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# INSPIRE

## **AAABNA | Inspire Final Readout**



February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2024

# Key takeaways from our project together

## Financial Impact



Since 2021, AAABNA has supported ~\$6 million in **Neighborhood Opportunity Fund (NOF)** investment in the Austin neighborhood.

## Business Impact



In 2023, AAABNA provided **192 business consultations**, made **99 referrals**, and hosted **70 new business outreach and attraction initiatives**.

## Community Impact



Interviewed community members called Soul City ***“synergy and energy for the community”*** and ***“what many of us have dreamed of having...all our lives.”***

## Member Impact



**~90% of survey respondents believe that AAABNA is** currently serving its mission well, with over 50% indicating it is doing so “very well.”

# Today's Objectives

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- Get AAABNA's sign-off on external-facing “marketing” materials
- Share internal-facing materials to inform AAABNA's strategic planning
- Introduce some potential considerations for board governance
- Align on project conclusion / wrap-up

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# Introduction to AAABNA and “Soul City”

*February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2024*

# AAABNA supports African American business owners and local economic and cultural revitalization, with a focus on Chicago's Austin neighborhood

## Austin African American Business Networking Association (AAABNA)

### Mission

*To create new business opportunities for African Americans in the Austin area as well as the City of Chicago*

AAABNA's unique mix of **1) assistance for small businesses**, **2) support for economic and cultural revitalization** along Chicago Avenue, and **3) enablement of networking opportunities** drives their impact on the community.

### How we impact our community



#### Small Business Assistance

- ▶ **Chicago Business Center (CBC):** AAABNA helps small business owners navigate City and State resources and processes, apply for grant funding, and grow their businesses.
- ▶ **Chicago Neighborhood Business Development Center (NBDC):** AAABNA offers local community / market information, consulting, and introductions to community partners to help businesses thrive.
- ▶ **Illinois Small Business Development Center (SBDC):** AAABNA also provides small business advice as part of Illinois' SBDC program.



#### Community Revitalization

- ▶ **Chicago Corridor Management:** AAABNA works with community members, the City, State, and corporations to drive economic and cultural revitalization on Chicago Ave as part of the "Invest South/West" initiative.
- ▶ **Building "Soul City" on Chicago Ave:** AAABNA is building a "cultural enclave" for African Americans via community outreach and attracting private and public investment.



#### Networking Opportunities

- ▶ **Business breakfasts and newsletter:** AAABNA offers monthly networking events with a guest speaker lineup to connect and educate local small business owners, as well as publishing a weekly business newsletter.
- ▶ **Community engagement:** AAABNA hosts a growing number of annual events for local community members, including a 5K, Chili Cook-Off, and Kwanzaa Gala.

### AAABNA in action





# AAABNA's services and events are helping create Soul City, a cultural enclave for African Americans and an economic driver for the Austin Community

## What is "Soul City"?

**The Soul City Vision:** “Chicago is known for its rich cultural enclaves like Greektown, Chinatown, and Boystown that are economic drivers. There should be a place in the city that functions as a cultural enclave for African Americans. Soul City is it.”

—Malcom Crawford, Executive Director, AAABNA

AAABNA is working with community members, businesses, and the City to transform Chicago Ave into a commercial and cultural hub through....



Feb. 2017

AAABNA advocates for Chicago Ave to be designated a "Retail Thrive Zone"

Select key events

Aug. 2020

AAABNA helps design a development plan for Austin as part of "Invest South/West"

June 2021

AAABNA launches the Soul City Blues Festival

2021-2022

AAABNA solicits community feedback on Chicago Ave's new streetscape design

Nov. 2022

City officials break ground on streetscape construction

Jan. 2023

AAABNA introduces community residents to potential Soul City Arch designs

...to a growing Austin reality.



## Civic leader and resident perspectives

“Historically [Chicago] Ave was the social place for black residents...You're connected to your historical legacy [with Soul City] **We want to showcase who we are and our culture...it's creating synergy and energy for the community.**”

7 State Representative Camille Lilly, 78th District

“Many of us have dreamed of having something like **Soul City all our lives**...Having a corridor that is culturally inclined to entertained...for us to be added to that, it gives a lot of weight. **The walkability, the convenience...Austin is on the rise!**”

CEO, ACT Yoga, Austin

“Soul City Corridor really stands for me as **what would have been**...if we had not been hit by the drug epidemic, violence, and all these other socio-economic factors...**It's really nice to be able to gather with folks who share a collective vision of what's possible.**”

Founder, Front Porch Arts Center, Austin



# AAABNA has created opportunities for Austin small business owners to overcome challenges—particularly low access to capital



## **Low access to capital** and **retail leakage** have historically been obstacles to Austin small businesses

- ▶ Oak Park has ~**53,000 residents** and 8 full-service grocery stores, while Austin historically had ~**100,000 residents** and no full-service grocery stores
- ▶ In 2021, Crain's Chicago Business wrote, "**Chicago Avenue had been written off as an urban desert**, with little to catch the eye beyond small storefronts, litters and vacant lots."

“Historically, **small business owners were not able to start business in the [Austin] community... They were surviving with what they had.**

State Representative Camille Lilly, 78<sup>th</sup> District



## AAABNA creates avenues of opportunity for business owners to **find and access funding**

- ▶ In November 2023, **Forty Acres Fresh Market** broke ground in Austin with support from AAABNA and NOF grant funding

“The fact that it [Forty Acres] is black owned is a very proud moment and a proud part of our community. As a community that is largely African American to now have an **African American-led grocery store is a good feeling.**”

Malcolm Crawford, Executive Director, AAABNA

“They served as **advisors and technical assistance for the Neighborhood Opportunity Fund (NOF)**. It was a totally new process that I was intimidated by, but working with AAABNA I felt confident to hit "submit" on the application”

Founder and CEO, ACT Yoga





# AAABNA has successfully helped small business and the City of Chicago develop new commercial and civic spaces along the Soul City Corridor

## INVEST SOUTH ★ WEST

*Through Invest South/West, AAABNA is working with the City and community residents to revitalize Chicago Ave as a focal hub for pedestrian activity, shopping, transportation, and quality-of-life amenities*

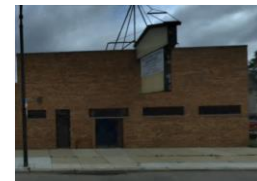
AAABNA's support is helping achieve the following:

- 1 Community Programming
- 2 Enhanced Landscapes
- 3 Lighting
- 4 Pedestrian Safety

1 CTA Bus Turnaround & Art Installation



3 T&C Fitness



5 Divvy Stations



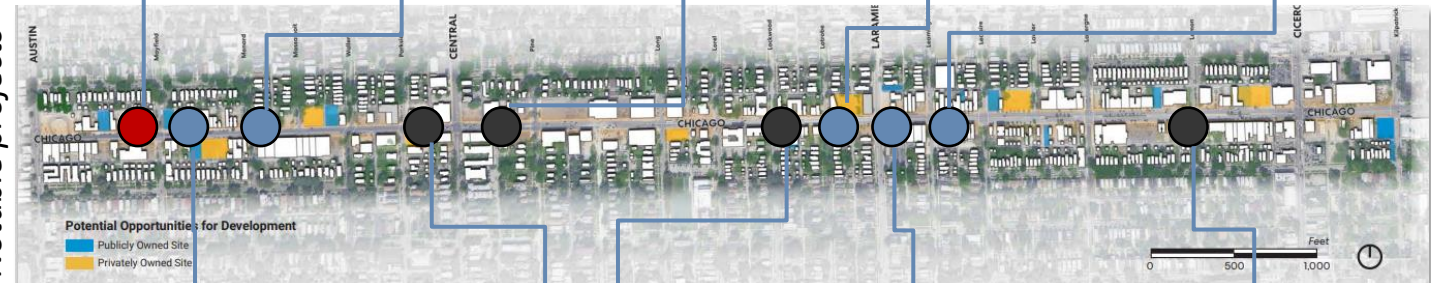
6 Lockwood Plaza



8 Mr. Anthony's Cleaners



Notable projects



2 L. May Creations



4 Pedestrian Bumpouts



7 Laramie State Bank



9 Pedestrian Bumpouts

● CTA ● NOF Grant ● Other



# Public artwork has been instrumental in Soul City's development, helping to create a unique, unifying neighborhood aesthetic

## "Pop Courts" by Vanessa Stokes



*AAABNA has worked with Vanessa in both installing her artwork and opening her first restaurant*

- “Soul City is the first space in this city where **black people are the ones actually implementing and creating a brand.**”
- “**I create art to bring our community together..** As humans, we bond over beauty and food and art.. There’s no better way for us to thrive together.”

Vanessa Stokes, Artist and Consultant

## "Human Nature Mural" by Jordan Campbell

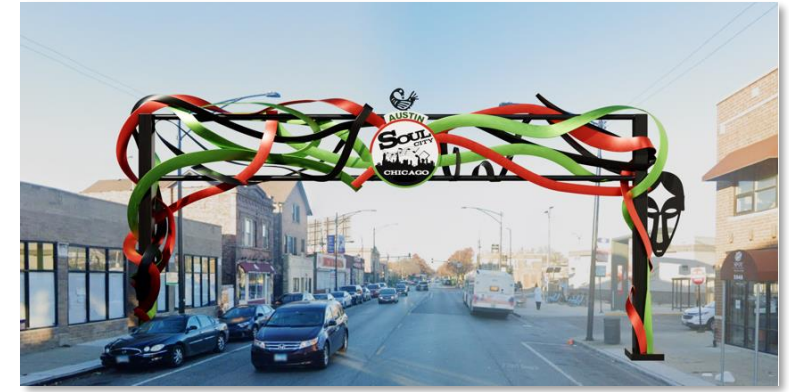


*AAABNA has worked with Jordan to assess art and amplify representation of PoC-created art*

- “It’s on the first black-owned gym on Chicago Avenue. It is **about consistency, determination and inclusivity**, and the importance of physical, mental and spiritual health.”
- “It’s important for us to recognize that Austin is predominantly black, but the **demographic is shifting** - so it was important for me to reflect this shift in our community in this piece.”

Jordan Campbell, Artist

## "Austin Soul City Gateway" by Bernard Williams



*Bernard worked with the Austin City Council and AAABNA to create the Austin Soul City Gateway, which serves as an entrance to the neighborhood*

- “The function of the gateway **serves to be an announcement.** It says, ‘here we are, who we are, and that we’re on the move, we’re vital and strong as a community.’”
- “Communities, historically, have identified themselves in **the way that they decorate their space.** The artwork is a reflection of the Austin community and acts as a visual voice.”

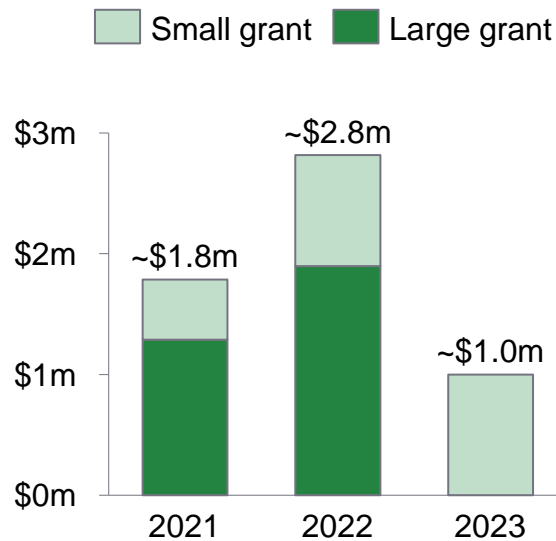
Bernard Williams, Artist

# From 2021-2023, AAABNA helped Austin small businesses receive nearly ~\$6M in City grant funding via technical assistance and other support



*AAABNA's Chicago Business Center (CBC) provides important services to help small business owners start and grow businesses, providing guidance in navigating regulatory and funding processes*

## Key recent achievements



Neighborhood Opportunity Fund (NOF) grants received with AAABNA support, 2021-2023

192

Business consultations



99

Referrals



70

New business outreach and attraction initiatives



14

Collaborations

## Testimonials

“AAABNA has **great point people** to navigate the acquisition and business process. They have a lot of information....**They were very helpful as I navigated the process of getting a Chicago recovery grant**...and were my first point of contact as I navigated this grant with the city.”

Founder and Artistic Director, Front Porch Arts Center

“AAABNA has a **vast arsenal of business techniques and a dynamic team**. Someone also knows the answer. Their technical support is a ‘hand-in-glove’ working relationship with tutelage and mentors to point things out for you. **They helped me receive a \$250k Neighborhood Opportunity Fund grant.**”

Founder and CEO, ACT Yoga

“The process of navigating MBE certifications is like a barrier built into the system. [AAABNA] has helped suggest people to help with this process. **They also provide value to the community through facilitating conversations about grants and how to obtain them.**”


CEO, UpGrade Sales Consulting





# Case studies illustrate how AAABNA's services and networking opportunities enable successful development in the Austin neighborhood

## AAABNA's Impact: Case Studies

	CTA Electric Bus Line Turnaround, 2021	ACT Yoga, 2023
	 	  
<b>The challenge</b>	<p><b>Helping the CTA get community feedback on public art:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>► The City of Chicago planned to install a public art piece at Austin's Chicago Avenue CTA bus facility, which was part of the City's first electric bus line, but lacked a plan to ensure local community buy-in before moving forward</li> </ul>	<p><b>Advising an Austin small business owner opening a yoga studio:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>► Marshawn Feltus, an Austin resident and yoga fan, sought technical assistance and advice to open the yoga studio in Austin, ACT Yoga</li> </ul>
<b>AAABNA's approach</b>	<p><b>Hosting a community feedback session:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>► AAABNA partnered with CTA in December 2016 to host a session to gather community feedback and allow the installation's artist, Shinique Smith, to directly answer any questions</li> </ul>	<p><b>Providing funding and networking support:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>► AAABNA helped Feltus apply for Neighborhood Opportunity Fund (NOF) and Back to Business grants and connected Feltus with local business owners and potential customers via AAABNA's business breakfasts</li> </ul>
<b>AAABNA's impact</b>	<p><i>By creating a space for feedback, AAABNA helped secure the Austin community's approval for the first permanent public art installation, enriching Chicago's first electric bus facility.</i></p>	<p><i>AAABNA helped Feltus receive a \$250k NOF grant, meet local business owners, and attract potential customers, leading to the opening of the first yoga studio on Chicago's West Side.</i></p>

# Austin residents highlight AAABNA's critical role in promoting networking, community connection, and business development

## What is the Austin community saying about AAABNA?



AAABNA's monthly business meetings foster networking opportunities

AAABNA creates a space for for black entrepreneurs and community members

AAABNA helps guide entrepreneurs through key processes like funding and compliance

### Feedback

- “It’s an organization for small business owners in the community that focuses on creating a network... that’s unique.”  
CEO, UpGrade Sales Consulting
- “Being a black man in the community, just knowing I have that space is important... I’m down here two or three times a week.”  
Founder and CEO, ACT Yoga
- “Being able to be a bridge for business owners who want to go through the Invest SouthWest Chicago recovery application process... AAABNA does a really good job with that.”  
Founder, Front Porch Arts Center, Austin

### Additional commentary

- “They’re more flexible, they’re more open [than similar networking organizations]. They’re more interested in what the business owners that come to them actually do.”

Founder, S.A.M.S Cleaning & Janitorial Services

- “It means a lot when they’re in it and helping the people they’re helping, generating wealth in our community and bringing the community together.”

CEO, Lets Juze



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- **Share internal-facing materials to inform AAABNA's strategic planning**
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# Introduction to the AAABNA team!

## Board of Directors



**Malcolm Crawford**  
*Executive Director*



**Charmaine V. Rickette**  
*Chairwoman*



**Bernard Headley**  
*Secretary*



**Ade Onayemi**  
*Treasurer*



**Shirley Fields**  
*Board Member*



**Letrusia May**  
*Board Member*

## Directors



**Eric Strickland**  
*Director, CBC*



**Corey Dooley**  
*Corridor Manager*

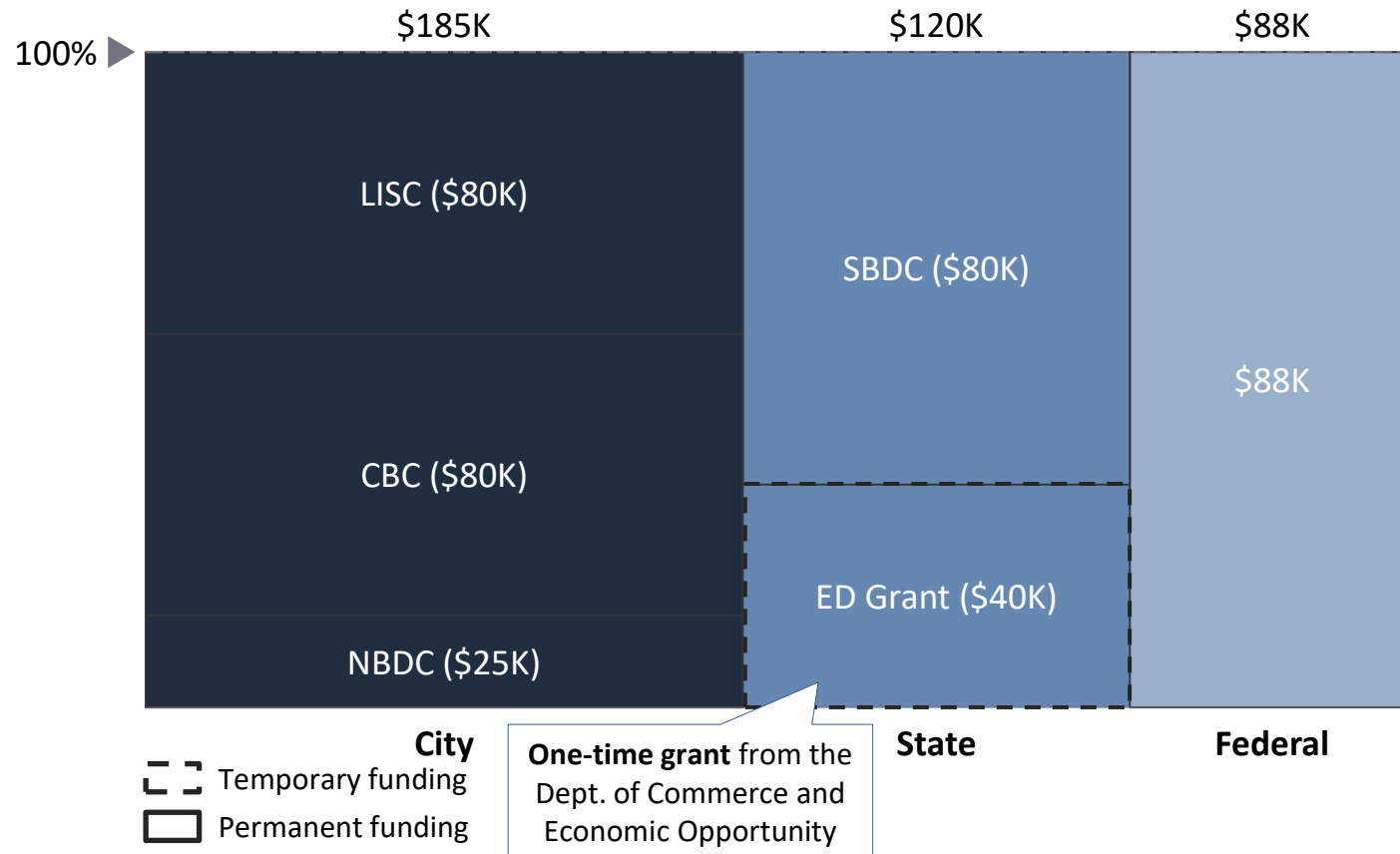


**Ron Smith**  
*Facilities Manager*

**“ Eric has a vast arsenal of business techniques... it’s a dynamic team over there with Malcolm, Eric, Corey, and Ron.”**  
**Founder and CEO, ACT Yoga**

# ~50% of AAABNA annual funding is allocated through the City

AAABNA Funding Sources & Allocations, 2023



## Challenges

### Ongoing challenges:

- CBC: AAABNA ends up losing money each year due to reimbursements (\$80K has never been received)
- SBDC (matching grant): Using their services created budget constraints, as AAABNA had no reimbursement potential

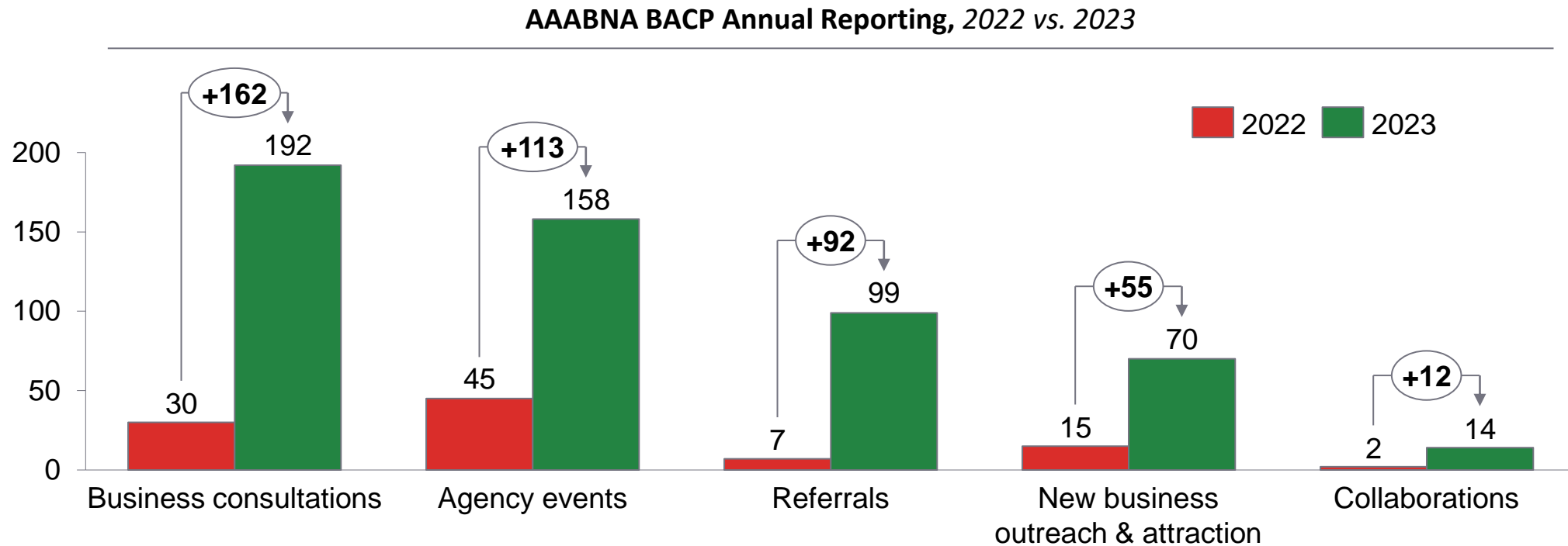
### Lost funding:

- Soul City Funding (State funding): Fell through due to large amount of paperwork
- B2B (State funding): \$15K grant was not paid despite all deliverables being complete; pursuing further creates additional challenges

**Funding reimbursements and administrative obstacles** seem to be key challenges in AAABNA's ability to source and maintain funding



# AAABNA increased all core services significantly from 2022 to 2023, according to BACP reporting



**Business consultations and agency events increased the most from 2022 to 2023 among AAABNA service offerings**

Based on internal survey insights, AAABNA has a very strong and positive community presence, and can use its internal resources / skillsets of existing members to expand its community impact, especially among youth

AAABNA Internal Survey Insights	
Survey respondents come from a variety of backgrounds, but are all <b>highly</b> satisfied with AAABNA's services	Living, working, and owning a business were indicated most often as survey respondents' connection to Austin
	~77% of respondents are highly satisfied with AAABNA's services and ~72% are likely to recommend AAABNA to a friend or colleague
Community events draw the most engagement from AAABNA members, and most respondents believe AAABNA is effectively serving its mission	~27% of respondents attend community events, and ~24% of respondents find community events most valuable
	~50% of respondents see AAABNA as a pillar for providing business opportunities to the Austin and Greater Chicago community, whether through personalized support or through regular organized events to encourage business owners to build their network
Most respondents have community / economic development expertise, and can serve as valuable resources to increase youth engagement and entrepreneurship training in the community	~41% of respondents have community and economic development expertise
	~27% of respondents identified as an entrepreneur / business owner
	Members express a desire for increased focus on youth involvement and entrepreneurship training, along with expanded networking opportunities
AAABNA members have a <b>strong relationship with the organization</b> , are familiar with its mission, and are active in attending events	Members see AAABNA as a strong community pillar, and demonstrate strong retention as a result
	~50% of respondents are very familiar with AAABNA's mission
	>60% of respondents are very / somewhat active in attending AAABNA events

# Respondents came from diverse backgrounds, but all believe strongly in the value of AAABNA



## What is your connection to Austin?

Living, working, and owning a business were indicated most often as survey respondents' connection to Austin



## Testimonials

“Being a black man in this community, **just knowing I have this space is important.**”

CEO, ACT Yoga, Austin

“When my family migrated from Mississippi in the 1950s and settled on the West Side, they had hoped to be a part of a living, breathing community, **where people that lived in the community worked in the community, found value in that community, and had a vision for that community.** The Soul City corridor really serves to me as what things could've been if everything had turned out well.”

Assistant Professor of English, Poet, Chicago State University

“Soul City is the first space in this city where **black people are the ones actually implementing and creating a brand.** Malcolm is looking at us, the people who live here, to create what the community looks like as we move forward.”

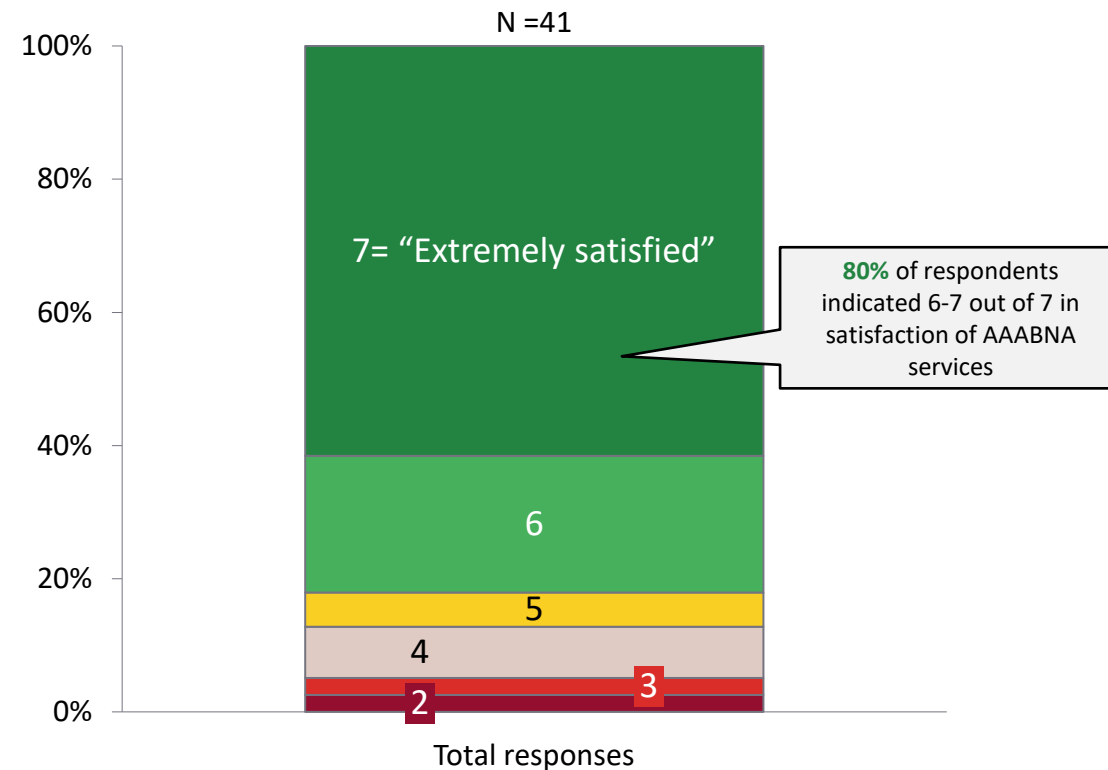
Artist and Consultant, VS Creative Consulting LLC



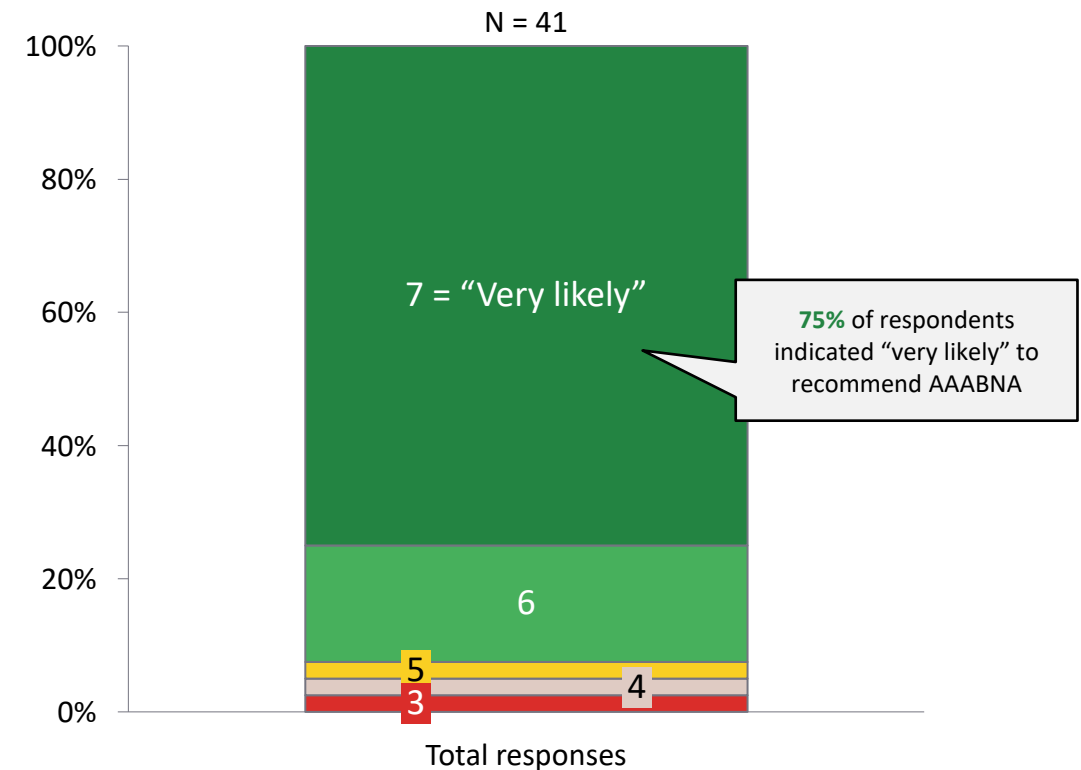
# Respondents indicated overall high satisfaction with AAABNA services and high likelihood to recommend to a friend or colleague



How satisfied are you with AAABNA's services for your business on a scale of 1-7?



How likely are you to recommend AAABNA's services to a friend or colleague on a scale of 1-7?

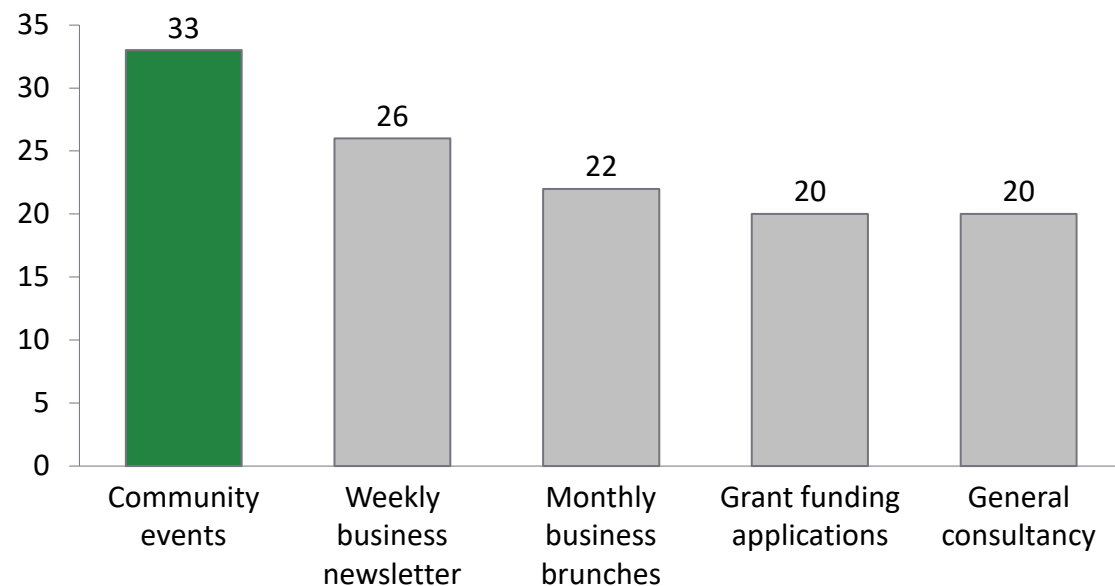




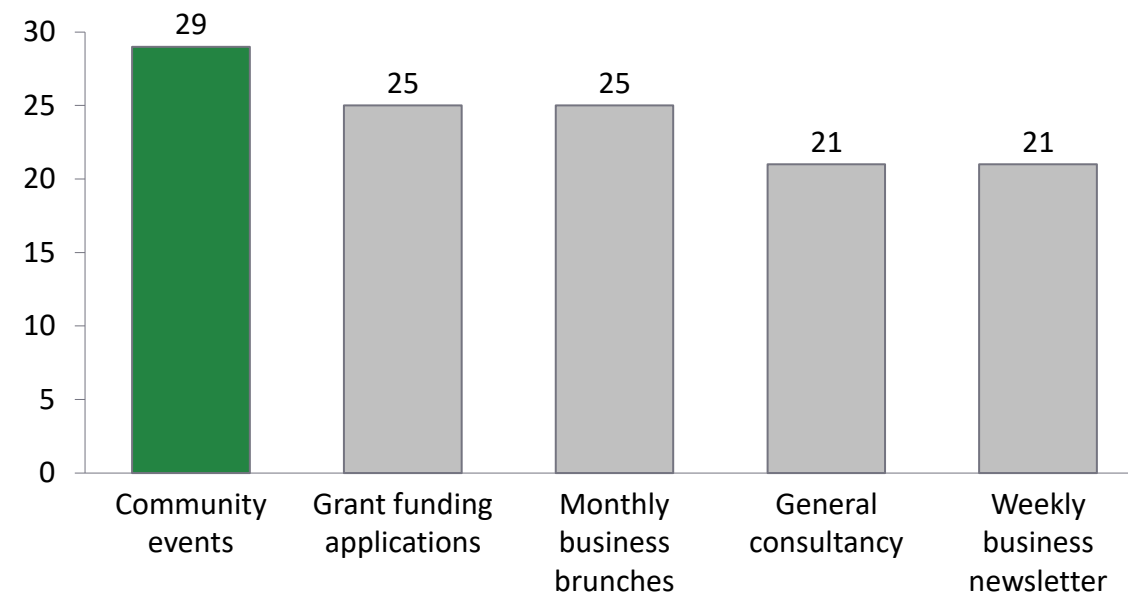
# Respondents highlighted AAABNA's community events as drawing the highest engagement and providing the highest value



What AAABNA services, programs, or events do you use?  
(n=41)



What specific aspects of AAABNA's programming do you find most valuable? (n=41)

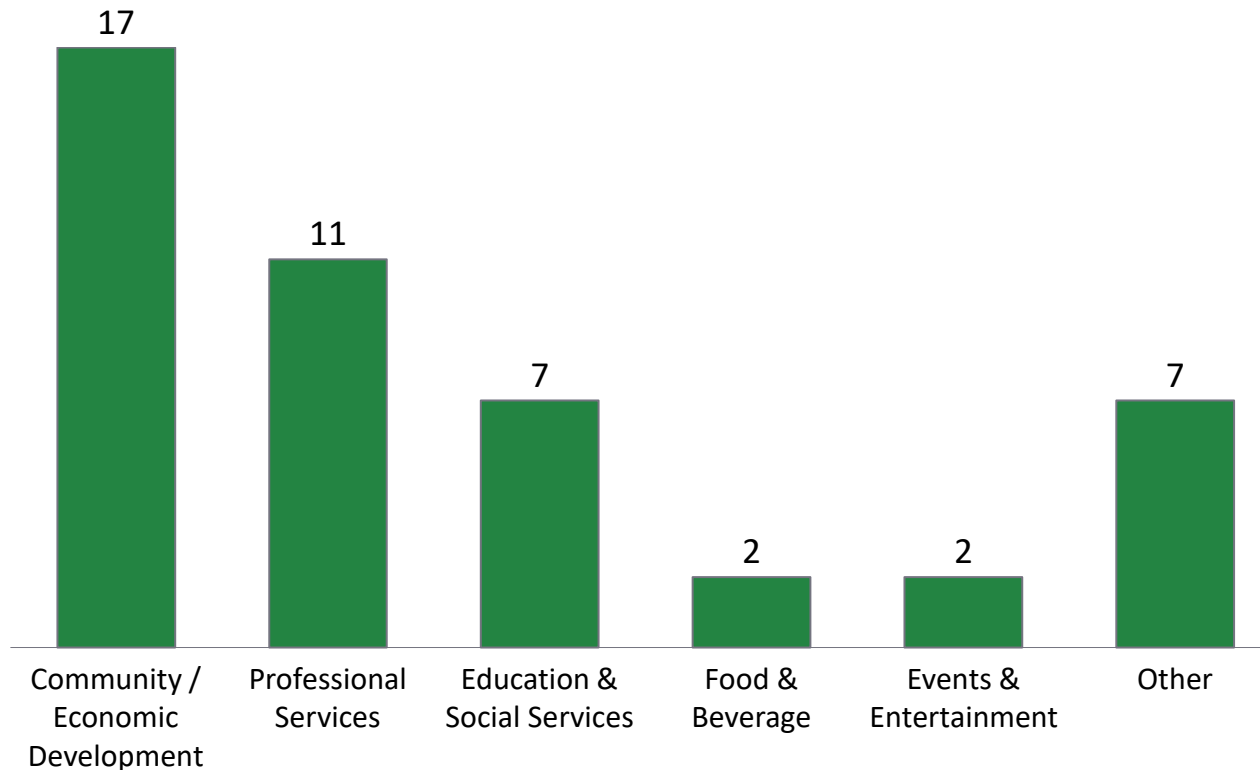


***Community events seem to draw the most engagement and value from AAABNA participants; remaining AAABNA services are fairly distributed in value provided to its members***

# A majority of AAABNA's network has expertise in community / economic development and professional services



What is your area of expertise? (n=41)



## Commentary

AAABNA works with like-minded individuals who have expertise in community / economic development and can help strengthen AAABNA's community presence

“ I’ve been involved with AAABNA for 7 years. I was introduced to Malcolm by Alderman Mitts. I am an entrepreneur / CEO and my area of **expertise is in Project Management / Community Development**. To further promote business opportunity, AAABNA should continue to **build on the Soul City brand**.”

Business Owner, Community Development

“ I’ve been doing community engagement, as well as art and culture engagement organizing for a long time, which is what got me into creative consulting. I consult with artists and non-profit organizations. **I combine the two, working on community development through art.**”

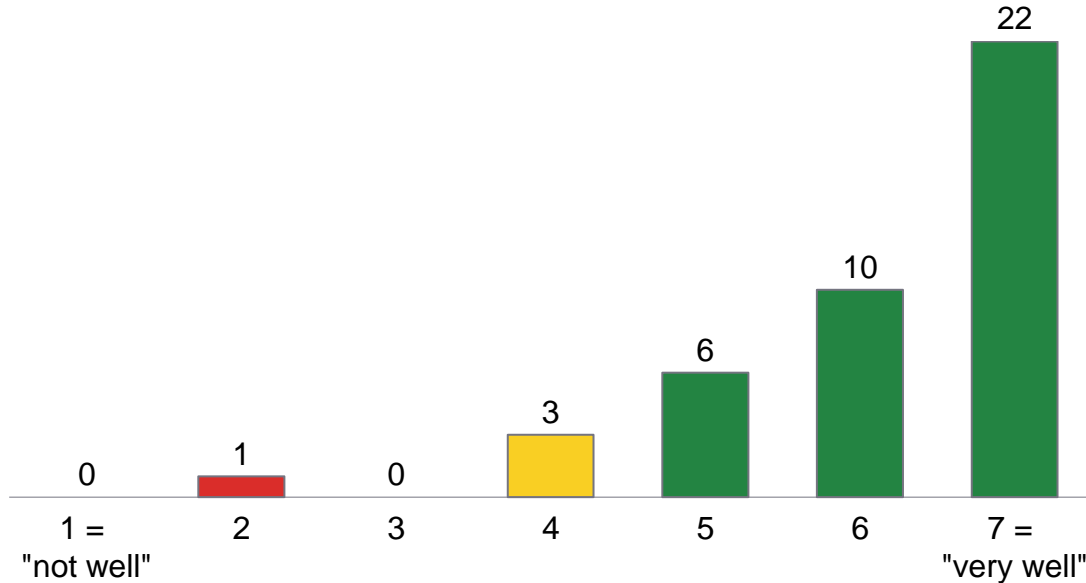
Artist and Consultant, VS Creative Consulting



~90% of respondents believe that AAABNA is currently serving its mission well, with over 50% indicating it is doing so “very well”



How well does AAABNA currently serve its mission to create business opportunities for African Americans in Austin and Chicago? (n = 41)



### Testimonials

“ I have seen **AAABNA’s monthly business networking meetings grow**, where it used to be just a few people, and now they have to add chairs in the back of the room to support the crowd.”

Founder, S.A.M.S Cleaning & Janitorial Services

“ AAABNA has a **vast arsenal of business techniques and a dynamic team**. Someone also knows the answer. Their technical support is a ‘hand-in-glove’ working relationship with tutelage and mentors to point things out for you. **They helped me receive a \$250k Neighborhood Opportunity Fund grant.**”

Founder and CEO, ACT Yoga

***AAABNA is seen as a strong pillar for providing business opportunities to the Austin and Greater Chicago community, whether through personalized support or through regular organized events to encourage business owners to build their network***



# Respondents indicated that an increased focus on training and youth involvement would help AAABNA strengthen its impact and mission



## Comments on Areas of Improvement

“ I think there is a need to provide (or partner with another organization) to **provide entrepreneurial training or classes**. I think it would help to strengthen the businesses that are being started within the community.”

Consultant/Photographer

“ There is a need to **get more youth involved** and establish more leadership roles for them.”

Community Case Manager

*While AAABNA provides essential services to the community, members are expressing a desire for increased focus on youth involvement and entrepreneurship training, along with expanded networking opportunities*

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- **Introduce some potential considerations for board governance**
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# Inspire compiled a list of questions about board effectiveness from local non-profit and for-profit board leaders

## Potential questions to consider when optimizing board effectiveness

1

### What is the governance framework?

- ▶ What **responsibilities** does the board have (and not have) within the non-profit?
- ▶ What **positions / titles** do different members hold within the board (e.g., committees)?
- ▶ What **expectations / cultural norms** exist for board members in general? What is **protocol** if these expectations are **not fulfilled**?



2

### How do we conduct meetings?

- ▶ What **types of items** should be included in a typical board meeting agenda?
- ▶ What are the **expectations** for board member **conduct** during meetings? What are the expectations for board member **attendance**?
- ▶ How do **board decisions get reached** when there is disagreement?



3

### What standing does the board have?

- ▶ How much should the board focus on **long-term strategy** vs. **day-to-day operations**?
- ▶ What **types of projects** should the board take on within the non-profit?
- ▶ How will the board **fund** its projects / efforts?



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After this project, AAABNA can leverage Inspire's materials to both help with promotion and to inform strategic planning

	December				January				February		
Week	11/27	12/4	12/11	12/18	1/1	1/8	1/15	1/22	1/29	2/5	2/12
Workstream											
<b>Workstream 1:</b> Internal data consolidation											
<b>Workstream 2:</b> Stakeholder interviews											
<b>Workstream 3:</b> Stakeholder survey											
<b>Workstream 4:</b> Board strategy											

### March, April, and beyond

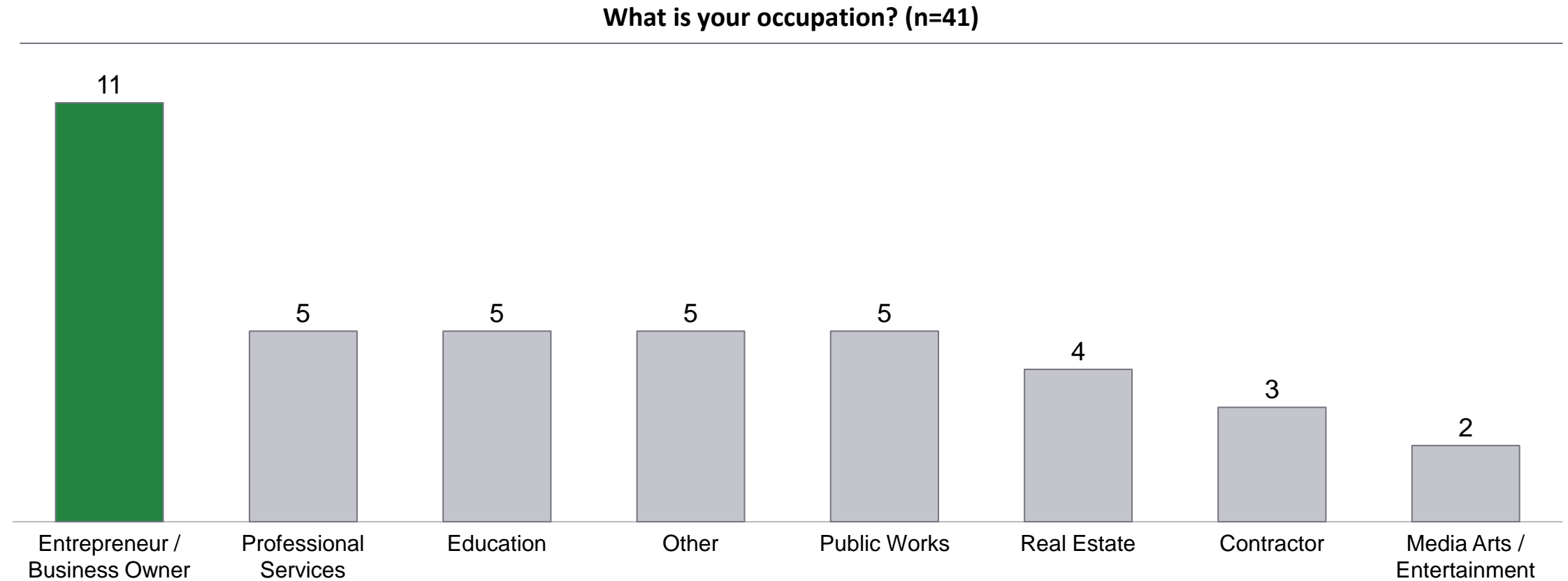
#### Inspire

- Inspire is happy to provide additional edits to the external marketing materials. However, **our contract will expire shortly.**

#### AAABNA

- AAABNA can use all or part of Inspire's external materials as part of **promotional materials or to share with conferences, other non-profits, etc.**
- Survey results and board framework can **help inform AAABNA's future strategic planning**, either with SVP or internally

# What is your occupation?



# What is your relationship with AAABNA?

Members truly believe in the mission of AAABNA and want to support it

“ I’ve been an active member since 2014. I’ve been involved with a number of social service agencies and became aware of AAABNA. It is my belief that our community issues need both social and economic rejuvenation. **AAABNA has been promoting that and working toward that economic renewal. That’s why I have been involved.**”

Consultant / Photographer, Marketing & Communications

“ I am a founding member and support of AAABNA. **I moved my architecture practice from Oak Park to the Austin community in 2005 in order to help establish AAABNA.**”

Architect, Community Engagement and Planning

Members see AAABNA as a necessary pillar of community

“ I’ve been a member of AAABNA for four years. **They have been a pivotal force in our community.** I find their grant / funding application awareness, their community activities, their general business consultancy, and their monthly business brunches to be the most valuable.”

Entrepreneur, Education

“ **AAABNA is trying to get the community to come together.** I own an art gallery in Austin and consider myself to be a somewhat active member of the organization .”

Business Owner, Entertainment

AAABNA demonstrates strong member retention

“ I have had over a **15-year relationship with AAABNA**, I started as a member and continue to attend their monthly business brunches. Many of my clients reside in the Austin neighborhood.”

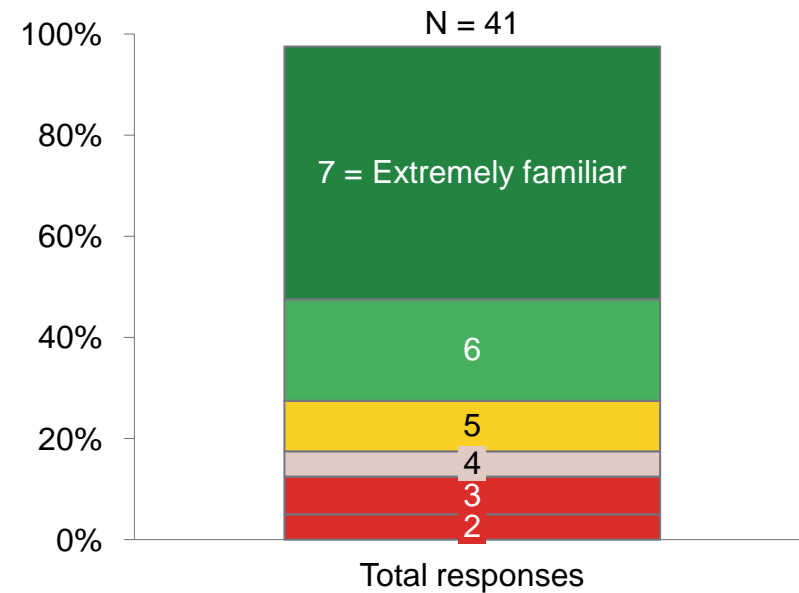
Business Owner, Property and Casualty Insurance

“ My dad introduced me to AAABNA many years ago. **It’s been a long time. I can’t even remember how long ago it was.** I grew up in this area and attend several community activities / events.”

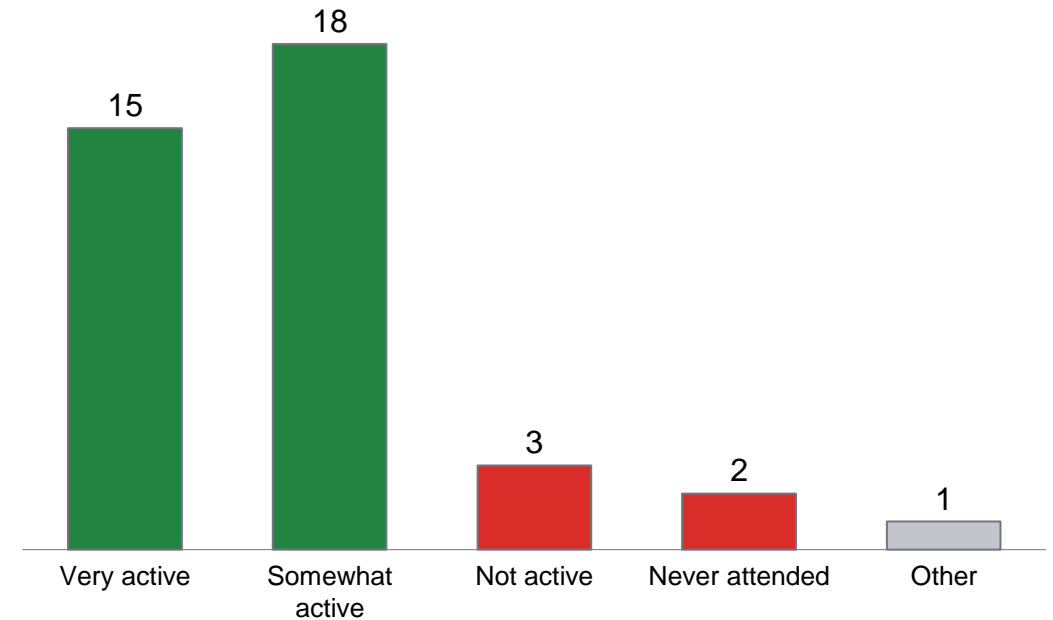
Tech Support / Entrepreneur, Cannabis Dispensary

# Familiarity and attendance

How familiar are you with AAABNA's mission and objectives?

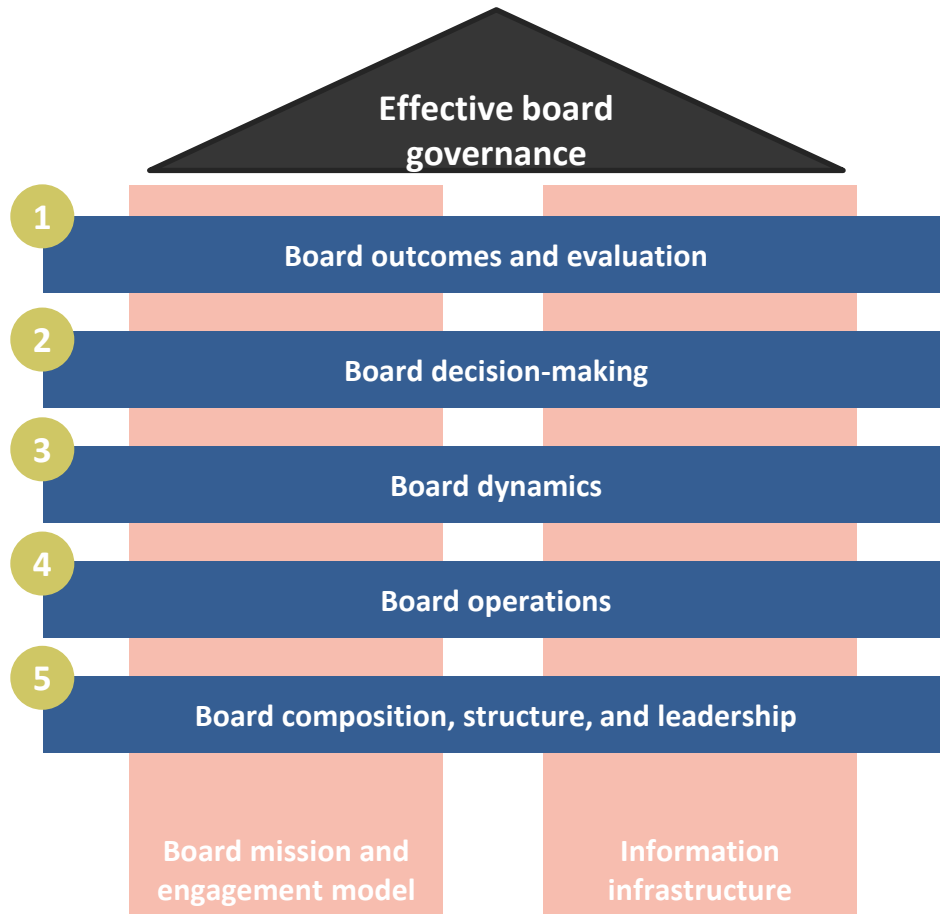


How active are you in attending AAABNA events? (n = 41)



**The majority of survey respondents demonstrate familiarity with AAABNA's mission and active levels of engagement with AAABNA's events**

# EY provides a board effectiveness framework defined by 2 pillars and 5 elements



## Effective board governance overview

- 1 Self evaluation process to identify the collective actions / targeted outcomes of the board
- 2 A delegated authority matrix to ensure transparency around voting procedures
- 3 Informal ways to enhance trust and build personal connections amongst board members
- 4 Formal board meeting schedule, with no surprise meetings, and a circulated agenda
- 5 Board skills matrix detailing individual strengths; board member roles revisited periodically



# Table of all emails and occupation of people who said they were interested in volunteering

Email	Occupation	Area of expertise
<a href="mailto:samsjcleaningservices@gmail.com">samsjcleaningservices@gmail.com</a>	Entrepreneurship	Education
<a href="mailto:vscreativeconsulting@gmail.com">vscreativeconsulting@gmail.com</a>	Entrepreneur / CEO	Project Management / Community Development
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