



MIAMI-DADE  
**BUSINESS  
NAVIGATOR**

COMMUNITY PARTNERS WORKING  
TOGETHER TO GROW YOUR BUSINESS

2023

**FINAL  
REPORT**



# INTRODUCTORY LETTER

Between February 2022 and November 2023, the Miami-Dade Business Navigator (MDBN) program, powered through the Small Business Administration (SBA) Community Navigator Pilot Program (CNPP), Florida Small Business Development Center (FSBDC) at FIU Business and six trusted community organizations across Miami-Dade County, served 1,770 Miami-Dade based entrepreneurs and small business owners, organized 235 trainings events for 7,262 attendees, at training events, provided over 9,302 hours of business counseling, and assisted businesses with securing over \$7.2 million in small business funding. The group assisted another 327 Florida-based businesses outside Miami-Dade County for 2,244 consulting hours.

Through the program, the group of community partners connect with underserved local entrepreneurs in Miami-Dade County and surrounding areas to launch, grow and revitalize their businesses. The program was launched in early 2022 with a \$2.5 million grant from the SBA to FSBDC, which serves as the “hub” administrative organization in Miami-Dade County, to deploy the funding among the six community organizations, called “spokes”, who provide small business resource support services: Ascendus, Branches, the EDC of South Miami-Dade, the Miami-Dade Chamber of Commerce, Prospera and StartUP FIU Local. In addition, the group is proud to have partnered with 35 additional community groups via MDBN trainings, referrals and outreach.

The MDBN program focused on entrepreneurs and small businesses owned by women, veterans and socially/economically disadvantaged individuals, helping to guide them to the resources, services and capital available. Our community partners were highly experienced business experts who provide no-cost, one-to-one consulting and training services in the areas that matter most to business success, including business development, access to capital and financial assistance, contracting and procurement, guidance in selecting resources and networking opportunities.

It’s our pleasure to present to you this final program report of Miami-Dade Business Navigator’s activities and achievements — just as it has been our pleasure to be a part of helping local entrepreneurs and business owners start, grow and succeed. Working together as a group our organizations have seen a number of successes in the program’s two-year period. We are excited that the collaboration and partnerships from the MDBN program will continue in the community after the program’s conclusion.

Brian Van Hook



FSBDC at FIU Business

Fabiana Estrada



Ascendus

Myrna Sonora



Prospera

Barbara Cotto



StartUP FIU Local

G. Eric Knowles



Miami-Dade Chamber of Commerce

Brent McLaughlin



Branches

Geri Grimes-Lewis



EDC of South Miami-Dade





**“The Miami-Dade Business Navigator program supported my goals where they gave me the confidence and the know-how to navigate loans and actually turn around my business during the toughest time, during the pandemic.”**

*– Priscilla Reyes, owner, Earthy Chic Boutique*



## MIAMI-DADE BUSINESS NAVIGATOR

From February 1, 2022 through November 30, 2023, the Miami-Dade Business Navigator program provided the following client outcomes:



### KEY PROGRAM OUTCOMES

**1,770**

Unique Clients  
Served

**4,443**

Training Attendees  
(Solo Events)

**11,618**

Consulting Hours  
Provided

**\$4,556,273**

Capital Accessed  
(Loans/Grants)

### ADDITIONAL PROGRAM OUTCOMES

**607**

Partner Client Referrals  
(Hub/Spokes)

**2,819**

Training Attendees  
(Co-Hosted Events)

**\$2,724,600**

Additional Capital  
(Equity/Other Capital)

**\$393,850**

Government  
Contracts Secured

**42**

Published Client  
Success Stories

**21**

Business Starts

**235**

Total Community  
Events/Workshops



**“Business Navigator has inspired me to remain consistent with my business.”**

*– woman, owner of a manufacturing business*



**BUSINESSES ASSISTED**

The Miami-Dade Business Navigator program provides individualized, confidential, no-cost advisory services to local entrepreneurs seeking to start, grow or revitalize their business. The MDBN partners are proud that, in addition to serving 1,770 Miami-Dade businesses, the partners have made 607 internal referrals for additional assistance and countless more to other groups in the community. The program is focused not just on assisting businesses with our team but also connecting them to wider resources in the Miami-Dade County ecosystem.

<b>1,770</b>	<b>11,618</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>607</b>
Unique Clients Served	Consulting Hours	New Business Launches	Client Referrals

**GROWTH COSTS MONEY**

We know this fact well, so we place considerable effort in helping local business owners access the capital they need to grow. Our Miami-Dade Business Navigators include experts in traditional business loans, grant applications, government contracts and other capital sources.

<b>\$4,556,273</b>	<b>\$2,724,600</b>	<b>\$393,850</b>
Loans/Grants	Equity/Additional Capital	Government Contracts Secured

**SHARED KNOWLEDGE**

Working with our community partner organizations, the Miami-Dade Business Navigator program hosts workshops, trainings and learning opportunities for entrepreneurs and businesses throughout Miami-Dade County. These events have ranged from webinars, information sessions, in-person workshops and monthly Navigator resource fairs which rotate around the county.

<b>235</b>	<b>4,443</b>	<b>2,819</b>
Community Events	Attendees (Solo)	Attendees (Co-Hosted)



# MIAMI-DADE BUSINESS NAVIGATORS

At its core, the success of the Miami-Dade Business Navigator program stems from the collective team of administrative and consulting professionals at each of the seven community organizations. These mission-driven experts have worked day in, day out to provide consulting and trainings to local businesses since the launch of the program in early 2022. Meet the Miami-Dade Business Navigator partner organizations:



FSBDC at FIU serves as the administrative hub of the program in addition to providing consulting and training services. The center has 11 Navigator business specialists in areas such as access to capital, marketing, government contracting and business development.



A Community Development Financial Institution assisting small business owners, especially minorities, women and immigrants, with capital and financial literacy.



A community organization active in southern and northern Miami-Dade County focused on micro-businesses.





A not-for-profit economic development organization representing municipalities and business organizations in southern Miami-Dade County.



The oldest black chamber of commerce in South Florida, which provides training, networking and consulting for black, minority and women-owned businesses.



An economic development non-profit specialized in providing bilingual assistance to Hispanic entrepreneurs trying to establish or expand their business.



## StartUP**FIU** Local

A program that helps local small businesses grow their companies. We do this by forging strong community partnerships and delivering comprehensive, inclusive education tailored to small business entrepreneurs. By bringing together tangible resources, industry-specific specialists and thoughtfully designed educational programming, we provide a wide range of services for entrepreneurs to support and grow their microbusinesses for no cost.



## NAVIGATOR PARTNERS

Miami-Dade County has a strong small business ecosystem. The Miami-Dade Business Navigator program is proud to have the partnership, assistance and support of key business and community leaders, organizations and other groups across the county. We are grateful to the following 30 organizations and other groups that have enhanced the program's mission and played a vital role in helping local businesses grow and flourish.









## CLIENT SUCCESS STORIES

### MOBILE MAGIC HANDS

*Mind Over Matter Allied Health, LLC.*

Mind Over Matter Allied Health, a mobile massage and physical therapy business, launched in January 2019, focusing initially on sports massage therapy for college and professional football players. Expanding services during the COVID-19 pandemic, founder Joshua Smith introduced mobile massages with safety measures, gradually building a client base through word-of-mouth and establishing a website in 2021. Introducing “Wellness Days,” he provided chair or table massages to various organizations, including the City of North Miami Beach. Looking ahead, Smith’s goal is to target larger companies and establish a brick-and-mortar location within the next few years. Joining the Miami-Dade Business Navigator in 2021 provided invaluable insights and connections thanks to consultant Myrtha Wroy. Smith also connected with the Florida Small Business Development Center at FIU Business, which aided in business development, networking, and understanding certifications and vendor opportunities. The support, including training sessions on topics like marketing, has been instrumental for business growth and navigating government contracting opportunities.



**“Networking and meeting people is crucial. I’ve even done some work for free to gain exposure, which is significant when starting off. People need to know who you are and what you do, and exposure through various events and mindsets is vital.”**

– Joshua Smith, owner, Mind Over Matter Allied Health, LLC.

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### SWEET SUCCESS

*Kimone’s Cake Art Studio*

Kimone’s Cake Art Studio is a high-end dessert shop offering personalized treats and cake decorating classes. Inspired by a cake decorating class, Kimone Ferguson turned her passion into a full-time venture, aiming to elevate cake artistry. Ordering is available through their website for pickup or delivery, with popup shops in the local Miami area. Collaborating with the Miami-Dade Business Navigator program provided invaluable guidance. Roslyn Rutledge-Rice from Florida SBDC at FIU Business offered marketing insights, while Steve Arman from Branches provided resources like business planning and QuickBooks training. Participation in StartUP FIU Local’s Becoming a CEO program enhanced customer-centric approaches and CEO development. These collaborations and programs played a pivotal role in business growth and development.



**“For new entrepreneurs who are just starting out, I would advise leveraging the available resources. The MDBN program has numerous connections to organizations offering various services. It’s essential to make the most of these resources because many partners are willing to assist and share their knowledge. Also, keep in mind that success doesn’t happen overnight; there’s a learning curve.”**

– Kimone Ferguson, owner, Kimone’s Cake Art Studio

## LITTLE CHEF BIG DREAMS

*Lil Chef Big Food, LLC.*

Lorna Flores, CEO of Lil Chef Big Food, embarked on her holistic wellness journey after a Vitiligo diagnosis, delving into functional nutrition and culinary arts. Frustrated by conventional medicine, she pursued functional medicine, leading to her company's inception. The business evolved from personal chef services to a comprehensive 90-day program, incorporating epigenetic testing and personalized nutritional plans. Collaborating with Miami-Dade Business Navigator consultants Michelle Caba and Maribel Balbin shaped her strategic direction. Their guidance in crafting a marketing plan and outsourcing tasks has been invaluable for business growth. Looking ahead, Flores plans to further outsource tasks like managing social media platforms. The program's support has been instrumental in streamlining operations and focusing on expansion, ensuring continued success for Lil Chef Big Food.



**“I am continuously getting informed, making myself knowledgeable to continue helping and to grow. This process helps me expand and, in turn, allows me to better assist my clients. To me, knowledge is power. This is one of the things that Michelle has helped me with. While she’s assisting me in one aspect, I am helping myself by gaining more knowledge in the health and wellness world, continuing to evolve as a person.”**

– Lorna Flores, owner, Lil Chef Big Food, LLC.

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## HOLISTIC HEALING THROUGH SOUNDS AND SCENTS

*Attunergy*

Attunergy, founded in July 2021, emerged from a dual purpose: addressing widespread stress and supporting holistic healing for founder Jessica Berger's cat, Fiona, diagnosed with cancer. Offering aromatherapy and sound healing, Attunergy fosters relaxation and well-being. Initially focused on Fiona's healing journey, positive responses led to its evolution into a company that is now people focused. The name, a fusion of “attune” and “energy,” reflects

its mission of tuning into inner energy for positive change. Supported by the Miami-Dade Business Navigator program and the Florida SBDC at FIU Business, Berger benefited from resources like business classes and personalized consultations with Michelle Caba and Roslyn Rutledge-Rice from the FSBDC. These collaborations provided crucial clarity and direction, offering a sounding board for entrepreneurial ideas. Attunergy continues to thrive, driven by a commitment to holistic wellness and community support.



**“Having subject matter business consultants, like what the Miami-Dade Business Navigator program offers, or connecting with fellow entrepreneurs who understand the struggles, can be incredibly helpful. They serve as your cheerleaders, offering encouragement, suggesting solutions, and lifting you back up when you’re feeling down.”**

– Jessica Berger, owner, Attunergy



## COMMITTED TO CRAFTING HEALTHY DESSERT

*Tinajita LLC (dba Vegallia)*

Natalia Serur and Corina Jimenez founded Vegallia in 2011 to address dietary needs during Serur's mother's battle with stomach cancer. Moving to the U.S. from Venezuela in 2015, they formed a team to create an even healthier frozen dessert alternative. In 2017, Vegallia opened the first fully plant-based frozen dessert facility in the U.S., offering sugar-free, dairy-free, gluten-free gelato-like treats. They expanded sales online, in specialty stores and in food service establishments nationwide. Facing challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, they turned to the Miami-Dade Business Navigator program for support. Consultants Roslyn Rutledge-Rice and Lilian Urbandt aided in sales strategy, financial management and business development, while collaborations with organizations Branches and Prospera contributed to their success.



**“Get connected. Learn about the process. There are fantastic resources available, and assistance like the Miami-Dade Business Navigator program that has been invaluable. There are numerous tools and insights these programs can provide. It’s a treasure trove that can prevent you from making the same mistakes we did when we lacked such resources.”**

– Natalia Serur and Corina Jimenez, owners, Tinajita LLC (dba Vegallia)

## NAVIGATING SUCCESS IN E-COMMERCE

*Mav Inc.*

Mav Inc, founded by Angel Gonzalez and Maria Osorio in 2019, initially began as a general e-commerce business. Identifying demand in the automotive parts sector, particularly in headlights and bumpers, they refined their focus. Seeking expansion, Osorio researched credit options, leading her to Prospera's assistance under the Miami-Dade Business Navigator program. They provided crucial financial aid and guidance, notably from consultant Jose Aguinaga, who supported in project presentation and business structuring. Prospera helped them navigate business norms and rules. Their short- and long-term plans include securing a warehouse in Doral or neighboring area for operational convenience. Prospera's support has been invaluable in propelling their success and shaping their entrepreneurial journey for the future.



**“If I were to share advice with fellow entrepreneurs, I would emphasize the importance of patience and continuous education. Success does not happen overnight, and setbacks are part of the journey. Perseverance, learning and dedicated inventory management are key. I am thankful for the assistance we have received from Prospera and the reliable supportive network we have established under the Miami- Dade Business Navigator program.”**

– Maria Osorio, owner, Mav Inc.

## FROM MUAY THAI TO MAINSTREAM

*Athlon Rub*

Athlon Rub offers a sports herbal topical formula for athletes, inspired by a traditional Muay Thai formula. Initially motivated by personal entrepreneurship goals and belief in the product's efficacy, the founder secured exclusive market distribution rights after experiencing its benefits firsthand in Thailand. Through collaboration with the factory, the formula was enhanced and made more accessible to U.S. customers. Despite challenges in niche markets, expansion into sports like soccer and running was successful. The Miami-Dade Business Navigator, through Branches, provided invaluable resources, training, networking opportunities, and grant access. Their support and consulting advice were instrumental in business success, including a digital transformation program to enhance digital marketing presence. Access to grants like the Local Initiative Support Corporation Verizon Grant and Mom & Pop Small Business Grant was facilitated by the program, highlighting the importance of seizing opportunities.



**“Staying connected with the business community is crucial. Keep in touch with the MDBN, stay informed about all the free training opportunities out there. Have your schedule readily available and make sure to read the emails. The grants, lessons, training, and networking opportunities offered to small businesses is incredibly valuable.”**

– Anthony Salcedo, owner, Athlon Rub

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## THE SMELL OF SUCCESS

*Place of Aroma, LLC.*

Founded by Carol Edmond, Place of Aroma specializes in safe, long-lasting custom candles and linen sprays, ideal for special events and gift season. A unique feature is the customizable hidden messages within the candles, adding a personal touch when lit. Inspired by a family tragedy related to fibroids, the business aims to address the link between these conditions and environmental pollutants found in everyday scented products. Support from the Miami-Dade Business Navigator program and from the Florida SBDC at FIU Business, particularly through marketing consultant Michelle Caba, has been invaluable. Caba's guidance emphasized the importance of understanding business fundamentals, such as branding and target customer identification, crucial for effective marketing strategies. This insight proved essential for the founder's journey as a new business owner, highlighting the significance of focusing marketing efforts on the right audience rather than a broad demographic.



**“The key is to seek help and put yourself out there. Attend various events and join organizations. You never know where you might find valuable information or support. That's exactly how I stumbled upon the Miami-Dade Business Navigator program through the Chamber of Commerce and other organizations.”**

– Carol Edmond, owner, Place of Aroma, LLC.



# MENTAL HEALTH AND MENTORSHIP

*Cognitive Wellness, LLC.*

As a college student, Jordan Hendrieth landed a job specializing in mental health support for adolescents and teens. After connecting with their stories and struggles, Hendrieth’s intrigue in mental health grew. He delved into research post-graduation, exploring therapy, direct care and psychology. Meeting a mentor solidified his path into therapy services. After Hendrieth received a master’s in social work and licensure, Cognitive Wellness LLC began in 2017, initially part-time. COVID-19 pushed his business into a full-time private practice. The Miami-Dade Business Navigator provided valuable resources, including training sessions and funding through Ascendus. This support bolstered Hendrieth’s confidence in transitioning to his full-time practice. Additionally, he received guidance on marketing strategies and leveraging artificial intelligence tools to enhance his business growth.



**“As for advice to fellow entrepreneurs starting out, I’d emphasize the importance of seeking information and mentorship. Find someone who’s already walked the path you’re on. Whether it’s through books, online resources or establishing connections with experienced mentors, the pursuit of wisdom is paramount.”**

– Jordan Hendrieth, owner, Cognitive Wellness, LLC.



# SOLUTION ON SUSTAINABILITY

*Gradible*

Yadira Diaz founded Gradible, initially aimed at grading businesses’ sustainability practices, but shifted focus to offer eco-friendly solutions. Partnering with a local company, Gradible diverts food waste from landfills by transforming it into compost and provides sustainable food service packaging. After six months, Gradible expanded to offer over 150 sustainable solutions, driven by Diaz’s passion for sustainability and concern for environmental challenges. Assistance from the Miami-Dade Business Navigator program, particularly consultant Marthy Wroy, was invaluable. Wroy’s proactive approach facilitated certifications and vendor opportunities, overcoming complex processes.



**“I’ve learned that you must take the leap and dive into entrepreneurship. You can’t wait until everything is perfectly organized. Also, take advantage of resources and grants, especially those available for women, minorities and veterans. Networking and putting yourself out there is crucial to success.”**

– Yadira Diaz, owner, Gradible

## WELLNESS AND PATIENT CARE

*Upright Spine Center, LLC.*

Amber Williams, a licensed chiropractor, leads Upright Spine Center, specializing in chiropractic care for musculoskeletal alignment and nervous system health, particularly for personal injury patients. Inspired by her grandmother's chiropractic appointments, Williams pursued a career in the field, realizing its benefits for athletes during her undergraduate studies. Introduced to the Miami-Dade Business Navigator program through the Chamber of Commerce, Williams received invaluable support from consultants at the Florida Small Business Development Center at FIU Business. They guided her through business analysis, growth strategy and business plan development, preparing her for future funding opportunities. While immediate funding wasn't secured, Williams is confident in the readiness of her business plan for future endeavors.



**“My advice is to start with the Miami-Dade Business Navigator program. A robust business plan is essential; it serves as a blueprint for your business’s operation. Take the time to plan strategically, think about your location, your target audience and the community you wish to serve. The MDBN program is excellent for getting you ahead of the game instead of just jumping in blindly, as I did.”**

*– Amber Williams, owner, Upright Spine Center, LLC.*

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## EMPOWERING SKIN STUDIO

*Faces By Aida, INC dba WYSP Skin Studio*

WYSP Skin Studio, formerly Faces by Aida, promotes inclusive, non-invasive aesthetic services rooted in skin health and self-acceptance. Founder Aida Castro's journey, from makeup artist to business owner, reflects her passion for skincare. With support from the Florida Small Business Development Center at FIU Business, Castro refined business systems and empowered her team, driving sales growth and operational efficiency. Consultant Roslyn Rutledge-Rice provided invaluable insights and confidence in overcoming challenges, while Myrtha Wroy identified new business opportunities. Previously daunted by financial uncertainty, Aida now navigates her business with clarity and seeks assistance confidently. The program's guidance and supportive network position WYSP Skin Studio for holistic growth, reflecting Castro's commitment to empowering individuals to embrace their natural beauty.



**“My advice for any aspiring entrepreneur is to embrace adaptability and resilience. There will be bumps along the way, but they often lead to breakthroughs and blessings. Create a village of like-minded people and resources to help you grow. Don't be afraid to ask for help. Delegating tasks is crucial as you expand your business. Have clear systems in place, and run your vision, not just work on it. The Navigator program is a heaven-sent blessing that has given me the tools to succeed and the confidence to spread the word about its impact.”**

*– Aida Castro, owner, Faces By Aida, INC dba WYSP Skin Studio*



## PUSHING INTO PERSERVERANCE

*BATISTA LT LLC (dba Land Airline)*

Land Airline was founded four years ago by Yasmany Batista Perez and Glenda Fuentes, who began as Uber drivers seeking better earnings and improving customer experiences. Transitioning from basic ride share to luxurious services, they identified a market gap for premium yet affordable transportation. Focusing on safety, cleanliness and personalized service, they positioned themselves between Uber and Lyft and luxury limousine companies. They found mentorship through the Miami-Dade Business Navigator program, particularly with consultant Jose Monte from Florida Small Business Development Center at FIU Business. The program provided invaluable expertise and financial assistance, aiding in accessing capital and credit through Ascendus. As immigrants, they appreciate the program's role in their continuous learning and business growth, considering it an untapped goldmine of essential information.



**“If you have the desire to start your own venture and constantly weigh the pros and cons, it’s time to act. Leave your fears behind and take calculated risks. When the entrepreneurial spark ignites within you, push aside doubts and hesitations. The first step is the toughest.”**

– Yasmany Batista Perez and Glenda Fuentes, owners, BATISTA LT LLC (dba LAND AIRLINE)

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## CULTIVATING CULTURE

*Imago Arts, LLC.*

Imago Art, founded by Trina Oropeza in 2016 in Coral Gables and now situated in South Miami, is a cultural center integrating art, music and literature, particularly emphasizing Hispanic traditions and values. With spaces including a bookstore, exhibition gallery and workshop rooms, they offer cultural activities for all ages. Their goal for 2023 was to achieve financial sustainability and generate profits by the next year, with a long-term vision of expansion statewide and nationwide. Through a Goldman Sachs training program, they connected with Prospera, a Hispanic-focused organization, seeking assistance in marketing. Prospera business consultant Jose Aguinaga provided essential support in market research and digital marketing, facilitating growth and access to resources. With Prospera’s help, they are also pursuing new loans and continue to work on expanding their goals and projects.



**“My advice for entrepreneurs is to choose a venture that aligns with their passion, believe in their business, seek guidance, maintain high ethics, coherence, professionalism and responsibility, and think about long-term success.”**

– Trina Oropeza, owner, Imago Art, LLC.

## A CUT ABOVE THE REST

### *Exclusive Tonsorial Services*

Inspired by his sister, Sergei Grant embarked on a barbering career, starting with home haircuts and expanding to friends and family. Transitioning full-time in 2014 after attending beauty school, he founded Exclusive Tonsorial Services. Despite challenges, including job loss, Grant persevered, becoming the official barber for Love & Hip-Hop: Miami. Seeking support, he turned to the Miami-Dade Business Navigator (MDBN), benefiting from their assistance in paperwork and business guidance. Grant maintains a positive outlook, crediting MDBN mentors for their support. He emphasizes the importance of hard work and mentorship for success. MDBN collaborates with organizations like Ascendus and Prospera to aid local entrepreneurs. For Grant, entrepreneurship means freedom and happiness in pursuing his passion.



**“Know that it’s going to be hard work. As long as you take yourself seriously and pay attention to what the mentors tell you, it’s going to be smooth sailing from there.”**

– Sergei Grant, owner, *Exclusive Tonsorial Services*

## NAVIGATING GROWTH

### *Swirls Palm Springs*

Swirls Frozen Yogurt offers a diverse range of treats, including frozen yogurt, ice cream, Acai bowls, smoothies and more, emphasizing quality and variety. Established by Gustavo Fiorini in June 2019 and opened amid the COVID-19 pandemic in June 2020, they adapted their self-service model for customer safety. Seeking funds through the Miami-Dade Business Navigator program due to slow growth and lack of credit history, they found support with Ascendus, obtaining a convenient line of credit. This enabled them to invest in expansion, including hiring staff, adding new product lines, upgrading facilities and enhancing marketing efforts. With increased sales by 30% and profits by 40% in one year, Swirls achieved higher-than-average profitability, attributing success to Ascendus’s assistance in lowering costs and driving growth.



**“My advice to other entrepreneurs is to carefully evaluate the costs of their start-up and control the business plan in terms of time and costs. It is important to study the consumer, the competition and market trends. Continuously offer new products or options to keep frequent customers. It is essential to analyze the numbers monthly to make decisions that maximize results and avoid bankruptcy due to debt.”**

– Gustavo Fiorini, owner, *Swirls Palm Springs*



## ABOUT FACE

*Makeup by Rory Lee*

Makeup by Rory Lee, offers vegan makeup products tailored for television and film, while also providing a staff for hair and wardrobe styling. Founded nine years ago, the brand merged with Makeup by Rory to streamline beauty product offerings and ensure quality and natural ingredients. The integrated approach caters to various needs, from everyday clients to industry professionals, emphasizing simplicity and effectiveness. Branches, a spoke under the Miami-Dade Business Navigator program, facilitated business growth through strategic opportunities and training. Micro-business director Steve Arman enabled advancements in marketing, technology and branding. Implementation of cybersecurity and marketing strategies enhanced the brand's e-commerce presence, bridging technological gaps. The program's support has been transformative, empowering the founder, Rory Lee, to adapt to modern business practices and drive growth in 2023.



**“For entrepreneurs just starting out, my advice is simple: never stop learning. Regardless of your level of success, continuous learning is key. Embrace modern technology, seek help when needed, and enjoy the journey. Don’t be afraid to admit when you don’t know something and leverage resources like the Miami-Dade Business Navigator program and organizations like Branches for guidance.”**

– Rory Lee, owner, *Makeup by Rory Lee*

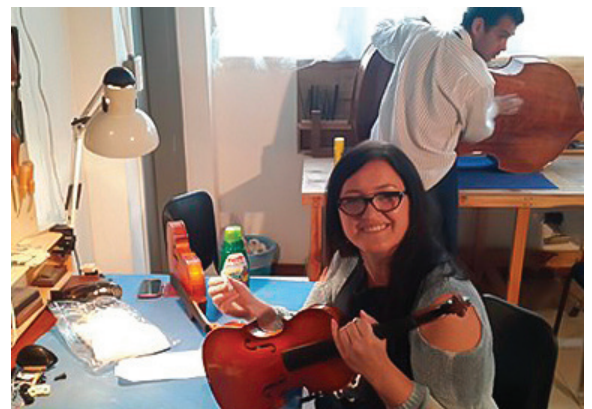
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## MUSIC MAKERS

*Ideal Music Box*

Ideal Music Box, which specializes in selling and manufacturing musical instruments, was founded by Aurelina Romero-Vivas 25 years ago in Venezuela. When her husband had to move, they expanded to the U.S. in 2019. Transitioning to an online model during the COVID-19 pandemic, they persevered and collaborated with brands like Iseman, makers of hand-crafted guitars in Hawaii. Leveraging platforms like Amazon, they focus on online sales and aim to expand into large-scale manufacturing.

Attending a Miami-Dade Business Navigator Resource Fair in 2023 connected them with Clementina Valladares from StartUP FIU Local, who provided invaluable insights and networking opportunities. The MDBN program filled crucial skill gaps in market research, financial management and marketing strategies, aiding business growth. StartUP FIU Local guided them toward successful ventures, emphasizing community connections and collaborations essential for their success.



**“Learning how to do things right is essential to avoid failure. We’ve experienced setbacks, so the key is not to fail again. Reach out, connect and leverage the support available to you. It can make a world of difference. The MDBN core beliefs in the importance of entrepreneurship by unlocking one’s potential and shaping a better future also align with the values of many entrepreneurs.”**

– Aurelina Romero-Vivas, owner, *Ideal Music Box*

# AN ENTREPRENEUR TAKES FLIGHT

*305 Aero Supplies, LLC.*

Richard Jones experienced firsthand how essential receiving aircraft parts and equipment on time can be to safety and operations. A U.S. Army veteran, Richard served as a 15N Avionic Mechanic in Afghanistan and Iraq. Following his military service, he worked as a defense contractor for a number of major aerospace companies.

Given his background and experience, in November 2021 Richard decided to take flight himself as an entrepreneur and launched 305 Aero Supplies LLC, which provides technology products and information technology services to government agencies. Being a veteran with defense industry experience, Richard naturally began looking into government contracting as a viable market for his new business.

Through the Miami-Dade Business Navigator program, Richard was paired with an FSBDC procurement specialist who helped get 305 Aero Supplies certified as a Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business. This opened opportunities with the Defense Logistics Agency and led to his first contract – the first critical step on his journey as a government contractor.

**“Florida SBDC at FIU and the Miami-Dade Business Navigator program played a vital role in the development and early success of 305 Aero Supplies, and I’m also excited that my company is in line to receive my second government contract.”**

– Richard Jones, owner, 305 Aero Supplies



# CURATING A TASTE OF HOME

*Mariana Foods, Inc.*

Maria Reig Silvestre created a company that combined two of her favorite things: her home country of Spain and food. She founded Mariana Foods in 2019, but when her business partner left after a year and the pandemic hit, she reevaluated her business and shifted to e-commerce. Soon her website and audience were growing daily, and she needed more warehouse space to store goods and more products to meet the needs of her customers.

Maria met Ascendus when she entered her business into the Miami-Dade Business Navigator program. She obtained a loan for \$25,000 through the Southern Opportunity and Resilience Fund and used it toward buying her own warehouse and increasing her supply of products from Spain, as well as a mailing service, a subscription service and a digital marketing campaign.

**“I am grateful for Ascendus because they trusted me and my business. It’s not only the money, but it’s also that they saw me and my company and believed that I could do it.”**

– Maria Reig Silvestre, owner, Mariana Foods





## MOVING FORWARD

*Alpha International Transport, LLC.*

Alpha International Transport LLC (AI Transport) is a third-party logistics company that provides efficient cargo transport solutions with reliable carriers. AI Transport's founder, Felton Brown, connected with the Miami-Dade Chamber of Commerce (M-DCC) through the Miami-Dade Business Navigator program for help with business plan development and financing plus international trade and domestic logistics contracts.



Working with M-DCC, Felton set up financial objectives and received assistance on applying for Minority, Disabled Enterprise and 8a certifications. He also received technical assistance from MDBN spokes StartUP FIU Local and Branches, and from the Beacon Council. Most importantly, Felton was encouraged to enter the Miami-Dade County's BizUp competition to fund future growth for small businesses and AI Transport was selected to receive the maximum \$100,000 grant.

Access to capital has been a turning point for AI Transport. The BizUp grant has given the company a major boost in the direction of growth. With the funding, Felton contracted with a logistics business development manager, invested in software for improved operational efficiency and in technology for better visibility in tracking transports.

**“The Miami-Dade Small Business Navigator Program has been a great tool in our small business development, from connecting to resources to creating a clear picture of where we see ourselves and our business going. The Business Navigator program has assisted us in seeing our vision manifest.”**

– Felton Brown, founder, Alpha International Transport, LLC.

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## BUILDING ON SUCCESS

*HJ Construction Group, Inc.*

Elena Hercule, a Haitian-born entrepreneur, has over 25 years of construction management experience and after leaving her position as VP for a commercial contractor was ready to launch her own consulting and construction management business.

As a new business owner, she had ambitious plans. Under the Miami-Dade Business Navigator program, Elena connected with the Miami-Dade Chamber of Commerce, where members helped refine her marketing efforts and streamline business operations to better achieve her financial goals. From creating a profile of her ideal client to identifying networking opportunities and updating marketing materials, Elena gained the insight she needed to succeed. Once she prioritized her services, she secured a significant client, has continued to onboard additional new clients and obtained a new construction management contract.



**“The strategies, resources and network provided through the Miami-Dade Chamber were instrumental in helping me achieve my first-year goal as a business owner.”**

– Elena Hercule, owner, HJ Construction Group, Inc.



## BEHIND EVERY FACE IS A STORY

Most journeys in entrepreneurship begin with a dream or an idea. Whether it's to make the world a better place, to share a gift of healing or to chart new pathways, no business idea is too small or too big. Thanks to the team of dedicated consultants and professionals at the Miami-Dade Business Navigator program, hundreds of underserved local entrepreneurs have seen their hard work pay off. Read more about their success and how they got there.



SCAN ME

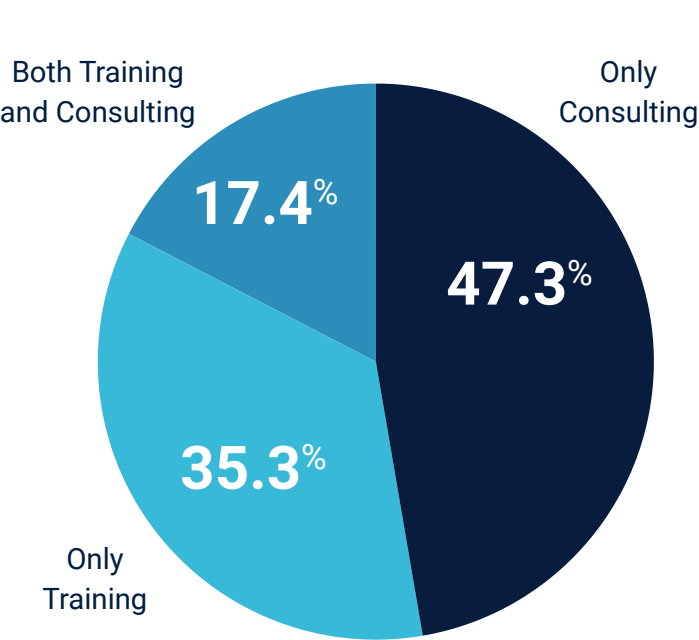
**SCAN QR CODE TO VIEW  
FULL LIST OF CLIENT  
SUCCESS STORIES**



# SATISFIED CLIENTS

The Miami-Dade Business Navigator Program connects highly experienced business experts at community partners with business owners and entrepreneurs to help grow local businesses and launch new ventures. From developing a competitive growth strategy to accessing capital, the program focuses on achieving client satisfaction and economic impact. The following data are based on the second-year client survey conducted by the **FIU Jorge M. Pérez Metropolitan Center** and from data in the network’s customer relations management system.

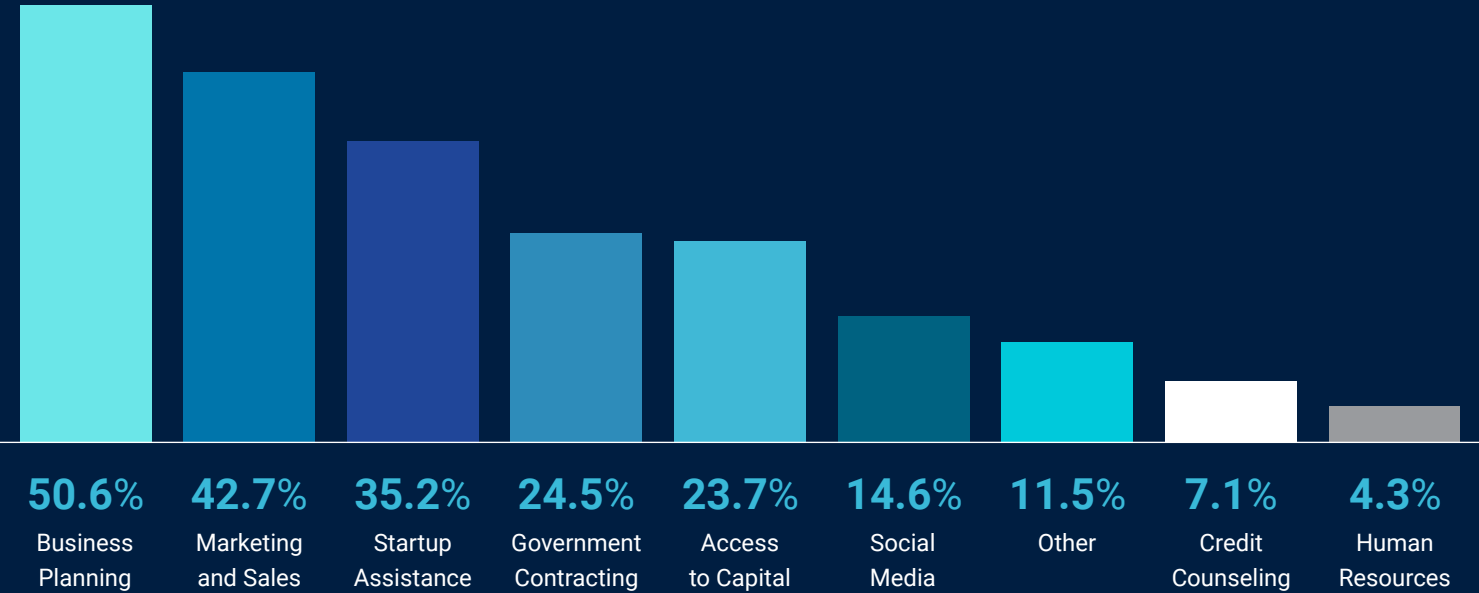
## TYPE OF SERVICES RECEIVED IN YEAR 2



**“The Business Navigator guided me to understand where my management and operational weakness were and how to use consultants, combined with the resources provided, to propel my business profitability.”**  
– hair salon owner

**“I have already recommended to other business owners I know to reach out and get assistance. We can go further together as a team!”**  
– video production company owner

## TYPES OF CONSULTING SERVICES



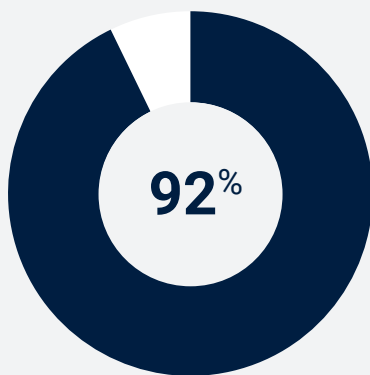
## SATISFACTION WITH SERVICES RECEIVED

Respondents were asked their satisfaction level using a 5-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The figures below note differences between Year 1 survey and Year 2 survey responses.

### CONSULTING

#### OVERALL SATISFACTION

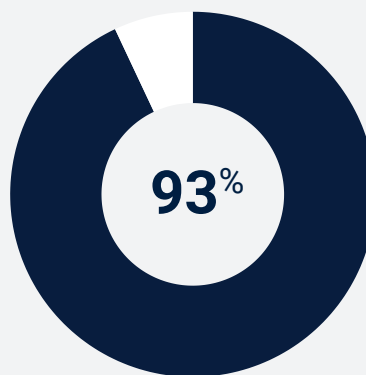
with Consulting Services



4.6 out of 5  
7% point increase

#### CONSULTANT KNOWLEDGE

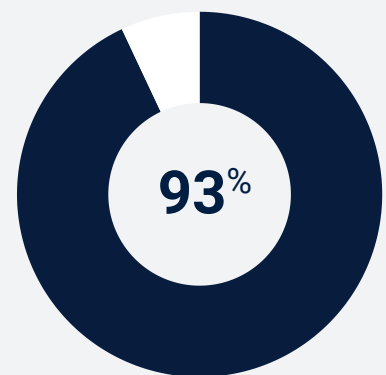
How Clients Rated the Knowledge  
of their Consultants



4.7 out of 5  
8% point increase

#### RECOMMENDATION RATE

Willingness to Recommend the  
Organizations Providing Service

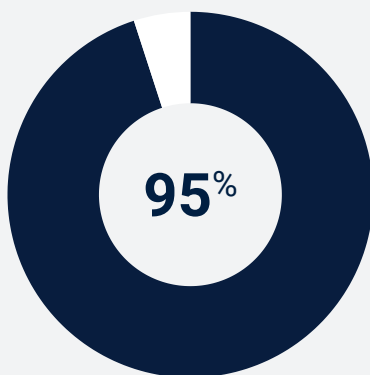


4.7 out of 5  
6% point increase

### TRAINING

#### OVERALL SATISFACTION

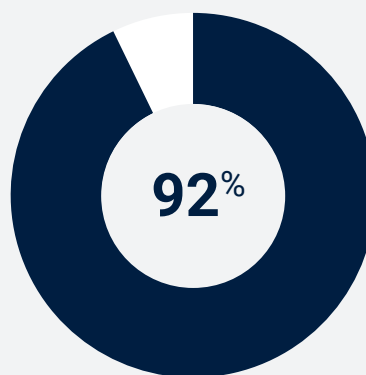
with Training Services



4.8 out of 5  
3% point decrease

#### TRAINING STAFF KNOWLEDGE

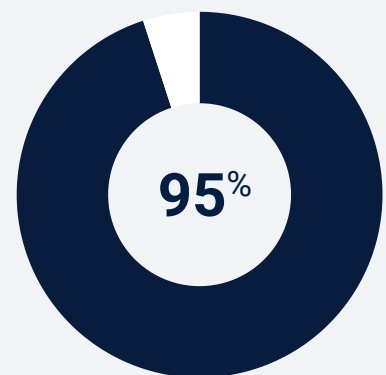
How Clients Rated the Knowledge  
of the Training Staff



4.6 out of 5  
No % point increase/decrease

#### RECOMMENDATION RATE

Willingness to Recommend the  
Organizations' Training Services



4.8 out of 5  
3% point increase

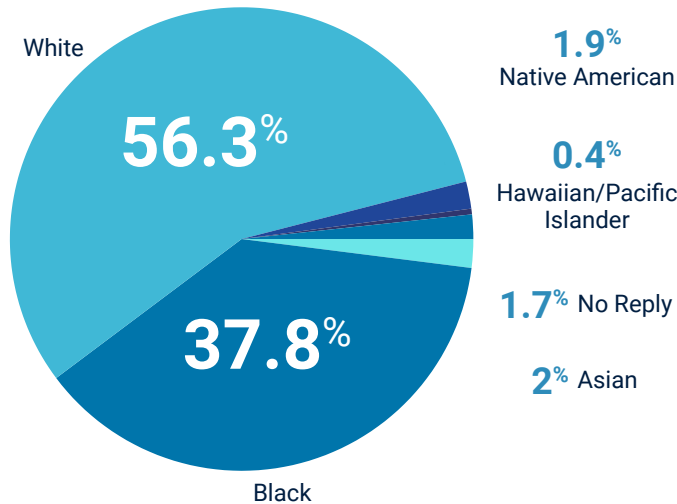


# CLIENT DEMOGRAPHICS

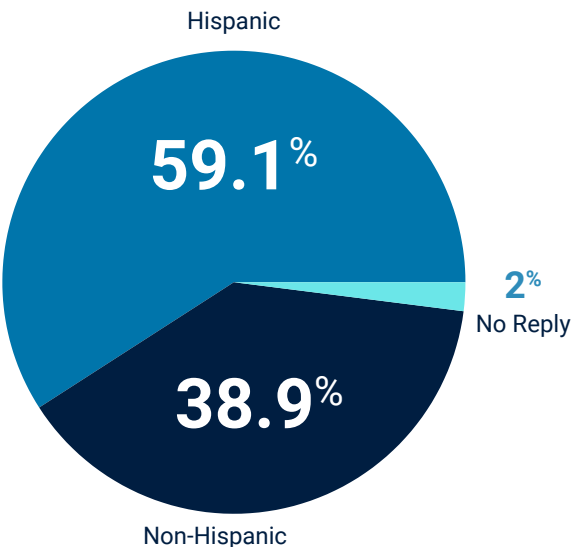
In addition to tracking program outcomes and impacts, the Miami-Dade Business Navigator partners are monitoring business demographics and characteristics to ensure the program is reaching small businesses in diverse communities in our area. Below is information on local small businesses consulted under the program during the two years of operations.

## CLIENT RACE

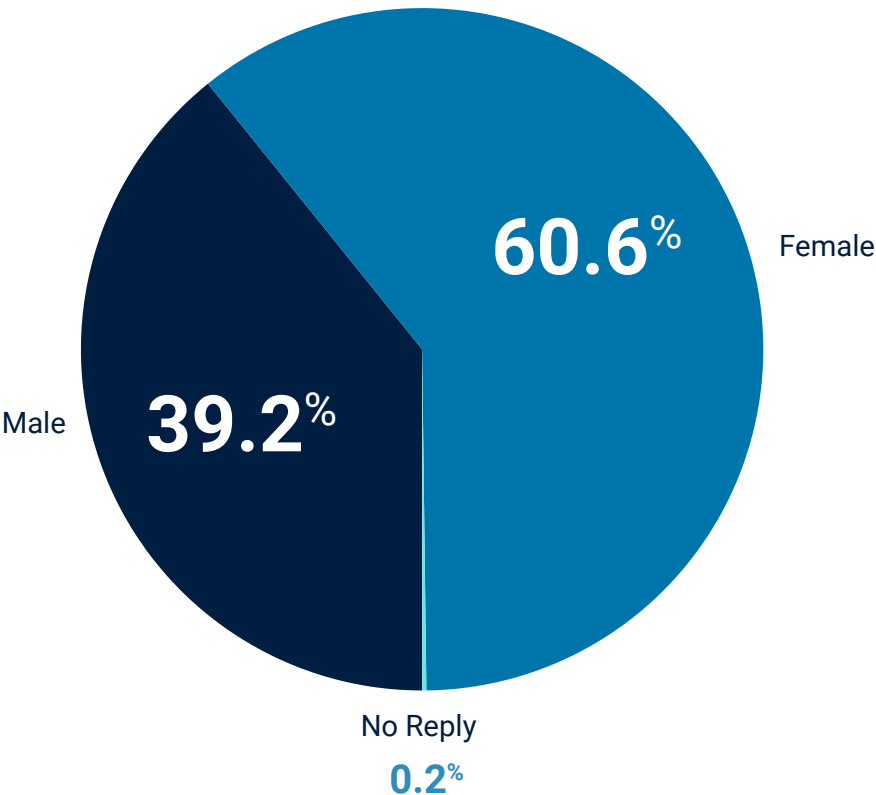
A client may report under multiple race/ethnicity categories



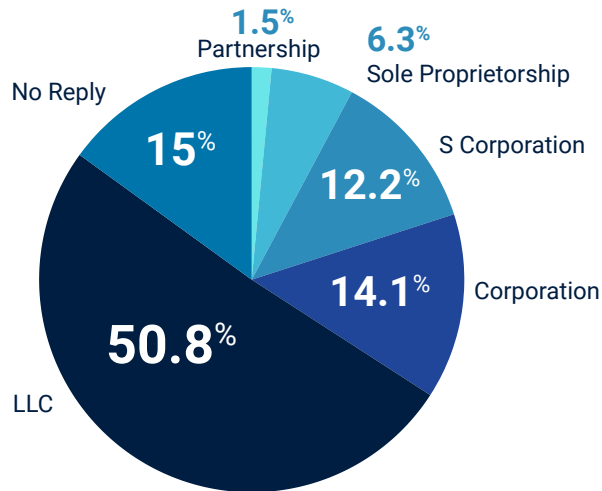
## HISPANIC ETHNICITY



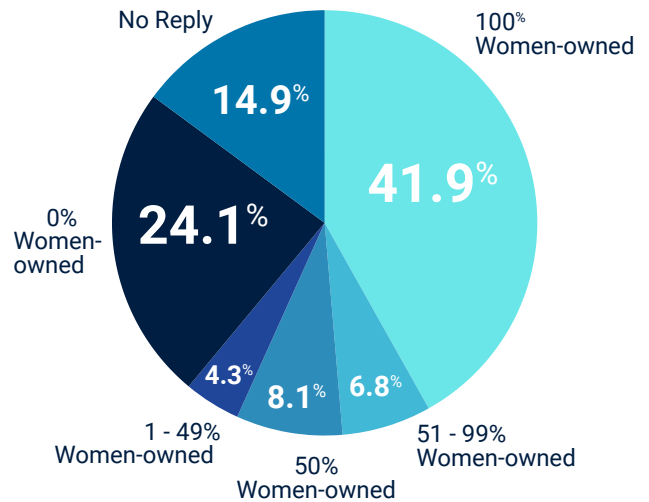
## CLIENT GENDER



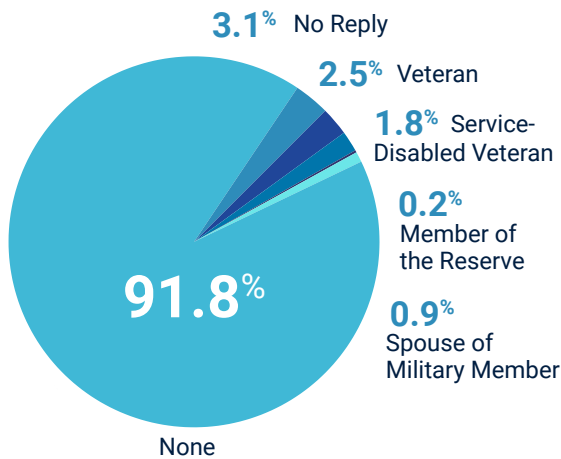
## BUSINESS ORGANIZATION



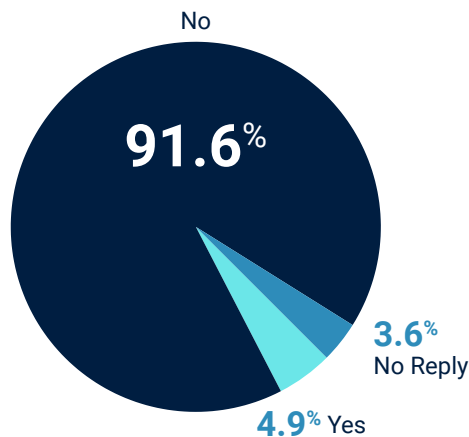
## WOMEN-OWNED FIRMS



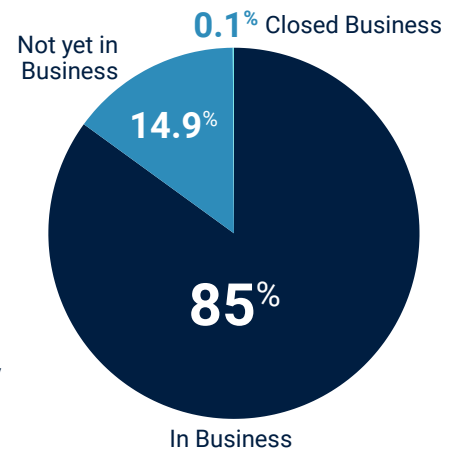
## MILITARY STATUS



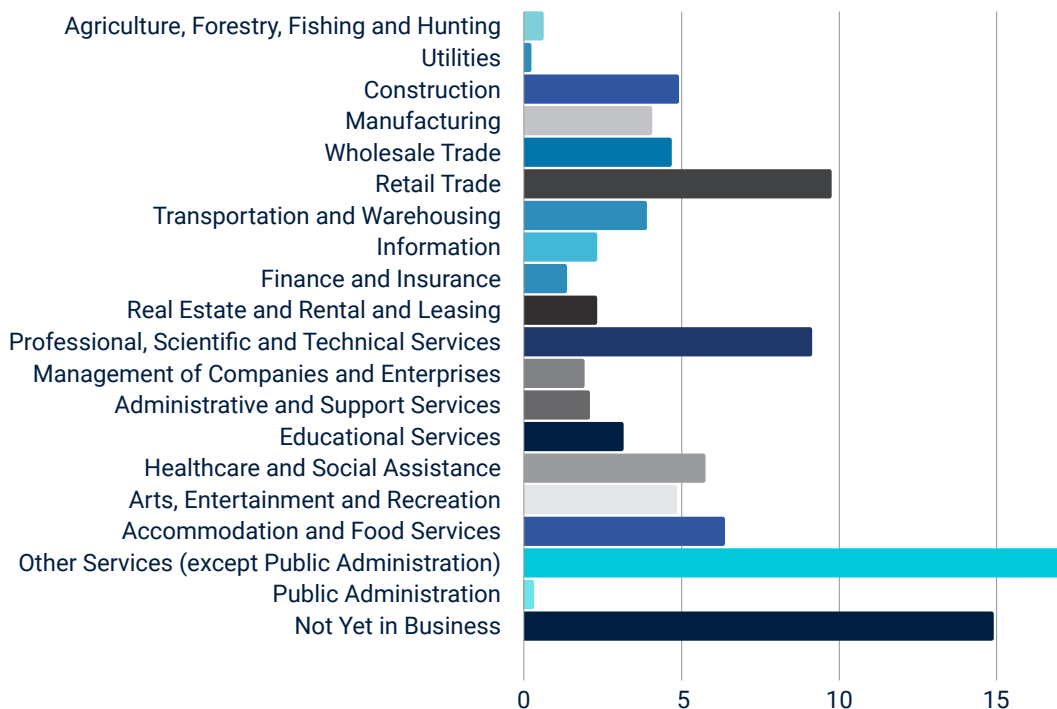
## DISABILITY STATUS



## BUSINESS STATUS



## BUSINESS SECTOR





## FIRM SIZE BY TOTAL ANNUAL SALES

Annual Sales	Clients	Employees	Annual Sales
No Response	115	N/A	N/A
Not Yet in Business	264	N/A	N/A
Zero or Less	414	702	\$0
\$1 to \$24,999	242	435	\$1,994,012
\$25,000 to \$99,000	303	706	\$16,819,674
\$100,000 to \$499,000	314	1,168	\$69,583,836
\$500,000 to \$999,000	58	361	\$39,073,550
\$1,000,000 to \$4,999,999	53	595	\$96,605,227
\$5,000,000 or More	7	217	\$62,600,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,770</b>	<b>4,184</b>	<b>\$286,676,299</b>

## FIRMS BY AGE OF BUSINESS

Response	Clients	Employees	Reported Annual Sales
Not Yet in Business	264	N/A	N/A
New Business (Less Than 1 Year)	134	210	\$1,591,517
1 to 3 Years in Business	439	889	\$24,231,165
4 to 5 Years in Business	553	1,485	\$84,810,886
6 to 10 Years in Business	147	649	\$37,359,817
11 to 20 Years in Business	170	729	\$74,113,506
21 to 50 Years in Business	55	440	\$57,414,058
51+ Years in Business	8	100	\$7,123,850
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,770</b>	<b>4,502</b>	<b>\$286,644,799</b>



**“The Miami-Dade Business Navigator  
has been there to help in all the ways  
that I need for my business.”**

*– Sergei Grant, owner, Exclusive Tonsorial Services*

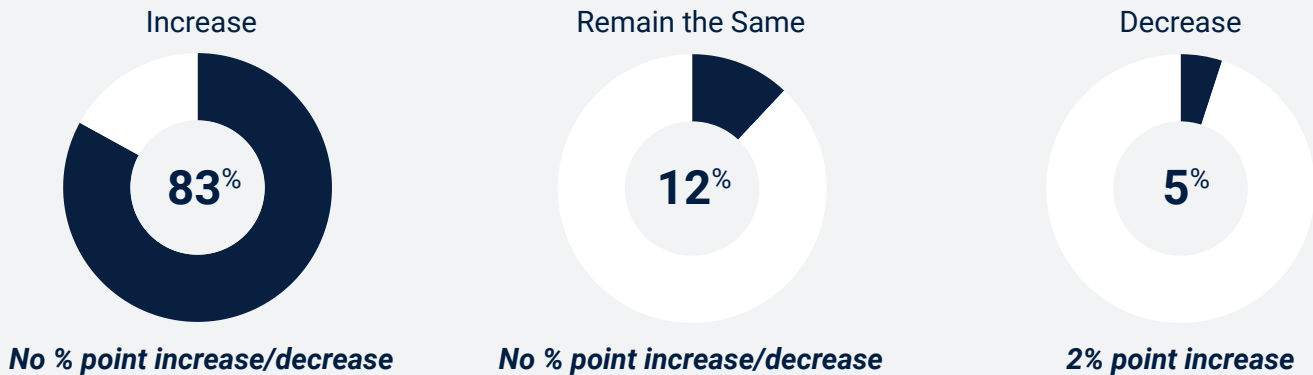


## MIAMI-DADE BUSINESS OUTLOOK

Through the final client survey, we heard from local businesses about their outlook for 2024, including their expectations for hiring, sales and areas of need. The figures below note differences between Year 1 survey and Year 2 survey responses.

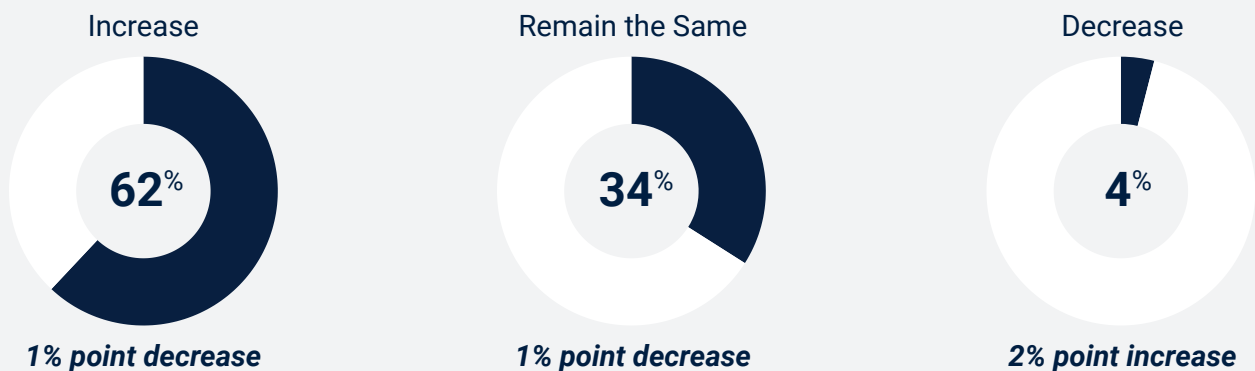
### EXPECTATIONS FOR SALES REVENUE

Program participants continued to have a positive outlook, with 83.4% expecting sales revenue to increase either moderately or substantially in 2024. There was a slight increase in respondents expecting a decrease in revenue.



### EXPECTATIONS FOR NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES

Most business owners in the program continued to have a positive outlook for the total number of employees in the business in 2024, with 62.2% expecting the number of employees to increase moderately/substantially. This reflected a slight decrease among respondents from the Year 1 survey responses.



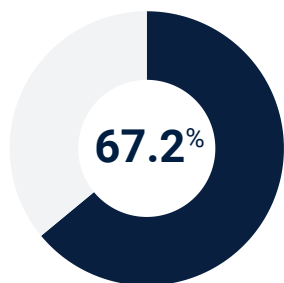
**“To all the aspiring entrepreneurs out there, whether you’re already on your journey, in the planning stages, or just contemplating starting your own business, I cannot recommend the Miami-Dade Business Navigator Program enough. It has been an absolute game-changer for me.”**

– Nicole Bronson, Anointed Florist & Gift Shop, LLC

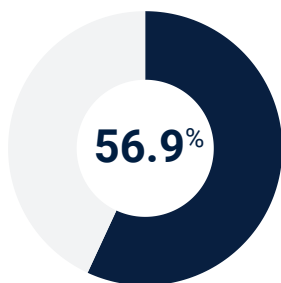


## AREAS OF NEED

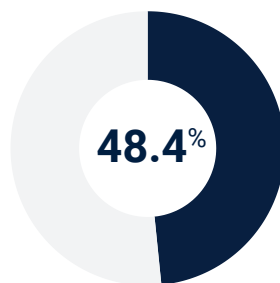
Participants were again asked to identify the greatest challenges to growing or starting their business. As with the Year 1 responses, access to capital was ranked as the most pressing challenge at 67.2%. Marketing and Sales and Business Planning again rounded out the top concerns. In the Year 2 survey, the question was modified so respondents could only select three options from among the nine choices to narrow down business priorities. Since the question's options were modified in Year 2, comparisons cannot be made among individual percentages from Year 1 to Year 2.



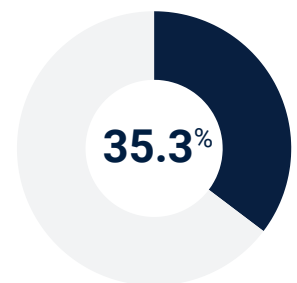
Access to Capital



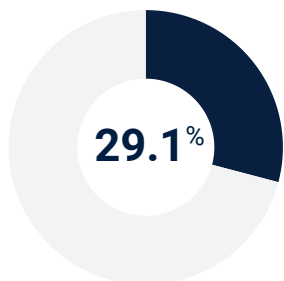
Marketing and Sales



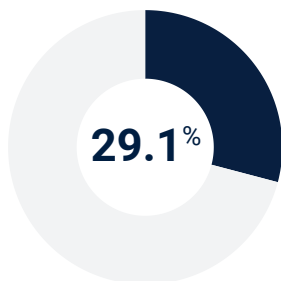
Business Planning



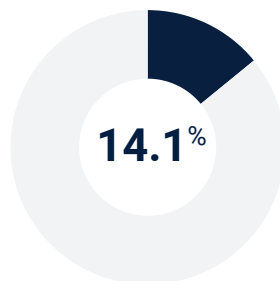
Government Contracting



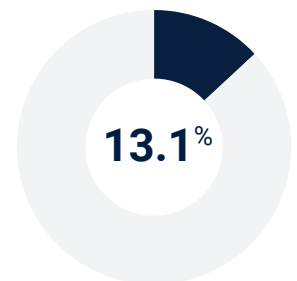
Social Media



Startup Assistance



Credit Counseling



Human Resources



# Thank You!

Thank you for an impactful second year of the Miami-Dade Business Navigator program.



**“Without the Business Navigator program, we in Miami-Dade would not have had any support. Your efforts are truly noticed and appreciated... it truly makes a difference.”**

*– woman, small-business owner*







# FINAL REPORT

## 2023

*Connect with Us!*

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### **MIAMI-DADE BUSINESS NAVIGATOR PROGRAM**

1101 Brickell Avenue, South Tower  
Room 204 | Miami, FL 33131

**Website:**

[www.MiamiBusinessNavigator.com](http://www.MiamiBusinessNavigator.com)

**Email:**

[Navigators@fiu.edu](mailto:Navigators@fiu.edu)

**Phone:**

(305) 779-9244