

ST. PETERSBURG, FL

COVID-19 RESPONSE: CURRENT COMMUNITY NEEDS



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Grow Smarter aims to reduce gaps by race and place in St. Petersburg by introducing equity to economic development efforts. The COVID-19 pandemic has made this vision more relevant than ever. As part of our response, Grow Smarter is gathering needs across the community that require action.

The following document is a snapshot of needs, separated by Grow Smarter focus area, that were identified on March 27, 2020 by the Grow Smarter Steering Committee and guests. Participants are listed below and include community leaders and subject-matter experts in the business, government, and nonprofit sectors. The Needs Report is also informed by early results of the Organizational Impact Survey, created by Grow Smarter in partnership with the Greenhouse and the St. Petersburg Chamber of Commerce; One Community's community survey and outreach efforts; and the St. Petersburg Downtown Partnership's COVID-19 Response Survey.

We want to emphasize the overarching need for rapid, equitable communication to the community: for survey distribution (to ensure we're responding to needs in all of St. Pete), policy updates and implications, and relief/resource information. This need came up in each Grow Smarter focus area.

Grow Smarter understands that all needs are evolving quickly, and we will continue to monitor how best to support St. Petersburg as we navigate this uncertain time together. In keeping with our vision of inclusive prosperity, we encourage all relief efforts and community leaders to consider how they are supporting underserved community members and minority- and women-owned businesses.

GROW SMARTER NEEDS ASSESSMENT PARTICIPANTS

Tashika Griffith | St. Petersburg College, Grow Smarter Chair, 2020

Sridhar Sundaram | USF St. Pete

Jessica Eilerman | City of St. Petersburg

Sean King | Habitat for Humanity

Veatrice Farrell | Deuces Live

Brother John Muhammad | Community Development & Training Center, One Community

Carl Lavender | Foundation for a Healthy St. Pete

Chris Steinocher | St. Pete Chamber of Commerce

Stephen Ponzillo | Regions Bank

Meiko Seymour | Pinellas Community Church

Michael Jalazo | PERC

Julie Rocco | Foundation for a Healthy St. Pete

Jason Mathis | St. Pete Downtown Partnership

Leah McRae | City of St. Petersburg

Gypsy Gallardo | 2020 Plan, One Community

Kanika Tomalin | City of St. Petersburg

Dana Hill | Florida Blue

Ryan Griffin | Johnson Pope, St. Pete Chamber

Alison Barlow | St. Pete Innovation District

Alan DeLisle | City of St. Petersburg

J.P. DuBuque | St. Petersburg Economic Development Corporation

DATA

ORGANIZATIONAL STATUS SURVEY

Grow Smarter, the Greenhouse, and the St. Pete chamber have released a survey to better understand the impact of COVID-19 on our local businesses. This survey suggests that small businesses (0-49 employees) are feeling some of the harshest economic effects of COVID-19.

160 respondents collected between (3/20/2020 and 4/7/2020)

33% of small business respondents say that this “may put them out of business”

53% of small business respondents say this will “significantly impact their work/financials”

“I am nervous because by the time the COVID-19 situation is over, I suspect it will be the slow summer season. We just opened in March. I don't think we will make the sales needed to stay in business. I am hoping for the best. It would help if our landlord would waive our rent while this situation is occurring.”

“A grant/loan from the federal government that will be forgiven. There also needs to be a grant/loan for small businesses with NO employees.”

ST. PETE CHAMBER TOWNHALL

The St. Pete Chamber of Commerce hosted a town hall to hear from the business community regarding the impact of COVID-19 on our local business owners.

30% of participants said that they are either “severely impact, may put them out of business” or have “completely closed their business and worry about re-opening it”

40% of participants said that they were “unsure of overall impact, but their work/financials are being significantly impacted”

ST. PETE GREENHOUSE

Greenhouse data tells us that **a majority of women owned business respondents are small brick and mortars—**falling under the most affected categories indicated by the Grow Smarter Survey.

CENSUS DATA

Census estimates suggest that White businesses in St. Pete report sales, shipments, receipts, revenue or business done at a value nearly **5 times greater** than that of businesses owned by people of color—**this gap is 4 times larger than that of the Florida average.**

ONE COMMUNITY NEEDS REPORT:

One Community did a phone and online survey of businesses in South St. Petersburg, and identified the following specific needs:

- Business navigation for stimulus dollars
- Business Tax and Finance Services
- Creating New Business Opportunities
- Help for Stylists, Barbers, and Nail Techs
- Help for St. Pete Creatives
- Special Loan Pool for Businesses Not Eligible for State and Federal Programs
- Virtual Open Mic Sessions with Community Leaders

NEEDS BY FOCUS AREA

TARGETED JOB CREATION

There is immediate need to identify employers with job openings and to match them with people who lost their jobs, accompanied by rapid training programs. To do this successfully, job boards need to coordinate. Broad and equitable communication about new opportunities is also important.

NEEDS

- Immediate cash relief for nonprofits, which can't access bridge loans
- Identify industries that are hiring for "job matching:" connecting people who have lost their job with new openings
- Rapid job training to support hire of unemployed people
- Coordinate and raise awareness of job boards (Become St. Pete, St. Pete Foundation, St. Pete Works, etc.)

NOTES

- Grow Smarter targeted industries, many of which seem to have been minimally affected by COVID, can serve as an economically diversifying and stabilizing force for the community going forward.

CULTURE AND COMMUNITY

Some arts and cultural resources (museums, musical performances) have gone virtual and therefore more easily accessible to all residents as a result of COVID. However, COVID is threatening small business and increasing the equity gap in our community as seen by increased demand for food pantry assistance. The faith-based community is providing a significant amount of front-line relief and is an important resource for getting information out to St. Pete residents. Some public safety concerns (domestic violence) are increasing as a result of COVID, which needs further investigation.

NEEDS

- Address needs for food and rent relief through partnerships between faith communities, schools, etc.
- Connect with faith communities to help share resources
- Connect with SPPD to understand how public safety is affected as a result of COVID

NOTES

- Access to some cultural assets has become more equitable as musicians, museums, etc. put their art online

COORDINATED EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Needs vary along the education spectrum. Small, independent daycare providers are at risk of closing. Pinellas County Schools has moved to online learning, which has made the digital divide more pronounced. Students have hardware but may lack reliable internet, especially in South St. Pete. Many postsecondary students were displaced from their dorms and need housing. As our area recovers from COVID-19, job training programs will need to adjust to new employer needs, which requires industry partnerships.

NEEDS

- Reliable internet access
- Parental/family support for kids learning at home (i.e., HIPPY Programs, Scholastic, Disney, NPR)
- Support for small, independent childcare providers
- Adapting job training programs based on current economic situation

NOTES

- Families are currently able to get the food they need at schools, but what will happen as the supply chain recovers from the over-distribution of food that we're seeing now?

ENTREPRENEURIAL GROWTH

The relief landscape is complex and inconsistent. St. Pete doesn't have the capacity to meet the need for resource navigation. Few opportunities for immediate (non-loan) relief exist, and it is difficult for entrepreneurs to plan beyond the next week.

NEEDS

- Capacity to help small businesses navigate resources
- Immediate support for solo entrepreneurs, who don't qualify for many state relief programs/loans
- Helping businesses plan in an environment of extreme uncertainty and inconsistency between national/state/local advisories

NOTES

- Sometimes, a bad economy leads to an increase in entrepreneurship. Will this happen in the case of COVID?
- Bars/restaurants want employees to return when they recover, but employees have no income during the bridge, and no certainty that the business will reopen
- Government loan applications are long and cumbersome

DISTRICTS AND CORRIDORS

The need for internet infrastructure has become more pronounced. There is a need to reach out to each business district/corridor in St. Pete, in order to document the needs of each as well as any existing efforts or resources that they're providing.

NEEDS

- Address the digital divide that has become more pronounced as a result of COVID
- Connect with all business districts/corridors to understand the individual needs of each one

HOUSING

The community needs help understanding and translating changing eviction policies, mortgage deferments, and homeless shelter closings/outreach. There is an immediate need for sharing existing resources and correcting misinformation. Housing needs will evolve depending on aid for unemployed workers.

NEEDS

- Coordinate resources and share resources with the community (which banks are allowing deferred mortgage payments, local/regional/state/federal resources, link to 211, process-related information – i.e., how do I apply for rent assistance?)
- Clarify how policies (for example, the federal relief bill) affect St. Pete residents
- Support for the unhoused population

NOTES

- Widespread misinformation about resources and policies