DOWNTOWN DAYS OF WONDER POP-UP SHOPS

SUMMARY

Downtown Tulsa Partnership

INNOVATION

Downtown Tulsa is home to America's historic Black Wall Street in the Greenwood District — a symbol of Black innovation and entrepreneurship since the late 1800s. The Greenwood District suffered significant losses of life and property during the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921, and despite Urban Renewal and Interstate construction during the '60s and '70s, it has rebuilt through resiliency and grassroots efforts to keep Greenwood a symbol of Black business and prosperity. The Downtown Tulsa Partnership seeks to elevate the history and story of Black Wall Street and Greenwood by working to increase the amount of visible BIPOC businesses throughout downtown — and this program was a tangible and tactical approach toward that work.

To connect with, build relationships with, and prioritize BIPOC entrepreneurship, DTP reached out to Tulsa's growing inclusive entrepreneurship resource ecosystem, and partnered with Tulsa Economic Development Corporation (TEDC), who runs the local MORTAR program, a 15-week curriculum for historically marginalized entrepreneurs, to connect with their network of graduates and offer one-on-one support through the application process for those interested. They also engaged other local incubators focusing on BIPOC entrepreneurship, including Hispanic, food entrepreneurship, and female-focused organizations.

The project worked to alleviate the significant challenges to commercial space access for entrepreneurs from underrepresented groups who have historically faced lending discrimination, exploitation by landlords, a lack of resources, and limitations on the networks they need to thrive. In the pilot year, DTP supported nine BIPOC entrepreneurs — 82% of the participating entrepreneurs.

OUTCOME

The program's pilot year measured impact through the percentage of participants considered nontraditional and BIPOC entrepreneurs, the amount of revenues raised, the amount of estimated profit, and the satisfaction level of participants relating to different aspects of the project. Seven of the nine participants completed the quality survey, and 100% indicated that they were satisfied to highly satisfied with all aspects related to program quality.

For the primary goal of increasing visible nontraditional business owners in downtown, the impact is measured through 82% of participating entrepreneurs identifying as BIPOC, as well as 82% of business owners being female, and 73% showcasing their business in a brick-and-mortar space for the first time. For the secondary goal of supporting local business growth downtown, DTP calculated an estimated $27,232 in total revenue raised during the duration of the program and over $8,500 in estimated total profit. Beyond their program participation, three shop concepts remained in their space through a month-to-month lease, and one business concept signed a long-term lease on a shop outside of downtown.

As an organization, the Downtown Tulsa Partnership is committed to continuing the program recognizing the direct impact on increasing visible nontraditional businesses while decreasing ground-floor vacancy downtown. DTP is currently pursuing philanthropic support to grow the program for next year and to offer larger grants covering operating expenses, as well as one-on-one business development and marketing support to the participating entrepreneurs.

EXECUTION

The program was launched with approximately two months of planning, relationship building and outreach. The Downtown Tulsa Partnership grew from two organizational staff members to six between May and August 2022, and this project materialized within months as an all-hands-on-deck effort to be operational by the holiday season. Execution began with identifying vacant ground-floor retail, and conducting significant outreach with property owners to encourage them to participate. By November 1, 2022, DTP received commitments for seven commercial spaces ranging from 200 to 1,200 square feet. After a targeted interest and demand survey completed by 33 local business owners showed the significant need for low-cost spaces and a high interest in temporary downtown storefront opportunities, the Partnership launched an application, program guide and webpage.

Twenty-five applications were received, and every applicant was offered a virtual interview to view photos of available shop spaces and teach DTP staff about their business while providing their ranked preferences on available spaces. After interviews, nine shop

concepts representing 11 entrepreneurs were chosen to participate in the program. The time frame was more condensed than similar programs that typically begin application processes 4-6 months before opening dates.

REPRESENTATION

DTP leaned heavily on seven local entrepreneur support organizations to connect with the greatest diversity of local small businesses. By translating the application materials and program guide into Spanish, DTP received 4 Spanish-speaking entrepreneurs' applications, and by hosting informational sessions in partnership with TEDC, local nontraditional business support and lending organization, DTP provided targeted application support to their graduates.

The program's participation process and costs were designed to be as equitable as possible. From deeply discounted rental rates to no background, credit, or rental history checks, DTP eliminated the most common barriers for underrepresented groups accessing commercial space: money and relationships. DTP curated the program and served as the connection between the property owner/manager and entrepreneur throughout their participation. This alleviated any undue burden on the property owner and kept the entrepreneur supported and connected to DTP throughout the 45-day shop operations.

REPLICATION

Downtowns everywhere struggle with ground-floor vacancy. Exacerbated by the pandemic and increasingly threatened by rising costs and other business challenges, local entrepreneurs could use support more than ever to access the tools they need to thrive. Temporary space activation programs like this pop-up shop program can work to address the changing landscape of downtown vacancies while amplifying a greater diversity and visibility of nontraditional business owners within a downtown economic ecosystem. This program is a creative and innovative approach to business attraction and retention that allows the unique business identities of your place a new platform for business promotion, storytelling, economic growth, and wealth building, and in some instances, like in Tulsa, home of Black Wall Street, keeping the historical truths of downtown's entrepreneurial past alive.

The program is incredibly replicable, and its foundation is relationship building — something every downtown organization is uniquely poised at which to excel. The program's core functionality comes from solid program materials, including a guide outlining expectations for all involved parties, an application, a temporary space use agreement, and basic requirements, including general liability insurance and W-9s from participants.

COMPLEXITY/SIMPLICITY

The main challenge was gathering commitments for commercial space from property owners. Property owners recognize the potential short-term benefit of some revenue for their vacant space but tend to be apprehensive toward the amount of time, money (in repairs and other shop needs), and follow-up they might need to provide by participating. Addressing those assumptions directly, as well as providing the temporary space use agreement upfront so they can understand their liability, gained some traction in getting space use commitments. DTP also allowed all spaces to be used "as is" with no requirement to alter, clean, or modify the space that a traditional tenant would likely require. Strong relationships ultimately helped DTP navigate this challenge. DTP also offered space on their webpage for property owner recognition and included them in all media releases as sponsors. Consistent communication, persistent outreach and strong relationships were the best approaches to the challenges.