

IN THE NEWS**GRAND RAPIDS**
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Small businesses: The heart of Michigan's economy and communities

Small businesses help to drive innovation, create jobs and contribute to the growth and vitality of communities everywhere. Their impact on Michigan's economy is why the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) backs resources like the Michigan Small Business Development Center (MI-SBDC) to support entrepreneurs and small businesses across the state.

The MI-SBDC offers free business consulting services to Michigan entrepreneurs looking to start, grow or sell their small businesses. Their network of consultants helps entrepreneurs navigate the challenges they face through training, events, coaching and more.

"Entrepreneurs and small business owners can benefit greatly from the free services available through our state-wide entrepreneurial ecosystem," said MEDC Senior Vice President of Small Business Services Amy Rencher. "The MI-SBDC is an invaluable resource that supports equitable and resilient economic growth in the state, and we encourage Michigan's entrepreneurial-minded residents to explore what they have to offer."

Since 2007, John Slagter, CEO of The Mackinac Technology Company in Kentwood, has utilized the MI-SBDC's catalog of expertise. When he developed window attachment technology that improves building energy efficiency, he knew he needed funding and decided to apply for a federal grant. Slagter received help from a MI-SBDC federal grant proposal consultant who walked him through the grant proposal process and aided him in negotiating his contract with the National Science Foundation.

"MI-SBDC helped me with what I needed most early on in my business journey and has continued to help us navigate various challenges and opportunities along the way," Slagter said. "They are one of the few, if not only, resources that have helped us throughout the years and I still value their insights to this day."

Marisela Sierra, owner of Navarro's Mexican Takeout, a third-generation Mexican restaurant in Muskegon Heights, learned about the MI-SBDC at a Black Wall Street Muskegon pitch competition in 2019. There, she took home a \$20,000 grant to help her grow her business. Understanding that numbers were not her strength, Sierra contacted the MI-SBDC for help and has been utilizing their services since.

“Our consultant helped me navigate the financial aspects of our business, including securing lenders, making investment decisions and planning for the future,” Sierra said. “Working with [MI-SBDC] was so easy and I’m excited to work with them more as our business continues to grow.”

Minority-owned businesses like Sierra’s play a crucial role in their communities’ economic vitality. They are supported by the MI-SBDC’s commitment to ensuring entrepreneurs of all backgrounds have access to the resources needed to succeed. The MI-SBDC’s Uplift Michigan initiative furthers this commitment by addressing barriers to economic inclusion for historically marginalized business owners.

“Uplift Michigan is a systemic, ongoing approach to supporting underrepresented businesses in Michigan and brings together a variety of resources that create more equitable opportunities for success,” said CEO and Executive Director of MI-SBDC, J.D. Collins. “Underserved populations are critical to Michigan’s economy. By providing greater access to business resources, we can begin to close the economic inclusion gap and help more entrepreneurs achieve their full potential.”

The initiative is an important step in promoting economic growth and job creation in the state, resulting in better outcomes for small businesses. Last year, the MI-SBDC served more than 8,500 clients, 34% of which were minority-owned businesses and 50% of which were women-owned. With 517 new businesses supported and more than 2,200 jobs created in 2022, there is no doubt that a diverse small business ecosystem, from The Mackinac Technology Company to Navarro’s Mexican Takeout, plays a crucial role in the success of Michigan’s economy and local communities.

For more information on small business resources, including the MI-SBDC, visit <https://www.michiganbusiness.org/services/small-business/>.