

Toward a Strategy for Promoting Black and Latino Businesses in New York State
The Black and Puerto Rican Caucus
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Statewide, black and Latino businesses face many barriers that hinder their start-up, survival and continued development. While the particular issues and problems that businesses face will vary by location, city size, community wealth, and population size, the particular genre of problems they face will be the same: inadequate access to capital; inadequate access to information and training; inadequate access to markets; poor marketing, and inadequate business assistance programs.

To this typical list of barriers, I would add the absence of strong business organizations among black and Latino businesses and the existence of functional linkages among businesses. The point is that in today's economic and business environment, to bolster their competitive edge, black and Latino businesses must not only secure assistance at the individual firm level and build city and region wide business organizations, but must also create linkages that connect their varied business organizations statewide. There are several reasons why this is so important:

First, businesses must be positioned to learn from each other. Mechanisms need to be in place for them to share experiences, learn about common problems and solutions, and identify issues that seem to cut across sectorial, regional, and racial lines.

Second, businesses must be positioned to take advantage of joint venture, collaborations, and other economic opportunities. For example, in Buffalo, over the next decade, a billion dollars will be spent on the public school construction project, the existing black and Latino businesses in Erie, Niagara, and Monroe counties will not be

able to take advantage of all these opportunities, a mechanism should exist for them to link with other businesses across the state with whom they might be able to form joint ventures, or simply let them know about particular opportunities that should be available.

Third, such a statewide network of organizations would have the ability to identify the key policy issues that need to be addressed at a state level to push forward business development and then be able bring those issues to Albany to translate them into policies.

The level of organization among black and Latino businesses vary across the state, but a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. The level of business organization is very weak in the upstate New York, particularly in Erie, Niagara, and Monroe counties. The climate for business development among blacks and Latinos is particularly dismal and the development of a regional approach that compliments local efforts is key to pushing forward business development in this locale.

To move in that direction, we propose the establishment of an Upstate Minority Chamber of Commerce that services Erie, Niagara and Monroe counties. Such a chamber would have a two-fold purpose. First, it would be responsible for cultivating and building functional relationships with other black and Latino chamber of commerces and business organizations across New York State and working with them to build a strong, statewide network of business organizations.

Second, it would be responsible for delivering a range of services to businesses in the tri-county area that would assist in their growth and development. For example, the chamber would be responsible for formulating and implementing a region wide strategy to promote black and Latino business development, it would carry out a series of studies

that lead to more effective business development strategies; it would disseminate information on a variety of topics that affect minority business development, economic development, and business and economic development trends. It would monitor legislative and public policy issues at the local, state, and national levels and keep both entrepreneurs and public policy makers aware of those issues that would affect minority businesses. Also, it would develop an extensive database of on minority businesses and minority business organizations statewide. Such a database will be helpful in formulating strategies to assist in the start-up and development of businesses and also will be invaluable in building a regional and state functional network of black and Latino businesses.

The Marketing Challenge Grant

This initiative has two interrelated objectives. The first is to develop a strategy to make the tourist industry an engine for economic development and business development in the black and Latino communities, and the second is to use tourism to spur business development of select commercial strips or Main Streets in the minority community.

The primary goal of the Marketing Challenge is to identify and promote Primary Legacy Sites in black and Latino across the State. These legacy sites include heritage trails, historical districts, benchmark monuments, and other cultural sites that tell the story of black and Latino life in New York State. The identifications, development, and promotion of these sites, I believe, can serve as engines of neighborhood development, job growth, and community wealth.

The point is that statewide, I do not believe that black and Latino communities are taking full advantage of the travel and tourism industry in community and business development. And they should because it is very big business. For example, in 1999 about \$519 billion dollars was spent on travel and tourism and generated an estimated eight million jobs. A recent travel industry survey found that 53.6 million adults said they visited a museum or historical site during the year, with 33 million adults saying they attended a cultural event such as a theatre or musical festival during the year. Moreover, tourism is the second biggest industry in the state and millions public dollars are spent each year promoting it.

The problem is that tourism in the black and Latino communities is on the margin of this big industry, and we need to find a way to bring it closer to the center. This is where the marketing challenge grant comes in. I propose making million dollars available to a particular firm or organization to develop and implement a five-year strategic plan to identify and promote Primary Legacy Sites in the New York State's black and Latino communities. Rather than simply issue an RFP, I propose creating a Marking Challenge Grant where institutions and organizations ranging from Ad agencies, marketing firms, and think tanks to community groups, academic institutions, and community based organizations would be encouraged to submit proposals.

The winner of the event would be given a one-time allocation to implement the winning proposal. Once the key sites had been identified, efforts would be made to assist local areas in the development of both their sites and the community's Main Street, so they would be able to take full advantage of the multipliers that would be generated from

the tourist activity. Each locale listed as a Primary Legacy Site would also be encouraged to develop a strategic plan for sustaining their site and Main Street over time.