



Shenandoah Valley Community Navigator Program

An ecosystem approach to supporting minority entrepreneurs in the Shenandoah Valley.

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Shenandoah Community Capital Fund

The Shenandoah Community Capital Fund (SCCF) is on a mission to help the rural population of the Shenandoah Valley create opportunities for themselves by starting and growing successful businesses.

We provide access to

- capital,
- community and
- support

while convening relationships among the Shenandoah Valley entrepreneurial ecosystem. We envision a Shenandoah Valley where every person has access to the resources, knowledge and support needed to start, grow and sustain a business.

Scan the QR code below to visit SCCF's website and learn more about our work.



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OPPORTUNITY

While 14.2 % of the U.S. population is Black, only 2.3% of employer firms in 2022 were Black-owned (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). Starting and growing a business in a volatile economy is hard, and Black entrepreneurs face additional barriers to success:

- 39% don't feel adequately informed about how to apply for capital
- 38% don't have a relationship with a lender
- 21% don't know where to apply for capital.

On top of the (1) lack of equitable access to capital, (2) Black-focused business advisory, training and mentorship are rare and (3) access to corporate and government supply chains is limited. Yet, Black-owned businesses have proven more resilient than their White counterparts and Black women entrepreneurs are the fastest growing demographic of new entrepreneurs - despite the systemic barriers they face.



COMMUNITY CONTEXT

The Shenandoah Valley is a vast rural region with a population of 523,000 (U.S. Census Bureau). Seventeen percent of its population identifies as a person of color.

SCCF understood early on that if we wanted our rural communities to not only recover from the pandemic, but grow into resilient and prosperous local economies, we had to invest in history's most underserved entrepreneurs: rural entrepreneurs, women entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs of color. Because for every \$1 spent at a local business, ca. 67% stays in the local community, resulting in an additional 50 cents in local business activity due to employee spending and businesses purchasing local goods and services.



STRATEGY: AN ECOSYSTEM APPROACH

The Shenandoah Valley Community Navigator Program (1) facilitates equitable access to capital, (2) increases access to Black-and-Brown-focused business advisory, training and mentorship and (3) raises awareness of Black-owned businesses in our local community to help secure their position in the market. We are (4) intentionally building the support ecosystem for minority entrepreneurs in the Shenandoah Valley.

Through a hub-and-spoke model, SCCF (hub) invests in five partner organizations (spokes) to

- build their capacity and train them as ecosystem builders
- fund their operations and outreach
- strengthen their technical assistance capabilities

The five partners are grassroots organizations that support minority entrepreneurs across the Valley and are already deeply embedded in their communities.

VALLEY BUSINESS COMPASS

SCCF developed Valley Business Compass to map the Shenandoah Valley entrepreneurial ecosystem and help entrepreneurs of all backgrounds navigate their startup journey. Only three months after launch, it lists 150 organizations and 300+ entrepreneurial resources specific to the Shenandoah Valley.



OUTCOMES

In its first year of the pilot, the Shenandoah Valley Community Navigator has provided

- 184 unique clients with
- 665 hours of technical assistance in 1:1 individual counseling sessions,
- 292 training hours and
- close to \$290,000 in funding through grants and microloans.

In practice: Once an important destination in the Motorist Green Book, Black-owned businesses dwindled for a half-century in Lexington, Va., until the last Black-owned storefront shut down in 2018. Five years later, Rockbridge County is experiencing a renaissance of Black entrepreneurship -- all thanks to what started out as a volunteer initiative following the murder of George Floyd in 2020 and is now the Walker Program -- one of the five partner organizations of the Shenandoah Valley Community Navigator Program.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. To strengthen your local economy, take a "grow your own" approach over the typical attraction/retention game.
2. When collaborating for greater impact, carefully select partners that are deeply embedded and have already built trust in their local communities.
3. For an ecosystem collaboration to be effective, you must first build trust among all partners. You can only build at the speed of trust.
4. Focus on the needs of the entrepreneurs you're seeking to serve.
5. When building an entrepreneurial ecosystem, diversity is key to innovation and progress.

NEXT STEPS

- Build a strong consortium of support organizations for minority businesses in the Valley.
- Advocate for the needs of underserved entrepreneurs on a local, state and federal level.
- Secure follow-on funding for this hub-and-spoke model to continue serving historically marginalized entrepreneurs.