

# MONTGOMERY COUNTY BUSINESS CENTER 2023 ANNUAL REPORT





# MESSAGE FROM COUNTY EXECUTIVE ELRICH



I am proud to share the Montgomery County Business Center 2023 Annual Report. **This year was a growth year for the team.** The team added staff to expand our efforts to reach more businesses in the County. The core mission for the Business Center remains proactive and responsive customer service to help more business start and grow here in Montgomery County.

One of the main goals for the Business Center in 2023 was to increase the County's proactive outreach. A small team of three staff – the County's Business Liaisons – were successful in this effort. Through the Business Liaisons, the County was able to connect with **almost 900 businesses through door-to-door outreach.** We targeted outreach in every regional area of the County, and the team addressed challenges in real time as they met face-to-face with these businesses.

I am also proud of the direct assistance provided by the County's Business Center. All too often, businesses are shuttled from one department or organization to another. With the Montgomery County Business Center, businesses receive a dedicated County staff member who walks with them through the different State and local agencies, departments, and organizations as the issue is resolved. The ongoing involvement of the Business Center staff ensures businesses are not lost in the labyrinth of the state and county.

The Business Center is quickly becoming the first stop for all businesses looking to start and grow in the County. This report highlights those efforts, and I am looking forward to the continued growth and efforts of the Montgomery County Business Center in 2024.





## 2023 ACTIVITIES AT A GLANCE

The Business Center is the first stop for businesses looking to start and grow in Montgomery County.

■ **\$4.6M** Direct grants/loans

■ **4.1K** Businesses assisted by County resource partners

■ **1.9K** Businesses directly assisted by Business Center staff

■ **59** Businesses supported by County incubators

### Spotlight - Launching in the County

Edwin Djampa, owner of **Omega 3 Nutrition** and a graduate of University of Maryland, could have launched his food manufacturing business anywhere in Maryland. He chose Rockville in Montgomery County. The County, in partnership with the city and other organizations, worked to help Edwin through the required steps to open his business. He was awarded almost \$30,000 through the County's Move Program, allowing him to quickly scale his business for the growing contracts with local and global clients.



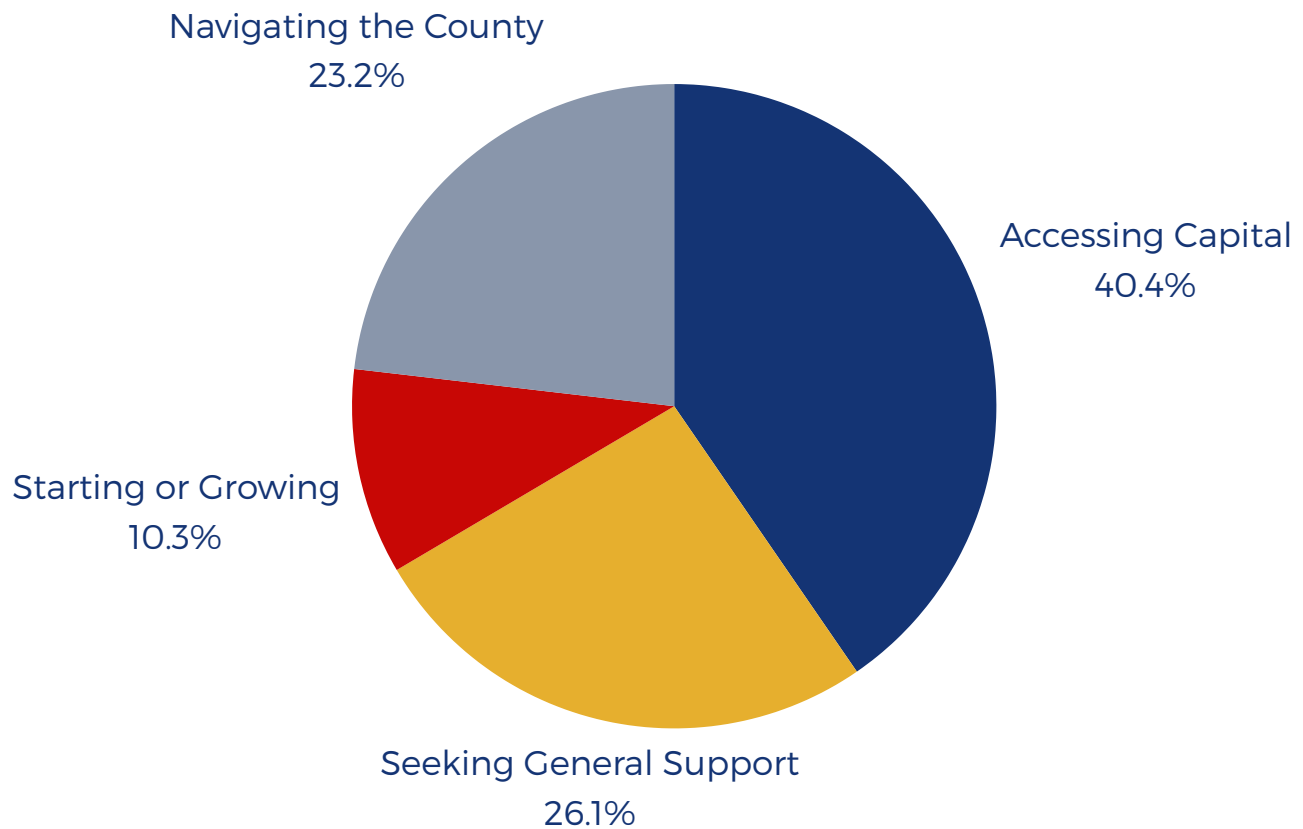


# ASSISTING AND NAVIGATING

The Montgomery County Business Center is here to help businesses start and grow. Our staff quickly connect businesses to the answers they need to navigate County processes and the critical resources to achieve their dreams. Business Center staff respond **within two business days** of receiving an inquiry from a business.

The Business Center staff directly assisted **more than 1,000 businesses** through all steps of their requests in 2023.

## What questions did we get in 2023?



## Spotlight - Navigating County Processes

Francis Addai, owner of **Akwaaba West African Cuisine** in Hillandale, reached out to the Business Center in October 2023 because he was waiting for approved permits. While he was waiting for his permits, he was paying rent for a shop that couldn't open. The Business Center quickly connected Francis with the Department of Permitting Services to identify next steps and timelines. Through these efforts, Francis passed his inspections, received his permits, and opened his restaurant.





# CONNECTING AND ENGAGING

Proactive outreach to the business community is a core mission of the Montgomery County Business Center. Our Business Liaisons are assigned to Regional Areas and spend at least two days a week going door-to-door to listen to business' thoughts and concerns. Many of these connections lead to follow up assistance, addressing questions before they become challenges for the business.



In addition to weekly outreach efforts, the Business Center supports the County's business engagement efforts through targeted, short-term projects. See the streetery spotlight below for an example. In 2023, the team provided concentrated outreach along the Purple Line construction corridor and in Wheaton.

## 2023 Proactive Outreach

- **882 businesses** engaged and assisted
- Promoted Purple Line grants to **312 businesses**
- Concentrated outreach in **every Regional Area**

## Spotlight - Elkin Street Streetery Outreach

The Mid-County Regional Services Center (RSC) needed to survey local businesses about the Elkin Street Streetery. This streetery was setup during the pandemic, and the RSC wanted input about the future of the streetery from the businesses. In coordination with the RSC, the Business Center targeted outreach during a week in 2023, surveyed the businesses, and provided a summary to the RSC. Through the Business Center's support, the **County quickly engaged the business community** to ensure their input was included for the future direction of the streetery.



# ACCESSING CAPITAL

The most common question received from businesses is access to capital. The Business Center helps businesses access these resources through County programs, traditional lenders, and the County's resource partners.

## County Grants/Loans

4 programs directly managed by the team

More than **\$4.6 million** to **600 businesses** in 2023

## Loans through Resource Partners

More than **\$15.0 million** to **156 businesses** in 2023



## Spotlight - Purple Line Grant

**Danny Hair Studio** in Silver Spring did not receive a Phase 1 Purple Line Grant. Through the Business Center's outreach, the County learned that the owner was discouraged about applying for future Purple Line grants and was considering closing the business. The Business Center, through a small team of dedicated staff, provided direct support to help the business through the application and registration process. The business received a grant in Phase 2 and remains open.





# SUPPORTING ENTREPRENEURS

The County operates three incubators – Germantown for life science businesses; Rockville for technology businesses; and Silver Spring for minority, female, and disabled (MFD)-focused businesses. This network is expanding in 2024 through a partnership with the Henry Jackson Foundation, providing more small lab space to start and grow businesses in the County. Through the County’s network, early-stage entrepreneurs gain access to office or lab space, networking with like-minded entrepreneurs, and programming to accelerate their idea into a revenue-generating business.



## 2023 Highlights

**59** tenants supported

**6** graduates

**14** new tenants

**\$20M** capital raised

**168 jobs** supported by tenants

## Spotlight - FDA Approval

**ReveraGen BioPharma** is a member of the County’s Innovation Network in Rockville. The County’s network has provided the critical flexibility needed by this business as it weathered the long and extensive clinical trial process with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). In 2023, ReveraGen BioPharma announced FDA approval of a new drug application – an important milestone for the business and for Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy patients.

# CONNECTING TO EXPERTS

The County augments its reach and technical support through various partner organizations. Through these contracted resource partners, businesses receive critical assistance to start, run, or grow their business.

## Expanding the County's Reach and Impact

**3,500 hours** of one-on-one coaching and technical assistance

**131** training events for **4,060** businesses

**110** businesses completed intensive training cohorts

*Above values exclude MCEDC, Visit Montgomery, and WorkSource Montgomery which have separate reporting requirements*

## Investing in Food Entrepreneurs

The County supports local small-scale food entrepreneurs through its contract with the **Crossroads Community Food Network**. Thuy-tu Tran, owner of **Muối Tiêu Vietnamese food truck**, took advantage of support and coaching through the County's contract. Through this support, Muối Tiêu has expanded into a larger restaurant space on Carroll Avenue in Takoma Park, expanding its menu offerings and full-service hours.

## Growing More Childcare Businesses

The County supports the **Maryland Women Business Center** (MWBC) to augment marketing and technical assistance to many entrepreneurs in the County. Elahe Darabi, owner of **Little Pomegranates Family Childcare**, was able to overcome her challenges through support of MWBC. Through this assistance, Elahe established her business and received marketing assistance to launch another full-time childcare provider in the County.





# COMING IN 2024!

**Client Relationship Management System:** The Business Center, in partnership with the Regional Service Center (RSC) Directors, will begin implementing a new client relationship management system in 2024. Through this platform, the Business Center and RSC Directors will be able to track the process and efforts to support each business and will be able to keep the County accountable for helping businesses to start and grow.

**Proactive Programming:** The Business Center will begin to schedule and implement more programming in 2024 to assist businesses around the County. These efforts will expand the County's reach to include more access and opportunities for businesses to overcome growth challenges. This programming will be done in partnership with many of the County's agencies and resource partners to avoid duplication.

**Website Improvements:** The Business Center continues to update and refine the County's website to assist businesses to start and grow in the County, while keeping it concise and relevant.



# MEET THE TEAM



**Gene Smith**  
Business Center Manager



**Derese Bikila**  
Economic Development  
Program Manager



**Patrice Cheatham**  
Business Liaison



**Richard Cisneros**  
Incubator  
Program Manager



**Alicia Chavez**  
Incubator  
Program Manager



**Naddia Clute**  
Small Business  
Navigator



**Marie Harvey**  
Business Liaison



**Daniel Koroma**  
Business Liaison



**Stephanie Sawyer**  
Admin Specialist -  
Contract Management

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/Business/>





