

PRESS RELEASE



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Mountain BizWorks Receives “Open for Business” Grant from Wells Fargo

Reduces barriers to lending for small businesses in North Carolina, fostering growth for local entrepreneurs and enabling recovery from COVID-19

ASHEVILLE, NC— Mountain BizWorks, a U.S. Treasury certified non-profit community development financial institution (CDFI), today announced that it has received an Open for Business grant from Wells Fargo Foundation. The grant enables Mountain BizWorks to further its programs to help local businesses survive and rebound from the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, the support will expand Mountain BizWorks’ [Catalyst Program](#) to assist entrepreneurs that might lack access to bank lending opportunities. Two Catalyst participants have already received funding from the grant: Sole82 and Safe Plus More.

“Mountain BizWorks is honored to be engaged with Wells Fargo on this initiative,” said Matthew Raker, Mountain BizWorks’ executive director. “It’s a win-win in every sense. The local economy benefits, as do the forward-thinking entrepreneurs we work with in our Catalyst Program. The funding process also makes it possible for businesses owned by people of color to gain access to business capital needed to adapt and thrive amidst the pandemic.”

Mountain BizWorks is reducing digital barriers to access the funding and services. The first recipient of funding is [Sole82](#), a boutique sneaker shop that is planning an expansion in the Asheville area. The other is [Safe Plus More](#), a community safety mobile app business that works with area agencies and at-risk populations.

The grant is intended to utilize capital, technical assistance, and technology to grow equitable small business success in the face of COVID-19. The support from Wells Fargo provides COVID-19 relief funding to businesses owned by people of color and low-income individuals. According to Mike Eggleston of the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis’ Community Development Department, “the pandemic has had far-reaching economic effects, especially for business owners who are under- or non-banked. Business owners from low-income communities of color, in particular, are significantly less likely to have access to COVID-19 relief resources than their counterparts elsewhere in the economy.”

Press Release from Mountain BizWorks

This is the challenge Mountain BizWorks set out to address. They have been working to flip this paradigm within its footprint of Western North Carolina (WNC) by providing resources like the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) and community-supported bridge loans specifically to people of color as well as to entrepreneurs based in rural communities with limited banking access. Since March of this year, Mountain BizWorks has deployed over \$42 million in COVID-19 relief funding to small businesses, nearly ten times the amount of lending it did in all of 2019.

“We believe in this strategy of providing COVID-19 relief resources and targeted ongoing financial products to underserved and non-banked entrepreneurs across Western North Carolina,” said Peggy Reingold, Community Relations Senior Consultant, Wells Fargo. “It is an effective way to create long term economic resiliency.” Indeed, the result of local entrepreneurs gaining access to CDFI financing and technical assistance will be their ability to weather economic fallout—making the difference of a community losing the equity and assets created within the last economic expansion, and retaining ownership, building capacity to access traditional financing and developing long lasting intergenerational wealth.

The organization’s Catalyst Cohort provides networking and growth guidance to a cohort of fast-growing WNC companies. Catalyst is designed for existing Entrepreneurs of Color whose businesses have demonstrated strong job growth potential and want to boost their profitability while further developing their professional networks. Participants in the one-year course receive intensive growth management training along with the opportunity to connect with experienced mentors and receive access-to-capital support.

To learn more about small business loan funds and other learning programs, visit mountainbizworks.org

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About Mountain BizWorks

Mountain BizWorks has been making business loans ranging from \$1,000 to \$250,000 to small businesses in Western North Carolina for nearly 30 years. Their tailored small business lending and peer learning programs help grow great businesses and expand economic opportunity. They work with companies who may find it difficult to secure funding from banks and other traditional sources. What makes Mountain BizWorks unique is that all loan decisions and relationships are managed locally. They work to ensure clients’ success by offering highly customized, peer-to-peer business coaching by an extensive network of local, successful business owners. This innovative blend of lending and learning helps entrepreneurs overcome obstacles, grow strategically, and create jobs.

For more: mountainbizworks.org