rock, an entrepreneur shared how she had to be creative with her marketing: “I couldn’t afford traditional advertising, so I started doing live demos at community events. It was exhausting, but it got my product in front of people.”

Differences Between Kansas City and Little Rock

While many motivations were similar across both cities, some differences were noted: Kansas City entrepreneurs seemed to place more emphasis on scaling businesses and entering high-growth industries like tech.

Little Rock entrepreneurs more often spoke about businesses rooted in local culture and community needs.

Kansas City entrepreneurs frequently discussed aspirations to compete nationally or globally. Little Rock entrepreneurs often mentioned the importance of serving and uplifting their local Black community.

These differences may be attributed to each city’s varying resources and opportunities.

Through this research, we have learned that Black women start businesses for different reasons, including community upliftment, cultural expression, financial independence, overcoming personal challenges, and creating positive change. Understanding these motivations is crucial for developing support systems that help Black women entrepreneurs thrive in Kansas City, Little Rock, and beyond.

A deep personal loss and a commitment to closing healthcare gaps drive Dr. Shelley Cooper's journey into entrepreneurship. As the founder of Diversity Telehealth, Shelley uses HIPAA-compliant virtual tools to serve underserved communities. Her inspiration came after her father's unexpected passing in 2018—an avoidable loss that could have been prevented with better healthcare access. "He could still be here now," she reflects.

Shelley's work centers on reducing no-show rates at clinics serving low-income patients with chronic diseases. Her software platform, Come On Now, connects patients and doctors via telehealth, ensuring timely medical visits without the barriers of transportation, weather, or work commitments. "I look back and think

of the things I never realized, which was how unusual it was for someone who looks like me to create something like this," she says, recognizing the rarity of a Black woman leading such an initiative in healthcare.

Dr. Cooper's entrepreneurial spirit doesn't stop with telehealth; she has also created Remodel Relief, an AI-supported home maintenance platform. Balancing multiple businesses, she remains focused on making a positive impact in her community and beyond.

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<https://www.facebook.com/DiversityTelehealth>

Dr. Shelley Cooper:

Transforming Healthcare through Telehealth



Systemic Barriers: The Challenge of Scaling and Sustaining

Black women entrepreneurs in Kansas City and Little Rock face systemic barriers that make it difficult to grow and maintain their businesses. These challenges, rooted in long-standing inequalities, create significant obstacles to long-term success. This section examines four key systemic barriers: access to capital, discrimination and stereotypes, market barriers, and lack of mentorship and representation.

Access to Capital

Getting money to start or grow a business is the biggest challenge for Black women entrepreneurs in Kansas City and Little Rock. The difficulty in securing adequate funding limits initial business growth and makes it hard to expand over time.

Data from the research shows big differences in access to capital: In Kansas City, Black women-owned businesses earn about 59% of what the average women-owned business makes. In Little Rock, it's about 68%. This shows a large gap in how much money these businesses can make.

In Kansas City, Black women-owned businesses account for only 7% of the total revenue of all women-owned firms, even though they represent 12% of women-owned businesses. In Little Rock, these numbers are 15.9% and 23.3%, respectively, showing a big difference between

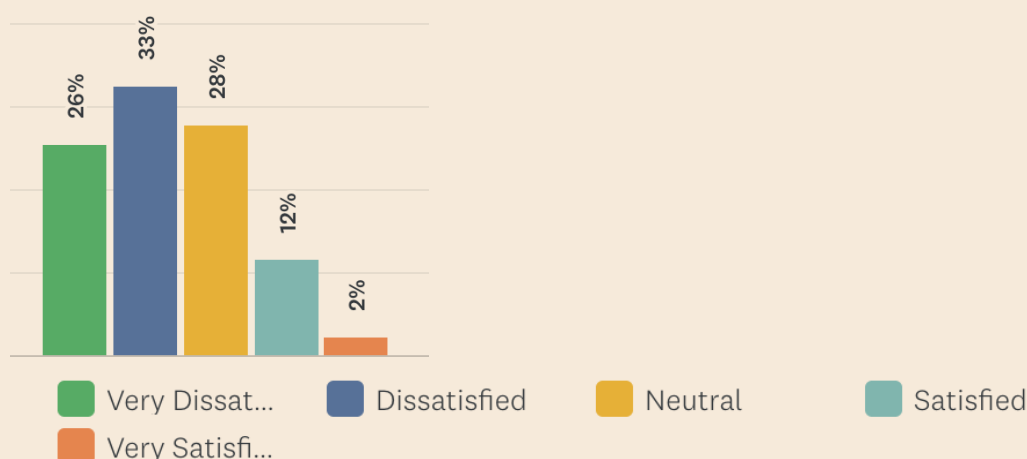
how many businesses there are and how much money they make

These differences in revenue are both a result and a cause of limited access to capital. With lower revenues, Black women entrepreneurs often struggle to qualify for traditional loans or attract investment. One Little Rock entrepreneur said:

"I've been borrowing from my retirement plan for ten years to make this come true. Because nobody will give me a chance."

This quote shows the frustration and resourcefulness of many Black women entrepreneurs who have to use their savings or borrow from family because they can't get money from banks or investors. The problem of needing more money affects how businesses can grow and compete. A Kansas City entrepreneur with less than three years of experience noted:

"A problem that I run into is when I'm applying for grants, or whatever it may be, a lot of them want you to have more income than I've made. They're like, oh, for those who have made 60 to 100,000 plus, and I haven't gotten there yet. This highlights a catch-22 situation where businesses need money to grow but cannot get it without showing they have already grown."



Thirty-three percent (33%) of participants reported being very dissatisfied with the access to capital to start their business.

Discrimination and Stereotypes

Black women entrepreneurs face both racial and gender biases, creating extra hurdles in their business journeys. These biases show up in various ways, from small, everyday slights to more obvious discrimination in business dealings.

In both Kansas City and Little Rock, participants reported being underestimated or overlooked because of their race and gender. A Kansas City entrepreneur shared:

“I think one of the things I never realized the community is having someone who looks like me come up with an idea that I did, and most times when I would go into different incubator accelerators, they were not populated in that way.”

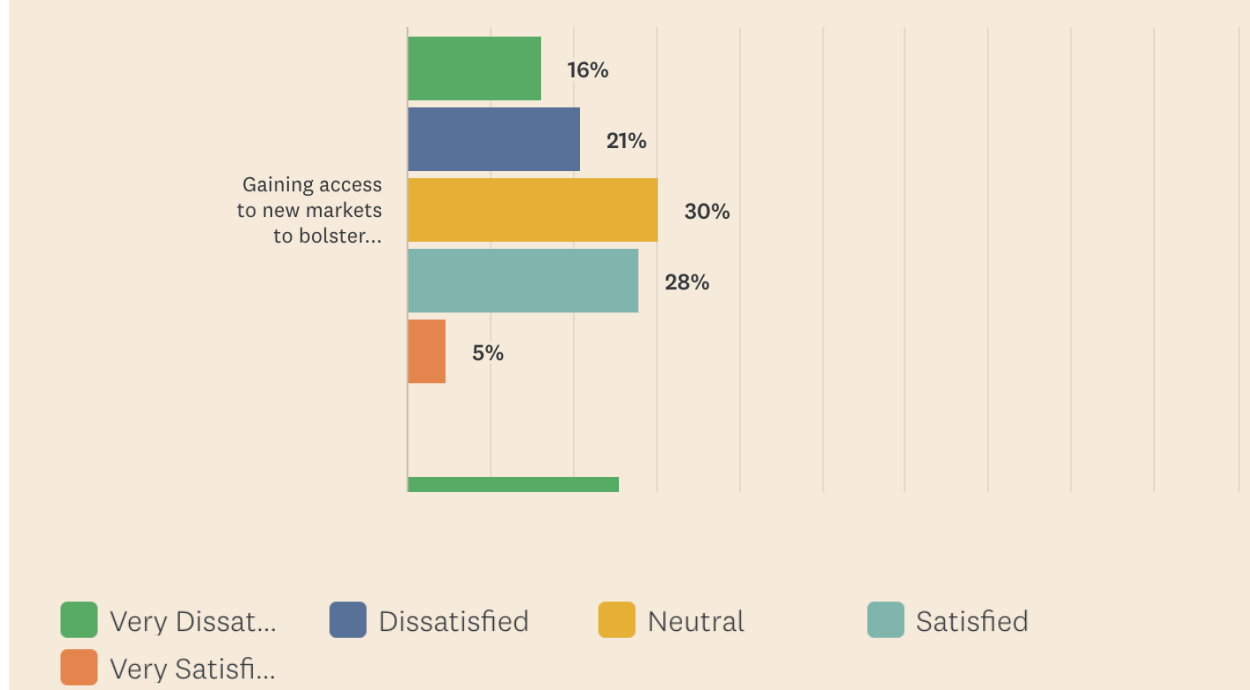
This quote shows how lonely and out of place many Black women entrepreneurs feel in business support settings.

These biases affect more than just personal interactions. They can lead to systemic issues in funding and support. For example, unconscious biases in lending decisions can result in Black women entrepreneurs being denied loans more often or getting less favorable terms, even when their businesses are just as strong as others.

Market Barriers

Gaining access to new and established markets and business networks is another big challenge for Black women entrepreneurs. Twenty-one percent (21%) of respondents reported difficulties accessing informal networks that often lead to business opportunities, partnerships, and client relationships.

Thirty percent (30%) of participants reported being neutral with regard to gaining access to new markets to bolster business and create new clientele.



A Little Rock entrepreneur highlighted this challenge:

“My business is very much different from other businesses because my business predominantly caters to Black Arkansans. I couldn’t find one person who left any breadcrumbs for me to follow when I started this.”

This quote underscores the extra burden Black women entrepreneurs face in niche markets or those serving predominantly Black communities. They often have to create their paths and networks from scratch without the benefit of established models or mentors.

Moreover, Black women entrepreneurs frequently report repeatedly having to “prove” themselves, facing skepticism about their capabilities or the quality of their products and services. This added scrutiny creates extra pressure and can slow down business growth and market penetration.

Lack of Mentorship and Representation

Not having mentors who understand the unique experiences of Black women entrepreneurs was a critical issue in Kansas City and Little Rock. Participants consistently emphasized the importance of having mentors who could relate to their specific challenges and provide culturally relevant guidance.

A Kansas City entrepreneur stated:

“... there are very few mentors that look like me, and so I had to go outside of the comfort zone, seek out those mentors that were willing to take the time and expend the energy into me.”

This quote highlights the challenge of finding relatable mentors and the extra effort required to secure mentorship.

The lack of representation extends beyond mentorship to leadership positions within entrepreneurial support organizations (ESOs) and funding bodies. A survey of ESOs in Kansas

City and Little Rock revealed a gap in diversity among leadership and decision-makers:

In Kansas City, while 38% of ESOs reported primarily serving Black entrepreneurs, only 25% of these organizations had leadership teams that reflected this demographic.

In Little Rock, the difference was even bigger, with 30% of ESOs primarily serving Black entrepreneurs but only 15% having representative leadership.

This lack of representation at the leadership level can result in support programs and funding decisions that don't adequately address Black women entrepreneurs' unique

needs and challenges.

In conclusion, the systemic barriers facing Black women entrepreneurs in Kansas City and Little Rock are complex and interconnected. Limited access to capital, ongoing discrimination and stereotypes, difficulties breaking into established markets, and a lack of culturally relevant mentorship and representation all contribute to the challenges of growing and sustaining businesses. Addressing these barriers requires a comprehensive approach to tackling individual biases and systemic inequalities. By doing so, more equitable entrepreneurial ecosystems can be created that allow Black women entrepreneurs to thrive and contribute fully to their local economies.



Victoria Mays:

Empowering Entrepreneurs Through Publishing and Technical Services



Victoria Mays has carved out a unique space in the entrepreneurial ecosystem as the founder of Pen to Publishing, a Black woman-owned business offering a range of services from editing to grant writing. Initially focused on helping individuals publish “legacy texts,” Victoria quickly realized that the market she wanted to serve could not afford the quality of services she aimed to provide. “There was a huge gap between what they could afford and the quality that could be rendered,” she explains.

Victoria’s ability to pivot has been key to her success. She moved into federal grant writing, eventually taking on a leadership role in a large organization. This experience

expanded her skills in both grant writing and business development. “I haven’t had to ask for contracts—they come through referrals,” she says, highlighting the importance of relationships and doing quality work.

Victoria’s journey hasn’t been without challenges. She describes the struggle of balancing work with caregiving responsibilities for her young child. However, her daughter is now older and ready to engage with growth opportunities fully. “Now I’m ready for those types of opportunities,” she says, reflecting on her future goals

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Support Systems and Resources

Black women entrepreneurs in Kansas City and Little Rock navigate a complex landscape of support systems ranging from formal entrepreneurial support organizations (ESOs) to informal community networks. This section examines these support structures' effectiveness, highlighting successes and shortcomings in meeting the unique needs of Black women entrepreneurs.

Formal Support Systems

Kansas City and Little Rock offer various formal support systems for entrepreneurs, including incubators, accelerators, and government programs. However, the accessibility and relevance of these resources for Black women entrepreneurs vary significantly.

Kansas City's Entrepreneurial Ecosystem
Kansas City demonstrates a more developed, formalized entrepreneurial ecosystem. As one Kansas City entrepreneur shared:

"There are a lot of resources here, the Kauffman Foundation, Kaufman fast track, Kaufman, Kaufman tech track. There are a lot of pitch competitions, or a lot of incubators."

This quote highlights the abundance of formal support structures in Kansas City.

KEY ORGANIZATIONS INCLUDE:

Kauffman Foundation: Offers various programs and funding opportunities for entrepreneurs.

KC SourceLink: Provides resources and connections for small businesses.

Women's Employment Network: Offers training and support specifically for women entrepreneurs.

UMKC Small Business Development Center: Provides business consulting and training services.

Despite this wealth of resources, many Black women entrepreneurs struggle to benefit from these programs fully. One participant noted: "... there are very few mentors that look like me, and so I had to go outside of the comfort zone, seek out those mentors that were willing to take the time and expend the energy into me."

This statement underscores a critical gap in many formal support systems - the lack of culturally relevant mentorship and guidance.

Little Rock's Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

In Little Rock, the entrepreneurial ecosystem appears less developed, with entrepreneurs relying more heavily on informal, community-

based networks and grassroots initiatives. Key organizations include:

Arkansas Women's Business Center: Provides training and support for women entrepreneurs.
Little Rock Regional Chamber of Commerce: Offers networking and resources for local businesses.

The Venture Center: Focuses on accelerating tech-based startups.

One Little Rock entrepreneur highlighted the challenges of navigating support programs that don't align with their specific business needs:

"A lot of the information that they were offering, I had already been through that and learned the hard way... my business didn't operate like regular businesses."

This quote illustrates a common issue where standardized support programs fail to address the unique challenges faced by Black women entrepreneurs, particularly those in niche or non-traditional industries.

Informal Networks and Community Support
In both cities, but particularly in Little Rock, informal networks and community support play a crucial role in filling the gaps left by formal support structures. Black women entrepreneurs often create their own peer support systems, sharing knowledge, resources, and emotional support.

A Kansas City entrepreneur emphasized the importance of these informal networks:

"We wanted to create a space where black women can come and be their authentic self-learning from each other, and you don't feel like he has to voice certain things at times."

This quote highlights the value of peer-to-peer support and the need for safe spaces where Black women entrepreneurs can share experiences and strategies.

These informal networks become even more critical in Little Rock, where formal support structures are less developed. As one entrepreneur stated:

"Relationships were the most important in helping me start my business."

This reliance on personal relationships and community ties demonstrates the resilience of Black women entrepreneurs and the need for more robust, culturally relevant formal support systems.

Impact of Support Systems

The research revealed mixed results regarding the impact of existing support systems:
In Kansas City, 38% of surveyed ESOs reported primarily serving Black entrepreneurs, but only 25% had leadership teams that reflected this demographic.



In Little Rock, 30% of ESOs primarily served Black entrepreneurs, but only 15% had representative leadership.

This lack of representation in leadership positions can lead to support programs that don't fully address the needs of Black women entrepreneurs.

However, when support systems are effective, they can have a significant impact. For example, one Kansas City entrepreneur shared a positive experience with a local ESO:

"The Porter House KC... they had this political sandbox alchemy sandbox program... I was selected as one of the five winners out of like 20 some applicants."

This program gave the entrepreneur valuable support in developing a pitch deck and securing funding.

Gaps in Support Systems

Despite the availability of various support programs, several gaps were identified:

Lack of Tailored Support: Many programs use a "one-size-fits-all" approach that doesn't address the specific needs of Black women entrepreneurs.

Limited Access to Capital: While many programs offer training and mentorship, few provide direct access to funding or investor connections.

Insufficient Long-term Support: Many programs focus on startup phases but offer limited support for businesses in growth stages.

Inadequate Representation: The lack of Black women in leadership positions within ESOs can lead to programs that don't fully understand or address the needs of this demographic.

Navigating the "Missing Middle": Entrepreneurs who have moved beyond the startup phase but aren't yet large enough for traditional growth-

stage resources often struggle to find appropriate support.

As one Kansas City entrepreneur described:

“You’re not a startup. You don’t necessarily need help getting started. You don’t need to figure out what you’re doing. You got your license, your groove, and you’re making a little money, but you’re not second stage. You’re not ready to hire you haven’t made enough money. And so you get in this really awkward spot where people just don’t know what to do with you.”

Opportunities for Growth and Success

Despite their challenges, Black women entrepreneurs in Kansas City and Little Rock are finding numerous opportunities for growth and success. This section highlights key areas of opportunity, emerging industries, and success stories that demonstrate the resilience and creativity of these business owners.

Emerging Industries and Markets

Technology and Innovation

In both cities, particularly Kansas City, Black women entrepreneurs are making strides in technology and innovation-driven industries.

One notable example comes from a Kansas City entrepreneur who developed a telehealth platform:

“I had started a previous business that was in person, but this business is a tech business.

And as a person who is a clinician first and occupational therapist, I was trying to build an app I didn’t know where to start. And so I, you know, found my resources and got education from the Small Business Development Center UMKC tech venture studio was super helpful and then spread me into all other kinds of things.”

This entrepreneur’s journey into tech demonstrates how Black women leverage their professional expertise to create innovative solutions in growing markets.



Health and Wellness

The health and wellness sector presents significant opportunities for Black women entrepreneurs. In both Little Rock and Kansas City, several entrepreneurs have found success in this area, often focusing on holistic and community-centered approaches to health. One model approach that we would like to highlight is Mattie's Foods in Kansas City.

In 2015, sisters Arvelisha and India embarked on a fast that unexpectedly changed their lives and led to the creation of Kansas City's first black-owned vegan restaurant. Emerging from their fast with a newfound vegan lifestyle, the sisters found themselves craving the comfort foods they once enjoyed. Faced with limited vegan options in their meat-centric city, they took matters into their own hands. What began as a quest to satisfy their craving for cheese and nachos evolved into a mission to provide delicious, plant-based alternatives to traditional comfort foods. Naming their venture after their grandmother Mattie, who passed away in 2001 from preventable ailments, Arvelisha and India set out to create a business that would honor her memory and potentially save lives. They recognized that many in their community were battling diseases like diabetes and certain cancers, which could be prevented or managed through healthier dietary choices. Mattie's Foods became their platform to introduce smarter,

plant-based versions of beloved comfort foods, ensuring that going vegan didn't mean missing out on favorite dishes.

Seven years after its inception, Mattie's Foods has grown from a food truck to a full-fledged restaurant in Brookside, Kansas City. The sisters have expanded their offerings to include vegan versions of soul food staples like greens, mac and cheese, cornbread, yams, and even barbecue "chicks." By providing these familiar flavors in healthier, plant-based forms, Arvelisha and India are not just running a successful business; they're creating a positive impact on their community's health. Their commitment to offering diverse milk alternatives and accommodating various dietary restrictions further underscores their mission to make healthy, comforting food accessible to everyone.

Arvelisha and India Woods owners of Mattie's Foods in Kansas City, MO. Personal Video, August 24, 2024. YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g17qIDwKPcc>

Mattie's Foods is a real story on how Black women entrepreneurs identify and fill crucial gaps in their communities, creating businesses that address specific health needs.

633 E 63rd St , Kansas City, MO, (816) 712-2887
mattiesfoods.vegan@gmail.com Mattiesfoods.com
<https://www.facebook.com/mattiesfoods>

Creative and Cultural Industries

In both Kansas City and Little Rock, Black women are finding success in creative and cultural industries. This includes art, music, fashion, and food services. One Kansas City artist and entrepreneur explained: “I paint a lot of Black lives, Black people... I also paint large scale murals as well.”

Remy Wharry has found success in her art and developed her own line of acrylic paints, demonstrating how creative pursuits can lead to product innovation and diversified revenue streams.

Remy Wharry:

Painting Kansas City with Passion and Purpose

Kansas City-based artist and entrepreneur Remy Wharry is using her art to uplift the Black community while building a unique business in the process. Specializing in large-scale murals and custom paint parties, Remy sets herself apart using her own acrylic paint line. “There are very few Black women with their own paint lines—maybe two or three of us in the country,” she explains. This distinction has garnered her strong support from fellow Black women artists, who use her paints in their own work.

Remy has frequently participated in Kansas City’s entrepreneurial support programs, receiving guidance and resources from organizations like the Porter House KC, The Gift KC, and most recently The Zhou Brothers Art Center. Although funding has been sporadic,



these programs have helped her refine her business pitch and grow her network. “Some months are good, and others are a struggle,” she admits, describing the unpredictable nature of running an art-based business.

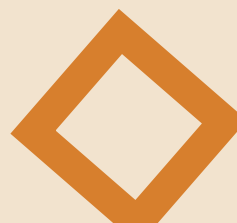
Despite the ups and downs, Remy remains committed to expanding her business and supporting other Black women in the arts. She continues to utilize local resources, driven by her passion for art and the community. “I want people to fall in love with my passion,” she says, reflecting on her approach to engaging customers and supporters.

RAW Art Acrylic Paint (816) 237-0079
Hello@rawartpaint.com rawartpaint.com

Quantitative Growth Indicators

While specific data on the growth of Black women-owned businesses in these cities is limited, some indicators suggest positive trends: In Kansas City, Black women-owned firms increased their share of all women-owned businesses from 10.5% in 2018 to 12% in 2021.

In Little Rock, the revenue share of Black women-owned firms relative to all women-owned firms grew from 13.2% in 2018 to 15.9% in 2021.



Success Stories: Resilience and Creativity in Action

Overcoming Financial Barriers

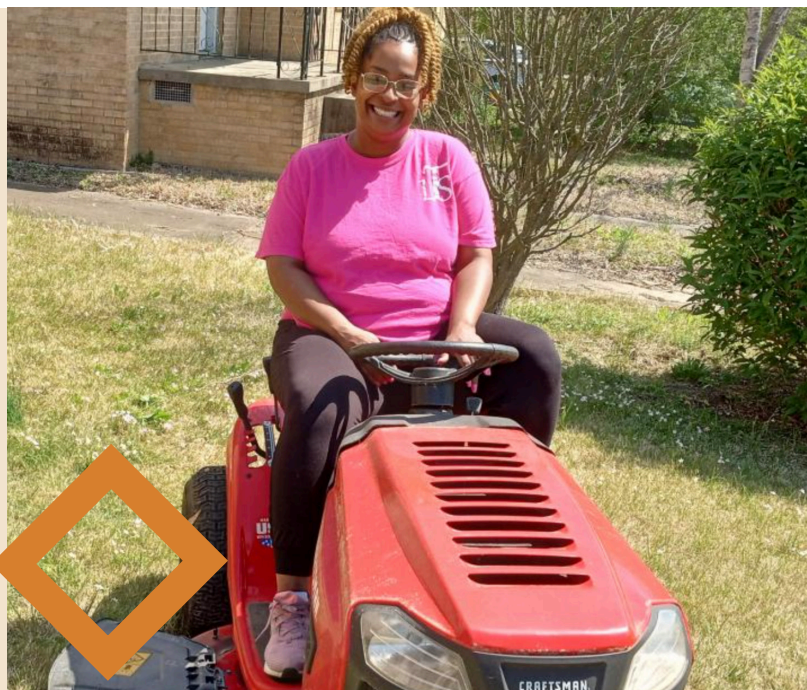
Many Black women entrepreneurs have shown remarkable creativity in overcoming financial barriers. One Little Rock entrepreneur explains her experience::

Alicia Talbert

Nine years ago, Alicia Talbert confronted a daunting obstacle that would fuel an unexpected entrepreneurial fire. When her husband's criminal record became a barrier to employment, Alicia refused to accept defeat. Armed with nothing but a push mower and an unyielding spirit, she launched Talbert's Lawn Service, a venture committed to offering second chances to formerly incarcerated individuals through meaningful work.

In its infancy, the business demanded every ounce of Alicia's resourcefulness. She poured her 401(k) savings into the company, allocated her paychecks to fuel growth, and stretched every available dollar to its limit. Each penny earned found its way back into expanding their fleet of equipment. Despite the financial tightrope walk, Alicia remained steadfast, propelled by her vision of creating opportunities for those often sidelined by society.

Today, Talbert's Lawn Service stands as a testament to Alicia's grit and ingenuity. From



humble beginnings with a single mower, the company now boasts a fleet of lawn care equipment with a host of happy customers. Talbert's Lawn Service has blossomed into a symbol of hope for second-chance employment in Little Rock, Arkansas. Alicia's story serves as a powerful reminder that with determination, community support, and a proactive approach to seeking opportunities, it's possible to cultivate a thriving business that not only achieves financial success but also elevates others along the path to prosperity.

This entrepreneur's story demonstrates how pivoting and diversifying offerings can lead to new opportunities and revenue streams.

Leveraging Community Support

Black women entrepreneurs often find success by tapping into strong community networks. A Kansas City entrepreneur explained her approach:

“I feel that 100%. And I think that the way that I went about doing it this time in this business is like spending an extra normal amount of time going places and meeting people and that worked this time like the first was I started it took a very long time for us to ramp up.”

This quote illustrates how investing time in building relationships and community connections can accelerate business growth.

Jonaie Johnson

From being a student greeter at an entrepreneurship award ceremony to being named the 2020 Student Entrepreneur of the Year and now leading Interplay, an innovative pet tech startup, Jonaie Johnson is a champion for leveraging the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Kansas City.

As the founder and CEO, Johnson has leveraged local resources to transform her vision into a promising business.

A graduate of the University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC), Johnson credits the university's E Scholars Program for laying the groundwork for Interplay's success. The company is developing “one of the world's first interactive dog crates,” aiming to revolutionize pet care for busy owners. This supportive environment has contributed to Interplay's recent achievements. In August 2024,



the company was accepted into the Techstars Atlanta & New Orleans accelerator program, securing a \$120,000 investment. Johnson sees this as pivotal: “With the \$120,000 investment and world-class mentorship, we now have the funding and resources to scale the company and get our product in the hands of customers.”

Jonaie's relationships with local ESOs throughout her journey, like the Small Business Development Center and Digital Sandbox, have propelled her business. Her story highlights the strength of Kansas City's startup ecosystem and its capacity to nurture ambitious entrepreneurs.

<https://www.instagram.com/gointerplay/>

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/jonaie-johnson/>

<https://gointerplay.com/>



Innovating in Traditional Industries

Some Black women entrepreneurs are finding success by bringing innovation to traditional industries. In Little Rock, one entrepreneur has gained recognition for her unique approach to food preservation: “We are in the process of opening our new pickle production facility and I can’t believe that our pickles are now available in three states!” - Serreta Boson

Serreta “Mizz PickleLady” Boson:

A Journey of Growth and Resilience

Serreta Boson’s entrepreneurial journey began with a personal challenge that she transformed into a thriving business. In 2016, she faced a serious health scare that left her uncertain about her future. Inspired by a family recipe passed down from her father, she started her pickle business, Sarge’s Famous Pickles, to support herself. “It wasn’t until my lowest point that I realized my talents could create space for me,” she shared, reflecting on her recovery and the launch of her company.

As Serreta navigated the challenges of starting a business, she sought support from various

local programs. She gained the knowledge and resources needed to grow her business through her participation in various initiatives. However, the journey was not without obstacles. “Other programs were helpful but were not always the right fit for me,” she said, explaining that although they emphasized good credit, her circumstances at the time made it difficult to meet their criteria.

Despite these setbacks, Serreta persevered, ultimately securing a \$25,000 Imani grant through ReMix Ideas, which allowed her to purchase a food trailer and expand her offerings. With her pickles available in multiple states





Photo credit: Happy Moments, LLC.

Sarge's Famous Pickles



and a growing business, Serreta looks forward to new opportunities. “I know that once I get the food trucks up, that’s our turning point,” she remarked, confident about the future. Her story is one of resilience, demonstrating that even when the road is tough, dedication and the right support can lead to success.

The Grand Opening of the Food Truck and Production facility was August 2024!

2915 E Kiehl Avenue, Sherwood, AR,
United States, Arkansas (931) 698-0210 -
sargesfamouspickles.com
[https://www.facebook.com/
SargesFamousPickles](https://www.facebook.com/SargesFamousPickles)

Serreta’s success in expanding her pickle business across state lines showcases how product development and marketing innovation can lead to significant growth opportunities.





Factors Contributing to Success

Several key factors appear to contribute to the success of Black women entrepreneurs in Kansas City and Little Rock:

Resilience and Adaptability: Many entrepreneurs demonstrate a remarkable ability to pivot and adapt their business models in response to challenges.

Community Focus: Successful businesses often have a strong connection to their communities, addressing specific needs or gaps in the market.

Innovation: Whether in tech or traditional

industries, successful entrepreneurs often bring new ideas or approaches to their fields.

Networking and Relationship Building: Many successful entrepreneurs emphasize building strong networks and relationships within their communities and industries.

Leveraging Support Systems: While support systems may be imperfect, successful entrepreneurs often find ways to maximize their available resources.

Opportunities for Future Growth

Looking ahead, several areas present significant opportunities for Black women entrepreneurs in Kansas City and Little Rock:

E-commerce and Digital Marketing: As more businesses move online, there are growing opportunities for entrepreneurs who can effectively leverage digital platforms.

Green and Sustainable Businesses: With an increasing focus on sustainability, entrepreneurs in eco-friendly industries may find new growth opportunities.

Education and Training Services: As workforce needs evolve, there are opportunities for entrepreneurs to provide specialized training and education services.

Supplier Diversity Programs: As more corporations commit to supplier diversity, Black women-owned businesses may find new opportunities in B2B markets.

Social Impact Ventures: Businesses that combine profitability with positive social impact will likely find growing support and opportunities. Despite facing significant systemic barriers, Black women entrepreneurs in Kansas City and Little Rock are demonstrating remarkable resilience, creativity, and business acumen. By identifying niche markets, leveraging community support, and bringing innovation to various industries, these entrepreneurs are building successful businesses and contributing to their communities' economic vitality.

The success stories highlighted in this section demonstrate that with the right support, resources, and opportunities, Black women entrepreneurs have the potential to be powerful drivers of economic growth and innovation in their cities and beyond.



Recommendations for Policymakers and Support Organizations

Based on the research findings, this section offers actionable recommendations to improve the entrepreneurial ecosystem for Black women in Kansas City and Little Rock. These suggestions aim to address the specific challenges identified and build on the opportunities for growth and success.

Enhance Access to Capital

Several targeted funding initiatives and improvements in lending practices are essential to support the growth and sustainability of Black women-owned businesses. A key recommendation is to create targeted funding programs that specifically address the unique challenges faced by Black women entrepreneurs. This can be achieved by establishing low-interest loan programs tailored to their needs, helping to reduce the financial barriers to starting and growing their businesses. Additionally, grant programs should be developed focusing on industries where Black women are underrepresented, providing them with greater opportunities to enter and succeed in these sectors.

Improving existing lending practices is another critical step. Financial institutions should implement bias training for loan

officers and investment committees to ensure fair and equitable treatment of Black women entrepreneurs. Additionally, reviewing and revising lending criteria are necessary to remove unintentional discriminatory practices that may limit their access to capital.

Furthermore, alternative funding models should be encouraged. One strategy is to support the development of community investment funds that prioritize investments in minority-owned businesses, including those led by Black women. Promoting crowdfunding platforms specifically designed to cater to minority-owned businesses can also give these entrepreneurs greater access to capital, empowering them to scale their businesses and contribute to economic growth.

Strengthen Mentorship and Networking Opportunities

To enhance the support system for Black women entrepreneurs, it is crucial to establish comprehensive mentorship and networking initiatives. One important recommendation is establishing mentorship programs tailored to Black women entrepreneurs' needs. This can be done by creating a database of experienced Black women business owners willing to serve as mentors. In addition, structured mentorship programs should be developed to ensure



mentees are matched with the most suitable mentors based on their industry, goals, and professional needs.

Fostering networking opportunities is also essential for the growth of Black women entrepreneurs. Organizing regular, in-person networking events designed specifically for this group will allow them to connect with peers, share insights, and collaborate on new ventures. Additionally, creating online platforms for ongoing communication and support will enable Black women entrepreneurs to continuously engage with one another, providing a space for long-term collaboration and resource sharing.

To further strengthen these efforts, promoting cross-industry connections is necessary. Facilitating partnerships between established businesses and Black women-owned startups can open new doors for collaboration, mentorship, and business development. These partnerships can also help Black women entrepreneurs access larger networks and markets.

“... there are very few mentors that look like me, and so I had to go outside of the comfort zone, seek out those mentors that were willing to take the time and expend the energy into me.”

Tailor Support Programs to Specific Needs

Black women entrepreneurs often face unique challenges that existing support programs fail to address. A common issue is that these programs do not adequately consider the specific needs of businesses at various growth stages, leaving many entrepreneurs underserved. To overcome this, developing stage-appropriate support that caters to businesses across their life cycles is essential. Programs should be designed for entrepreneurs at different stages, from startups just getting off the ground to scale-up businesses looking to expand. Particular attention should be given to addressing the “missing middle,” where businesses have outgrown initial support but are not yet ready for more advanced, later-stage programs. This gap often leaves entrepreneurs without the resources they need to grow sustainably.

Additionally, providing industry-specific training is crucial for supporting Black women entrepreneurs in sectors where they are concentrated or emerging. By offering targeted training in these areas, programs can better equip entrepreneurs with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in their specific fields.

It is important to provide holistic support that addresses these entrepreneurs' professional and personal challenges. This includes offering resources that help balance work-life demands and support mental health, critical aspects of maintaining a sustainable business.

Increase Representation in Leadership and Decision-Making Roles

To enhance the entrepreneurial ecosystem for Black women, it is essential to implement strategic diversity initiatives that promote representation and inclusion at all levels. Implementing diversity initiatives within Entrepreneurial Support Organizations (ESOs) is a key recommendation. This can be achieved

by setting clear targets for increasing the representation of Black women in leadership roles. Developing leadership development programs specifically tailored for Black women entrepreneurs will also help ensure they have the skills, resources, and networks needed to advance into leadership positions.

Ensuring that diverse perspectives are integrated into decision-making processes is another critical step. Black women entrepreneurs should be included on boards and committees that shape entrepreneurship policies and programs. Their lived experiences and insights are invaluable for developing programs that effectively address the challenges faced by minority entrepreneurs.

Supporting Black women-led support organizations is also vital. These organizations are key in providing tailored support to Black women entrepreneurs. By providing funding and resources to organizations founded and led by Black women, we can help these entities expand their reach and impact within the entrepreneurial ecosystem.



Data Point: In Kansas City, while 38% of ESOs reported primarily serving Black entrepreneurs, only 25% of these organizations had leadership teams that reflected this demographic.

Address Market Access Barriers

To expand opportunities for Black women entrepreneurs, particularly in accessing larger markets, developing strategies that promote visibility and inclusion in key business ecosystems is essential. One recommendation is to develop supplier diversity initiatives in collaboration with large corporations and government agencies. These initiatives should aim to establish or enhance supplier diversity programs that prioritize contracts with Black women-owned businesses. Training programs should also be provided to help these businesses qualify for supplier diversity opportunities, ensuring they have the necessary skills and certifications to compete effectively.

Another important step is to create showcasing opportunities for Black women-owned businesses. Organizing trade shows or expos specifically featuring these businesses will give them direct access to potential customers, partners, and investors. Furthermore, developing online platforms that showcase Black women-owned businesses can provide continuous visibility and help connect them with new markets and strategic partnerships.

Facilitating market research and intelligence is also crucial for helping Black women entrepreneurs identify new business opportunities. By providing resources and tools

for conducting market research, entrepreneurs can better understand emerging trends, customer preferences, and untapped markets, allowing them to grow their businesses strategically.

“My business predominantly caters to black Arkansans specifically as it stands right now... I couldn’t find one person that left any breadcrumbs for me to follow when I started this.”

Improve Data Collection and Reporting

One of the key challenges in supporting Black women-owned businesses is the lack of comprehensive, up-to-date data on their operations and outcomes, particularly at the city level. To address this gap, it is critical to enhance data collection efforts. Regular surveys and studies focused specifically on Black women entrepreneurs should be conducted to gather insights into their business challenges, opportunities, and growth patterns. Partnering with local universities to carry out longitudinal studies will provide a deeper understanding of long-term business outcomes and trends, helping to build a more accurate picture of the entrepreneurial landscape over time.

Ensuring transparency in reporting is another essential step. Publishing annual reports on the state of Black women’s entrepreneurship in each city will raise awareness and allow stakeholders to measure progress and identify areas where further support is needed. This data should be used to track the effectiveness of existing support programs and policies, ensuring that initiatives meet their intended goals and serve Black women entrepreneurs’ needs.



Finally, adopting a data-driven approach to policymaking is crucial. By leveraging the data collected, cities can develop and refine entrepreneurship policies and programs that are directly informed by the experiences and outcomes of Black women entrepreneurs. This approach will ensure that support programs are more targeted, equitable, and impactful, ultimately leading to better outcomes for these business owners.

Foster a Culture of Inclusive Entrepreneurship

To effectively support and elevate Black women entrepreneurs, a multi-faceted approach is necessary, focusing on visibility, education, and inclusivity. A key strategy is to promote success stories by showcasing the achievements of Black women entrepreneurs through targeted media campaigns and awards programs. These initiatives can raise awareness

of their contributions to the economy and be powerful tools for inspiring the next generation of entrepreneurs. By amplifying their success, young and aspiring business owners can see tangible examples of achievement and resilience in the face of systemic challenges.

In addition to celebrating these successes, educating the broader community—specifically investors, banks, and entrepreneurial support organizations—about the unique challenges and opportunities involved in supporting Black women entrepreneurs is essential. Tailored educational programs can equip these stakeholders with the knowledge and understanding necessary to dismantle biases and foster more equitable access to resources. This effort promotes awareness and builds stronger, more informed networks that can provide critical financial and operational support.

Creating inclusive spaces is another fundamental recommendation. Developing co-working spaces and incubators that are designed to cater to diverse entrepreneurs, including Black women, can offer more than just office space. These environments provide a sense of community, mentorship, and access to resources, all in a culturally supportive atmosphere.

Inclusive spaces allow entrepreneurs to focus on innovation and growth without the need to navigate barriers or biases within traditional business environments.

Implementing these recommendations will require collaboration between policymakers, support organizations, the private sector, and entrepreneurs. Kansas City and Little Rock can create more inclusive, dynamic, and

prosperous entrepreneurial ecosystems by taking a comprehensive, data-driven approach to supporting Black women entrepreneurs. These efforts will benefit Black women entrepreneurs and contribute to the overall economic vitality and innovation in both cities.

Final thoughts

Black women entrepreneurs in Kansas City and Little Rock are powerful drivers of innovation, economic growth, and community development. Despite facing significant challenges, these business owners demonstrate remarkable resilience, creativity, and determination. This report has highlighted their experiences, challenges, and opportunities, revealing both the untapped potential of Black women entrepreneurs and the urgent need for systemic change in the entrepreneurial ecosystem.



Key Findings:

Access to Capital: The most significant barrier for Black women entrepreneurs is limited access to funding. In both cities, Black women-owned businesses earn substantially less than the average women-owned firm, with Kansas City businesses earning about 59% and Little Rock businesses earning about 68% of their counterparts' revenue.

Lack of Representation: There's a critical shortage of mentors and leaders who understand the unique experiences of Black women entrepreneurs. This gap extends to leadership positions within support organizations, limiting the effectiveness of existing programs.

Market Barriers: Many Black women entrepreneurs struggle to break into established markets and business networks, often having to create their own paths in niche industries.

Resilience and Innovation: Despite these challenges, Black women entrepreneurs show incredible resourcefulness, often leveraging

community support and creating innovative solutions to overcome barriers.

Emerging Opportunities: Black women are finding success in various sectors, including technology, health and wellness, and creative industries, often addressing crucial needs in their communities.

The importance of supporting Black women entrepreneurs cannot be overstated. Their success contributes not only to their economic empowerment but also to job creation, economic diversification, and the overall vitality of their communities.

The need for systemic change is clear. While individual success stories are inspiring, they highlight the extraordinary effort required to overcome persistent barriers. True progress will require coordinated action from policymakers, support organizations, financial institutions, and the broader business community.





Call to Action:

To create more inclusive and supportive entrepreneurial ecosystems in Kansas City and Little Rock, stakeholders must:

Develop targeted funding programs that address the unique capital needs of Black women entrepreneurs.

Increase representation of Black women in leadership positions within support organizations and funding bodies.

Create mentorship and networking programs that connect Black women entrepreneurs with culturally relevant guidance and support.

Tailor support services to address the specific challenges faced by Black women entrepreneurs at different stages of business growth.

Implement supplier diversity initiatives and market access programs to help Black women-owned businesses expand their reach.

Improve data collection and reporting to track progress and inform evidence-based policies and programs.

Foster a culture of inclusive entrepreneurship through education, media representation, and community engagement.

These recommendations can provide starting points for Kansas City and Little Rock to enhance their entrepreneurial environments that support the unique needs of Black women entrepreneurs to drive greater economic growth and community development.

As this report demonstrates, the potential of Black women entrepreneurs is vast and largely under-optimized. ESOs can harness this potential by addressing the systemic barriers entrepreneurs face and providing targeted, effective support, creating more equitable and prosperous communities for everyone.

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Colophon

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