LEVERAGING DIGITAL

Resources and Training for Small Business Growth and Community Benefit

AEO | In partnership with **Empower** By **GoDaddy**

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Executive Summary

Kenya Freeman, Sylvia Mollie Collections

AS THE BUSINESS WORLD DIGITIZED

over the last decade, GoDaddy identified a pressing need: Small businesses in underserved communities needed help creating a digital presence. Research made clear that bolstering these businesses — especially microbusinesses — would promote equity and economic inclusion in low-income and minority communities. **GoDaddy Venture Forward Initiative, a multi-year research effort to quantify the impact of 20 million U.S. microbusinesses on the U.S. economy,** found that microbusinesses need technical assistance, what AEO calls trusted guidance — training, tools, and access to networks — to establish and improve their websites, e-commerce capabilities, and digital marketing strategies.

In 2017, this insight prompted GoDaddy to partner with leading nonprofits to roll out **Empower by GoDaddy**, a community-based program to bring digital marketing expertise to microbusiness owners. A year later, GoDaddy joined up with Association for Enterprise Opportunity (AEO), the leading voice of innovation for microfinance and
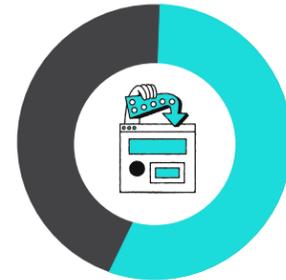
More than 50% of all small business owners surveyed do not have a website, measure the results of their marketing or have a social media account.[1]
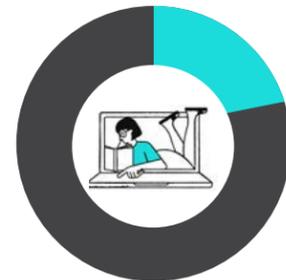
Less than 25% of microbusiness development organizations surveyed help clients navigate technology.[2]

microbusiness, to expand the program nationwide. With a mission to create economic opportunity for underserved U.S. entrepreneurs and a history of engineering transformational change through research, convening, incubation, and advocacy, AEO was in a good position to help GoDaddy provide small and microbusinesses full-surround support.

The expanded Empower program reached entrepreneurs in their communities across the U.S., providing them with resources and guidance to improve their digital skills. To best reach underserved demographics in rural and urban including veterans, women, people of color, immigrants, refugees, seniors, and members of the LGBTQ community — the program partnered with business support organizations (BSOs) to deliver the program's training, tools, and resources.

In 2020, the coronavirus pandemic made the need for training on digital tools and capabilities for small businesses all the more urgent as shoppers turned to e-commerce, digital marketing gained more prominence, and more everyday business tasks had to be done remotely.

A business support organization (BSOs) is a for-profit, nonprofit, or public organization dedicated to supporting the stability and growth of small businesses via technical assistance and access to networks.[3]

Approximately
13 million
financially vulnerable small business owners operate in the U.S.(Prosperity Now)

The Empower program was positioned to help small businesses embrace this sudden change instead of suffering from it.

Through its partnership with AEO, the Empower by GoDaddy program served 1,756 small business owners in 26 states in its first year. Almost 90% of program participants saw increased revenue after completing the program, with 61% saying theirs grew up to 10%, and nearly 25% reporting more than a 10% increase. Importantly, most participants felt they had increased knowledge and greater confidence in building a digital presence.

This program can serve as a model for communities and stakeholders seeking to create impact within the small business sector around the country. Empower by GoDaddy is replicable, and the lessons learned are robust and actionable.

This report presents the details of the program and offers a call-to-action and a set of strategies aimed at helping build an entrepreneurial ecosystem that can have a profound impact on communities — especially underserved communities — throughout the United States.

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02

The *Power* of Small Business

SMALL BUSINESSES PLAY A CRITICAL ROLE in the U.S. economy by providing income, building wealth, and creating upward mobility across racial, ethnic, and gender lines. A robust small business ecosystem leads to higher incomes for owners, better outcomes for their families, strengthened local and regional communities, and significant advantages for the national economy. Small business wages are frequently higher than — even double — the federal minimum wage, and when these businesses grow and hire, they create resilience within their communities.[4] AEO has even stated that small businesses "wield an inherently boundless power to resuscitate America's employment and economic health.[5]

Businesses that employ five or fewer people, known as microbusinesses, have an outsized presence within the small business community and in U.S. communities. Microbusinesses make up 92% of U.S. businesses and are responsible for more than 41 million U.S. jobs.[6] GoDaddy research found that each new microbusiness that is added to the U.S. economy per 100 residents increases annual household median income by $485.[7] In addition, GoDaddy Venture Forward research reports that two jobs are created for every entrepreneur, whether via direct hiring, supplying materials, or bringing money into the community. In 2011, AEO found that if one in three microbusinesses were to each hire a single employee, the U.S. would reach full employment.[8]

Above: Jennifer Woodruff, Naturally Made with Love
Next Page: Mindi Breen, Wolf Howl Honey

The path of self-employment provides autonomy, flexibility, and earning potential that can be of particular value to people from underserved communities, especially women and people of color. Research by AEO finds the median net worth of Latinx business owners is almost five times higher than that of Latinx non-business owners. For African-American women, the difference is more than tenfold.[9] These types of advantages make small business an attractive career path for people from underrepresented communities. A survey by GoDaddy showed that business owners in

Fortunately, it has never been easier to start a small business. In today's digitized economy, there is a low barrier to entry to becoming self-employed, and the option offers an attractive path toward financial independence for those seeking a flexible alternative to traditional employment. Aspiring business owners can be any age, do not need a college degree, and can usually start a business with a small initial investment, often using personal assets. The small business community includes not only young professionals and established, middle-aged entrepreneurs — the median age of small business owners is 50 — but also older people seeking out second careers or a more active retirement. The appeal and sustainability of everyday entrepreneurism lies not just in its affordability and accessibility, but also in an evolving desire to feel financially empowered and autonomous. For some small business owners, those feelings stem from a changing economic ecosystem, while others feel a pressing drive toward localism and community.

Microbusinesses make up approximately

92%

of U.S. businesses
and are responsible for more than 41 million U.S. jobs.[6]

marginalized communities were more interested than entrepreneurs from non-marginalized communities in transforming their businesses from supplemental to a main source of income: African American respondents were 250% more likely, women 68% more likely, and foreign-born business owners 150% more likely.

As policymakers, community organizations, and others take a deeper interest in the future of work in a quickly changing economy, they should stay alert to the fact that small businesses can create impressive resilience, growth, and economic opportunity for communities around the country.

03

What Small Businesses *Need* Today

Georganne Bryant, Frances

TODAY'S BUSINESS LANDSCAPE

looks different than that of a decade ago, and — thanks to COVID-19 — different even than the picture of two years ago. Digitization is the dominant trend, and while that has been the case for years now, the pandemic super-charged the speed and urgency of this shift. McKinsey reports that the pandemic accelerated the progress of digital transformation by three or four years. Executives told McKinsey that they see this shift as permanent and are making investments in further digital advancement.[10]

Statistics bear out the importance of this development. UN trade and development experts report that global ecommerce's share of retail sales jumped from 16% to 19% during 2020, calling the rise "dramatic,"[11] and McKinsey reports that e-commerce experienced 10 years' worth of growth in three months in 2020.[12]

> " The density of websites represents an important new measure of digital participation in communities and in local economies."
>
> *–Harvard Business Review Analytic Services* [13]

A survey of 8,200 marketers by Salesforce found that 90% had changed their approach during the pandemic, with 91% focusing on social media, 88% publishing digital content, and 86% putting energy into websites and apps.[14] Research from PYMNTS found that in fall 2020, one-third of consumers said they were very or extremely

likely to purchase from a retailer that offers digital, touchless offerings over one that doesn't. This data and more like it prompted PYMTS to ask whether small businesses can "avoid being left behind in the great digital shift."[15]

Creating a robust digital presence has become a near-necessity for many small business, no matter their sector or location. While some small businesses have a brick-and-mortar presence, online activity can provide a much broader scope of economic opportunity, as it does not rely on physical proximity to customers.

With the rapid rise in digitization and changing customer expectations about how businesses should market and sell, small businesses urgently need support in ensuring their digital presence is robust. GoDaddy Venture Forward data shows that a digital presence can expand the reach and financial success of small enterprises, and that they need technical assistance or what AEO calls trusted guidance — training, tools, and networks — to establish and enhance an effective digital presence. A GoDaddy customer survey found that 77% of microbusinesses believe that having a website would increase revenue, but 50% do not have a website because it seems too difficult or too costly to create one.
Eighty-three percent of the BSOs that work with the Empower by GoDaddy program believe that small business owners need better strategies to expand customer markets, which these days means better digital outreach and e-commerce capabilities.

Left Page: Hopeton St. Clair Hibbert, St. Clair Renaissance

As a McKinsey study puts it: "Access to technology is vital… Technology companies could play a critical role by providing affordable or free access to digital tools and solutions to help the most vulnerable companies upgrade their technology and compete in the digital age."[16]

With the Empower program, GoDaddy and AEO are doing just that — bringing digital marketing expertise and tools to business owners from all socioeconomic backgrounds to support their success.

> " Small businesses with slim margins have little room to invest in the business models and technologies that they will need to survive. It will take collaboration across the economy to keep them afloat."
>
> *– McKinsey & Co.* [17]

04

Empower by GoDaddy:
Enabling Small Business to Strengthen Communities

Christy Moore, Social Spin Laundromat

WITH THE RIGHT SUPPORT in the context of the digital landscape, small business owners can build their ventures into viable commercial enterprises that are financially sustainable, contribute toward equity and economic inclusion, and increase the resilience of their communities. In service to that goal, Empower by GoDaddy provides individualized marketing education and mentorship, access to custom online workshops and coaching support in group and webinar settings, networking opportunities, and free GoDaddy products to establish an online presence.

The program's three-pronged approach includes:

1. **Live training and one-on-one coaching**
2. **A free domain name and website for two years**
3. **A learning platform with robust curriculum that can be accessed at any time**

The curriculum consists of 10 modules, video tutorials, worksheets, a facilitators guide for in-person cohorts, and access to no-cost coaching by industry experts at GoDaddy. With the advent of the coronavirus pandemic, GoDaddy and AEO adapted the program to be delivered remotely, training partners to run virtual programming and ensuring that all entrepreneurs had access to laptops and wi-fi to fully engage in a virtual experience.

The Empower by GoDaddy Module Topics:

1. Evaluate Your Brand
2. Choose the Right Tools for You
3. Design a Great Website
4. Creating Your Site Content
5. Getting Found Through SEO
6. Creating Your E-Commerce Presence
7. Grow Your Business with Email Marketing
8. Mastering Your Brand's Social Media
9. Offer an Exceptional Sales and Customer Service Experience
10. Protecting Your Website

When participants complete at least three modules from the curriculum, they receive a promotion code for a free bundle of tools — either focused on website-building or on e-commerce — that they can access for up to two years. After two years, businesses are automatically enrolled into a discounted program offering 50-70% off product renewals and new products.

66 *I love that GoDaddy, a big business, is giving back in a way and helping people out who want to start their own business, and giving them the opportunity to build their business before paying for the services.*"

–Maine Cohort Participant

This approach is unique in the program landscape; both qualitative and quantitative feedback from entrepreneurs in the program found value in the combination of tools, curriculum, and coaching — and revealed that no single approach works as well as this combination. Empower by GoDaddy offers community stakeholders a framework for providing trusted advice and support to entrepreneurs.

The Empower by GoDaddy program leverages local BSOs that play an important role in advocating, supporting, and guiding small businesses. These BSOs are the implementers of the program and can offer it one of two ways— high-touch or low-touch — depending on community needs and BSO capacity.

The high-touch option uses a cohort model that allows small business owners to network and learn in community. The low-touch delivery model allows for a self-guided experience appropriate for business owners who have a basic understanding of digital presence and who require flexibility. This customizable design allows BSOs to fit the Empower program into their workflows and use it to supplement existing programming.

66 *Thanks to Empower, now I can build my own professional website with the platform and tools I learned throughout the course while managing my online marketing. It doesn't feel like such a hard task anymore for someone like me who doesn't have a business background.*"

- Empower Participant

05

Case Studies of the
Empower Program
in Urban and Rural
Communities

Georgia Micro Enterprise Network Assists Entrepreneurs in South Atlanta

THE GEORGIA MICRO ENTERPRISE NETWORK (GMEN), a membership-based nonprofit organization that improves economic self-sufficiency throughout Georgia via microbusinesses development, partnered with AEO and GoDaddy to offer the Empower program in predominantly Black South Atlanta. GMEN sought to address limited digital literacy and lack of access to computers among microbusiness owners in this densely populated urban area.

GMEN worked with three cohorts of microbusiness owners to build websites. Since many microbusiness owners in the area conduct most of their online activity using smartphones, which limits their ability to create robust websites and an efficient digital presence, GMEN's director requested that AEO provide participants with tablet devices to access the Empower by GoDaddy programs and resources. Individual, hands-on coaching created the most success for participants; this high-touch delivery of the Empower program was so popular that the classes were standing-room only.

Raising GMEN's profile in the Atlanta ecosystem was one of the many benefits of its hosting the Empower program: GMEN was able to leverage its success with Empower to build partnerships and programming with other organizations to offer additional support to its clients.

Spurred by this success, GMEN is developing plans to bring Empower by GoDaddy to rural Georgia in a van packed with tablets and wireless hotspots to replicate the effect of the program in Atlanta.

Above: Ian Morris, wellbox

Participant Profile: Dana Pettaway

Dana, who runs a side business as a virtual personal assistant, had limited time and money to invest in her business but knew she needed to create a website and learn to use social media. The Empower program offered her a free domain name, two years of free website hosting, and training on scheduling content across social media platforms. More than a year after finishing the program, she still relies on a cohort member as an accountability partner and keeps the lines of communication open with GMEN.

" I loved being part of a group because they gave me feedback on my level… I got to meet a lot of people and I learned a lot about other businesses that are in my community."

–Dana Pettaway, Virtual Reality Assisting Firm, Atlanta Empower Program Participant

Participant Profile: Avoilan Bingham

Avoilan, owner of a company in the tech space, viewed his selection as an Empower program participant as validation of his business concept. Before Empower he said he had no digital engagement strategy, and the program helped increase his confidence in his ability to create and manage a professional digital presence. With Empower, entrepreneurs like Avoilan get a proof-of-concept backed by industry best practices for establishing a digital presence and digital marketing strategy.

" I saw Empower as an opportunity to take what I was doing to the next level, really kind of legitimize and validate what I've been working on."

–Avoilan Bingham, The Bingham Agency, Atlanta Empower Program Participant

New Ventures Maine Boosts Rural Microbusinesses

FOR 40 YEARS, New Ventures Maine has offered free, one-on-one consulting and tuition-free classes to aspiring entrepreneurs and small business owners throughout the state, particularly in rural areas where 61% of Maine residents live. Due to Maine's largely rural landscape, launching and sustaining a successful business requires a digital presence.

> " Little businesses in rural Maine need that reach; they need to get outside of their local area… it's critically important that these entrepreneurs are online."
>
> —*Karin, New Ventures Maine, Program Manager*

New Ventures Maine partnered with the GoDaddy Empower program to help entrepreneurs gain the critical digital presence required to expand their reach and gain new customers. Many participants started with a single social media page and maybe an e-commerce site, and while some had their own websites, these were often of poor quality, leaving customers confused or disengaged. Empower helped participants improve these elements and align them in a coordinated digital presence.

While Maine microbusinesses stand to gain tremendous exposure and reach to new markets through a digital presence, many homes and small towns have unreliable broadband internet coverage. Some of the program participants do not have internet access at home, but were able to get online at New Ventures Maine locations throughout the state, a vital assist in helping them with digital development.

Participant Profile: Janet Grieco

Janet, an owner of an artisan tisane and organic tea company in Perham, Maine, had long relied on word-of-mouth to grow her business. She had no website or digital strategy when she enrolled in the Empower program, and she now has a thriving digital presence that has led to a dramatic increase in visibility and sales. A local television program found her website and interviewed her, exposure that resulted in her products' placement in a statewide chain of stores focused on locally produced goods.

> " Every time I go to the farmer's market now, people say, 'My friend told me about your web page, and I looked it up and had to come and find you!' The fact that the web page and the things that we're putting out there are bringing people to become aware of what we do is really good."
>
> –*Janet Grieco, Greater Northwood Tea, Maine Empower Program Participant*

Participant Profile: Laura Hale

Laura will soon open the doors of an independent bookstore in rural Maine just south of the Canadian border. The structure of the Empower program fit Laura's needs perfectly, and the free domain and website hosting saved her thousands of dollars. Laura is using her website as an advertising tool to build awareness and generate excitement about her new brick-and-mortar store. In the short time her website has been live, it has delivered much-needed visibility and credibility to her fledgling business.
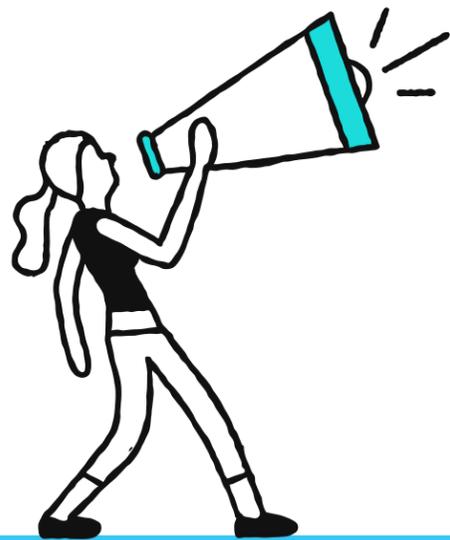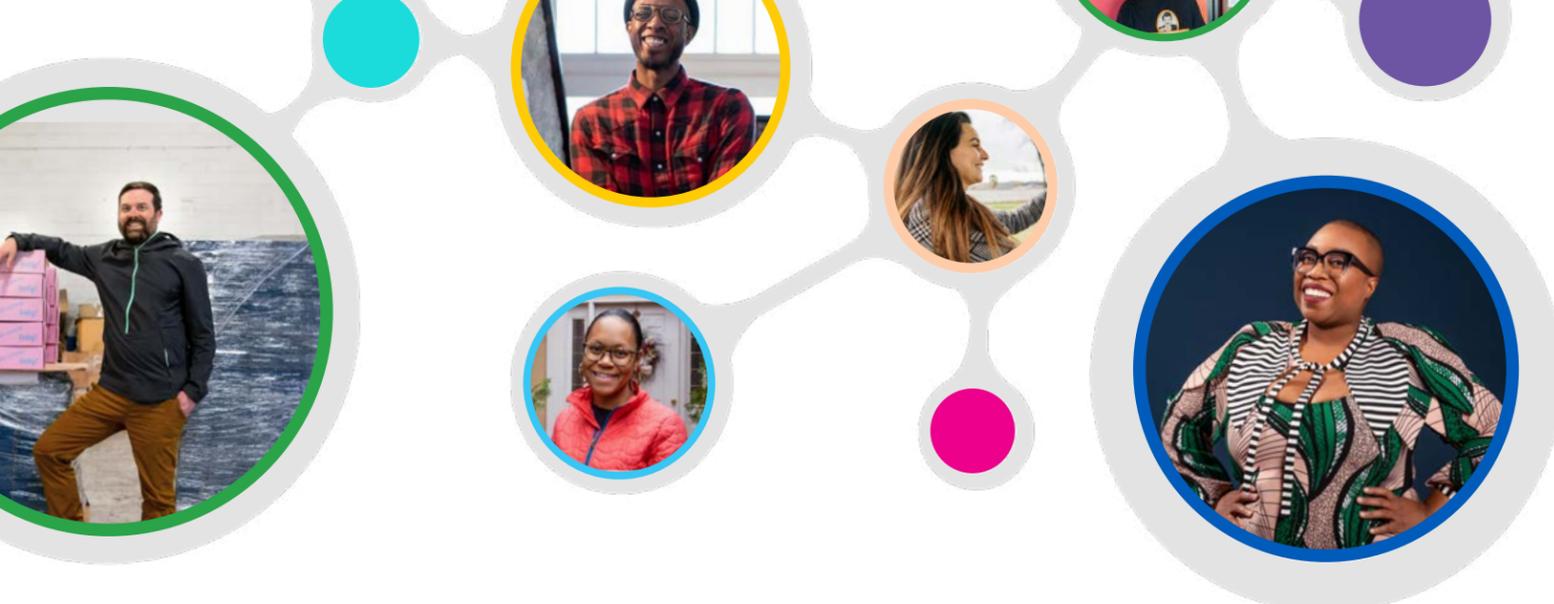
> " I wouldn't have been able to do a website on my own, without this program… It was a really great opportunity for me to create my own website and do it affordably."
>
> –*Laura Hale, Neighborhood Books, Maine Empower Program Participant*

Call-to-Action:
Help Create a Thriving
Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

Stephen Ochs, Fetch Park

Call-to-ACTION

AEO and **GoDaddy** call on *policymakers*, *corporations*, and *community organizations such as BSOs* to join forces in strategic partnerships to support thriving microbusiness ecosystems that can contribute to the overall success of communities across the country.

THE IMPACT OF THE EMPOWER PROGRAM mobilizes the support of multiple actors in the entrepreneurial ecosystem, each working toward the collective goal of supporting small and microbusiness owners that need access to resources.

An entrepreneurial ecosystem is a network bound together by a culture of trust, collaboration, and strategic alignment that allows stakeholders to foster innovative solutions for entrepreneurs. The speed at which talent, information, and resources move through the ecosystem can affect entrepreneurs at each stage of their business growth. Ecosystem size matters: The economic impact of each additional startup grows as the ecosystem grows. The larger the ecosystem, the higher the performance and average value of each startup.[18]

Urban and rural economies benefit tremendously from the growth of local small businesses, and key stakeholders in these communities have the power to lift these business owners in their quest for long-term financial stability. Governments are the most powerful drivers of entrepreneurship given their ability to create an enabling policy and regulatory environment and their role in ensuring innovators have access to necessary technological infrastructure.[19] Corporations can enable small business success by serving as capital providers, thought leaders, partners, customers, and providers of talent.[20] BSOs play the important role of advocating, supporting, and guiding small businesses, addressing disparities in opportunity, and connecting entrepreneurs to training, resources, and capital.[21]

All stakeholders stand to benefit from an investment in microbusiness success, from improved local economies to increased customer potential for business services. As these small business owners build and grow their operations, they create jobs and economic opportunity. But to succeed, they need the cooperation and support in developing a dynamic and compelling digital presence.

This is why AEO and GoDaddy call on policymakers, corporations, and community organizations such as BSOs to join forces in strategic partnerships to support thriving microbusiness ecosystems that can contribute to the health of communities across the country.

Previous page: from top left to right:
ET Rivera, Tres Leches Café
Werc Crew, Xavier BLK
Christy Moore, Social Spin Laundromat
Cameron Robertson, Cameron's Violin Workshop
Hopeton St. Clair Hibbert, St. Clair Renaissance
Nikki Shaffer, The Farm At South Mountain
Ian Morris, wellbox
Jennifer Woodruff, Naturally Made with Love
Anaré V. Holmes, Anaré Holmes
Kenya Freeman, Sylvia Mollie Collections

Radesha Williams, Brunch-ish

07

Strategies for Policymakers and Partners to *Uplift* Small Businesses

AS MARKET AND WORKFORCE NEEDS shift, reimagining the digital landscape to include vibrant small businesses allows innovative solutions to emerge. To that end, GoDaddy and AEO have identified key strategies that partner organizations can implement to help shape the future of business and work.

For Local BSOs

Use inspirational stories to recruit participants.

Share past participant success stories to motivate potential participants to join the program. These stories will help participants know what to expect and will reinforce the legitimacy of the program's methods.

Provide or reinforce basic skills before leveling-up to program content.

Basic digital literacy is the most-needed skill among Empower by GoDaddy program participants. Offer training to build digital literacy and basic computer skills before teaching more sophisticated skills such as website creation or e-commerce strategy design and implementation.

Provide segmented training and support for product- and service-based businesses.

While a digital presence is necessary for both product- and service-based businesses, they differ in what kind of tools and training they need and how to best leverage them. Help each entrepreneur achieve the most success by customizing training and support to their needs.

Create meaningful connections through business owner stories.

Highlight real stories and successes from microbusiness owners' lived experiences. While funders and partners find data compelling, understanding the personal and community impact of specific businesses resonates with audiences and sets the stage for deeper engagement.

Foster an environment that facilitates peer learning and networking.

Business owners learn best from other business owners who are facing similar challenges. Encourage ways for participants to learn from the experiences of others. Moreover, new opportunities, such as partnerships or promotional possibilities, come from making new connections. Intentionally build community to create meaningful support for program participants.

Implement a "train-the-trainer" model.

To ensure consistency and standardization in delivery and experience, subject matter experts should train staff responsible for supporting the implementation of any digital literacy program. Equipping staff with an adequate level of proficiency and comfort with the curriculum and tools will help ensure program success.

Previous page: Scott and Lori Neff, As You Wish Pottery

> " Legislators, policymakers, and even judges don't know just how many everyday entrepreneurs there are, or how profound their influence is."
>
> *–Harvard Business Review Analytic Services* [22]

For Policymakers

Invest in digital skills training to support up-skilling the workforce.
As the future of work continues to shift toward the digital space, community leaders must ensure that the workforce has the appropriate digital literacy to compete. A tech-savvy entrepreneur can respond better and faster to changing customer expectations and maintain a competitive edge. And with small businesses employing 47% of the private-sector workforce, training them on digital literacy is an essential strategy to keep that hiring going as they are enabled to grow.[23]

Gather insights from microbusiness owners.
Focus groups, in-depth interviews, and surveys offer insight into the experiences, challenges, and journeys of small business owners. Policymakers can learn what they need to survive and grow and uncover strategic opportunities to enhance support to generate increased value and social impact.

Leverage data showing the economic and community-building power of microbusinesses.
Policymakers can pull microbusinesses out of the margins by highlighting the tremendous impact they impart to their local economies. Policymakers can tap into tools like **Venture Forward**, a multi-year research effort led by GoDaddy, to help them quantify the microbusiness contribution to the business landscape.

**Foster a small business-friendly environment through incentives.**
Policymakers can help offset the costs of doing business for microbusiness owners by offering tax refunds and other incentives that make broadband internet and other necessities businesses rely on more accessible and affordable for all.

Invest in accessible and affordable broadband access in all geographic areas.
Lack of access to affordable broadband internet inhibits microbusiness owners' ability to launch and grow within the digital landscape. Subsidies can make reliable broadband a feasible reality, even for rural communities where the high cost can prevent local leaders from pursuing greater connectivity. Some options for closing the gap include electrical cooperatives, alternative technologies, and public-private partnerships.[24]

Next page (Top): Ron Hill, Ron Hill Photography
Next page (Bottom): Stephen Ochs, Fetch Park
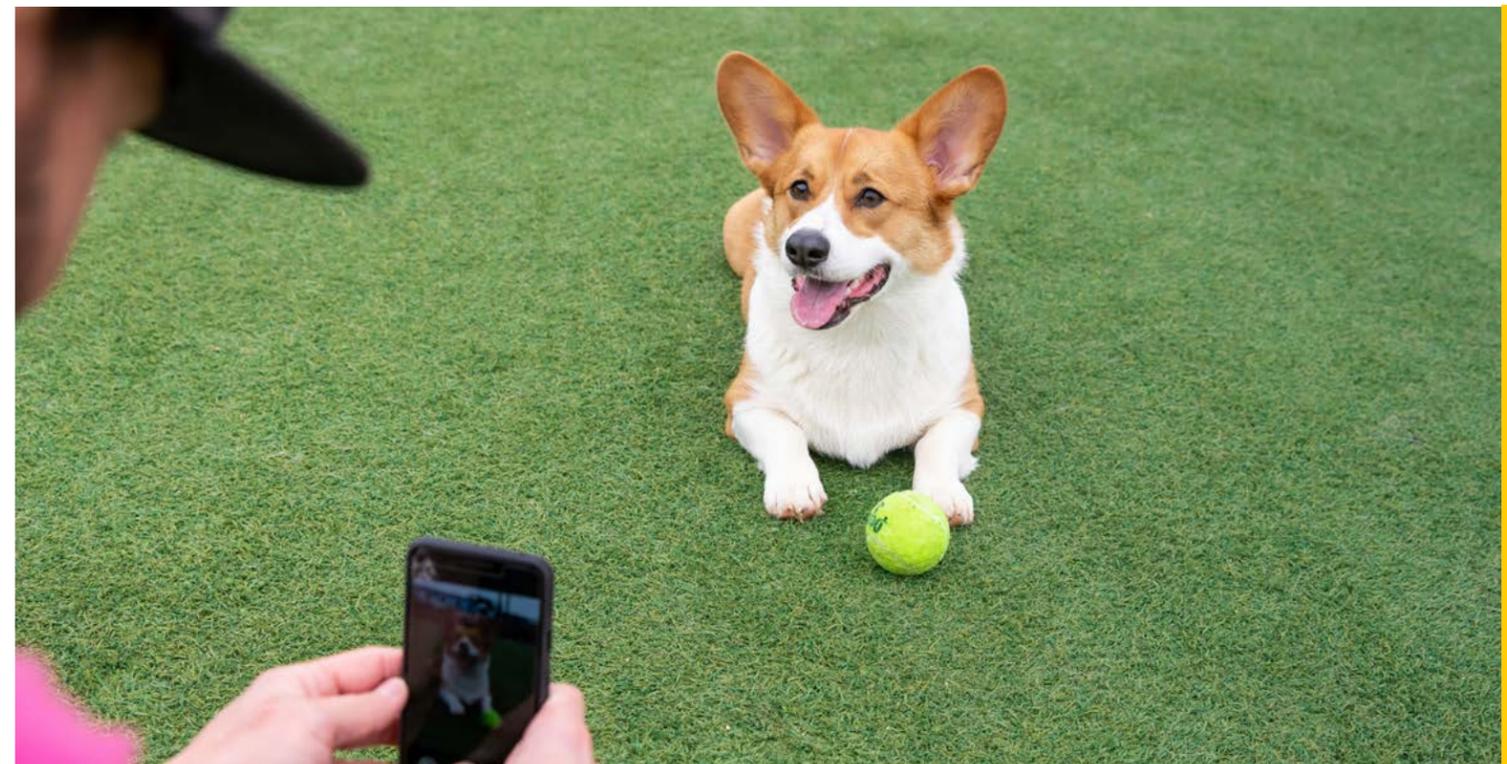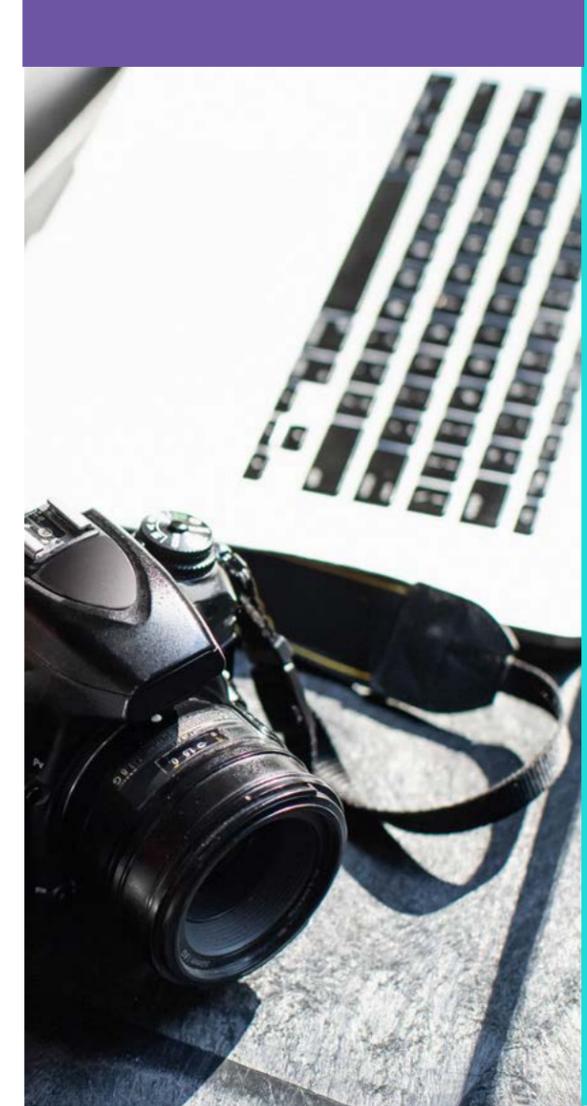
For Corporate and Philanthropic Partners

✅ **Leverage your company's expertise via critical coaching and mentorship.**
Coaching and mentoring relationships between staff and local entrepreneurs can create new opportunities for networking, potential business ideas, and overall growth as entrepreneurs seek trusted guidance and support. Such programs also help companies build critical community relationships and put their corporate social responsibility values into action.

❝ Working closely with our Empower entrepreneurs provided me with a sense of purpose. I was able to see a direct impact in the work I did and what we do as a company. I went back to the office more inspired and ready to be my best to carry out our mission, once I was able to see (in person) the impact we truly make as a company.❞

– Courtney, Learning Operations Analyst, GoDaddy People Operations – Gilbert, AZ

Left: Courtney and others, GoDaddy
Next page: Empower Entrepreneurs participating in GoDaddy's Made in America Empower workshops.

✅ **Establish strategic partnerships with local BSOs.**
Cross-sector partnerships create mutual value and deep social impact. Working with BSOs and entrepreneurs creates win-win-win situations that bring together diverse resources in ways that achieve more impact, greater sustainability, and increased value to all stakeholders.

✅ **Integrate microbusiness' experiences and needs into new program and service designs.**
A deep understanding of the needs of microbusinesses should drive the design and development of programs and services. This approach ensures that small business engagement is relevant and meaningful, which results in increased business value and social impact.[25]

✅ **Facilitate partnerships that eliminate fragmentation in local ecosystems.**
Navigating the wide variety of virtual and in-person entrepreneurial resources available can cause confusion and low engagement among entrepreneurs. Partnerships aimed at mapping these resources, aligning their provisions, and helping entrepreneurs navigate the ecosystem can help entrepreneurs efficiently connect to the resources they need.

✅ **Communicate stories of impact.**
Share stories about how small businesses are having impact from the perspective of entrepreneurs, partners and community leaders. It's also helpful to share your corporate perspective on the impact small businesses have in the community, leveraging your brand and reach to support small businesses.

08

Conclusion

Empower Entrepreneur participating in GoDaddy's Made in America Empower workshops.

> ❝ Inclusive growth and development is possible in the digitally enabled economy, and ... supporting online participation for businesses and residents is one strategy for promoting economic opportunity and thriving communities. ❞
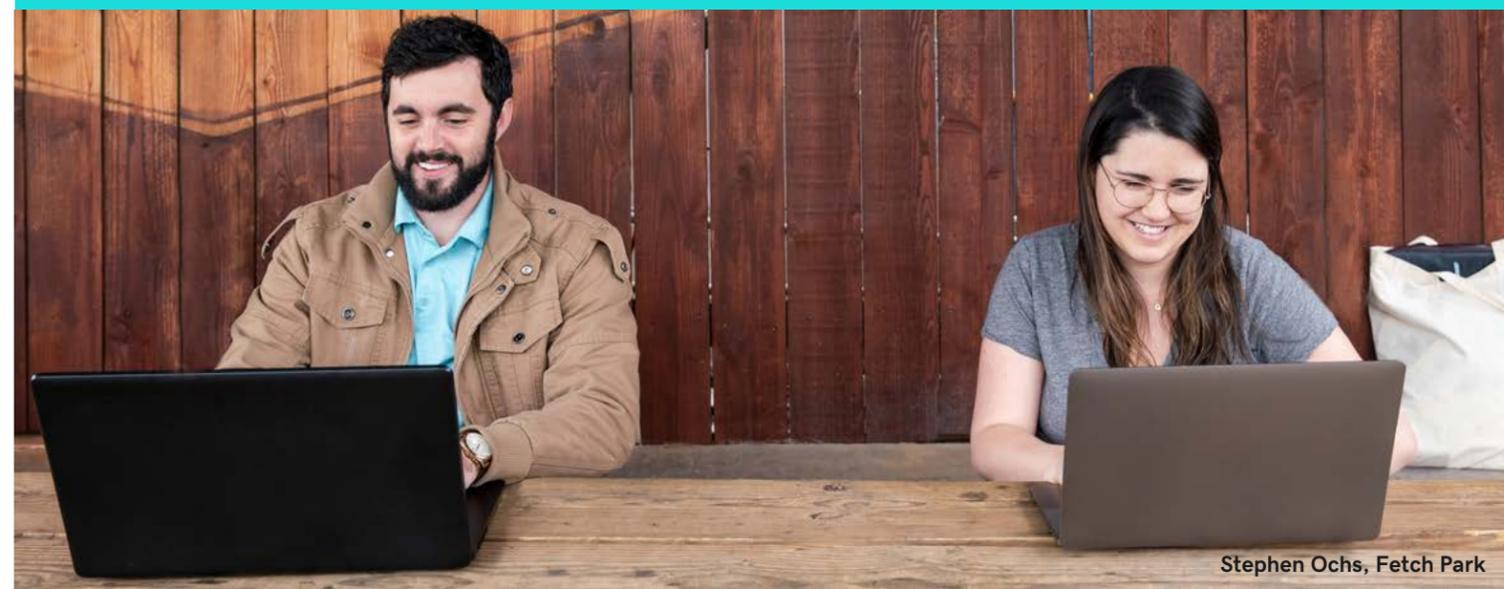>
> — *GoDaddy* [26]

THE NEED FOR DIGITAL SKILLS — from basic computer literacy to digital marketing strategies and execution— is not only newly urgent for small business owners in the COVID-altered world of remote interaction, but will continue to grow in importance as work and commerce evolve in coming years. Put succinctly, a strong digital presence is now an essential precondition for business success and will only be more and more so in the future. This means that local economies driven by small businesses will increasingly rely on entrepreneurial ecosystems that make digital literacy a core component of business training and resource provision. Investing in a digital-first business-training approach like Empower by GoDaddy is a strategic path for policymakers, corporations, and community organizations to turbo-charge local economies and encourage more equitable access to resources that can ensure widespread distribution of the benefits of small business success. Business-development programs and resources focusing on building digital skills and strategies among small businesses are essential elements of a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Above: Entrepreneurs participating in an Empower by GoDaddy workshop in Phoenix, AZ.

Stephen Ochs, Fetch Park

Endnotes

1 Association for Enterprise Opportunity. (2020). Empower by GoDaddy Program Entrepreneur Feedback Survey [2019-2020]. Unpublished

2 Ibid.

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