

PROGRAM BOOK

TUESDAY, JUNE 18, 2024
CENTRAL CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL
10:30AM - 1:30PM



LAWRENCE
PARTNERSHIP

IDEAS | INVESTMENT | ACTION

IMPACT REPORT
2022- 2024



A WORD FROM OUR BOARD CHAIR & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

When you consider how much life has changed over the last 10 years, it's amazing to think about what it was like when the Lawrence Partnership got started. Today's business climate looks almost nothing like it did even five years ago.

Three years ago, we set out to focus on three key areas: **Community Engagement**, **Emerging Leadership**, and **Inclusive Economic Development**. Our goal was to create a cycle of growth that can keep businesses growing and thriving in Lawrence, not just today, but years from now.

We take pride in the **Know Your City** program, which has worked to strengthen community bonds through education. Understanding how a city works is key to getting the services you need, whether that's for an elderly relative who needs to know about exercise opportunities or for a small business that needs guidance on navigating a permitting process. If you haven't joined us yet for our monthly talks, you should.

Then there are our Emerging Leaders. Lawrence can only thrive if our leaders learn the skills they need to help our city grow. With the **LEADS** program, we showed the state how to do it right, and this coming year, we're going to revamp our **Partnership Network**. More on that is coming soon.

But where you can truly see the impact we have is in Inclusive Economic Development. Many successful startups have emerged from the **Revolving Test Kitchen (RTK)**, offering full, healthy meals, coffee, vegan donuts, or frozen treats; these startups are not only adding jobs to the community but also reaching well beyond Lawrence.

We've provided grants that have helped businesses get off the ground and soar. They can now take on projects that were previously out of reach for their growth. Then there are the companies that couldn't secure loans through traditional means and now have the capital they need to expand right here in Lawrence.

This doesn't happen without help; it takes a spectacular team and a community of partners and sponsors who are investing in the community.

We don't know what the next 10 years will bring, but we hope to be here, investing, helping, teaching, and growing.

With unwavering optimism,



SOCRATES DE LA CRUZ
Founding Partner, De La Cruz Companies
Chairman, Lawrence Partnership



GEORGE A. RAMIREZ
Executive Director
Lawrence Partnership

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KNOW YOUR CITY



LEADS
200+ NETWORK MEMBERS



6 GATEWAY CITIES
IMPACTED REGIONS 2

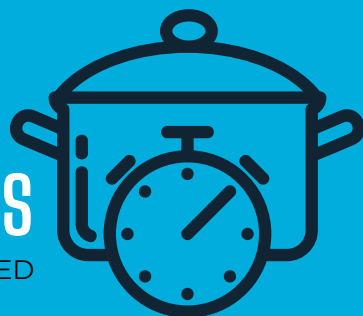
300+ PARTICIPANTS
OVER 24 SESSIONS



13 SMALL BUSINESSES GRADUATED



2,000 IN 2 WEEKS
NATIONAL BRAND MEALS COOKED



150,000 ICE POPS



31,000 HEALTHY MEALS



1 TV SHOW FILMED

VENTURE LOAN FUND

\$954,000
INVESTED LOCALLY

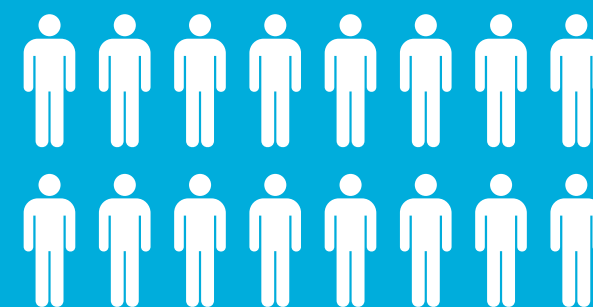


19
JOBS KEPT IN LAWRENCE

8 BUSINESSES



16 JOBS CREATED



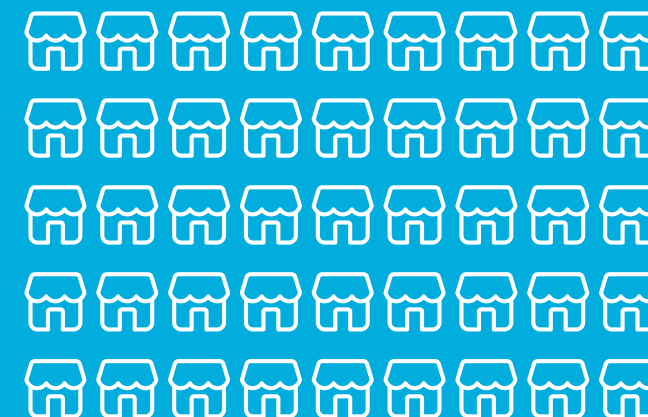
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE GRANTS



\$135K

PROVIDED

ACROSS
45 BUSINESSES



The Lawrence Partnership invites you to

Know Your City Conozca Su Ciudad

KNOW YOUR CITY IS A 12-SESSION PROGRAM DESIGNED TO EDUCATE LAWRENCE RESIDENTS ABOUT THE INNER WORKINGS OF THEIR LOCAL GOVERNMENT, AGENCIES AND RESOURCES

Lawrence is a city rich with resources, whether in healthcare, housing, arts, or dozens of other topics. But understanding what's available and how to access those resources is difficult. The Know Your City program is designed to remove the mystery and help the residents of Lawrence better understand how their government works for them.



TO DATE, THE PROGRAM HAS REACHED HUNDREDS OF PARTICIPANTS AND FEATURED MORE THAN 30 SPEAKERS ACROSS 24 SESSIONS



Held on the second Thursday of every month and produced in both English and Spanish, Know Your City/Conozca Su Ciudad runs 12 sessions a year to educate residents about the inner workings of their local government, agencies, and resources. The forums offer insight into the work of several offices and agencies. Live sessions happen at the **Lawrence Public Library** with presenters offering insights in English, and live interpretation is done by our partners at **Dominguez SP Interpreters**. Sessions are also streamed live on the Lawrence Partnership Facebook page, broadcast on **LCAT-TV**, and recordings are later available on the Lawrence Partnership website.

KNOWING HER CITY PROVIDED A PATH TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Gladys Martinez didn't expect to find out how to help her family when she showed up to her first Know Your City event. As the VP of Community Banking and Development at **Reading Cooperative Bank**, the Lawrence native thought she'd just be meeting people as part of her job. But what she found in that first meeting kept her coming back.

"I thought city government was just about taking care of the streets, the fire department, and police. I learned what went on behind all that," she said.

For her mom and her uncle, it meant identifying exercise programs, as well as social and transportation programs that can get them out of their homes and interacting with others.

They are now both exercising more, something of particular importance to her uncle who had recently suffered a stroke.

But then there were the connections she made that helped Reading Cooperative better engage with the Lawrence community. She met the city leaders in both Elder Care and Veterans Affairs, leading to bank donations and programs that have helped others. For veterans, Reading Cooperative donated to the **Flags for the Fallen** program to help make sure the Memorial Day ceremony had enough flags.



For the elderly community, Reading Cooperative hosted a Spanish-language event on financial literacy and fraud protection that attracted about 50 people. "We did the fraud event in Spanish because there are a lot of Spanish speakers and this information is not readily available in that community. That is a big impact for them."

Of course, the event included Heav'nly Donuts and coffee. "They loved the donuts, I got a lot of feedback on that!" Martinez joked.

As for future programs, Martinez keeps showing up, and she thinks it's a great resource for anyone thinking of getting a business up and running in Lawrence.

"I see it as an opportunity for a new business. If you want to learn who does what and how to get permits, you have to get to know the people in the city. That gives you a better view of who you're serving."



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

UNLEASHING TALENT, WEAVING ART & SPARKING COMMUNITY SPIRIT

Every downtown needs a gathering place where people can work, play, engage, and network. The Lawrence Partnership sees the alleyway at **427 Essex Street** as a key part of that vision.

The goal is bold: a place lined with artist murals that reflect the vibrancy of the local community, along with pop-up food vendors and high-quality Wi-Fi. To date, the Lawrence Partnership has secured a \$125,000 **Transformative Development Initiative (TDI)** grant from **MassDevelopment** for cleaning the space and purchasing new outdoor furniture. It's also working with partners including **Elevated Thought**, the **Essex Art Center (EAC)**, **Revolving Test Kitchen (RTK)**, and **Merrimack Valley Transit (MeVA)**.

The space could even host weekly farmers' markets, and on weekends, dance studios have already started talking about holding salsa lessons on-site.

What's next is additional fundraising for things like mural painting, WiFi, and ongoing programming, with the goal of having an active space later in 2024.



THE NEED FOR DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Good, consistent, and high-speed internet access is key to just about anything in today's economy. It doesn't matter if you're an employee, a business owner, or a student. Good internet gives you the access you need for collaboration and communication.

Yet, of the residents around 427 Essex Street, 25% do not have access to Wi-Fi, while another 25% have low-quality connectivity. Currently, the only other option available is the local library. By creating a public place for reaching the world, Essex Street can become a hub of activity for the community.

EMERGING LEADERS

Lawrence needs tomorrow's leaders, which is why the Lawrence Partnership has undertaken multiple initiatives to identify, engage, and train the people we need to power the community into the future.

LEADing the State

The Lawrence Partnership played a key role in incubating the **Leaders Engaged and Activated to Drive System-wide Change (LEADS) Program**. A collaboration with the **Alliance for Business Leadership** and **Harvard Business School Faculty**, LEADS is a 10-month fellowship designed to foster and cultivate local leaders who can drive the local innovation economy.

Here in Lawrence, LEADS carried out two cohorts and through that was instrumental in establishing the **Lawrence Downtown Initiative**, **Lawrence Small Business Support**, **Lawrence Workforce Development**, and the **Lawrence Opioid Commission**.

Since launching, LEADS has gone on to have a powerful impact around Massachusetts. Today it includes more than 200 members across six Massachusetts Gateway Cities and is now in its fifth cohort of leaders.



Merrimack Valley Small Business Coalition 2024 kick-off meeting

NEW BEGINNINGS FOR THE Lawrence Partnership Network

Our leaders need one another. That's why, over the coming year, the Lawrence Partnership Network will undergo a relaunch, identifying and cultivating a select group of leaders dedicated to growing businesses and assisting others in the community.

In addition to the Partnership Network, the Lawrence Partnership is reaching into high schools by advising the **Pathways Program**, helping students gain the skills they will need to lead tomorrow.



Lawrence Partnership Leaders Attend NGIN CityScapes Summit in Durham, NC

INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

VENTURE LOAN FUND

PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES THAT POWER THE LOCAL ECONOMY

The Venture Loan Fund offers essential financial support to the entrepreneurial community of Lawrence by providing small businesses and startups with funds when they can't secure financing through traditional banks or credit unions. Here in Lawrence, small and micro-businesses help drive the economy, yet they face significant challenges in accessing the necessary funds to start and grow.

The Lawrence Venture Loan Fund addresses this gap through innovative solutions and collaborative efforts, fostering local wealth creation and enhancing the economic cycle.

Supported by the Lawrence Partnership, the Venture Loan Fund relies on a blend of public, private, and philanthropic sources with a single objective: to encourage the establishment and expansion of businesses in Lawrence. Together, this group has created a \$1.1 million fund to power this lending. The **Essex County Community Foundation (ECCF)** provides loan loss reserves, mitigating the risks associated with these loans, while **Mill Cities Community Investments (MCCI)** handles loan administration.

Beyond financial support, loan recipients gain access to valuable technical assistance from MCCI and other coalition partners, further enhancing their chances of success. This comprehensive support system not only helps individual businesses thrive but also strengthens the broader economic landscape of Lawrence, making it a model of community-driven economic development.



CURE-AID PHARMACY: FINDING THE RIGHT PRESCRIPTION FOR GROWTH

Joanne Ortiz Read founded Cure-Aid Pharmacy in 2014 and opened a brick and mortar shop two years later. But when it came time to expand, she had trouble landing the financing she needed to make it possible.

Cure-Aid Pharmacy, a beacon of hope for the community, particularly the elderly and medically disabled, is the brainchild of Joanne and her dedicated team. Comprising mainly of bilingual local employees, they serve as a vital link between patients, prescribers, and family members, offering personalized medication counseling, free home delivery, and essential vaccines.

Running a pharmacy means walking a financial tightrope, balancing the need for expensive medications on site with the delays built into insurance payments. For Joanne, this created a cash flow issue that kept her from moving out of a parking-constrained location on Essex Street to a more accessible medical building.

She first turned to traditional banks for financing, including one with whom she'd had a long-time relationship. However, she could not secure a line of credit, a common issue faced by independent pharmacies.

She then came to the **Venture Loan Fund** and that was the game-changer for Cure-Aid Pharmacy. She secured \$100,000 in loans, enabling the transition to the new location.

Then, over Labor Day weekend of 2022 she and her team moved into their new facility. She's since seen major growth, including an increase in vaccine administration and more long-term care patients. The move also facilitated the acquisition of three major new clients and expanded the pharmacy's capabilities in manufacturing and packaging medications.

The impact of the Venture Loan Fund on Cure-Aid Pharmacy's growth has been profound. In 2022, the pharmacy's gross sales reached \$6.5 million, growing to \$8.4 million in 2023. This financial stability has also enabled her to invest in her employees, providing them with opportunities for professional development and hiring more experienced staff.

It's this kind of funding that enables local businesses like Cure-Aid Pharmacy to grow and build the Lawrence community.



INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE GRANTS

Getting a business moving, or even keeping it afloat, means doing the little things so that the entrepreneur can focus on what they truly want to do. Often, these tasks fall outside of their personal skill set, such as marketing, website design, accounting, or other essential operational functions.

Technical Assistance Grants are designed to support businesses in Lawrence, Andover, and North Andover to thrive. Administered through a partnership with the **Essex County Community Foundation (ECCF)**, grants can be up to \$3,000 and are available on a first-come, first-served basis. The application process helps small business owners identify their needs and then allocate the funding where it will be most beneficial.



\$135K

PROVIDED

45 BUSINESSES FUNDED



COLECTIVA WELLNESS & HEALING:
REACHING FINANCIAL WELLNESS

“My business wouldn’t be where it is today financially if it wasn’t for the technical assistance grants.” And where it is today is impressive.

A'dahi Baira (pronounced: Ah-dah-hee Bye-da, and formerly known as Elizabeth Delgado) is the Founder and CEO of Colectiva Wellness & Healing, a company that focuses on organizational development, consulting and community healing. But in 2022, it was her business that needed outside help.

In 2020, she was furloughed due to the pandemic from her job working in the human resources and marketing department at Lawrence General Hospital to start out on her own, and through a solid business network and **EForAll** alumni skills, put together a portfolio that brought in roughly \$60,000 in revenue. Still, she had little idea about how to make her company grow, especially when it came to financial issues.

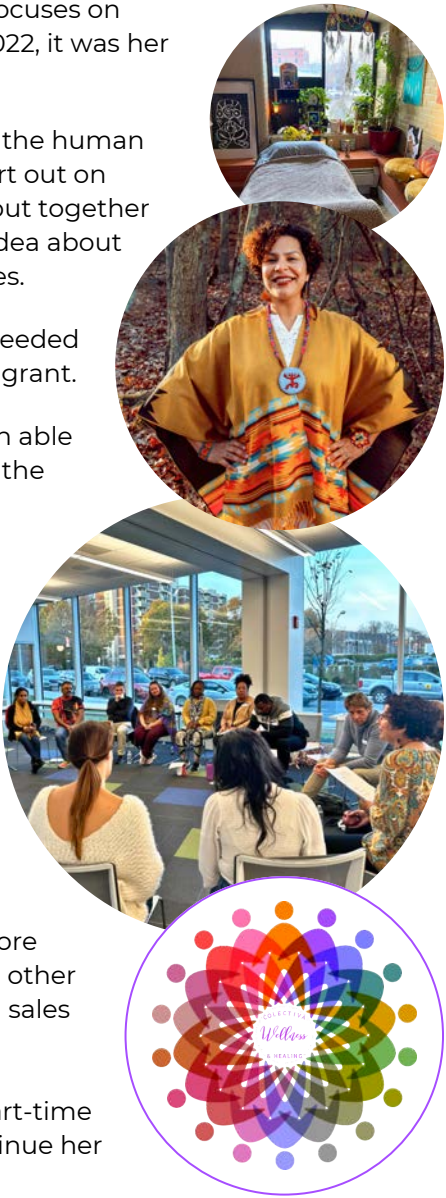
Thanks to a \$3,000 **Technical Assistance Grant**, Baira had the funds she needed to hire an accountant, something she never would have done without the grant.

“You need to invest in an accountant,” she said. “I really wouldn't have been able to do that without the grant. So I'm really grateful, really, really grateful for the grant and the opportunity. A lot of small businesses don't have that opportunity. I am also grateful for the relationship I have built with my accountant, **Abdiel Perez** during the grant cycle. When we completed the grant, I hired Abdiel immediately after and we are still working together today.”

Hiring an accountant not only brought her a service provider but also provided lessons in financial literacy that Baira needed to help make Colectiva grow. By conducting financial reviews and truly understanding what services were driving her revenue, she could make better decisions on where to invest her time.

Now, four years into running her own business, she’s seen her revenue nearly double. She’s revamped her employee wellness services to focus more on organizational retreats and development consulting. She still offers the other services, but they’re less of a regular focus when it comes to her outbound sales efforts.

And the best part? She’s started growing, having recently brought on a part-time employee. Next, she hopes to revamp her social media presence and continue her meteoric growth.



INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

REVOLVING TEST KITCHEN

GIVING THE LAWRENCE FOOD SCENE A TASTE OF SUCCESS

Thanks to the Revolving Test Kitchen (RTK), aspiring entrepreneurs in the Lawrence food scene have the resources they need. Located at the **Northern Essex Community College** Lawrence Campus at 420 Common Street, the RTK serves as a dynamic incubator for diverse food-related businesses, including food trucks, catering companies, and small-batch producers.

The RTK provides a shared culinary workspace that eliminates many of the barriers typically faced by would-be food entrepreneurs. The facility includes multiple preparation and cooking areas, as well as both dry and cold storage. By handling utilities, trash, recycling, internet, property taxes, and kitchen maintenance, the RTK allows its members to focus solely on growing their food businesses.

Over the past three years, the RTK has dramatically expanded its capabilities thanks to upgrades funded through a mix of grants and donations, including a \$100,000 **Transformative Development Initiative (TDI)** grant, \$650,000 from the **Federal Economic Development Administration**, as well as substantial in-kind contributions from local businessman **Sal Lupoli**. These enhancements include new vendor stalls and significant kitchen equipment, with all renovations expected to be completed this year.

Operating hours from 4 a.m. to midnight, along with 24-hour member access, ensure flexibility for a variety of business schedules. Reservations are managed through an online platform on a first-come, first-served basis. Additional benefits provided to members include food safety audits, professional cleaning services, and regular member meetings and roundtable discussions. The RTK also actively promotes its member businesses through social media and newsletter features, fostering a community of growth and innovation in Lawrence's vibrant food scene.



IN COLLABORATION WITH:



MANAGED & OPERATED BY:



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:





JESSY'S PLACE CAFÉ: MOVING FROM KITCHEN TABLE TO STOREFRONT IN THREE YEARS

The Revolving Test Kitchen was instrumental in transforming Jessy Melo's business from a modest home-based operation to a bustling café with a brick-and-mortar location, six dedicated employees, and a loyal customer base.

In 2020, Jesse opened a small business creating custom healthy meals from her kitchen. However, as the business grew, she needed more manufacturing capability and guidance on how to expand her nascent business. That's when she joined the **Revolving Test Kitchen (RTK)**.

"There is a big difference in cooking from home and then going to my first commercial kitchen. We were provided with ovens and cooking stations, which made the production process faster," she said.

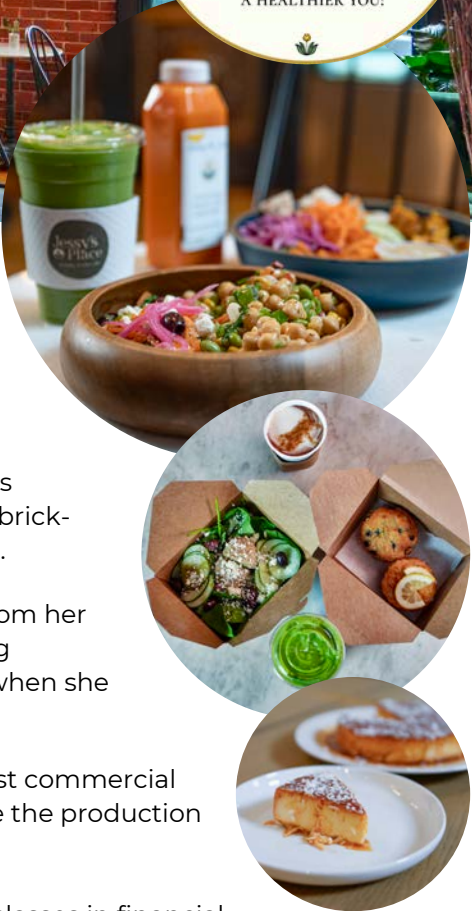
The cooking school graduate also took advantage of other offerings like classes in financial management, food sourcing, and how to train her growing workforce.

Then there were the 15 to 20 hours each weekend she'd spend in the kitchen prepping items like turkey lasagna with zucchini and eggplant, baked plantains, pressed juices, and brown rice and beans. Her customer base ranged from 30 to 60 people a week, each ordering as many as 12 items. That's a lot of meals. In fact, she estimates that she sold more than 31,000 meals while there.

Over time, she started to branch out, using the RTK to experiment with pop-ups where she could build personal relationships with her clients. That led her to shift to a brick-and-mortar strategy, something she modeled in the Revolving Test Kitchen even as she looked for a space. She booked more hours, hired and trained staff, and operated at a scale that matched what she expected she'd need later.

"The Revolving Test Kitchen is a great foundation for someone who wants to test it out. But it takes the member understanding that it's not always going to be profitable, you're learning," she said. "When I started, I was selling about \$15,000 from my home. When I started at the Revolving Test Kitchen, I sold \$75,000 that year. Then it grew to \$120,000 in 2022."

Ultimately, she invested in a space at 60 Island Street in Lawrence, where she now runs **Jessy's Place Healthy Meals and Café** and is meeting her financial goals. She still prepares meals, but instead of delivering them, she offers them up in a grab-and-go refrigerator. She also sells coffee, sandwiches, and other fresh food to a loyal and growing customer base.



CREMOSOS GOURMET ICES: A BLEND OF PASSION AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Enmanuel "Manny" Almonte founded Cremosos Gourmet Ices in grief. Just days after his father died, Manny came up with the idea of building a company offering esquimalitos, his father's favorite Dominican ice cream treat.

"When I started, I had no experience in the business world," Manny shared. Initial setbacks included costly mistakes like purchasing the wrong packaging machine. Despite these hurdles, Manny's determination never wavered. True help came when he landed in the **Revolving Test Kitchen (RTK)**, thanks to Jesús Suriel of **Enterprise Bank**. The RTK provided the necessary infrastructure at a low cost, allowing Manny to get off the ground.

Manny's perseverance paid off when he completed the **EparaTodos Merrimack Valley's Business Accelerator** program. This milestone not only brought Cremosos much-needed attention, but also earned a \$3,500 prize.

Today, Cremosos Gourmet Ices can be found in 75 stores throughout Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island, including 10 **Market Baskets**, and demand is growing rapidly. Manny is now expanding to states like New York, Connecticut, and Virginia. However, the RTK's physical limitations mean the company is currently unable to fulfill all potential orders. Manny is now seeking a larger facility to increase production capacity.

The support from the RTK has been crucial. As an incubator for food-based businesses, the RTK offers more than just a commercial kitchen; it provides a supportive community and expert guidance. This environment has been essential in helping Manny turn his culinary dream into a reality.

"Life is an endless journey of discovery where obstacles are springboards that launch us toward constant growth and mistakes are hidden treasures of wisdom that guide us toward success. Cremosos is just getting started," Manny said.

