SMALL BUSINESS

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fftc FWD
find what you need to lead

fftc:FWD is a civic empowerment platform for everyone.

fftc:FWD is an innovative civic leadership platform from The Robinson Center for Civic Leadership at Foundation for the Carolinas that makes it easier and faster for people, groups, and organizations to find what they need to lead on issues and topics they care about in our community.

Who	What	When	Where	How
is doing what and do they connect to each other?	issues are important in our community and to me?	I want to know more, how can I find what I need?	can I easily see opportunities for collaboration and partnership?	can I help?

fftc:FWD Folios like the one you are reading now provide on-ramps to knowledge, data, and information on key topics and themes to broaden access to the levers of change for everyone's access and use.

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fftc:FWD is focused on the communities within the Charlotte-Mecklenburg region in the state of North Carolina.

Cover art by: **Mary Zio**
fftcfwd.net/artists/mary-zio

What is small business?

Small businesses help define a community's character, providing personalized service and adding to local charm with unique products.

They drive economic growth with job creation and boost local tax revenue, which helps support local nonprofits and revitalize our neighborhoods.

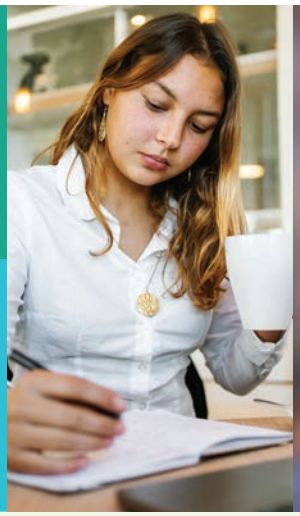
Their smaller scale also makes it easier for residents to enter the workforce in settings that contribute to our community identity and growth.

In being run by an individual, family, or small group rather than shareholders or a corporate structure, they may have fewer operational resources than a big business, but more flexibility to innovate and pivot quickly.

The definition of "small business" varies by industry according to the United States Small Business Administration. For instance, a manufacturing firm might be considered small with 500 employees, while a restaurant or other service-based shop might have fewer than 10 employees.

What never varies is the role they play in our communities, as there are small businesses in nearly every industry, including consulting firms, creative agencies, tech startups, food, hospitality, and retail.

Starting a small business can be the gateway to entrepreneurship for many of us with a vision, dream or idea. Preparation and planning are critical to small business success.



Key Facts

Here are some key facts around small business locally and nationally

92%

of Mecklenburg County businesses employ fewer than 50 people

<500

employees qualifies a business as small in most cases by the Small Business Administration

54%

of small business owners in Charlotte-Mecklenburg struggle to identify appropriate funding sources

74%

of net new job creation across North Carolina comes from small businesses each year

1.7M+

people employed by small businesses in North Carolina

90%

of startup founders plan to stay in Charlotte due to its business climate and quality of life

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What is happening now?

Charlotte has a reputation for being a destination for corporations and banking, but it is also home to a robust, diverse small business sector.

These small businesses are crucial for Charlotte, helping to maintain the city's character and culture amid a population boom. The landscape is entrepreneurial, and securing funding to expand or even remain open is key – especially when growth is driving up operating costs (rent and labor, for example).

Navigating the system to access resources can be daunting, especially for early-stage and historically underrepresented founders. However, a growing network of small business support organizations and initiatives can help small businesses thrive.

The City of Charlotte completed a Small Business Ecosystem Assessment in late 2025. Compiling input from more than 860 small businesses, it provided guidance to help Charlotte strengthen its small business and inclusion programs and make financial, support, and growth resources more accessible to more small business owners across the community.

Other similar reports and assessments include the 2024 Startup Ecosystem Report, which indicated that Charlotte is a very attractive destination for entrepreneurial talent, particularly in technology and innovation, but that the systems to support startup growth have room for improvement.

Starting Points

These six organizations are good starting points for someone new to this topic to learn more.

ASPIRE COMMUNITY CAPITAL

Helps business owners access capital through low-interest microloans.
aspirecommunitycapital.org

CITY OF CHARLOTTE

Assists certified Small Business Enterprises with development programs, training, strategic development, and networking.
charlottenc.gov/Growth-and-Development/Economic-Development/Resources-for-Small-Businesses-and-Entrepreneurs

CHARLOTTE REGIONAL BUSINESS ALLIANCE

Assists entrepreneurs and employers with the goal of growing businesses and business leaders.
charlotteregion.com/about-us/clt-alliance-foundation/

MECKLENBURG COUNTY NORTH CAROLINA

Provides free one-on-one advising and technical assistance to help small businesses foster growth.
oed.mecknc.gov

PROSPERA

Provides bilingual assistance to Hispanic entrepreneurs trying to establish or expand their business.
prosperausa.org

The Women's Business Center of Charlotte

Focuses on training and support for entrepreneurs and small business owners.
theinstitutenc.org/programs/wbcc

These are not the only organizations leading local work around small business. Visit fftcfwd.net to see more!

Tools & Resources

Beyond Open Small Business Resources: Developed for the Beyond Open grant program that concluded in 2024, this small business resource page is still available to the public.
beyondopenclt.com/business-resources

City of Charlotte Small Business Ecosystem Assessment: Looks at how ecosystem partners can better align efforts responsive to the unique needs of Charlotte's small businesses. *cltgov.me/bizeco*

Explore More

Scan to see resources including articles and reports related to small business.

Take Action

Learn Who is Leading

Learn more about key organizations leading and coordinating around small business in the community. *fftcfwd.net/small-business*

Give Back Financially

Donate to a 501(c)(3) nonprofit whose mission focuses on entrepreneurism and small business efforts, or that offers free or low-cost services and programs.

Donate directly: *sharecharlotte.org*

Give through a fund: *fftc.org*

Volunteer

Volunteer for a nonprofit whose mission focuses on providing support and mentorship to small business owners, or that offers related programming. Visit SHARE Charlotte's website for volunteer opportunities. *sharecharlotte.org*

Support Community Advocacy

Engage with local government groups to add your voice to ongoing discussions about the small business ecosystem.

Shop Local

Support local small businesses by utilizing their services and amplify them to others in your community.

Align Priorities

Corporations and foundations can align strategic community and philanthropic priorities around issues related to development and economic mobility, especially as it pertains to small businesses.

Lingo to Know

Capital: The money used to start, operate, and grow a business, including loans, investments, and cash flow.

Microbusiness: A business with 1 to 9 employees, typically with low operational costs but more flexibility to operate.

Scale: Increasing revenue and operations while managing costs, enabling expansion and higher profitability.

Small business: An independently owned company with limited employees and revenue, typically serving regional customers.

Solopreneur: An individual who owns, manages, and operates a business alone, handling all responsibilities without employees.

Underrepresented founders: Entrepreneurs from marginalized groups with limited access to capital and networks compared to most founders.

Connecting the Dots

Explore related folio topics such as those listed below on our website.

View this folio

fftcfwd.net/small-business

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Contact us: fwd@fftc.org

Thank you to the City of Charlotte for providing guidance on core content as Lead Agency for this folio.

Sources for the content of this folio can be found on the Small Business folio webpage.