



THE MAYOR'S TASK FORCE FOR AUSTIN WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

MARCH 2024



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Letter from the Task Force Chair

Dear Mayor Watson,

As Chair of the Mayor's Task Force for Austin Women Entrepreneurs, I am honored to present this report, which marks a pivotal moment in our city's journey toward a more equitable entrepreneurial ecosystem. Austin, known for its thriving economy, vibrant culture, and spirit of innovation, stands at the threshold of a transformative opportunity—to redefine what it means to be a city of opportunity for all entrepreneurs.

This report is the culmination of months of research, discussion, and collaboration by the Task Force, a group of dedicated individuals who represent the best of our city's diverse entrepreneurial ecosystem. Our findings shed light on the challenges women entrepreneurs in Austin face—challenges that, if addressed, will unlock untold economic growth and opportunity for our city. From the lack of access to capital to the need for more affordable business-building solutions, the barriers our women entrepreneurs encounter are significant but surmountable with targeted action and collective will.

The initiatives outlined in this report are more than recommendations; they are a call to action for every member of our community—from city officials and nonprofit directors to business leaders, investors, educators, and citizens. Each initiative has been carefully crafted to address the specific needs of women business owners in Austin in order to level the entrepreneurial playing field, help them succeed, and propel Austin to the forefront of cities as a beacon of inclusion and economic vitality.

On behalf of the entire Task Force, thank you for your commitment to addressing the gender inequality that exists in Austin's entrepreneurial ecosystem and to making Austin the best city in the world for women to start and build businesses.

By embracing the recommendations in this report, we can create a future where our women entrepreneurs will have an equal opportunity to succeed and contribute to our city's prosperity. The time for action is now, and the stakes could not be higher—for our economy, our community, and our collective future.

Best regards,



Carla McDonald

Chair, Mayor's Task Force for Austin Women Entrepreneurs

Executive Summary

Austin, the 10th largest city in the United States, the country's second-fastest-growing major metropolitan area, and the capital of Texas, is a thriving hub for business and a community rich in intellectual, financial, cultural, and other resources.

The city's economic strengths, favorable business climate, low state and local tax burden, vibrant higher education community, high-quality workforce, strong entrepreneurial spirit, welcoming culture, and overall quality of life have made it a magnet for both startup founders and large global employers, like Tesla, Apple, Oracle, Facebook, and Google.

According to the [Milken Institute's 2023 Best-Performing Cities list](#), which evaluates the performance of 403 metropolitan areas across the U.S. based on 13 indicators, Austin ranks #1. Austin is envied as one of the world's best technology centers, best places to conduct business, and best places to live.

Twenty colleges and universities in the Austin area support Austin's flourishing economy by providing the city's growing job market with a

steady stream of highly educated talent and aspiring entrepreneurs. According to City of Austin data, 52.1% of the population holds a bachelor's degree or higher. In addition, programs like the Texas Innovation Center, Longhorn Startup, and the Kendra Scott Women's Entrepreneurship Leadership Institute have helped the University of Texas at Austin earn the #2 spot on *The Princeton Review's* annual list of the 100 best undergraduate programs for entrepreneurship studies.

Not surprisingly, Austin has become a center for venture capital and tech startups, earning the city the nickname "Silicon Hills." According to *PitchBook*, in 2023, the Austin-Round Rock Combined Statistical Area (CSA) ranked #6 behind the Bay Area, New York City, Boston, Los Angeles, and Washington, D.C. in deal value (\$3.9B) and #6 behind the Bay Area, New York City, Los Angeles, Boston, and Philadelphia in deal count (424).

While Austin is a land of opportunity for scores of entrepreneurs, many entrepreneurial women feel excluded from the city's thriving innovation economy.

This report seeks to:

- 01 Shed light on the current experience of Austin women entrepreneurs
- 02 Highlight the need for Austin's entrepreneurial ecosystem to be more gender-inclusive and equitable
- 03 Recommend specific actions that should be taken to support Austin women business owners more robustly and catalyze their full economic and community potential

The Mayor's Task Force for Austin Women Entrepreneurs

“The town is loaded with enterprising, talented women ready to take the risks to start and grow businesses. It’s also loaded with resources for helping those women achieve success. But our entrepreneurial ecosystem needs to be more inclusive and equitable. AWE will be a great catalyst for Austin, helping us align our assets to make Austin the #1 city in the world for entrepreneurial women to start and build businesses.”

Mayor Kirk Watson,
Watson Wire, July 13, 2023

In July 2023, Mayor Kirk Watson formed the *Mayor's Task Force for Austin Women Entrepreneurs* (AWE Task Force) to identify actions the city, the private sector, higher education institutions, and nonprofits can take to make Austin the best city in the world for women to start and build businesses.

The mayor called for the formation of the AWE Task Force as part of his Economic Development Plan, which seeks to shift Austin's economic development paradigm by empowering more Austinites to participate in and enjoy our city's prosperity.

Mayor Watson named Carla McDonald, an Austin entrepreneur and a longtime investor in and supporter of women entrepreneurs, as chair of the Task Force. McDonald assembled the Task Force over eight weeks to bring together a diverse group representing the city's entrepreneurial ecosystem and demographic profile. Members are leaders in their fields, have strong track records as advocates for women entrepreneurs, and are solution-oriented thinkers.

Chair

Carla McDonald
Founder and Managing Director, Dynabrand Ventures

Members

Sara T. Brand
Founding General Partner, True Wealth Ventures

Perla Cavazos
Deputy Administrator, Central Health

Donna Day
Central Texas Regional Market President, Sunflower Bank

Fang Fang
Chief Executive Officer, Big Plan

Tamara Fields
Austin Office Managing Director, Accenture

Dr. Montserrat Fuentes
President, St. Edward's University

Veronica Garza
Founder and President, Siete Foods

Dr. Patricia Greene
Professor Emerita, Babson College, and Former Director, Women's Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor

Valeska Pederson Hintz
Partner, Perkins Coie

Kathy Kuras
President and CEO, YMCA of Austin

Lezlie Tram Le
Founder and Chief Executive Officer, LT Development

Heidi Leach
Vice President of Startup Banking, JP Morgan Chase

Mellie Price
Executive Director, Texas Ventures Labs, McCombs School of Business, University of Texas at Austin

Paola Retes
Vice President, Live Oak Ventures

Jan Ryan
Founder and CEO, 3Hills Group

Neha Sampat
Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Contentstack

Anna Sanchez
Senior Vice President of Commercial Banking, Truist

Kendra Scott
Founder and Executive Chairwoman, Kendra Scott

Cristina Silingardi
Principal, Brisas Ventures

Lauren Washington
Cofounder and Chief Executive Officer, Fundr

Task Force Timeline and Process

The Task Force followed a structured timeline and process to conduct its work:

2023

August and September

The full Task Force was formed.

October

The Task Force conducted primary research to understand better the landscape for Austin women entrepreneurs and identify the key obstacles they face.

November

The Task Force analyzed and summarized the research findings and identified areas of critical need for Austin women entrepreneurs. It also conducted an audit of current resources available to the city's women business owners.

December

The Task Force participated in two all-day brainstorming sessions, underwritten and facilitated by Accenture, to ideate solutions addressing the needs of Austin women entrepreneurs.

2024

January and February

The Task Force held several more ideation sessions to fine-tune the group's thinking and formulate and finalize their recommendations.

March

This report was written and submitted to Mayor Kirk Watson.

In addition, between September 2023 and March 2024, members of the Task Force held one-on-one discussions with numerous entrepreneurial equity advocates throughout the country to learn about successful initiatives in their cities. They also met with key stakeholders in Austin's entrepreneurial ecosystem to seek input on and gain early support for the work of the Task Force.

Austin Women Entrepreneurs: A Definition

For its work, the Task Force defined an Austin woman entrepreneur as a person who lives and/or works in Austin, identifies as a woman, and fits into one of the following three entrepreneurial personas:



Small Business Entrepreneur

This woman entrepreneur is deeply rooted in the Austin community and, with other Austin small business owners, forms the backbone of the city's local economy. They prioritize local engagement and value steady growth. They need access to funding that suits small-scale operations and guidance regarding efficient resource allocation, operations, promotion, and small business growth. They also require community support to thrive.



Growth Business Entrepreneur

This Austin woman business founder is a risk taker and innovator who is focused on expansion. They are concentrated on scalability, leveraging trends and technology to grow, and transforming their startup into a major player by disrupting an existing industry. To scale, they need significant capital for expansion and access to talent, industry experts, mentors, partners, and customers in and beyond Austin.



Aspiring Entrepreneur

This entrepreneurial Austin woman is full of ideas, ambition, and enthusiasm and is in the early stages of turning their vision for a business into reality. They are focused on gathering information and knowledge about business basics, entrepreneurship, and their industry. They need guidance from experienced entrepreneurs and opportunities to connect with potential partners, customers, and advisors.

Women and Entrepreneurship: A National Perspective

Women-Owned Business Growth

Women's entrepreneurship in the United States has seen remarkable growth over the last decade, signaling a significant shift in the economic landscape as more women recognize that business ownership offers greater autonomy, flexibility, financial stability, and opportunities for professional growth. Women-owned businesses play a vital role in the U.S. economy. They account for 39.1% of all U.S. businesses, generating \$2.7 trillion in revenue and employing 12.2 million people.¹

Between 2019 and 2023, the number of women-owned firms increased at nearly double the rate of men-owned firms. In 2023 alone, the growth rate of women-owned businesses outpaced the rate of companies owned by men by 94% for number of firms, 253% for employment, and 82% for revenue.²

This growth also reflects a trend of diversification across industries, with women-led firms expanding their footprint in sectors traditionally dominated by men, such as technology, renewable energy, finance, insurance, healthcare, real estate, and construction.

Women are also at the helm of more unicorns (privately held businesses valued at over \$1 billion) than ever before. A decade ago, there were no women-founded unicorns; today, 14% of all unicorns were founded or co-founded by a woman.³

Inequitable Access to Funding

Despite their growing presence and impact, women entrepreneurs face significant challenges that hinder their progress, including navigating a funding ecosystem where just 8% of investment partners at venture capital firms are women.⁴

Access to capital is the most significant barrier for women founders, who received just 1.8% of all venture capital dollars in 2023.⁵ This is the lowest

share of venture capital for women entrepreneurs since 2016. Black women, who are starting businesses faster than any other demographic segment, received just 0.39% of national venture capital dollars.^{6,7} According to a 2024 National Advisory Council on Innovation and Entrepreneurship (NACIE) report, "*Venture capital has lagged behind nearly every other industry in including women and people of color.*"

When women do raise venture capital, the average investment size is less than half the amount raised by male founders,⁸ and they must navigate different conversations. Studies show that venture capitalists tend to ask men "promotion" questions about the potential for gains, while they ask women "prevention" questions about the potential for losses.⁹

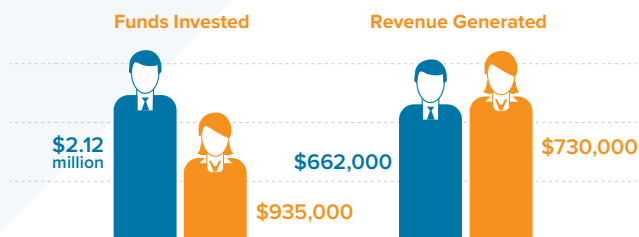
The funding disparity extends to traditional financing, where women entrepreneurs are three times more likely to be denied a business loan. Moreover, in 2023, women who held majority stakes in their businesses received just 21% of all U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) loans and 16% of the total SBA loan dollars disbursed.¹⁰ Additionally, the average SBA loan amount granted to these women business owners was 70% of the average amount male business owners received.¹¹

Superior Performance Metrics

Performance metrics do not support these funding disparities.

According to "Why Women-Owned Startups are a Better Bet," a study by Boston Consulting Group, women founders generate higher revenues than their male counterparts, and the average return on investment for women-owned businesses is double that of men-owned businesses.¹²

Startups Founded or Cofounded by Women Garner Less in Investments but Generate More Revenue



Sources: MassChallenge; BCG analysis.
Note: Of the 350 companies included in the analysis, 258 were founded by men, and 92 were founded or cofounded by women

Similarly, a study by First Round Capital, a seed-stage venture firm focused on technology startups, found that companies with a woman founder performed 63% better than those with all-male founding teams.¹³

Furthermore, in its 2022 report, “All In: Women in the VC Ecosystem,” *PitchBook* reported that “female founders had lower median burn rates, greater valuation growth at the early stage, and lower valuation declines at the late stage compared to all-male founded companies year-over-year.” *PitchBook* also noted that women-founded companies exit faster, with their startups showing a median exit timeframe of 6.7 years versus the 7.5 years that is typical for the broader startup market.¹⁴

A Morgan Stanley report summed up the funding disparity by calling it “the trillion-dollar blind spot,”¹⁵ and *Pitch.com* noted, “If investors were looking at the data, they’d be doling out money to female founders left and right.”

Gender Biases

Beyond the financial hurdles experienced by women founders, women in entrepreneurship often face gender-based biases and stereotypes that negatively impact their access to professional, networking, and sales opportunities. For example, according to U.S. Small Business Administration data, women-owned businesses netted just 4.6% of all federal contracting dollars in 2022.¹⁶ These challenges are compounded for women of color and others with intersectional identities, who face additional layers of discrimination.

Regional Efforts

Some U.S. states and cities are taking meaningful steps to address these inequities and promote greater gender equality in their entrepreneurial ecosystems. For example, in Los Angeles, a group of technology companies and venture capital firms—with support from the mayor and the Annenberg Foundation—has formed [PledgeLA](#), an initiative designed to create a more diverse and equitable technology sector.

In addition, California Governor Gavin Newsom recently signed into law Senate Bill 54, which requires certain venture capital firms in the state to report data about their prior-year investment diversity metrics. Several other states are currently considering or drafting similar legislation.

The New York City Economic Development Corporation has launched a variety of initiatives, including [Venture Access Alliance](#), which addresses inequities in the city’s tech startup ecosystem, and [Women Forward NYC](#), a gender equity program supported by the city, private and public partnerships, and academic institutions. Similar programs designed to create more equitable entrepreneurial ecosystems have been launched in Raleigh, Chicago, and Kansas City.

Looking Ahead

The trajectory for women’s entrepreneurship in the U.S. is promising, but a concerted effort by both public and private institutions is needed to overcome persistent barriers. Initiatives to improve access to capital, policies that address systemic biases, and more robust mentorship, education, and networking opportunities are critical. Equally important is catalyzing a cultural shift toward recognizing and valuing the diverse contributions of women entrepreneurs. As these efforts gain momentum, women-owned businesses will continue to thrive, driving innovation, creating jobs, growing economies, and enriching communities nationwide.

The Experience of Women Entrepreneurs in Austin

“I just don’t feel the support is here.”

Women entrepreneurs in Austin face the same challenges encountered by women entrepreneurs in the rest of the country. However, in some instances, our city’s women business owners face even more formidable obstacles.

Funding Challenges

According to *PitchBook*, while 1.8% of national venture capital dollars went to women founders in 2023, that number was less than 1% in Austin—the lowest it has been since 2015—despite, as noted earlier, the city ranking 6th nationally in both venture capital deal count and deal value.

Austin women entrepreneurs also under-index on U.S. Small Business (SBA) loans, a key funding source for small business owners. Nationally, in 2023, women who own 50% or more of their company received 21% of total SBA loans. In Austin, that share was just 19%, and the average loan size for Austin’s women founders was \$565,330 versus \$733,270 for our male founders.¹⁷

Ease of access to SBA loans could be a factor. Unlike Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio, Austin does not have an SBA office or a Women’s Business Center, an SBA initiative that helps women entrepreneurs obtain loans and navigate the application process. In 2023, Austin women entrepreneurs who own 50% or more of their company received just 46 SBA loans. In contrast, their Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio counterparts received 91, 66, and 48 loans, respectively.¹⁸

Feeling Disconnected

Austin women entrepreneurs also face the challenge of breaking into an innovation economy rooted in a history as a male-dominated center for technology startups. Few Austin women entrepreneurs—and even fewer outside the tech sector—serve on the boards and governing bodies that drive the city’s innovation economy and economic development initiatives, leaving their needs and perspectives relatively unheard. According to one Austin woman entrepreneur, *“It still feels like a club that not everybody feels like they’re invited to.”* This viewpoint was amplified by another woman founder who said, *“It’s hard to stay visible in a city where there is so much emphasis on tech and you are not part of that world.”*

The underrepresentation of Austin women entrepreneurs extends beyond capital access and boardrooms. Austin women entrepreneurs do not enjoy the same levels of public support and awareness as their male counterparts, which profoundly impacts their ability to build networks. For example, just 19% of those included on a recent list of Austin’s top businesspeople were women. Among those not included are two Austin women entrepreneurs of color who founded unicorns and one of the first black women in America to raise over \$1 million for a technology startup. Those included were invited to a networking reception, which illustrates how overlooked women entrepreneurs lose meaningful opportunities to “break into” Austin’s entrepreneurial ecosystem and build helpful professional networks.



Austin-Round Rock female (co-)founded VC capital (\$mm)

	2008	2009	2009	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Female Founders Only	\$0.4	\$0.4	\$1.5	\$0.6	\$8.6	\$7.6	\$35.9	\$8.5	\$16.2	\$67.3	\$32.6	\$72.6	\$249.1	\$299.9	\$275.4	\$39.1
Female & Male Founders	\$34.7	\$55.0	\$3.3	\$37.0	\$60.0	\$30.3	\$144.5	\$249.5	\$118.3	\$194.3	\$333.0	\$425.5	\$327.6	\$919.2	\$1,061.7	\$878.2
Male Founders Only	\$930.6	\$722.6	\$562.3	\$989.6	\$917.0	\$933.8	\$1441.0	\$1,150.5	\$901.3	\$1,473.9	\$2,149.7	\$2,772.1	\$2,709.2	\$6,038.3	\$4,096.4	\$2,985.7

¹⁷As of 12/31/2023

Austin-Round Rock female (co-)founded VC capital %

	2008	2009	2009	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Female Founders Only	0.0%	0.1%	0.3%	0.1%	0.9%	0.8%	2.2%	0.6%	1.6%	3.9%	1.3%	2.2%	7.6%	4.1%	5.1%	1.0%
Female & Male Founders	3.6%	7.1%	0.6%	3.6%	6.1%	3.1%	8.9%	17.7%	11.4%	11.2%	13.2%	13.0%	10.0%	12.7%	19.5%	22.5%
Male Founders Only	96.4%	92.9%	99.2%	96.3%	93.0%	96.1	88.9%	81.7%	87.0%	84.9%	85.5%	84.8%	82.4%	83.2%	75.4%	76.5%

¹⁸As of 12/31/2023

The Inspiration Gap

The lack of visibility for so many of our talented women entrepreneurs has also resulted in a significant “inspiration gap” in the city, limiting the broader community’s awareness of—and access to—women role models and leaders. As Dr. Nina Ansary wrote in *Anonymous is a Woman: A Global Chronicle of Gender Inequality*, a book that profiles extraordinary women in history, “*It’s hard to be what we cannot see.*”

The Reputation Gap

These realities are impacting Austin’s reputation as an equitable entrepreneurial hub. While Austin makes top 10 lists regularly, it has never been named a top 10 city for women entrepreneurs. It did not earn a place on *Forbes’* most recent list of the “10 Best Cities for Women Business Owners,” *U.S. News & World Report’s* most current list of the “10 Best Metro Areas for Women Entrepreneurs,” or Fundera’s 2023 list of the “15 Best Cities for Women Entrepreneurs.” In addition, the 2023 *Dell Women Entrepreneur Cities Index* noted that Austin is trending down in its “momentum score,” a calculation based on how Austin is progressing relative to its history and the momentum of other cities. Slowing the momentum further was the recent closure of Austin’s largest nonprofit dedicated exclusively to Austin women entrepreneurs and its only angel network serving that segment of business owners.

Poised for Progress

Despite these challenges, Austin women entrepreneurs are a resilient group that has made remarkable strides, contributing significantly to the Austin economy by creating jobs and fostering innovation. According to 2023 data from the Census Bureau’s Annual Business Survey, women own 38.5% of all businesses in the Austin metro area, and their ventures span a variety of sectors, from tech to retail and hospitality. Collectively, they generate over \$5 billion in sales and employ approximately 100,000 workers. Many also play a key role in advancing our city’s identity as an entrepreneurial center: eight Austin women entrepreneurs appear on *Forbes’* 2023 list of America’s 100 most successful women entrepreneurs.

Addressing the needs of our city’s women entrepreneurs is essential for fostering a more inclusive and equitable entrepreneurial ecosystem in Austin. Building awareness for existing programs that support our city’s women entrepreneurs and creating new initiatives that address the existing inequities and gaps will catalyze significant progress. By acknowledging and actively working to overcome these barriers, Austin can affirm its reputation as a center for innovation and ensure its sustained economic growth and vitality, benefiting from the full spectrum of talent and creativity that women entrepreneurs bring to the table.

Task Force Research

To dig more deeply into the experience of women entrepreneurs in Austin, the Task Force surveyed more than 300 Austin women entrepreneurs, held five focus groups, and conducted numerous one-on-one interviews with our city's women business owners. All types of Austin women entrepreneurs were represented, from brick-and-mortar business owners to founders of e-commerce companies and large enterprises, including unicorns. Our research revealed three significant obstacles that Austin women entrepreneurs face when starting and building their businesses.

Access to Capital

“Please do whatever it takes to get more VC and angel funding for women to start businesses.”

According to our research, access to capital is the biggest impediment Austin women entrepreneurs face in operating and expanding their businesses.

One respondent summarized the issue this way: *“Access to capital for women entrepreneurs is very limited, and if you solve this, Austin can be a great place for growth.”*



Sixty-two percent of those surveyed cited access to capital as the biggest challenge they face in building their business, but the issue goes deeper.

7/10 Seven of the top 10 impediments noted by the respondents were related to capital in some way, e.g., the cost of office space.

38% Thirty-eight percent opted to elaborate further on their answers, highlighting the depth of the issue.

One noted the frustration of being treated differently when seeking capital. *“Men can get funded on an idea, while women get funded on traction. Investors ask men about assumptions that can go right, while they ask women about assumptions that can go wrong.”*

Ironically, the access-to-capital issue is most pronounced among women business owners in the profitability stage of their business, a time when their companies should be most attractive to lenders and investors. Forty-five percent of those surveyed who are running profitable businesses said “access to capital/funding” is a significant obstacle for them.

Despite these challenges, Austin women entrepreneurs are resourceful, funding their companies from various sources, including sales (70%), savings (43%), and credit cards (25%).

Access to a Broader, More Helpful Network

“[Austin’s entrepreneurial ecosystem] is private, full of hurdles, clique-y, and exclusionary.”

In our survey, 52% of respondents cited “access to a broader, more helpful network” as a significant impediment to running and growing a business.



Access to a broader, more helpful network



Access to mentors

Thirty percent highlighted “access to mentors” as an obstacle, and many noted the challenges in navigating an ecosystem defined largely by male entrepreneurs who have known each other for decades.

Said one respondent, *“Networking through traditional groups is challenging [because] they are primarily male-led. Most angel investors and even executive education programs, where a lot of networking occurs, are predominantly male.”* Said another, *“There is a lot of gatekeeping that happens in Austin.”*

In response, many women have adopted a “create your own” mindset, launching 30 to 40 different women-only networking groups. While this can help women entrepreneurs meet one another, it does nothing to address their challenges or integrate them into the broader entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Summing up the challenges of building a network in Austin, one woman founder said, *“Unless you’re a young white man in tech or a venture capital guy, there’s very little space for women [to do] new and innovative things here.”* Another said, *“It’s hard to stay visible in a city where there is so much emphasis on tech and you are not part of that world.”*

Access to Affordable Goods and Services

“The cost of commercial property is unreasonably high. Coupled with the rising prices of products and supplies, it’s becoming impossible to be profitable and expand. I want to help other young women become entrepreneurs. I want to contribute to the economy. Every year, that vision seems less possible due to rising costs.”

For Austin women entrepreneurs, access to capital and access to affordable goods and services are two sides of the same coin.

In an environment where capital is hard for Austin women entrepreneurs to secure, access to affordable technologies, education, childcare, and other essential resources is crucial to ensuring their capital lasts as long as possible.

In our survey, access to affordable business-building goods and services was cited as a critical impediment to growth for most Austin women entrepreneurs. Respondents communicated concerns about affordable access to business-advancing tools and technologies (39%), office space (32%), healthcare (28%), education (17%), childcare (10%), and eldercare (5%).

Many noted the lack of affordable services that specifically fit the needs of women. Said one, *“Women’s [roles] as child caregivers can be a barrier to entrepreneurial success.”* Said another, *“Childcare is extremely hard to come by for networking events in the evenings.”* A third urged the Task Force to *“please focus on affordable childcare with very flexible hours.”* Another business owner summed up the situation by sharing the dilemma faced by many women entrepreneurs: *“Do you pay for childcare or the [office] space or your house? I have worked with people who are defaulting on their house payments because they don’t want to lose their space.”*

Access to affordable business education was also highlighted as a key challenge. One business

owner said, *“Austin is lacking in educational programs. I had to drive to Dallas weekly for four months to attend the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses program. I know of at least five other [Austin women entrepreneurs] who did this and many more who wanted to but couldn’t. We need more programs like this locally.”*

The city’s logistical processes and bureaucratic protocols were also identified as a cause of financial strain for many respondents. It was noted that permitting delays can keep women who have signed leases from opening their businesses, which depletes their capital significantly. Remarked one entrepreneur, *“Businesses will often close before they can open their doors.”*

In conclusion, access to capital, access to a broader, more helpful network, and access to affordable business-building goods and services are the three biggest obstacles facing Austin women entrepreneurs. Addressing these challenges requires deliberate action to ensure that women have equal opportunities to succeed. Our diversity as a city is a competitive advantage for our economy, and our economy can only reach its full potential when we remove the systemic barriers to participation and allow all in our community to participate fully in our innovation economy.

The Case for Supporting Austin Women Entrepreneurs: Gender Equality and Economic Growth Go Hand in Hand

Supporting Austin women entrepreneurs and fostering gender equality in our entrepreneurial ecosystem is not just the right thing to do; it is the smart thing to do. By investing in women's entrepreneurship, Austin can harness their untapped potential for the city's economy, build a more diverse, inclusive, and robust economy, and sow the seeds of prosperity for all Austinites.

GDP Growth

Increasing women's entrepreneurship correlates with higher levels of economic development and GDP per capita growth.¹⁹ According to an analysis by Boston Consulting Group, if women and men participated equally as entrepreneurs, global GDP would increase by 3% to 6%, adding \$2.5 trillion to \$5 trillion to the global economy.²⁰ This highlights the significant economic potential of women entrepreneurs in Austin and illustrates how supporting them more actively would generate \$5.8 billion to \$11.6 billion in additional revenue for the Austin economy.

Job Creation and Expansion

According to a paper in *The Review of Economics and Statistics* and recent U.S. Census data, startups are responsible for 15% to 20% of aggregate job creation.^{21,22} Moreover, studies show that 3.4 jobs are created for every angel investment made in a startup.²³ Supporting the growth of our city's women-owned businesses will drive meaningful job creation in Austin, boosting our city's economic resilience. In addition, because women tend to employ more women,²⁴ this job growth will lead to

a more diverse and inclusive Austin economy. This is significant because top talent searching for jobs and corporations looking to relocate often seek out metropolitan areas perceived as equitable and forward-looking.

Increased Innovation

Supporting our city's women entrepreneurs will stimulate a more innovative and competitive business environment. Women bring diverse perspectives to business, so helping our women founders identify and address overlooked market needs will lead to new products, services, and even industries that can build Austin's economy, expand its innovation footprint, and enhance its reputation.

Stronger Communities

Because women entrepreneurs are more likely than their male counterparts to reinvest their earnings in their communities,²⁵ helping our women entrepreneurs thrive will also lead to broader social benefits in Austin. These benefits include uplifting neighborhoods, promoting social well-being alongside economic development, and providing powerful role models for future generations.

Economic Mobility

Entrepreneurship plays a key role in empowering economically disadvantaged women. According to a U.S. Small Business Administration study, *"Self-employed workers who own incorporated businesses have much higher earnings than all other worker groups in low-income areas."* By supporting the full range of our city's women entrepreneurs more robustly, we will help low-income women in Austin ascend and provide immigrant women with a better path to achieving the dreams that brought them to Austin.

Enhanced Engagement

Another factor to consider is the seismic shift in wealth that is taking place in our country. In addition to starting more businesses than men, women are gaining more financial power. According to a McKinsey & Company report, women now control about a third—or \$10 trillion—of total U.S. household assets. That number will increase to \$30 trillion by the end of the decade.²⁶ To underscore the magnitude of that figure, the researchers noted that it is almost equal to the annual U.S. gross domestic product (GDP). Given that women will control two-thirds of U.S. investable assets by 2030²⁷ and make up 49% of the Austin community, it is vital to our long-term economic growth that we include them more actively in our local entrepreneurial ecosystem as founders, mentors, and investors.

An Inclusive Future

In conclusion, the importance of supporting women entrepreneurs in Austin cannot be overstated. Not only will policies and programs that support women entrepreneurs address the issues of inequality in our entrepreneurial ecosystem, but they will also tap into a wellspring of economic potential that will drive significant economic growth. Encouraging venture capital firms and others to invest in our women founders, providing platforms for entrepreneurial women in Austin to connect and collaborate with others, and offering new resources that are tailored to the challenges that Austin women entrepreneurs face is vital to building a thriving Austin future. By supporting women entrepreneurs, Austin can also set an example for other cities to follow, demonstrating our leadership as both a global center for entrepreneurship and one of the country's most inclusive and forward-looking cities.

Resources Currently Available to Austin Women Entrepreneurs

An audit by the Task Force of resources currently available to Austin women entrepreneurs revealed that Austin has a variety of excellent public, private, and nonprofit programs that support the community of entrepreneurs who are pivotal to the city's innovative spirit and economic growth. Among these are accelerators, like Capital Factory, DivInc, SKU, and Economic Growth Business Indicator; community development financial institutions (CDFIs), like PeopleFund, Just, and BCL of Texas; the city's various chambers of commerce; the city's Small Business Division; and the Austin Public Library, which offers access to business databases, market research tools, and business and digital literacy programming.

However, while we found over 80 resources available to Austin entrepreneurs, very few have been designed explicitly to support women business owners. This distinction is critical because, as noted earlier in this report, Austin women entrepreneurs face unique funding, awareness, and gatekeeping challenges. While inclusive programs that support a range of entrepreneurs are invaluable, the need for initiatives that directly address the hurdles that Austin women entrepreneurs face is evident and undeniable.

Task Force Recommendations for New Resources

Throughout this report, it has been noted that Austin women entrepreneurs face significant barriers when starting or growing their businesses, leaving untapped their full potential to contribute to the Austin economy and community. Now is the time to acknowledge and unlock their potential and commit to their equitable participation in our entrepreneurial ecosystem and innovation economy.

Achieving substantial progress for our city's women entrepreneurs will require a concerted effort beyond just one program or initiative. It will call for a collective commitment from all Austinites—from policymakers, nonprofit directors, and community leaders to venture capital investors, mentors, and educators—to see themselves as agents of this transformation our community needs.

On the following pages, you will find 12 initiatives proposed by the Task Force based on the gaps and needs identified. Each recommendation is accompanied by a description of the initiative, an insight into its anticipated positive impact, and the metrics that could be used to evaluate its success. While additional initiatives certainly could have been suggested, these 12 recommendations have been evaluated as the most pragmatic, feasible, and impactful in terms of supporting the

full range of Austin women entrepreneurs and providing a solid foundation for future efforts.

Some of the initiatives are ready for immediate action, while others will require thoughtful planning and the engagement of key community stakeholders for implementation. Some are poised to make an immediate impact, while others will take time to gain traction and represent a longer-term—but we believe vital—investment in the future of our entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Moreover, every recommendation is designed to address one or more of the three critical needs identified through our research:

- Access to capital
- Access to a broader, more helpful network
- Access to more affordable business-building tools and services

These recommendations are an immediate call to action for the entire Austin community to play a role in fostering an environment where women entrepreneurs can thrive, reflecting our collective aspiration for a more inclusive and prosperous city.

Open a U.S. Small Business Administration Women's Business Center in Austin

Description

Women's Business Centers (WBCs) are a national network of offices that assist women in starting and growing small businesses. WBCs are run by the U.S. Small Business Administration's Office of Women's Business Ownership (OWBO) and offer women entrepreneurs access to SBA loans as well as training, mentoring, and networking opportunities. They also help women business owners become certified so they can pursue federal contracting opportunities.

WBCs are a significant support system for women entrepreneurs, and their impact is growing. In 2023, SBA loans to women entrepreneurs climbed to \$5.18 billion from \$4.7 billion the previous year.²⁸ That same year, U.S. Senator Ben Cardin (D-Md.) introduced the Women's Business Centers Improvement Act, which seeks to increase the number of WBCs nationwide and double their funding so they can provide even more resources to women business owners.

In Texas, WBCs are located in Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio. The Task Force recommends Austin seek to open a WBC to provide our city's women entrepreneurs with easier access to SBA loans and the training resources WBCs and the SBA offer.

Anticipated Positive Impact

Establishing a WBC in Austin will catalyze significant benefits for Austin women entrepreneurs, including:

- Providing more SBA loans to Austin women entrepreneurs
- Stimulating the economy and creating jobs, as our women business owners use their funds to buy more goods and services and hire more employees
- Providing women business owners with more business education and training resources
- Offering Austin women entrepreneurs more opportunities to meet and collaborate with others in the WBC network
- Helping Austin women entrepreneurs gain more federal contracts

Success Metrics

Evaluating the success of a WBC in Austin could include the following key indicators:

- Year-over-year increases in the number of SBA loan applications submitted by and loans awarded to Austin women entrepreneurs
- Growth in the number of Austin women entrepreneurs engaging with and completing WBC programs
- Increases in the number and total value of federal contracts awarded to women-owned businesses in Austin

Create an angel investor group to invest exclusively in businesses founded by Austin women entrepreneurs

Description

An angel group is a collective of individual investors, called angel investors, who pool their financial resources to invest in early-stage startups. Angel investors are typically knowledgeable, experienced, well-connected, and actively involved in their investments, introducing founders to new hires, customers, business partners, and additional sources of capital. They are also a key part of the startup funding landscape: there are more than four million angel investors in the U.S., and according to *TechCrunch*, their investments exceeded \$25 billion in 2023.

Angel investors are a beacon of hope for women entrepreneurs. Whereas just 8% of VC firm partners are women, 40% of angel investors are women, up from 34% in 2021 and just 5% in 2004,²⁹ and that percentage is expected to rise further as women gain more economic power.³⁰ In addition, a Harvard Business School study found that women angel investors are twice as likely to invest in businesses with a female founder or a strong social impact.³¹ Not surprisingly, the number of women founders seeking angel capital increased to 37% in 2022 from 27% in 2021.³²

To leverage these trends, the Task Force recommends an angel group be formed in Austin to invest exclusively in companies founded by Austin women entrepreneurs. The group, which should also provide angel investing education and training, could be a local chapter affiliated with an established angel network like [Golden Seeds](#), emerge as a completely new and independent angel group, or be integrated into a local angel group or venture capital firm, as in the case of [Vitalize Angels](#).

To drive engagement, we recommend the city launch a program akin to the [Kansas Angel Investor Tax Credit Program](#) and offer angel investors a property tax credit valued at 50% of their investment.

Anticipated Positive Impact

Creating an angel group of this kind will have significant benefits, including:

- Increasing the amount of funding going to startups founded by Austin women entrepreneurs and fostering more economic growth and innovation
- Creating more jobs since, as noted earlier in this report, 3.4 jobs are created per angel investment
- Helping Austin women entrepreneurs meet mentors and expand their professional networks
- Increasing the number of women investors in Austin and ensuring a more diverse and inclusive investment landscape

Success Metrics

Evaluating the success of a local angel network for Austin women entrepreneurs could include the following metrics:

- The number of investors in the group and how active they are
- The number of founders who pitch to the group, the number of investments made, and the total dollars invested
- The number of new jobs created by the funded startups
- The financial returns generated by the investments
- The number of invested startups that go on to secure additional funding, become profitable, and/or exit
- The range of sectors represented in the investment portfolio
- Investor and founder satisfaction with the angel group and investment process

Create The Mayor's Fund for Austin Women Entrepreneurs, a non-dilutive capital grant program

Description

Grants are “free” funding that help entrepreneurs start, sustain, or expand their businesses. They appeal to business owners because, unlike loans, grants do not need to be repaid, and unlike investment capital, grants are non-dilutive, i.e., they don't require the founder to give up a portion of their ownership in the business.

To support the capital needs of Austin women entrepreneurs, the Task Force recommends that the city create The Mayor's Fund for Austin Women Entrepreneurs to provide grants of up to \$25,000 each to select Austin women business owners from a diverse range of industries. The Mayor's Fund could be funded through a variety of sources, including city revenues, philanthropic contributions, and public-private partnerships.

Any number of factors could determine how the grants are awarded. For example, the grants could be used to build on Austin's reputation as a global innovation center and expand the definition of “innovation” to be more inclusive. For instance, grants could be awarded to a cleaning company owner who wants to create a line of zero-waste, eco-friendly cleaning products; a salon owner who wants to develop a haircare line with sustainably harvested camu camu, an Amazon rainforest fruit; and a food truck owner who wants to launch an urban farm. In these cases, the funds would be used to develop prototypes and/or conduct new-product research. To maximize each grant's impact, support, such as business mentoring and education about prototyping and intellectual property protection, could be provided. Grant recipients would also benefit from profile-raising media coverage about their businesses and how their grants will be used. Grants could also be awarded to help fund the following:

- Startup costs, like office space and supplies
- Expansion projects, such as opening new

locations in neighborhoods that would benefit from the product or service

- Marketing campaigns that build awareness for Austin women entrepreneurs so they can remain competitive in male-dominated business sectors
- Technology and facility upgrades to ensure women-owned businesses can remain competitive

Anticipated Positive Impact

The anticipated positive outcomes of this program include:

- More innovation/an increase in the number of new products, solutions, and services offered in the Austin market
- An increase in awareness for Austin women entrepreneurs and their businesses
- Greater growth for businesses owned by Austin women entrepreneurs
- Job creation
- An increase in the number of women starting businesses in Austin

Success Metrics

The following metrics could be used to assess the program's impact:

- The number of women entrepreneurs applying for grants and the number of grants awarded
- The diversity of businesses supported
- The number of jobs created using grant funds
- The number of innovations registered each year and the development and commercialization of new products, services, or processes funded by the grants
- Satisfaction levels with the application process and program

Establish the Capital Pledge to Empower Austin Women Entrepreneurs

Description

As noted previously in this report, a crucial gap exists in Austin's funding landscape: women founders in Austin receive significantly less venture capital than the national average. To address this imbalance, the Task Force recommends creating the Capital Pledge to Empower Austin Women Entrepreneurs. Inspired by initiatives like [PledgeLA](#) and New York City's [Venture Access Alliance](#), the pledge would galvanize the local venture capital community to commit to funding, supporting, and scaling women-led ventures.

VC firms in Austin that take the pledge will commit to increasing their financial investments in companies founded by Austin women entrepreneurs and providing them with mentorship, access to essential resources, and introductions to those who can facilitate the growth of their businesses. Additionally, the pledge will include a commitment to increase the presence of women in executive and decision-making roles within their investment firms and on the boards of their portfolio companies.

To ensure accountability and drive continuous improvement, we recommend the initiative include an annual, anonymized data collection effort led by a neutral third party to understand investment trends, track the city's progress in funding women entrepreneurs, and identify persistent challenges. This will enable the pledge's signatories to measure their impact and refine their approaches to supporting women entrepreneurs, ensuring that the pledge is a living commitment with real-world outcomes.

Anticipated Positive Impact

The pledge would catalyze the following positive outcomes:

- A more balanced and just venture ecosystem where women entrepreneurs can access equal opportunities for funding and growth
- A multiplier effect on the local economy, including higher job creation and a more vibrant, diverse business community
- A broader range of solutions to market needs as women bring different perspectives and experiences to the tech and other industries

Success Metrics

The success of this initiative could be measured by the following:

- The number of funded women entrepreneurs in Austin and the percentage of venture capital flowing to women-led startups
- The number of women-founded businesses in Austin
- The number of women at our city's venture capital firms that are in leadership positions, serve on investment committees, and hold investor board seats

Increase access to affordable debt financing for Austin women entrepreneurs

Description

Enhancing access to affordable debt financing for women entrepreneurs in Austin will increase capital access and motivate more women to start and expand their businesses. A collaborative effort among financial entities, nonprofits, the private sector, and the city will be essential for the successful implementation of this recommendation, which can be operationalized in a number of ways:

- The city can reduce financial barriers by subsidizing interest rates for women-owned businesses or by offering loan guarantees to women entrepreneurs. This will minimize lending risks and enable financial institutions to propose more favorable rates.
- Austin's financial institutions can be encouraged to collaborate with local nonprofit organizations that help women entrepreneurs access low-interest loans.
- Local nonprofits dedicated to economic empowerment can provide interest-free loans or subsidize interest payments for loans secured through traditional lenders, easing the financial burden on women entrepreneurs.
- Microfinance institutions within the city can extend micro-loans at reduced rates and with no fees, aiding women in launching or growing their businesses with less financial strain.
- A federally funded loan program, inspired by [GrowKS](#), can be launched to make matching loans accessible to Austin women entrepreneurs.

The Task Force also recommends including financial literacy programming and counseling in this effort. This will ensure that Austin women entrepreneurs know how to apply for loans and understand what banks, credit unions, and other debt sources look for when reviewing applications.

Anticipated Positive Impact

Providing women entrepreneurs in Austin with more accessible financing options will yield beneficial outcomes, including:

- Heightened job creation and decreased unemployment
- An upsurge in community reinvestment
- Enhanced innovation
- A rise in the number of women-led businesses that are—or are on their way to being—profitable

Success Metrics

The following indicators could be used to measure the effectiveness of this program:

- Number of loans disbursed
- Rate of loan repayments
- Growth in women-owned businesses
- Job creation by funded women-led startups
- Revenue enhancement in financed businesses
- Number of follow-on investments in the businesses
- Satisfaction with the loan programs

Create an online marketplace for Austin women entrepreneurs that provides access to affordable goods and services

Description

Austin women entrepreneurs lack equal access to capital, so helping them keep their expenses low to extend their operational runways is essential. At the same time, Austin is a major market for software and other business-to-business (B2B) products and services. To marry the two, the Task Force recommends that the city create an online marketplace where Austin women entrepreneurs can access essential products and services that support various aspects of starting and growing a business at low or no cost.

Examples of the products and services that would be available to Austin women business owners on the marketplace include:

- Software tools, e.g., project management solutions, accounting programs
- Hardware products, e.g., computers, laptops, printers, networking equipment
- Professional services, e.g., legal, accounting, marketing
- Physical resource solutions, e.g., meeting space, office space, retail space

Implementing an online marketplace will require coordination with Austin's private sector to secure deals and discounts for Austin women entrepreneurs. While we believe many Austin-based companies will eagerly participate in the program to support our women entrepreneurs, we recommend that the city create the Austin Women Entrepreneurs Business Partners Program to maximize participation opportunities. Tax incentives or deductions could be offered to companies that donate products and services to the marketplace. Companies would also receive certifications identifying them as program supporters, enhancing their reputations as active community champions for gender equality in entrepreneurship.

Anticipated Positive Impact

The anticipated positive outcomes of this program include:

- A reduced capital burden on Austin women entrepreneurs
- A lower barrier to entry for women to start businesses in Austin
- An increase in the business community's involvement in the city's effort to create a more inclusive and equitable entrepreneurial ecosystem
- A stronger foundation for future collaborations between Austin's public and private sectors
- Loyalty among Austin women entrepreneurs to the companies participating in the program

Success Metrics

The following metrics could be used to evaluate the impact of the online marketplace:

- The number of women entrepreneurs actively using the marketplace
- The number and range of companies and organizations contributing products and services to the marketplace
- The quantity and value of the transactions occurring through the marketplace
- Reported satisfaction with the program among women entrepreneurs and the participating companies and organizations

Create the Austin Women Entrepreneurs Childcare Initiative

Description

To help make childcare more affordable and accessible to women entrepreneurs in Austin, the Task Force recommends launching the Austin Women Entrepreneurs Childcare Initiative. The initiative could take a variety of forms, including:

- Providing city-issued vouchers for discounted or free childcare and offering tax credits and/or incentives to participating childcare facilities
- Offering financial assistance or childcare subsidies to qualifying Austin women entrepreneurs
- Providing grants to Austin women entrepreneurs who own childcare centers and want to expand them to offer evening hours (N.B.: Employers for Childcare, an Austin task force launched by The Texas Restaurant Association, Early Matters Texas, and the Texas Association of Business, found that fewer than 1% of childcare facilities are open after 8 p.m.)
- Establishing a collaborative childcare fund, supported by private sector investments, that provides subsidies and/or vouchers for quality childcare services during daytime and evening hours
- Encouraging local corporations with childcare programs to broaden their definitions of “employee’s children” so more women can access them, i.e., an employee’s partner or family member who is a woman business owner in Austin
- Partnering with local childcare providers to offer discounted rates and reserved spots for Austin women entrepreneurs during the evening when networking events are taking place
- Partnering with local higher education institutions to develop programs where students in early childhood education can gain practical experience and academic credit by providing Austin women entrepreneurs with supervised childcare services

Anticipated Positive Impact

Among the anticipated benefits of this program are the following:

- Better access to affordable, quality childcare so Austin women entrepreneurs can focus on growing their businesses
- More flexibility for Austin women business owners to engage in activities outside of traditional business hours
- A more engaged childcare community

Success Metrics

Evaluating the success of this program would include the following metrics:

- The number of childcare facilities, private sector partners, nonprofits, and other members of the community participating in the program
- The number of Austin women entrepreneurs being served by the program
- The number of women entrepreneurs starting businesses in Austin due to its childcare offerings and stable childcare environment

Create The Women's Innovation Academy, an educational collective leveraging the excellence of Austin's colleges and universities

Description

Many of today's most groundbreaking and funded startups—those promising to have the most significant impact on our society and economy—are in AI, virtual reality, ed-tech, fintech, biotech, cleantech, big data, and supply chain management and logistics, sectors that are dominated by men.

To ensure that our women entrepreneurs have the opportunity to participate fully in these high-growth industries, the Task Force recommends creating The Women's Innovation Academy to encourage our city's entrepreneurial women to explore and innovate in these sectors. The goal of the Academy would be to empower our current and next-generation women founders to transform groundbreaking ideas into market-ready solutions commercialized through patents, licenses, and strategic industry partnerships.

Rather than being housed at one Austin university, the Academy would be "borderless," providing our entrepreneurial women with access to the best resources offered at all participating Austin-area colleges and universities. Through the Academy, our city's current and aspiring women business owners would be able to access research and data, top-tier facilities and labs, libraries, classes, university grants, and thought leaders, including professors, industry experts, and alums. Unlike an accelerator, the Academy would not be cohort-based or time-bound. Instead, it would provide resources to innovative, entrepreneurial women in Austin on an ongoing basis, whether in-person, virtually, synchronously, or asynchronously.

Anticipated Positive Impact

The anticipated positive outcomes of this program include:

- More women-led startups in high-tech, high-growth industries, creating a more diverse and gender-balanced entrepreneurial landscape in Austin
- Active cultivation of our next generation of Austin women entrepreneurs
- Enhanced innovation that will underscore our city's reputation as a global innovation leader
- Increased economic growth through the development of new products and services

Success Metrics

The following metrics could be used to evaluate the success of this program:

- The number of participating colleges and universities and the depth and breadth of resources offered
- The number of women leveraging the program's resources
- The innovation output, including the number of ideas, patents, prototypes, and new products developed
- The number of startups launched as a result of cultivating ideas at the Academy
- The growth of those startups, including the number of jobs created and their funding milestones
- Satisfaction with the program

Create a virtual hub for Austin women entrepreneurs that centralizes resources, facilitates connections, and builds community

Description

A “virtual hub” in the context of an entrepreneurial ecosystem refers to a central online gathering place where ideas, expertise, resources, and support systems are accessible to entrepreneurs, facilitating collaboration, learning, innovation, and business growth.

Because the current entrepreneurial resources in Austin are decentralized and often difficult to locate, the Task Force recommends creating a virtual hub that will serve as a one-stop shop for entrepreneurs to access and sign up for resources.

For example, the hub would contain an inventory of local and national capital sources, such as grants, loans, and investors who support gender-diverse companies; a directory of mentors by sector and expertise; webinar and data libraries; and calendars of events. It would also be linked to the online marketplace and the other initiatives recommended in this report.

A fundamental aspect of the hub would be to address the education and training needs of Austin women entrepreneurs. As noted earlier, more than half of Austinites hold a bachelor’s degree or higher. However, for women, those degrees tend to be in health-related fields or the liberal arts. The hub would serve as a virtual education center for our women business owners, providing easy access to in-person and virtual local and national education programs, classes, and workshops that meet the skill development needs of women entrepreneurs.

The hub would go beyond cataloging, centralizing, and streamlining access to resources; it would create an immediate sense of community among women business owners and others in the ecosystem. Our recommendation adopts a cohort

approach whereby women business owners would be organized into groups that can be intentionally guided along their growth path by volunteer coaches and mentors and through peer learning, which is a critical component of successful entrepreneurial growth. Interactive networking features would also be included.

The hub would provide three additional benefits:

- It would enable all in the entrepreneurial ecosystem to identify and address any resource gaps and redundancies
- It would serve as a new source of data for the city since those registering to use the hub could be asked to take occasional surveys and share their experiences as women entrepreneurs in Austin
- It would grant the media and other awareness builders access to a larger community of Austin women entrepreneurs

Anticipated Positive Impact

The anticipated positive outcomes of this program include:

- Better, faster, and easier access to resources for all women entrepreneurs; more time leveraging resources and less time trying to locate them
- A stronger sense of community among Austin women entrepreneurs and others in the business community
- More networking, mentoring, collaboration, and peer-to-peer learning opportunities for Austin women entrepreneurs
- Greater insights into the needs and challenges of women entrepreneurs in Austin

Success Metrics

The following metrics could be used to determine the impact of the hub:

- The number of women entrepreneurs registered on the hub, the number of active users, the frequency of visits, and user retention
- The number and variety of resources available and leveraged on the hub, the number of new connections and collaborations formed, and success stories
- User satisfaction with the hub

Create an Austin Women Entrepreneurs Council at the Austin Chamber of Commerce

Description

The Task Force has identified the Austin Chamber of Commerce, whose vision is for Austin to be “the country’s most prosperous business community,” as a pivotal platform for amplifying the success and economic potential of women founders in Austin.

To this end, we recommend that the Chamber incorporate more Austin women entrepreneurs into their leadership and advisory bodies, ensuring that the perspectives of women founders can better inform Chamber initiatives, policies, and advocacy work.

In addition, we suggest the Chamber establish a special council comprising a diverse group of Austin women entrepreneurs to serve as a strategic advisory group that will integrate women entrepreneurs into the broader Austin business community, foster a more diverse business ecosystem, and drive economic growth.

This integration is a critical step forward, moving our city’s women business owners beyond the confines of women’s networking events, solidifying their role in our local economy, and advancing their progress, visibility, and recognition.

Anticipated Positive Impact

Adopting this recommendation would result in the following benefits:

- More inclusive and dynamic Chamber of Commerce initiatives that contribute actively to making Austin the best city in the world for women to start and build businesses
- Increased participation by Austin women entrepreneurs in realizing the Chamber’s vision for economic prosperity in Austin
- More robust resources, networking opportunities, sources of capital, and policy advocacy that support the growth of women-led businesses
- A stronger signal of Austin’s broader commitment to diversity and equity in the entrepreneurial sphere, with potential ripple effects throughout the local and national business communities

Success Metrics

The success of this strategic recommendation could be measured by:

- The creation and active functioning of the council within the Austin Chamber of Commerce
- The number of women entrepreneurs serving on Chamber boards and committees

Audit and streamline the process for starting a company in Austin and becoming certified as a woman-owned business

Description

The United States ranks 55th in the World Bank study of “ease of launching a new business” based on the number of regulatory barriers reported. According to our research, the process of starting a business in Austin is often difficult and time-consuming for women entrepreneurs. For example, the “Starting a Business” area of the austintexas.gov website references nine different agencies at the city, state, and federal levels, each with its own requirements.

The Task Force recommends a comprehensive audit be conducted to evaluate the process of applying for a permit to open a woman-owned business in Austin. The audit would identify bottlenecks, redundancies, and outdated procedures that complicate or prolong the application process for Austin women entrepreneurs and suggest solutions.

The audit would also examine the process for becoming certified as a Women-Owned Business Enterprise (WBE) in Austin, which many women have said is frustrating but important. Many women business owners value being WBE certified because it provides access to government contracts, private sector set-aside contracts, and special grants.

The audit would also seek to identify ways to do the following:

- Reduce the amount of information needed to verify a business is woman-owned
- Provide an option for Austin women entrepreneurs of color to identify as “woman of color” on their WBE application as opposed to having to complete both the WBE and the Minority-Owned Business Enterprise (MBE) applications, so opportunities provided specifically to Austin women entrepreneurs of color can be tracked

- End the practice of disqualifying women founders who are still running their companies and whose ownership stakes have been diluted below 51% from becoming WBE certified; women should not be penalized for successfully raising capital
- Collaborate with the Women’s Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC) and the National Association of Women Business Owners (NAWBO) to explore the possibility of enabling women business owners to apply for all appropriate certifications through a single streamlined procedure

Anticipated Positive Impact

The expected positive outcomes of this effort include:

- An increase in the number of women-owned businesses in Austin that are WBE, NAWBO, and WBENC certified
- An increase in the number of government contracts and private sector opportunities going to Austin women entrepreneurs
- Better data tracking so the city can accurately monitor and distribute existing and new opportunities to Austin women entrepreneurs and Austin women entrepreneurs of color
- An increase in the number of women moving to Austin to start a business because of the city’s more attractive and streamlined processes

Success Metrics

The following metrics could be used to evaluate the impact of changes made as a result of the audit:

- The average time and investment required from application to permit issuance
- The number of new business applications submitted by Austin women entrepreneurs
- The number of Austin women business owners whose companies are WBE, NAWBO, and WBENC certified
- Year-over-year growth in the number of certified women entrepreneurs and women entrepreneurs of color in Austin who serve as contractors and subcontractors
- Satisfaction levels with the city's permitting and certification processes

Establish an Austin women entrepreneurs advocacy position in City Hall

Description

There are numerous city initiatives, task forces, and commissions whose missions are relevant to the lives of Austin women entrepreneurs.

Examples include childcare and workforce task forces and commissions, like the Austin Economic Development Corporation and the Economic Prosperity Commission. There are also a host of initiatives and events sponsored by the city's Small Business Division and the Office of Economic Development that relate to women's entrepreneurship.

The Task Force recommends establishing the position of Austin Women Entrepreneurs Advocate at City Hall to give Austin women entrepreneurs a voice in all relevant task force, commission, and department meetings so their needs, experiences, and perspectives can be considered. The advocate could also support the various city departments by engaging more women business owners in their initiatives and events, hosting regular town hall meetings with women entrepreneurs, and fostering more public-private partnerships that advance our women business owners.

Whether full time or part time, the advocate could also help lead the effort to implement some or all of the recommendations in this report.

Anticipated Positive Impact

The anticipated benefits of this initiative include the following:

- An increase in the level of community support felt by Austin women business owners
- Better representation of Austin women entrepreneurs in city programs
- More inclusive economic development initiatives and an increase in the relevance of city programs to Austin women entrepreneurs
- A more supportive environment for women-owned businesses in Austin

Success Metrics

The success of the program could be evaluated based on the following metrics:

- The number of city initiatives that address the needs of Austin women entrepreneurs
- The number of Austin women entrepreneurs engaging with city initiatives, attending events, and utilizing city resources
- Feedback from women business owners regarding the effectiveness of the advocate in representing their interests and needs

Recommendations at a Glance

The tables below illustrate how the recommendations in this report address the specific needs of Austin women entrepreneurs, whether they own a small or growth business or have yet to launch their company. While all women business owners in Austin will benefit in some way from the 12 proposed recommendations, the second table serves to identify the groups of Austin women entrepreneurs who we believe will derive the most value from each recommendation.

	Access to Capital	Access to a Broader, More Helpful Network	Access to Affordable Goods and Services
Women's Business Center	X	X	X
Angel Network	X	X	
Mayor's Fund	X	X	
Capital Pledge	X	X	
Debt Financing	X		
Online Marketplace			X
Childcare Vouchers			X
Innovation Academy	X	X	X
Entrepreneur Hub	X	X	X
Chamber Council		X	
Audit and Certification			X
City Hall Advocate		X	

	Small Business Owner	Growth Business Owner	Aspiring Entrepreneur
Women's Business Center	X	X	X
Angel Network		X	
Mayor's Fund	X	X	X
Capital Pledge		X	
Debt Financing	X		X
Online Marketplace	X	X	X
Childcare Vouchers	X	X	X
Innovation Academy		X	X
Entrepreneur Hub	X	X	X
Chamber Council	X	X	X
Audit and Certification	X	X	X
City Hall Advocate	X	X	X

Conclusion

In conclusion, Austin's vibrant economic landscape, status as a hub for entrepreneurship, and strong sense of community present an unparalleled opportunity for growth, innovation, and diversity. However, as this report has outlined, a significant gap exists in the city's entrepreneurial ecosystem—the lack of support, underrepresentation, and undervaluation of women entrepreneurs. Addressing this oversight is not just a matter of fairness or equality; it is an economic imperative. In this report, the Task Force has presented a roadmap for rectifying this imbalance, proposing specific initiatives that will harness the untapped potential of women entrepreneurs, establish equality in our entrepreneurial ecosystem, and drive Austin's economic growth and innovation to new heights.

The recommendations in this report are pragmatic, actionable, and tailored to meet the distinct challenges women entrepreneurs face in Austin. From seeking to open an SBA Women's Business Center to launching an online marketplace with free and discounted goods and services, each initiative is designed to provide the support, resources, and access that Austin women entrepreneurs need to succeed. The anticipated outcomes of these recommendations underscore the transformative potential of fully integrating women entrepreneurs into our business community.

The recommendations are also a clear call to action for all who live and work in Austin. Creating a powerful, thriving, and inclusive economy will require the collective effort and commitment of all stakeholders in our city's entrepreneurial ecosystem.

As Austin continues to build its reputation as a major global center for innovation, mobilizing resources to include our women entrepreneurs in that effort is vital. By acting on the Task Force's recommendations, Austin can set a benchmark for gender inclusivity and economic innovation, ensuring a prosperous and equitable future for all its residents. The time to act is now; let us embrace this opportunity to make our city a model for equality in entrepreneurship and elevate Austin to unprecedented heights of unity, inclusiveness, and economic prosperity.

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Endnotes

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