

2024 ANNUAL REPORT



MONTGOMERY COUNTY
Maryland
**BUSINESS
CENTER**



MESSAGE FROM COUNTY EXECUTIVE ELRICH



I'm proud to share the Montgomery County Business Center 2024 Annual Report. **This year was another year of strong growth for the team.** With a full complement of staff, the team excelled at its core mission of proactive and responsive customer service to the County's business community.

The Business Center has become the first stop for businesses looking to start and grow in the County. Our team of dedicated staff ensure businesses receive the assistance they need without being bounced around from department to department. **The team directly supported more than 1,200 businesses in 2024**, with start up assistance one of the top requested items.

When my administration launched the Business Center in 2023, the team was

launched with proactive outreach as a core function. The Business Center, with its four Business Liaisons, continues to demonstrate the importance of proactive outreach. The team successfully engaged with businesses in all regions of the County - providing invaluable support in the moment. The best news the team learned through this outreach is that **most businesses are happy to hear from the County and require no immediate assistance.**

I'm continually impressed with how quickly the Business Center became a major player in the County's support to businesses. I hope more of them take advantage of this team's expertise in 2025.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Marc Elrich". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Marc" and last name "Elrich" clearly distinguishable.



2024 ACTIVITIES AT A GLANCE

From start to growth,
the Montgomery County Business Center is here to help.

■ **2.1K** Businesses directly assisted by Business Center staff

■ **74** Businesses supported by County Innovation Centers

■ **\$1.2M** Direct grants

■ **5.6K** Businesses assisted by County resource partners

Turning the Impossible to Possible

"It's Impossible. When we think about what's possible, we rely on our own perspectives and experiences. In our world, the process to owning a mobile grooming salon seemed daunting and unreachable. Who would help us? How would we secure financing? Where do we start?

Who would believe in us? Marie Harvey and the Montgomery County Business Center was the answer. From conceptualizing the dream of Bad Mutha Fluffa Mobile Pet Grooming to delivery of our brand new mobile grooming vehicle, she stayed alongside us and fostered connections to organizations to provide additional assistance, like the Small Business Development Center.

"It's Impossible" has turned into "It's Possible." We are grateful for the encouragement, support, and guidance from Marie and the Business Center! "

Shy Kelly & Tiffany Kelly Bad Mutha Fluffa Pet Grooming, Inc.

PROACTIVE OUTREACH

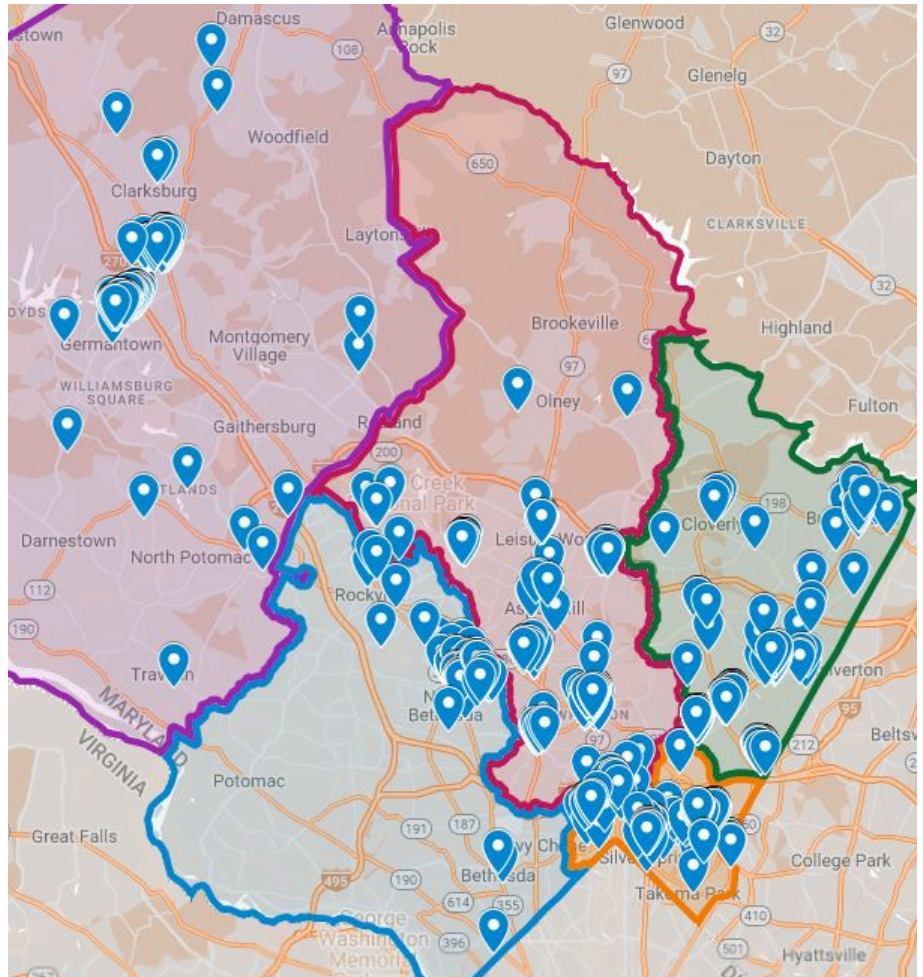
Proactive outreach is a core mission for our team. Our Business Liaisons spend about 2 days a week meeting businesses in the community and addressing their concerns.

We're there for your business

"I'm a licensed acupuncturist and run an acupuncture clinic in Montgomery County. I've been a licensed acupuncturist for more than 30 years, without any issues. This year, however, I became distraught after I received a citation for a health violation. I was surprised by this citation, and I tried contacting the health inspector to learn more. My bodyworks license was up for renewal, and I feared that this citation may mean I would lose my license. As I was trying to figure out how to respond, I remembered that Patrice Cheatham with the Montgomery County Business Center had stopped by my clinic to share resources about the County. I didn't need anything at the time, but I did now. I found Patrice's card and called her to explain the situation. Patrice quickly worked with me and HHS to resolve the situation. Many thanks to Patrice and the Business Center for your strong advocacy and support to the business community. "

Dr. Aiqiu Zaho, Acme Acupuncture & Herbs Clinic

Where We Went



What We Did

- **831 businesses** engaged and assisted
- Collaborated on **5 targeted outreach** projects
- Concentrated outreach in **every Regional Area**

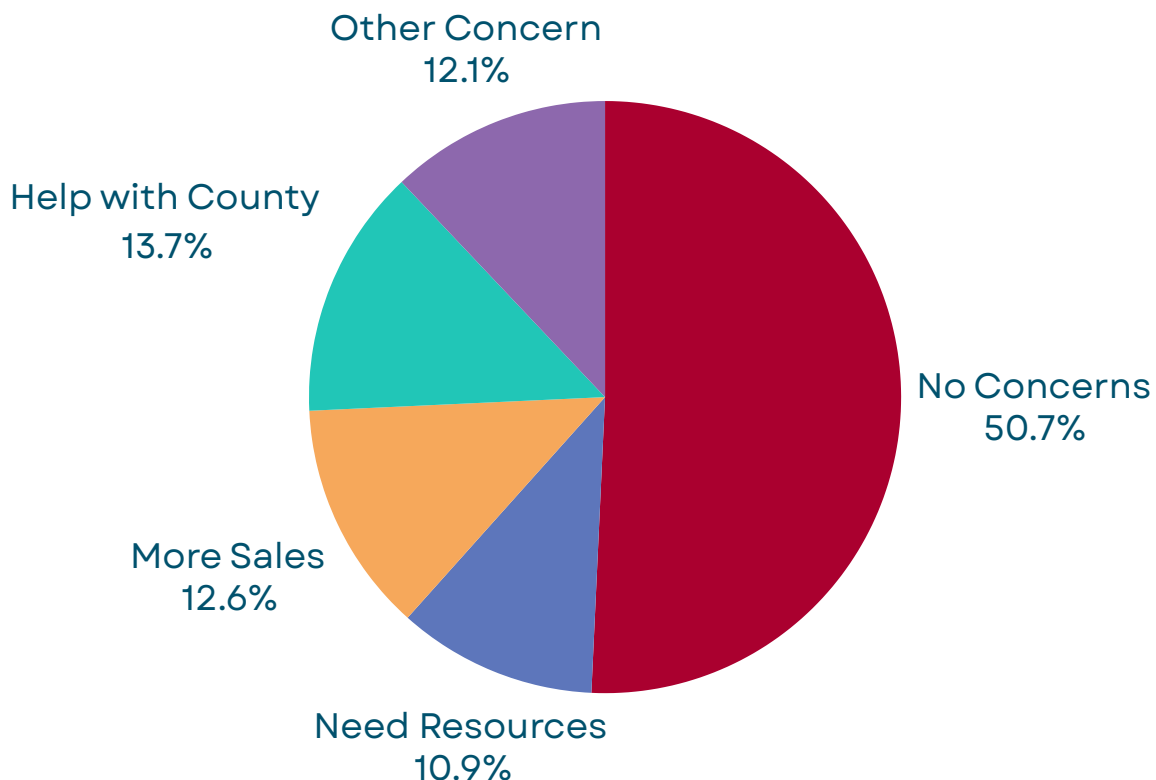
Same day service

"When I decided to become a professional artist, I knew I had to learn how to become a business professional as well. That meant figuring out what was needed in the County and the State to be recognized and licensed as a business. I found the Montgomery County Business Center through the county website. I contacted them on a Friday afternoon and didn't expect to hear back from them till the following week - if ever. It was 4:45 on the same day - a FRIDAY that Marie Harvey called me! Marie was not just a human returning my call, she was a warm, welcoming and very helpful human! I was so surprised.

Marie walked me through all that needed to be done and then emailed me all the steps with resources attached! She made a very confusing process really easy! I never would have figured this out myself! Marie has been there to answer my questions, encourage me and even showed up to my first art show! The Montgomery County Business Center is actually staffed by people who care. I'm just one small person and they made me feel important."

Marie Connor, Owner, Stonegate Arts

What We Heard



TAILORED GUIDANCE

The Montgomery County Business Center provides tailored guidance through every stage of growth, responding **within two business days** of receiving an inquiry from a business.

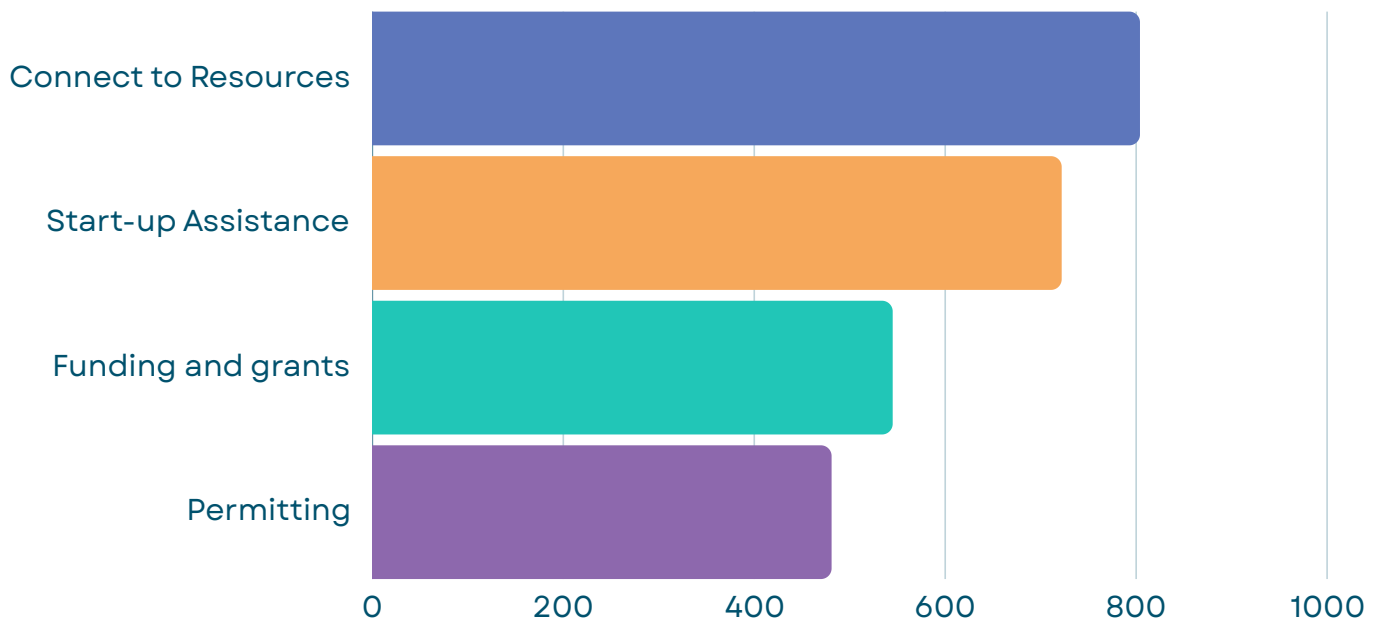
The Business Center staff directly assisted **more than 1,200 businesses** through all steps of their requests in 2024.

Connecting all the dots

"Naddia Clute is single handedly responsible for a handful of the successes that Enclave Coworking has had in navigating permit processes, local government regulation, and even interactions with private contractors as we have expanded our Chicagoland business into Montgomery County. With nothing to gain personally, Naddia has made herself available to us time and time again on a litany of issues related to WSSC permitting and inspections, Montgomery County inspection and fire safety rules, and has even given her time and attention to helping us secure a MOVE grant which was instrumental in getting our first Montgomery County location off the ground. In my entire professional career, I have come across only a handful of people as helpful and attentive as Naddia. I would wholeheartedly provide my endorsement of her abilities and efforts at her position."

Tom Griseta, Chief Operating Officer, Enclave Coworking

Top Requests for Guidance



FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

The Business Center helps businesses access many grants and loans through County programs, traditional lenders, and the County's resource partners.

Growing with grants

I'm thrilled to share the success story of my food truck business, which has grown into a thriving venture thanks to the support of the Montgomery County Business Center. With their help, I secured a prime location on Bonifant Street. Despite the challenges posed by the Purple Line Construction, the County's grant program provided a vital lifeline. As I look to expand my business in Downtown Silver Spring, I've continued to rely on the expertise of my Business Liaison. Together, we identified a new location for my restaurant, and after months of perseverance, we secured a suitable space.

However, accessing financial capital to complete the buildout proved to be a hurdle. Once again, my Business Liaison came through, connecting me with a financial institution that provided the necessary funding. I'm deeply grateful for the Montgomery County Business Center's unwavering support, guidance, and resources. Their commitment to empowering local businesses has been instrumental in my success, and I look forward to continued growth and collaboration. "

**Avalanche (Masada) Deen, co-owner,
Sweet Sweet Kitchen**



County Funding

**5 programs directly
managed by the team**

**More than \$1.2 million to
258 businesses in 2024**

Resource Partner Loans

**More than \$3.2 million to
178 businesses in 2024**

INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM

The County operates three innovation centers - Germantown for life science businesses; Rockville for technology businesses; and Silver Spring for minority, female, and disabled-focused businesses. The County continues to grow the network to include other organizations, such as the Henry Jackson Foundation, and new space for AI businesses.

2024 Highlights

- 74** members supported
- 23** new members joined
- 82%** global occupancy (increase)
- 191 jobs** supported by members
- 29** events sponsored

Innovation in Germantown

"Finding the right infrastructure as a newly founded biotech company was a challenge, but Germantown Innovation Center made it not only possible but seamless. Their commitment to supporting us step by step was a game changer. They didn't just provide a space—they provided a foundation for innovation, reflecting their genuine investment in the future of cutting-edge science. We couldn't have asked for a better partner in launching our journey."

Sam Kamali, CEO Caleo Biotechnology.



CONNECTIONS TO ESSENTIAL RESOURCES

The County augments its reach and technical support for businesses through various partner organizations to provide a stronger ecosystem for businesses to start and grow.

Expanding the County's Impact

4,755 hours of one-on-one coaching and technical assistance

173 training events for **5,570** businesses

197 businesses completed intensive training cohorts

Microenterprise Program

TKenya, owner of Lilian's Southern Box Catering participated in the Crossroads Community Food Network's Microenterprise Development Program in 2024. As result of her participation, Kenya received a grant to fuel her business's continued grown and in November 2024 she launched her business on DoorDash Platform expanding her customer reach. She is also looking to enhance her team and recruit a chef and prep staff to further elevate the quality of service offered and streamline operations.



MOVE-ing into the County

"It has been an amazing experience working with the Montgomery County Business Center and especially with Naddia, the Small Business Navigator. We, as small business owners received the access to resources and connections that we were looking for to help us open the doors. Naddia's efforts in helping us get the MOVE grant from the County was commendable. She worked with us to help us gather all the information to make our case and get us the grant. The grant was very helpful for us as a new business where we already made a significant investment in the County and the finding was crucial for us. We are very happy with all the assistance we received from the Business Center and the Montgomery County Executive's office that has enabled us to open our business on time. We appreciate the continuous support and encouragement received from the County as a whole and they have welcomed Hyper Kidz with open arms."

Jaimin Patel, Hyperkidz Rockville Team

MORE 2024 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Client Relationship Management System (CRM): The Business Center fully implemented the new CRM in 2024, providing easier and more efficient reporting on the team's efforts and business's needs.

Proactive Programming: Through the leadership of Naddia Clute, the Small Business Navigator, the Business Center partnered with M&T Bank to launch the multicultural Accelerator in 2024. In addition, Alicia Chavez and Richard Cisneros, Program Managers, launched three new series of events through the County's Innovation Centers.

Website Improvements: The Business Center continued to refine and update the website to make it easier for businesses to find and access resources.

COMING IN 2025!

Enhancing County Programming: Coming off the success of 2024, the team is excited to develop more critical programming for our businesses. The team will continue to identify opportunities to integrate this programming with the County's resource partners.

Increasing Business Engagement and Interaction: The County's CRM allows for greater opportunities to connect businesses with programs and receive feedback through surveys and other methods. The team plans to leverage this asset more in 2025.



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



Guzman Elola
Business Liaison



Marie Harvey
Business Liaison



Daniel Koroma
Business Liaison



Stephanie Sawyer
Admin Specialist -
Contract Management

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

