

# 2025 ANNUAL REPORT



**St. Louis Small Business Empowerment Center**

A 501c3 sponsored by the Greater St. Louis Empowerment Zone

**15 YEARS**  
of Empowering  
Small Business  
Owners

# LEADERSHIP REFLECTIONS

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Dear Friends and Supporters,

It is with pride and gratitude that we celebrate **15 years of the Small Business Empowerment Center (SBEC) championing the economic growth of Main Street America.** Since our launch in 2010, and despite the year's unprecedented challenges, our mission has been consistent: *to ensure every entrepreneur has the knowledge and resources to thrive.*

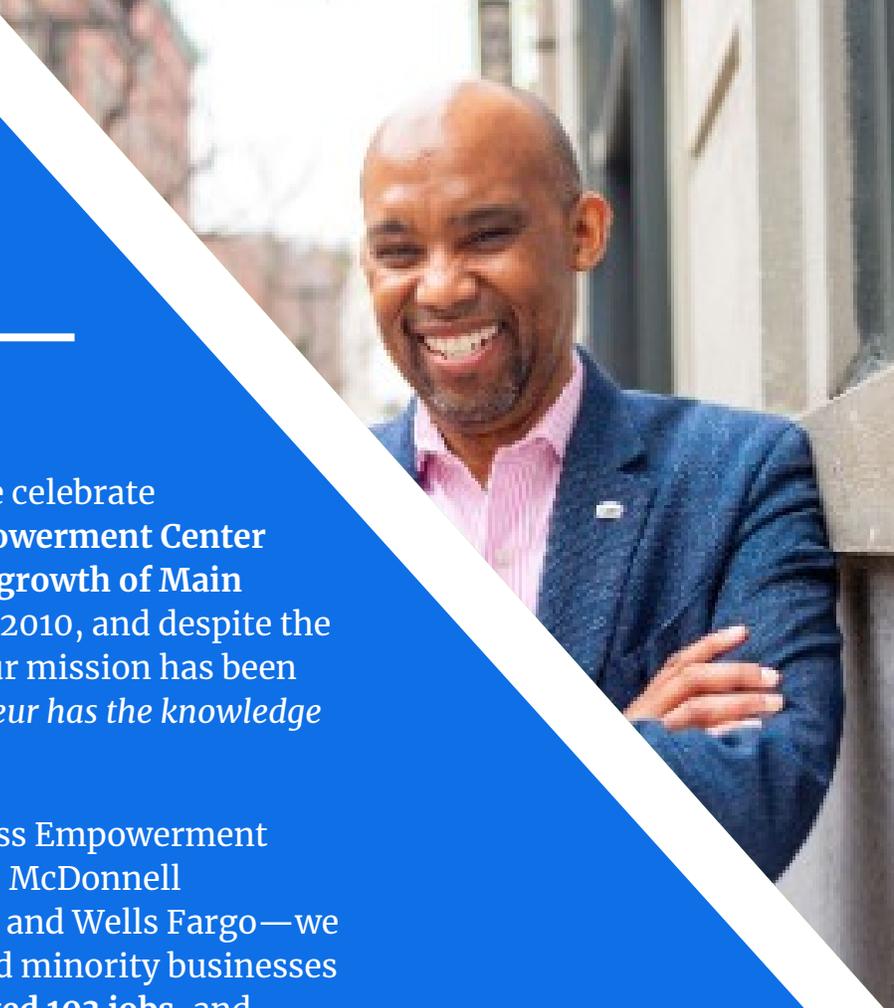
This year, through the Small Business Empowerment Fund—underwritten by the James S. McDonnell Foundation, Deaconess Foundation, and Wells Fargo—we **funded 25 small businesses**, assisted minority businesses with over **\$15 million in loans**, **created 103 jobs**, and **advised 40 startups.** Additionally, the Edward Jones Main Street Program recognized nine businesses for their community-building work, and we have proudly provided coaching and training to these deserving entrepreneurs.

These achievements reflect the collective effort and unwavering dedication of our community of supporters. We have ambitious goals and exciting initiatives on the horizon, and we look forward to sharing them with you.

Thank you for being an integral part of the SBEC family.

With heartfelt appreciation and warm regards,

Kevin Wilson  
Executive Director, Small Business Empowerment Center





# BACKGROUND & HISTORY

## A Legacy of Impact

Since its founding, the Small Business Empowerment Center (SBEC) has been dedicated to transforming the economic landscape of underserved communities. Our journey has been marked by a steadfast commitment to entrepreneurship, job creation, and community revitalization.

## The Foundation and Early Years

SBEC emerged from the closure of the SBA's "One Stop Capital Shop" in St. Louis' Empowerment Zone—an area marked by high poverty and unemployment. Recognizing the need for sustained economic development, a group of visionary leaders launched SBEC in 2010 to provide:

- Entrepreneurial training
- Access to capital
- Support for women- and minority-owned businesses
- Community-based economic development

Today, SBEC stands as a beacon of hope and a catalyst for inclusive economic growth.



# COMPANY PROFILE

## Who We Are

The Small Business Empowerment Center (SBEC) is a regional economic development organization dedicated to expanding opportunities for emerging and established small businesses—including minority-owned, women-owned, and veteran-owned enterprises. We provide access to capital, technical assistance, and strategic support that strengthen business infrastructure, accelerate growth, and build long-term sustainability.

## What We Do

- Facilitate access to capital
- Support revenue growth and job creation
- Build sustainable financial pathways
- Strengthen supplier diversity
- Advance community revitalization

*A trusted partner for 1000+ small business owners across the region.*



# VISION & MISSION

## Our Vision

Every entrepreneur will have access to the knowledge and resources needed to start and grow a successful small business that can change the community they serve.

SBEC envisions an economic environment with:

- Broader capacity for growth
- More certified diverse suppliers
- Increased contract awards
- Stronger strategic alliances
- Improved access to capital

## Our Mission

SBEC provides economic development services that help entrepreneurs—including minorities, women, and veterans—thrive in underserved neighborhoods and Main Street business districts.

We exist to assist business owners in:

- Creating jobs
- Increasing sales
- Accessing capital
- Strengthening capacity
- Winning contracts

*We believe in the power of entrepreneurship to transform communities.*

# 2025 IMPACT

**\$15M**  
**IN CAPITAL ACCESS**

**45**  
**BUSINESSES FUNDED**

**103**  
**JOBS CREATED**

**40**  
**STARTUPS ADVISED**

**100+**  
**SUPPLIER DIVERSITY  
ENGAGEMENTS**

**14**  
**REGIONAL  
PARTNERSHIPS**

## New in 2025

- James S. McDonnell Foundation
- Main Street Initiative, powered by Edward Jones, SBEC, and New Leaf Climate
- America's SBDC
- FranFit
- GrowthWheel
- Venturize
- LiftFund
- SLDC's MasterCard
- Northside Economic Empowerment Center
- Silver Linings
- SmartBiz
- St. Louis Builds Credit
- The Project, powered by AEO
- Associated Bank

*\$19M+ Total Economic Impact*

# PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

SBEC is committed to increasing access to capital for small businesses. Through technical assistance and mentorship, we aim to enhance their capacity for infrastructure development, operational scaling, and job creation. Our focus on sustainable loan disbursement will empower these businesses and contribute to a more equitable and prosperous future.

## James S. McDonnell Foundation Fund

SBEC received a \$1.9M grant to facilitate the Minority Business Loan Fund. JSMF's investment allows SBEC to establish a revolving loan fund to provide working capital to minority entrepreneurs.

### Key Results

\$1M in loans distributed to 25 minority-owned businesses

\$3M in capital leveraged

Commercial contracts and technical assistance to 75 businesses

\$15M in revenue growth

1,000 new jobs created

### Main Street Initiative 2025 Investments

Bama Health Foods & ASL Creative Firm: Birmingham, AL

HoneyBee Sage Wellness & Apothecary, Sherman Park Grocery & AMRI Counseling Services: Milwaukee, WI

GEM Factory, Freddie Lee's Gourmet Sauces, Kingsway Development & Under Grace Home Health Agency: St. Louis, MO

## Main Street Initiative, powered by Edward Jones, SBEC, and New Leaf Climate

SBEC joined forces with Edward Jones and New Leaf Climate to select and support small business owners who make their communities healthier, safer, and stronger. Nine businesses were awarded \$30,000 grants to support their efforts and fund retirement plans.

SBEC provides technical assistance, business development support, and strategic planning to grantees.

# PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

## **AEO + Capital One Business Health Assessment**

SBEC provided real-world insights to shape a national tool and helped entrepreneurs identify operational and financial gaps.

## **Mastercard Digital Doors Webinars**

We promoted nearly 10 national webinars offering tips and insights to Hispanic and startup businesses, reaching hundreds of SBEC clients.

## **Youth Entrepreneurship (Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship)**

SBEC business coaches supported youth preparing for a national competition by providing each student with four hours of individualized coaching.

## **Encore Entrepreneurship (AARP)**

We hosted workshops for adults 50+, connecting participants to certification and supplier diversity resources.

## **Greater St. Louis Inc.'s SupplySTL Navigator**

SBEC served as a regional connector for procurement opportunities. We linked 100+ small businesses to anchor institutions, strengthened regional collaboration, and expanded inclusive procurement pathways.

## **Other Key Initiatives**

- Retail Tenant Improvement Grant Program
- UMSL Accelerator
- Gateway Manufacturing Coalition
- Choice Neighborhoods Initiative
- Rooted Initiative

*Strengthening entrepreneurs across every stage of the journey.*

# DONOR APPRECIATION

## THANK YOU TO OUR 2025 FUNDERS

AARP  
Associated Bank  
Bank of America  
CDFI Fund  
Deaconess Foundation  
Economic Development Agency  
Edward Jones  
Enterprise Mobility  
James S. McDonnell Foundation  
Kauffman Foundation  
NISA  
Small Business Administration / SBDC  
St. Louis Community Credit Union  
St. Louis Community Foundation  
St. Louis Port Authority  
Truist Bank  
US Bank

*Your investment  
strengthens Main  
Street America.*  
– KEVIN WILSON

# OUR TEAM

## SBEC STAFF

Shawna Collier, Business Development/Loan Officer

Marika Jakubovska, Accounting

Andrew Turnage, Business Development

DiAerica Woods, Loan Servicer/Portfolio Manager



Kevin Wilson  
Executive Director

## SBEC ADVISORS

Erica Henderson, Chief Strategist

Kimberly Henderson, Marketing Storyteller

Francis Chmelir, Technology Consultant

Fielding Jezreel, Grant Writer

## SBEC BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Cheryl D. S. Walker, Chairman

Reginald Scott, Co-Chairman

Michelle Stuckey, Treasurer

Dr. Joe Frank

John Henderson

Lorraine McKinney

Dr. Vernon Mitchell, Jr.

Denise Phillips

Alan Richter

Mitchell Washington

*Your commitment  
fuels our mission.*  
– KEVIN WILSON



Thank **YOU**  
for your ongoing support

PROUDLY  
CELEBRATING

**15**  
**YEARS**

Contact Us

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