



SBAC **EMPOWER**

# 2026 IMPACT REPORT

SBAC Empowerment Foundation

06 January 2026

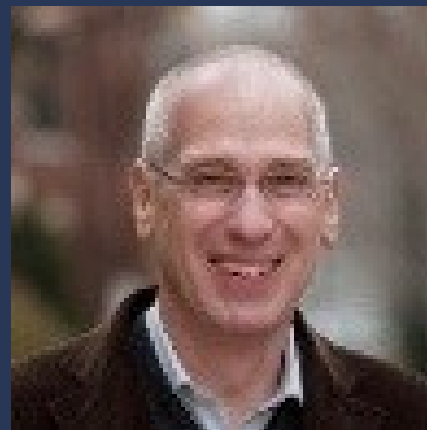




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**“Starting and growing a business is difficult and even more so in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Having a mentor and friend who can ask the right questions and add accountability and support is a priceless benefit to a small business owner.”**

**- SCOTT BASKIN**  
SBAC EMPOWER BOARD





# Overview

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\*Data made possible through SBAC Empower Data collection through December 31, 2024



# OUR MISSION

## SBAC EMPOWER HISTORY

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SBAC Empowerment Foundation (SBAC Empower) was founded as a 501(c)(3) NFP and a sister organization to the Small Business Advocacy Council (SBAC). Our goal is to assist small businesses and aspiring entrepreneurs in disadvantaged communities by providing education, mentorship and access to support services and programs on local and national levels.



Empower believes that every business needs a mentor, especially start-ups. Starting a business is hard, especially in a disadvantaged neighborhood. Studies show that entrepreneurs who have mentors are three times more likely to succeed than those without mentors. Years 0 to 3 are the most difficult. While other programs concentrate on businesses with some successful track record, these beginning-stage businesses are Empower's focus and niche.

While aspiring entrepreneurs begin with a big dream and lots of enthusiasm, they have little knowledge of the potential challenges ahead. Our entrepreneurs learn from someone who has been in their shoes, knows the questions to ask to overcome those challenges, and is willing to share - warts and all. The mentor does more than help create financial plans and set goals; the mentor holds the new entrepreneurs accountable and, in essence, becomes a respected sounding board for unexpected problems that may arise.

It takes a village to start a business, and Empower's deep network of experts is available to all the mentees in the program.





## Our Neighborhoods



SBAC Empower provides education, support, and resources to entrepreneurs and small business owners in economically challenged neighborhoods or those from disadvantaged circumstances including minorities, women, veterans, unemployed individuals, or those with limited financial means. Some of the communities we have helped include Englewood, North Lawndale, South Shore, Cook County Jail, Bronzeville, Logan Square, Greater Roseland, Woodlawn and more.

## Key Demographics

- Median Household Income
  - \$29,968 - which is less than 40% of Chicago's Median income
  - 35.5% live in poverty
- Unemployment Rate
  - 30% higher than the City of Chicago as a whole
- Neighborhood Diversity
  - 66% Black
  - 20% Hispanic
  - 11% White
  - 2% Asian

5.5%

*35.5% of the neighborhood population we serve lives in poverty.*



We focus on areas with fewer resources, funding, and attention. Some of the communities we have helped include Englewood, North Lawndale, South Shore, Cook County Jail, Bronzeville, Logan Square, and Woodlawn and more.

80% of the businesses we assist are in the critical initial phase of their business with a business life starting between 1-4 years.

2/3 of those businesses have only 1-4 employees (not including themselves) while the other 1/3 are operating solo.

Proving that our mentors really care, 68% of our Mentee/Mentor relationships continue past the 1-year commitment.

\*Data made possible through SBAC Empower Data collection, April 2019- December 2025

## SBAC EMPOWER PROGRAM IMPACT

*\*\*Compiled through SBAC Empower data collection tools*

68%

*Mentees remain active with their Mentor after a year*

*Mentee/Mentor Pairings 2020-2025*

15

Chicago Neighborhoods

80%

*Have been in business 1-4 years*

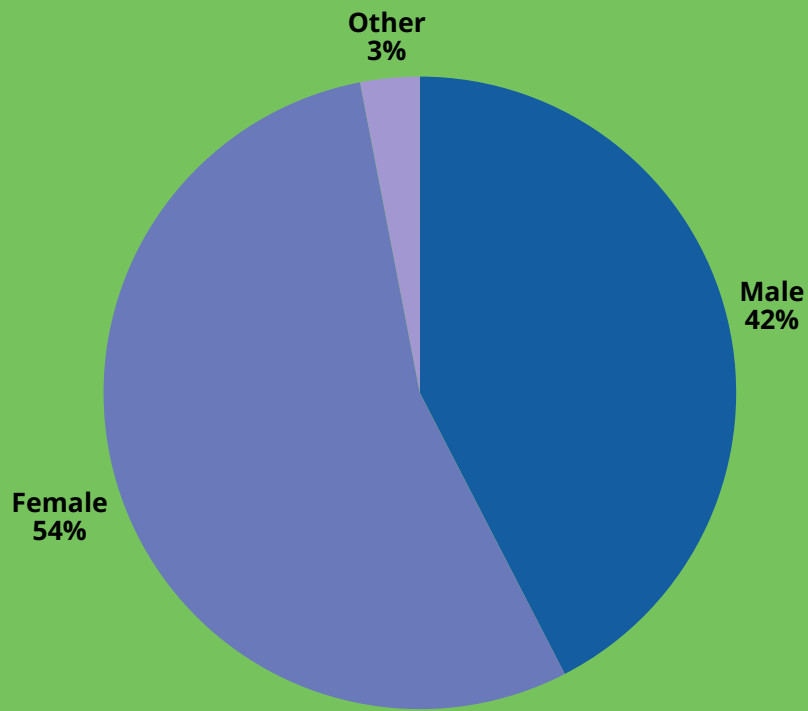
0-4

*Average number of employees*

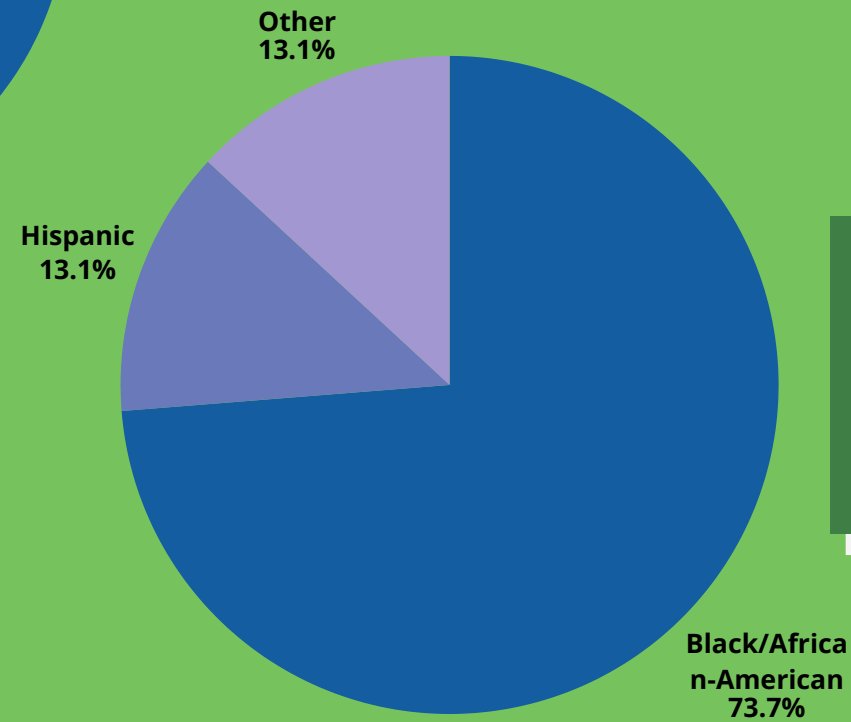




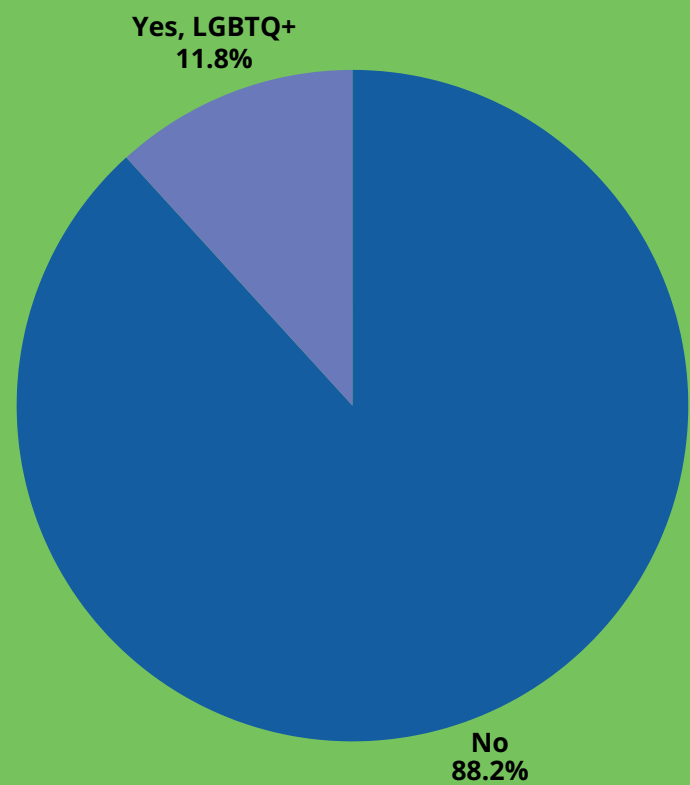
# KEY IMPACT - PROGRAM DEMOGRAPHICS



Our Mentees are Male (42%) and Female (54%), with 3% identifying as another gender



The racial makeup of our Mentees is Black/African American (74%), Hispanic (13%), and "other" (13%)



Some of our mentees, as of collection, identify as part of the LGBTQ+ Community

## A Drive for Diversity

At SBAC Empower, we strive for a high range of diversity among our mentees so several different viewpoints are considered and - most importantly - welcomed.



# Timeline of the Mentoring Program

Established small business owners, startups, and even large firms need assistance at times. Knowing that someone is working to help you succeed helps avoid some of the most common reasons for failure.



## Application

### Received

Upon receipt, we arrange an Introductory Meeting with the applicant to determine where assistance is needed.

## Pairing

Once a suitable pairing is made, an email is sent with all the info (bios, info) needed to both Mentee and Mentor to commence the relationship.

## Monitoring

Monthly surveys are sent, and check-in calls are made to monitor participant satisfaction and growth. Additional services include quarterly networking.

## Advancement

Upon a full year with the program, participants are awarded for their commitment during our spring and end-of-year fundraisers.





## Mentor Program Industry

### 1 OUR MENTEES

Working with local chambers of commerce and locally run community development corporations in economically challenged neighborhoods, we identify and recruit small business owners who want a mentor to help and guide them with their business.

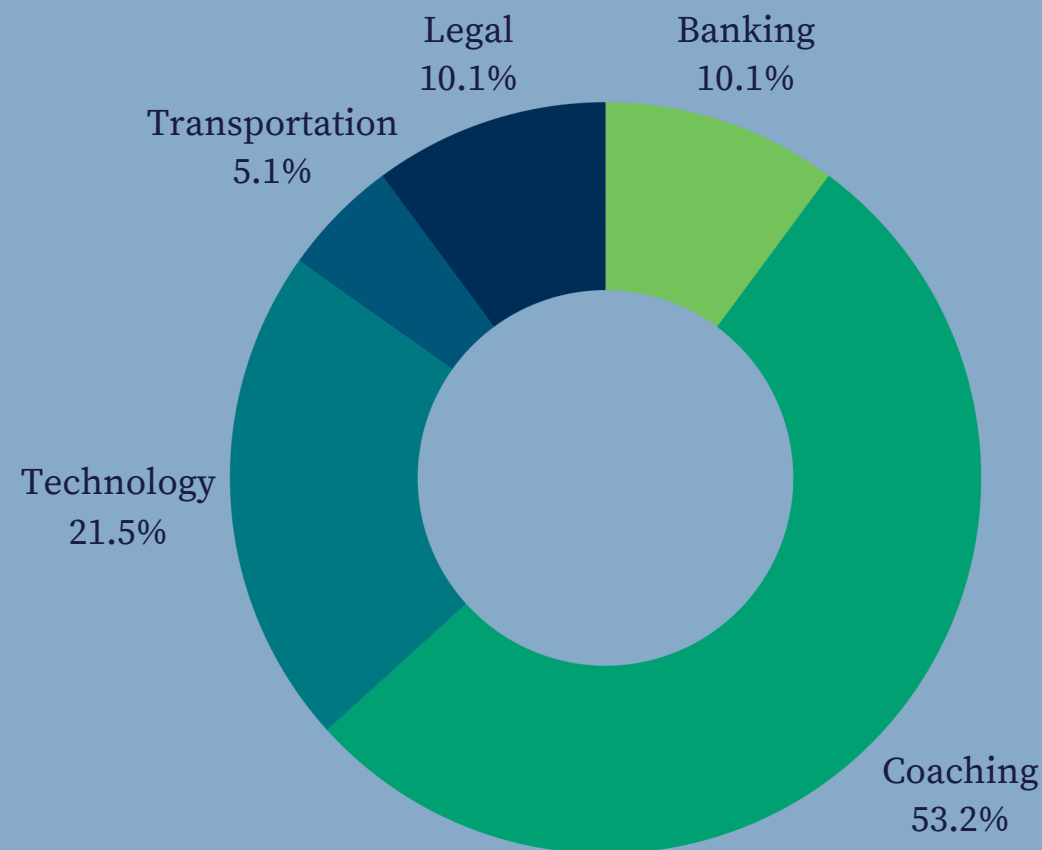
### 2 OUR MENTORS

Our Mentors are procured from the SBAC and other established organizations. They have a passion for extending a helping hand whenever and wherever it is needed.

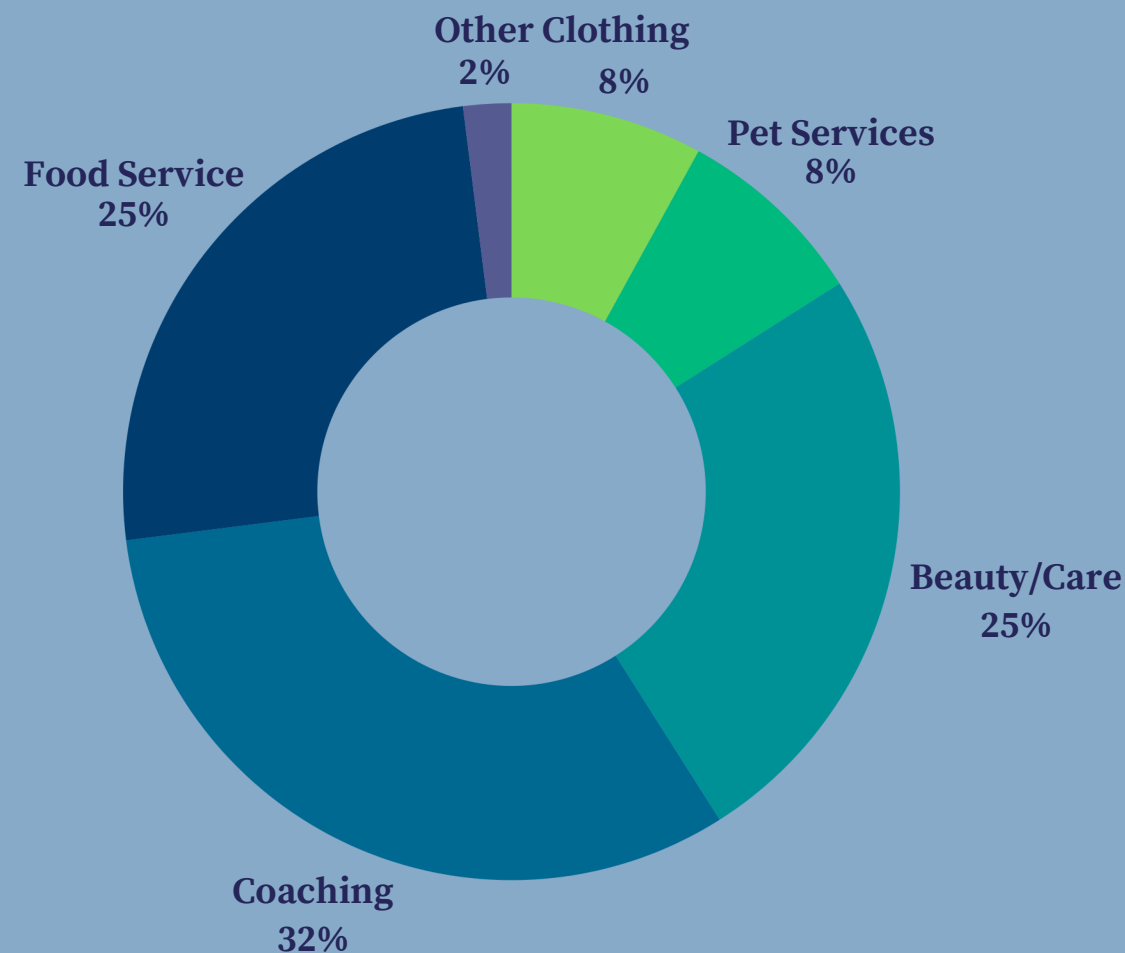
### 3 TRAINING

Potential Mentors and Mentees are required to submit an application before being accepted. Mentees must provide details on their business service/product and intentions. Furthermore, both parties are required to participate in a training session to fully understand their responsibilities and commitment.

MENTORS BY INDUSTRY



MENTEES BY INDUSTRY



*\*Data made possible through SBAC Empower Data collection, April 2019- December 2025*



# KEY IMPACT - WORKSHOPS

Over 2025, SBAC Empower has partnered with sponsoring organizations to offer a handful of workshop series hosted monthly in the 3rd and 4th quarters of the year.

This networking and outreach have allowed SBAC Empower to connect with business chambers, small business owners, and prospective sponsors/donors in economically challenged neighborhoods.

The rich content and take-home value of the presentations have enabled Empower to secure sponsors for the 2025 and planned 2026 workshops and programming.

## Our workshops have allotted us:

- Approximately 10 chambers have been partnered with as of December 2025
- 36 workshops hosted as of December 2025
  - Combined with the chambers - roughly 370,000 people reached
- \$36,215 of grants and/or corporate sponsors due to workshops



85%

*Mentees gained this year from workshops alone*

*The Workshops bring in a great influx of Mentors, Mentees, and connections*



# OUR GROWTH

SBAC Empower has experienced exponential growth across all of our platforms. We have seen an increase in mentee and mentor applications, especially through Google and our social networks.



**2,000**

Website Visits



**8.9%**

Audience Growth across platforms



**127%**

Engagement Rate across platforms



**1,092**

Video Views



Community Members

**32,000**

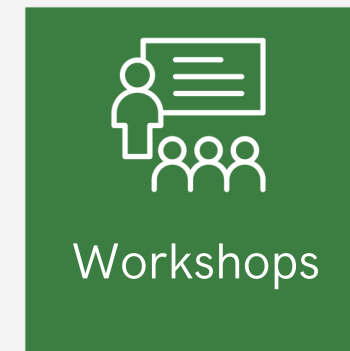
community contacts



Communities Reached

**12**

Communities Reached



Workshops

**11**

Workshops Completed in 2025



Active Mentees

**90**

People have come to us for help



Active Mentors

**~40**

Mentors dedicated to helping our mentees



\*Data made possible through SBAC Empower Data collection, April 2019- December 2025



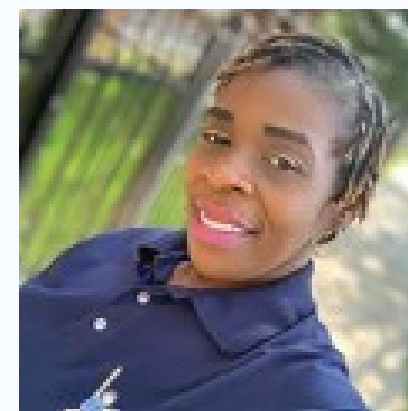
# TESTIMONIALS

SBAC Empower | 06 January 2026  
Part 6



Dinitia Robinson  
Embrace Love Designs

"I appreciate the opportunity to help small business owners. After 26 years of working with business which are primarily very established, I get to be reminded not only of hardships for the new entrepreneur"



Anjel Brown  
Co-Founder, Resourceful Friends LLC

"A great benefit of attending the SBAC Empower Small Business training sessions was acquiring a business coach. Working with a Coach allowed me to stretch my wings, and we are now impacting over 300 youth yearly."

"Having Empower be exactly what their name means - to empower me within such a hard environment...I wanted to give up. But you know what I got? Scott [her mentor]"



Stephen Ball  
Senior Vice President/Chicago Market Executive, Byline Bank

"My mentor, Phil, is amazing. He has taught me how to create a culture for my business and then be the culture I have created. I really appreciate SBAC [Empower] for this platform and this opportunity..."



Karen Jones  
President and CEO, Chocolate Chips Association, Non-Profit  
501(c)3 S.T. E<sup>2</sup>.A.M. Program for Girls



# THE EMPOWER TEAM



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# EMPOWER SPONSORS

Platinum  
Transparency  
2024

**Candid.**

