



A contract opportunity initiative driving BIPOC
business accelerators

REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Program Objective	1
Program Design	2
How Does It Work?	3
Program Metrics & Targets	6
Program Funding	7
Application	7
Application Workshops	8
Deadline	8
Selection Criteria	9
Program Launch Timeline	9
Attachments	10



PROGRAM OBJECTIVE

The Port of Seattle (Port), Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce (Chamber), and King County cities are seeking trusted community messengers and organizations to serve as *small business support liaisons* ("Connectors") for a two-year pilot program. The City of Seattle is not a designated service area currently.

Community Business Connector (CBC or Connector program)

The overall goal of the Connector program is to make our small business support ecosystem more supportive and inclusive by building relationships with businesses facing challenges due to linguistic, cultural, and geographic barriers, including economic impacts due to COVID-19.

The program intends to support local small businesses that are the backbone of our neighborhoods and communities. To achieve this purpose, we are piloting an outreach and technical assistance program to support these vital enterprises.

The **Community Business Connector Program** aims to serve small businesses across King County through a comprehensive outreach program that helps businesses tap available resources. Contracted Connectors, which can be organizations or individuals, will be a direct point-of-contact to field business help inquiries with business assistance providers and navigator networks.

The CBC initiative got its inspiration from the US Small Business Administration's Community Navigator Pilot program. After numerous conversations with city agencies and other stakeholders, we learned that King County needs a similar business navigator initiative to strengthen our small business support ecosystem.

Economic development staff from local cities, community groups, and small business assistance providers helped guide overall program development and supported additional community engagement. Recruiting culturally and linguistically knowledgeable advisors can help bridge the gap to reaching economic equity in underserved communities.

By deploying individuals as small business support liaisons who are recognized as trusted messengers in their communities, we hope to address the barriers that prevent BIPOC-owned and rural businesses from accessing available resources. Targeted outreach for Connectors also includes raising awareness of available

According to a recent Port survey of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)-owned businesses, largely in south and east King County, 76% of businesses indicated that they need help with applying for loans and grants and want to increase revenue through marketing and online sales.

Of the 318 surveys returned in nine different languages, 47% of businesses are doing worse compared to a year ago and only 18% of businesses are doing better this year.

To add, King County Associate Development Organization (ADO) members report that small business owners most common needs consist of support in navigating city permits, taxes, and legal issues.

resources to any small business negatively impacted by COVID-19.

Building a more inclusive regional small business support ecosystem requires enhancing awareness, skills, relationships, and trust between our Connectors and existing business technical assistance providers. Our intent is to encourage collaboration and learning together to create collective processes to best serve all small businesses.

The anticipated program launch is November 2022 with seven (7) Connectors in the first year assigned to defined geographic hub locations and language communities. In year two, we expect to add at least three (3) additional Connectors. The number of new Connectors will depend on projected funding from cities and other sponsorship opportunities.

PROGRAM DESIGN

CBC is a local business outreach program utilizing a help desk ticket system to coordinate small business support. Program design considerations for targeted outreach align with business retention and expansion best practices and address specific needs of multicultural communities.

Why a Community Business Connector?

- **Business Recovery & Retention:** Preserve small businesses through better networked support with existing local business services.



- **Equitable Business Support:** Build trusting relationships with small businesses to reduce linguistic, cultural, and geographic barriers in securing business assistance.
- **Ecosystem Insights:** Conduct targeted small business outreach to gather information about business health and garner input to refine existing small business programs.

The **CBC pilot program** is designed to collaboratively create a framework for stronger partnerships, networked referral processes, and collaborative programs that serve small businesses across King County. Any modifications of the program will be assessed by the Chamber with input from King County ADO members and its strategic working groups.

Connectors will be in regular communication with business owners in their community, prepared to help where they can with support from business assistance providers.

The services will consist of one-on-one support in-language and culturally relevant interactions to share helpful information. Targeted outreach includes connecting with BIPOC-owned businesses and reaching business communities in rural and unincorporated areas.

Connectors will track and manage client intake and referrals via an online **Business Help Desk Ticket System**. Help Ticket information will be received in person or over the phone by a Connector. The Chamber will provide administrative support to Connectors when needed.

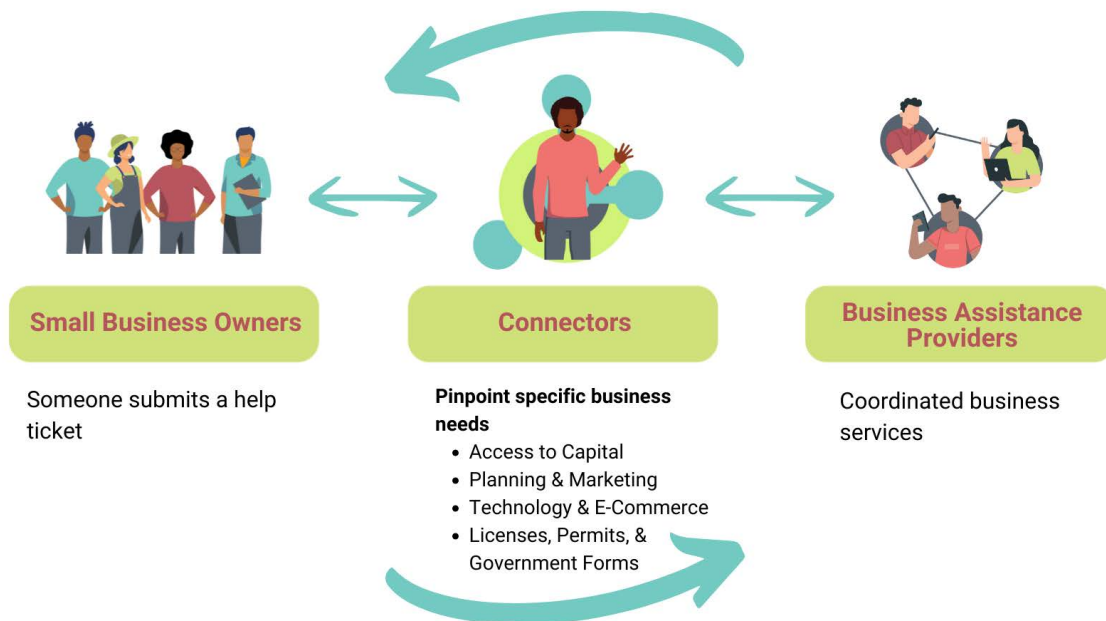
HOW DOES IT WORK?

The CBC program serves as a help desk for small businesses.

Businesses, community-based organizations, or anyone in the “community network,” in this case, King County cities and unincorporated areas, can submit a help ticket.

Once an online ticket is submitted, it will be assigned to a “Connector.” The Connector will pinpoint a specific need based on the help ticket request using the system’s interactive search function.

The Connector will report back to the business owner with referral options to facilitate a service connection. Connectors stay with the business owner as a liaison to help coordinate services.



This **Request for Qualifications (RFQ)** seeks organizations and individuals recognized as trusted community messengers to serve as small business support liaisons (“Connectors”) to local small businesses. Connectors will learn about the business assistance provider landscape in King County and how to use the Business Help Desk Ticket system. Ultimately, Connectors will create meaningful dialogue to help build lasting relationships with business owners.

Applicants

- Must be residents of King County over the age 18.
- Should have a track record of supporting businesses in their communities. Extensive technical assistance expertise is not required.
- May include local nonprofit and/or community-based organizations, individuals, and for-profit businesses as part of the application. Existing business technical assistance providers may apply if they have a connection to communities and the ability to offer in person interaction and in-language services if needed.
- Selected Connectors will be contracted with the Chamber and assigned to defined geographic hub locations in King County. Service priority is targeted to cultural communities and language interpretation needs.
- Non- and for-profit entities must be incorporated under the laws of the State of Washington and King County to apply. This includes any required licenses to operate in the state and county.



Small Business Liaison Services

The work plans will be negotiated with organizations and individuals selected as Connectors to–

- Provide one-on-one in-language and/or culturally or geographically relevant business outreach and personal interaction.
- Identify businesses needs within your community and determine the most appropriate and effective way to assist with available programs and services.
- Collaboratively work with existing business technical assistance providers and other small business network partners to make effective referrals.
- Highlight available business resources and programs assigned by the Chamber and participate in small business community meetings to support local small business associations and community-based organizations.
- Monitor and support referral relationship between the business owner and technical assistance provider. This includes utilizing the Business Help Desk Ticket System along with email, phone, video conferencing, or messaging apps like WhatsApp.

Collaboration in Small Business Support Ecosystem

Connectors will have regular communication with the Chamber's Economic Development Program Manager and referral partners to ensure businesses receive appropriate services and support by–

- Tracking and managing client intake and referrals via an online Business Help Desk Ticket system.
- Participating in partner meetings:
 - Review Business Help Desk Ticket trends and appropriate solutions,
 - Learn and share challenges along with best practices that might be replicated by other small business navigator partners, and
 - Identify opportunities for addressing unmet needs and gaps to create programs and improve referral processes.
- Attending workshops with subject area experts to better assist businesses recommended by CBC. Topics may include funding opportunities, entrepreneurship programs, updates on government regulatory systems, customer development opportunities, and other related information.
- Keeping track of emergent issues not being addressed in existing categories of business assistance and sharing insights with the Program Manager to foster continuous program improvement.

PROGRAM METRICS & TARGETS

CBC is a local business outreach program utilizing a help desk ticket system to coordinate small business support. Service priority is given to business owners not currently receiving technical assistance due to language barriers, cultural competency, and geographic location. This includes existing small businesses that suffered economic impacts due to COVID-19.

Converting small business contacts to client leads for referral partners is only one part of the CBC service delivery. Additional community capacity building activities will be coordinated in collaboration with the Chamber, the Port, Connectors, and various local organizations and city agencies.

Program metrics will be used to measure the success of targeted small business outreach. Connectors will be assigned to hub locations and language communities to engage in personal interactions with small business owners, both online and in person.

Minimum program metrics to be tracked and reported to the Chamber by each Connector are the number of:

- Business visits and business area walks
- Business help desk tickets filed and closed
- Business intake forms completed
- Follow-up communications/notifications
- Referrals to business assistance providers
- Business retention and expansion surveys completed
- Client experience feedback interviews
- Attendees at workshops and business community meetings

Metrics will be reported in the Help Desk system by Connectors with support from the Program Manager. Reporting tasks are designed to be captured in real-time at the point of business interaction. Other supporting reports will be designed after insights and data are collected in the field. Work plans for Connectors will be designed collaboratively.



PROGRAM FUNDING

In 2022, the Chamber will select at least seven (7) contracts in defined geographic hub locations in King County. See attached map of Connector Hubs & Communities.

Connectors will receive a one-time funding award from \$30,000 to \$40,000 over 12 months as part of the pilot program. Contract renewal will be evaluated based on a Connector's performance, business support needs in a specific geographic or language area, and funding from cities.

The sources of program funds are detailed in a [press release](#) published by the Port.

APPLICATION

We encourage King County residents, nonprofit and community-based organizations, and for-profit businesses with relevant experience, capabilities, and connections to apply. **Organizations and individuals located in Seattle can apply.**

Applicants pursuing a contract with CBC will be evaluated through a competitive review process conducted by the Chamber. The CBC application, frequently asked questions, videos on-demand, and program updates can be found at www.communitybusinessconnector.com.

APPLICATION WORKSHOPS

Please register and attend an application workshop to receive guidance on how to apply.

- **Friday, August 5**
10 a.m. - 11 a.m.
- **Monday, August 15**
5:30 p.m. - 6:30 p.m.

Visit www.communitybusinessconnector.com for more details.

DEADLINE

Applications and supporting documents must be submitted by 5:00 p.m. (Pacific) on Friday, September 9, 2022. We may ask finalists to submit a personal reference contact and or letter to inform our selection process.



SELECTION CRITERIA

Applicants will be evaluated based on criteria within four categories, totaling a score of 100: Target Population and Outreach (25 points), Experience (50 points), Training Abilities (10 points), and Tracking (15 points).

An application review committee will score applications. Selections will be based on the highest score, language need, and underserved small business community in a hub location.

These communities include BIPOC, rural, and unincorporated areas. Priority selection is given to King County residents and organizations seeking to hire or contract with active community members to serve as Connectors. An interview may be requested to make a final Connector selection.

PROGRAM LAUNCH TIMELINE

Informational Webinar	Available online
RFQ & Application Open to Apply	Aug 2
Application Workshops	Aug 5 & 15
Submission Deadline	Sept 9
Selection & Awards	Oct 4
Program Orientation	Fall/Winter 2022

ATTACHMENTS



Program Partners



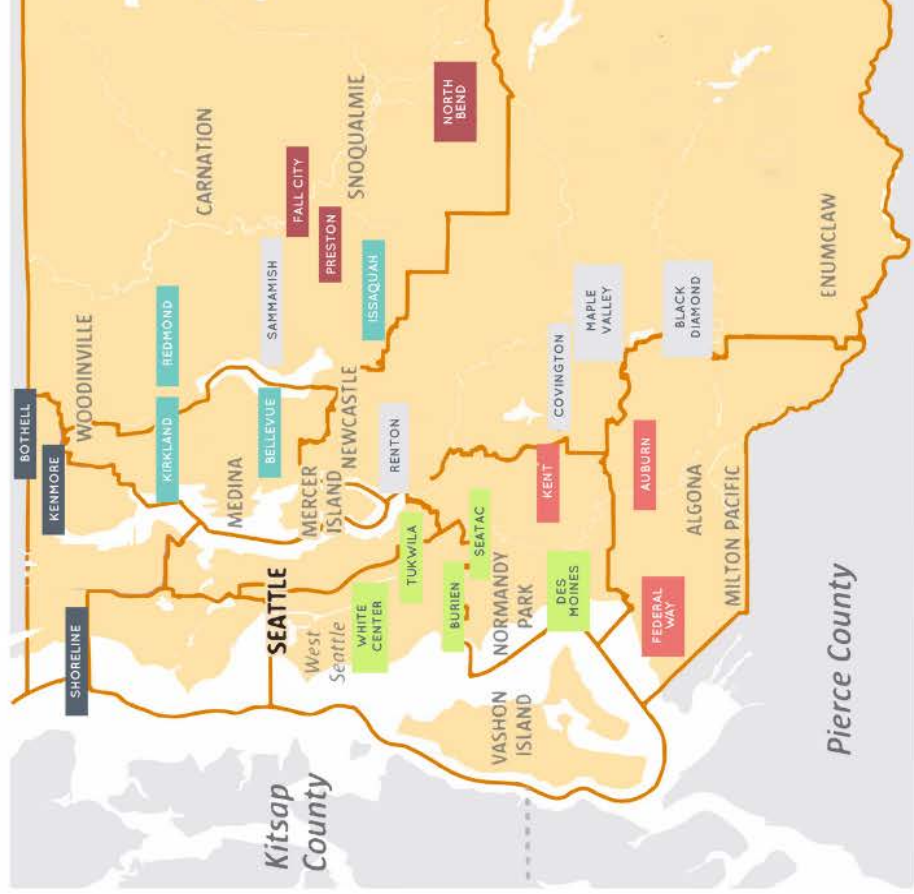
What's an Ideal Connector?



Connector Hubs & Communities

DEFINED GEOGRAPHIC LOCATIONS IN KING COUNTY

Hubs	Location	*Communities
●	1	Kenmore, Bothell, Shoreline
●	2	Kirkland, Bellevue, Redmond, Issaquah
●	3	Tukwila, Burien, Sea Tac, Des Moines, White Center
●	4	Renton, Maple Valley, Covington, Black Diamond, Sammamish
●	5	Federal Way, Auburn, Kent
●	6	Preston, Fall City, North Bend



*Communities are geography-based with consideration to language services needs.