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Abstract

The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) contracted Pacific Research and Evaluation, LLC to conduct an evaluation exploring the role of district offices within the SBA and the greater entrepreneurial ecosystems. The evaluation addresses research questions related to how district offices strengthen local small business ecosystems, contribute to the SBA's capital and small business contracting goals, and how administrative data can be used to demonstrate district office contributions to these goals and related performance metrics. The evaluation utilized a mixed-method approach, collecting both quantitative and qualitative data from internal SBA staff (e.g., district office leaders/regional administrators, program office leaders) and external stakeholders (e.g., resource partners, community partners, other stakeholders, 8(a) program participants).

Key findings:

- ◆ District office staff are committed to the SBA's core mission to help small businesses start, grow, and be resilient.
- ◆ While district offices excel at forming and maintaining relationships with resource partners, they cannot equally attend to every relationship.
- ◆ Adequate business opportunity specialist and/or lender relations specialist staffing is essential to maintaining district office capital and contracting expertise.
- ◆ Current metrics lack strategic alignment between the activities conducted by district offices and relevant strategic objectives.

Recommendations:

1. Clarify the role of district offices and district office staff positions
2. Develop new and improve existing avenues of communication
3. Increase efficiency within district offices
4. Develop a strategic ecosystem building plan at the district office level
5. Revise and implement strategic metrics that are aligned to district office roles and relevant strategic objectives

Key words: Evaluation, Capital Deployment, Small Business Federal Contracting, Entrepreneurial Ecosystem, Performance Measurement

Executive Summary

Purpose

Pacific Research and Evaluation, LLC (PRE) designed and conducted an evaluation of U.S. Small Business Administration's (SBA) field operations performance from August 2023 to July 2024. The purpose of this evaluation is to better understand and provide evidence of the Office of Field Operations (OFO) district offices' role within the SBA and the greater entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Four research questions guided the development and implementation of evaluation activities:

- ◆ **RQ1:** How do district offices leverage resources to strengthen local small business ecosystems?
- ◆ **RQ2:** How do district office efforts contribute to the SBA's capital deployment and servicing goals and performance metrics?
- ◆ **RQ3:** How do district office efforts contribute to the SBA's small business contracting goals and performance metrics?
- ◆ **RQ4:** How can district offices' administrative data be used to demonstrate direct and indirect contributions to the SBA's capital access and contracting programs goals and performance metrics?

Methodology

In order to answer these research questions, PRE developed a multi-stage approach to data collection and analysis. First, existing data and documentation were reviewed. This secondary data and background review included an examination of data captured in the Goals Measures Activity Tracking Tool (GMATT), Power BI dashboard reports, the Customer Experience (CX) Survey, FY 2022 – 2026 Strategic Plan, FY 2024 District Office Operating Plans and Ecosystem Assessments, OFO Customer Relationship Management (CRM) Needs Analysis, and other background documents provided by the SBA.

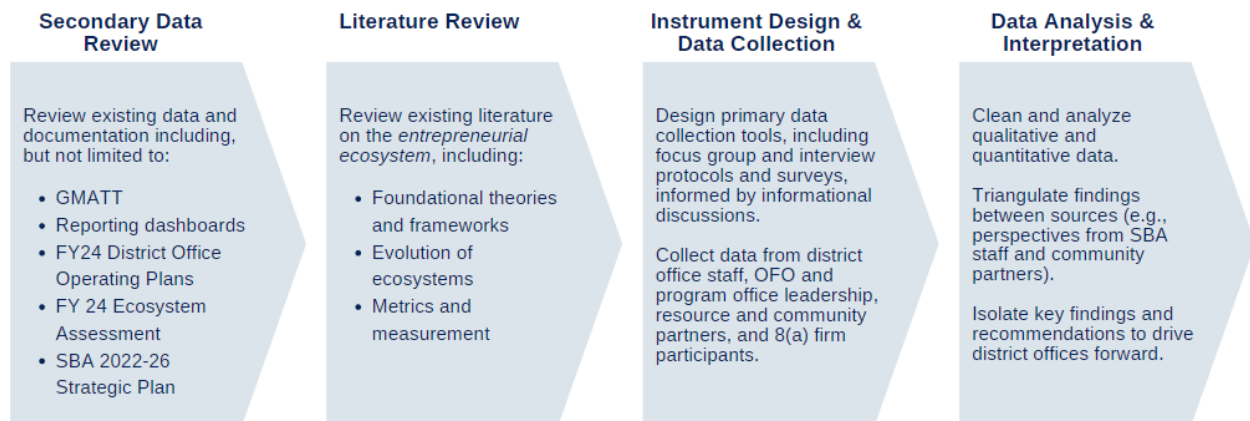
Before designing new data collection tools, PRE conducted a literature review focused on entrepreneurial ecosystems and facilitated informational discussions with OFO headquarters and regional office staff. These two activities, combined with the secondary data and background review, provided PRE with the information and context needed to design effective data collection tools and instruments. Primary data were collected from March through June 2024 via a mixed-method approach that utilized a purposive sampling technique to capture both quantitative and qualitative data.

Quantitative Data

- ◆ District office leadership, supervisory staff, and regional administrator survey
- ◆ Resource, community partner, and other stakeholder (i.e., “resource and community partner”) survey¹
- ◆ Current 8(a) Business Development Program participant survey

Qualitative Data

- ◆ Interviews with select district office directors and deputy directors
- ◆ Focus groups with SBA program office leadership familiar with capital and contracting
- ◆ Focus group with SBA program and performance staff familiar with measurement
- ◆ Open-ended questions in each survey



After data were collected, PRE cleaned and analyzed each new data source. Qualitative data were coded using thematic analysis, in which responses are categorized into themes through an iterative process using multiple coders. Quantitative data were inspected for data quality (e.g., missingness, outliers, straight line responding), after which descriptive statistics (e.g., means, standard deviations, distributions) were calculated. Correlations were also used to examine relationships between individual survey items. Although expected, limitations of the study include a relatively low response rate (~9%) to the survey sent to resource partners (i.e., SBA-funded resource partners; Small Business Development Centers [SBDCs], Women’s Business Centers [WBCs], Veteran’s Business Outreach Centers [VBOCs], SCORE), community partners (e.g., APEX Accelerators, Community Navigators), and other stakeholders/intermediaries (e.g., lenders). Note that for the remainder of this document these groups will be referred to as “resource and community partners” but are inclusive of all external entities district offices work with to bring capital and contracting opportunities to small businesses. Additionally, the survey sent to 8(a) firms similarly garnered an approximate 9% response rate. Nevertheless, data

¹ Note: Although small businesses are important stakeholders, aside from 8(a) firms, they were unable to be included in data collection efforts.

provided by 8(a) firms and all other study participants yielded useful insights for better understanding the current role of district offices. These data also provide a foundational study upon which future, more targeted studies may be based.

Research Questions and Summary Findings

The PRE team considered all sources of data, including multiple perspectives on similar topics, to triangulate findings and answer the research questions.

- ◆ **RQ1:** How do district offices leverage resources to strengthen local small business ecosystems?

District offices assume roles as relationship managers, conveners, program experts, ecosystem connectors, and communicators, which are collectively leveraged to strengthen local small business ecosystems.

- ◆ **RQ2:** How do district office efforts contribute to the SBA's capital deployment and servicing goals and performance metrics?

District offices support the SBA's capital-related goals by working with SBA program offices, resource/community partners, and small businesses to expand the number of lenders in their communities, increase the visibility of loan programs, support the success of lenders, and improve access to capital for small businesses.

- ◆ **RQ3:** How do district office efforts contribute to the SBA's small business contracting goals and performance metrics?

District offices support the SBA's contracting-related goals by recruiting small businesses to the various certification programs, providing education on small business set-asides, managing 8(a) portfolios, and providing business development and program administration support to small businesses. They also forge strong relationships with APEX Accelerators and other resource/community partners to help small businesses more effectively secure federal contracts.

- ◆ **RQ4:** How can district offices' administrative data be used to demonstrate direct and indirect contributions to the SBA's capital access and contracting programs goals and performance metrics?

By refining and expanding metrics collected by district offices, there is an opportunity to better leverage data to more effectively capture district office activities, outcomes, and impact.

While conducting evaluation activities to answer the research questions, the multi-source and multi-method approach also led to the development of four overall key findings that span across the research questions. Upon examination of all findings, the PRE team developed recommendations to identify areas of improvement and support data-driven decision making. Evaluation activities also resulted in the refinement of existing, and the development of new,

performance indicators to align and link OFO's strategic-level performance metrics with the SBA and program offices.

Key Findings

Several key findings emerged from the current evaluation.

- District office staff are **strongly committed to the mission** of helping small businesses start, grow, and be resilient. Resource and community partners agree that district offices are committed to these goals and appreciate the time and effort district office staff are willing to put in to be responsive towards their needs.
- District offices **excel at forming and maintaining relationships** with resource partners, although, given heavy work demands, they cannot equally attend to every relationship. Participants note that certain resource partners are prioritized (e.g., if they share a building with the district office) over other resource and community partners. Nevertheless, district offices were praised for connecting members of the ecosystem via referrals and hosting/co-hosting events and trainings to better support small businesses' access to capital and contracting opportunities.
- **Maintaining specialized knowledge and expertise** around SBA capital and contracting programs **is challenging** when district offices lack a lender relations specialist (LRS) and/or a business opportunity specialist (BOS). District offices demonstrate more confidence and comfort contributing to capital deployment than contracting-related goals. While district office staff can answer most questions, resource and community partners appreciate their willingness to seek out answers to more technical questions when they do not know.
- Current **metrics lack strategic alignment** between the activities conducted by district offices and relevant strategic objectives identified in the SBA Strategic Plan.² Both district office and program office leaders in the SBA shared that OFO would benefit from capturing more relevant and insightful metrics linking district office activities to outcomes to demonstrate the impact district offices have on SBA capital and contracting goals, as well as the larger entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Recommendations

The PRE team developed five recommendations, which are summarized below.

Recommendation #1: Clarify the role of district offices and district office staff positions.

Rationale: District office staff juggle many tasks, but they are not always clear on how to prioritize or structure their time. As the face of the SBA, district offices receive a wide variety of questions and requests that are not always relevant to the work they do within the SBA, often because customers (e.g., resource/community partners and small businesses) are not clear on the role of district offices and do not know where to direct questions.

² <https://www.sba.gov/document/support-sba-strategic-plan>

Recommendation #2: Develop new and improve existing avenues of communication, both internally and externally

Rationale: Internally, communication between district offices has been improving, but many remain unaware of efforts and resources created within other offices to strengthen their entrepreneurial ecosystems (e.g., lender visit checklists created by individual district offices). This lack of awareness can lead to duplicated efforts between district offices. Additionally, communication between program offices and district offices can lag, as district offices do not receive program-related information as quickly as they need to serve business owners. Program offices do not want to burden district office staff, who they know are already limited in time and resources, with additional communications. However, the impact is that small businesses may be notified about SBA program updates before district offices. Externally, there is variation in the type and consistency of communications between district offices and resource/community partners and small businesses (e.g., email blasts, social media, statewide resource guides, information on the SBA website). Within offices, reduced staffing has impacted external communications, leaving some resource/community partners wondering if, for example, they were removed from a newsletter distribution list or if the district office stopped producing them.

Recommendation #3: Increase efficiency within district offices

Rationale: District offices struggle to manage their workload with limited staffing. Given these staffing limitations, there are opportunities for neighboring district offices to more effectively share resources and expertise (e.g., when one district office has a BOS on staff and a nearby office does not). Technology and automation can also be better harnessed and utilized to reduce the time required to accomplish tasks (e.g., automating when customer service surveys are sent). Finally, applying more standardization between district offices is important because without standardized practices, district offices do not approach tasks consistently across offices, thereby decreasing efficiency.

Recommendation #4: Develop a strategic ecosystem building plan at the district office level

Rationale: District offices are committed to serving all members of their communities; however, some have challenges identifying and reaching small business owners from underserved communities. There is no strategic plan or guidance to help district offices effectively build an equitable ecosystem. District office staff also noted desiring access to more customer data to better enable them in this effort.

Recommendation #5: Revise and implement strategic metrics that are aligned to district office roles and relevant strategic objectives

Rationale: District offices struggle to effectively “tell the story” of their interactions and demonstrate their impact with current metrics. Data collected in GMATT is burdensome to enter, not all data is effectively used (e.g., written-in comments), and results are not displayed in a way that links district office activities to outcomes.

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Acronyms

- ◆ 8(a): 8(a) Business Development Program
- ◆ B2B: Boots to Business
- ◆ BOS: Business Opportunity Specialist
- ◆ CDFI: Community Development Financial Institutions
- ◆ CRM System: Customer Relationship Management System
- ◆ CX: Customer Experience
- ◆ EE: Entrepreneurial Ecosystem
- ◆ GCBD: Office of Government Contracting and Business Development
- ◆ GMATT: Goals Measures Activity Tracking Tool
- ◆ HUBZone: Historically Underutilized Business Zone
- ◆ LMS: Learning Management System
- ◆ LRS: Lender Relations Specialist
- ◆ OCA: Office of Capital Access
- ◆ OED: Office of Entrepreneurial Development
- ◆ OFO: Office of Field Operations
- ◆ OII: Office of Investment and Innovation
- ◆ OIT: Office of International Trade
- ◆ OMB: Office of Management and Budget
- ◆ OSMEI: Office of Strategic Management and Enterprise Integrity
- ◆ OVBD: Office of Veterans Business Development
- ◆ OWBO: Office of Women's Business Ownership
- ◆ PRIME grant: Program for Investment in Micro-Entrepreneurs grant
- ◆ SBA: U.S. Small Business Administration
- ◆ SBDC: Small Business Development Center
- ◆ SOP: Standard Operating Procedure
- ◆ WBC: Women's Business Centers
- ◆ VBOC: Veterans Business Outreach Center

Introduction

Pacific Research and Evaluation, LLC (PRE) designed and conducted an evaluation from August 2023 – July 2024 to study the role of district offices within the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) and broader entrepreneurial ecosystem. The evaluation addresses research questions related to how district offices strengthen local small business ecosystems, contribute to the SBA's capital and small business contracting goals, and how administrative data can be used to demonstrate district office contributions to these goals and related performance metrics.

The remainder of this report details the project background, design and methods employed, data analytics approach, findings, conclusions, and recommendations. This report is intended to provide multi-source data to inform SBA leadership about the value of district offices, demonstrate the impact of these offices, and provide recommendations for furthering impact.

Background and Project Description

Context

The SBA is a federal agency that was created in 1953 to support and promote small businesses across the country. The SBA works to preserve free competitive enterprise and to maintain and strengthen our nation's economy. Its services include access to capital, entrepreneurial development, government contracting, and advocacy efforts on behalf of the nation's small businesses. Looking ahead, the SBA has made commitments that will ensure its programs are delivered in equitable, customer-centric, and sustainable ways.

The SBA includes 68 district offices located throughout 10 regions across the United States. Through these offices, the SBA administers a variety of programs to support small businesses in their efforts to launch and expand their operations. District offices provide contracting, capital, and counseling programs to local small businesses to provide the tools and resources needed to run their programs. These district offices are overseen by the Office of Field Operations (OFO), which is the organizational unit responsible for the direct execution of the Agency's products and services for America's small business. OFO partners with internal program offices and collaborates with SBA resource partners, lenders, and other stakeholders to provide services to small businesses.

Project Purpose

The current evaluation includes three objectives:

1. Explore the role of the district offices within the SBA and broader entrepreneurial ecosystem.
2. Develop a set of performance indicators to align and link OFO's strategic-level performance metrics with the Agency and program offices.

3. Identify areas of improvement and support data-driven decision-making to align OFO activities around equitable systems improvement, inform strategic planning, and guide communication efforts between SBA offices.

To better understand and provide evidence of the role of OFO in the SBA and the greater entrepreneurial ecosystem, this current evaluation addresses four key research questions:

- ◆ **RQ1:** How do district offices leverage resources to strengthen local small business ecosystems?
- ◆ **RQ2:** How do district office efforts contribute to the SBA's capital deployment and servicing goals and performance metrics?
- ◆ **RQ3:** How do district office efforts contribute to the SBA's small business contracting goals and performance metrics?
- ◆ **RQ4:** How can district offices' administrative data be used to demonstrate direct and indirect contributions to the SBA's capital access and contracting programs goals and performance metrics?

Key SBA Stakeholders Involved

Designing an evaluation to effectively answer the research questions requires input and perspectives from a variety of individuals throughout the SBA. Key personnel consulted include district office leadership (e.g., district and deputy district directors), OFO leadership, leadership involved with capital-access (e.g., Office of Capital Access [OCA], Office of International Trade [OIT], and Office of Investment and Innovation [OI]), leadership involved with contracting (e.g., Office of Government Contracting and Business Development [GCBD], Office of Entrepreneurial Development [OED], OII, Office of Veterans Business Development [OVBD], Office of Women's Business Ownership [OWBO]), and individuals in OFO and the Office of Strategic Management and Enterprise Integrity (OSMEI) with measurement-related expertise.

PRE's Approach to Equity and Culturally Responsive Research

PRE is committed to conducting culturally responsive evaluation work and recognizes that an understanding of the cultural contexts in which programs operate is important to maximize impact and achieve desired outcomes. PRE's methods for conducting a culturally responsive evaluation include: 1) assembling an evaluation team that is culturally aware, 2) engaging a variety of stakeholders with differing perspectives, 3) designing data collection tools to be inclusive of stakeholders impacted by district offices (e.g., resource and community partners), and 4) mindful selection and adaptation of data collection instruments (e.g., to ensure instruments are relevant and appropriate; minimize the burden of the participation request).

Design and Methods

The following sections detail PRE's approach to the design and methods that guided the team's evaluation approach. Key components of the design and methods include a literature review, secondary data and background review, informational discussions, and the development of new data collection instruments.

Literature Review

The concept known as the "entrepreneurial ecosystem" (EE) offers a "systemic view of entrepreneurship" and emphasizes the idea that "the community and culture of a given place can have a significant impact on entrepreneurship" and thus a region's economic growth and development (Cavallo et al., 2019, p. 1292). While no single, agreed upon definition currently exists for the term, a review of the literature identified several foundational aspects of EEs that informed the development of PRE's evaluation approach:

- ◆ **Spatial** – Entrepreneurial ecosystems are place-based or, in other words, influenced by the unique characteristics of their geographical location (e.g., Cavallo et al., 2019).
- ◆ **Relational** – A variety of actors and elements are present within an ecosystem and interact in unique ways, enabling entrepreneurs to access the necessary resources, infrastructure, and knowledge to create, grow, and sustain their businesses (e.g., Fredin & Lidén, 2020).
- ◆ **Dynamic and Evolutionary** – Actors and elements are continuously interacting in dynamic and evolving ways with other actors and the larger environment (e.g., Buratti et al., 2023).

In the context of the SBA, "entrepreneurs" or "small business owners" are individuals who are aspiring to start a business, own a business, or help run a business that has fewer than 500 employees. These individuals are positioned at the heart of the "ecosystem", and district offices connect these small business owners to other critical actors (e.g., lenders, community organizations). District offices also work to encourage, facilitate, and enable the success of local EEs.

PRE used the concept of EEs along with a theoretical framework based on both Isenberg's (2010; 2011) Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Framework and Vargo & Lusch's (2004) Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) framework as the foundation to guide the methodology and approach of this evaluation. Additional aspects of the literature review related to theoretical frameworks and measurement considerations are discussed below.

Theoretical Framework

Isenberg (2010; 2011) created an Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Framework that can be applied within the context of the SBA to better understand the current role of district offices within their

local ecosystems.³ Isenberg proposed four key tenets necessary for the successful functioning of EEs:

- ◆ Enabling policies and leadership
- ◆ Access to financial capital and quality human capital
- ◆ A conducive culture and venture-friendly markets
- ◆ A range of institutional supports

Applying this framework to the SBA, district offices build relationships and facilitate connections among actors in the ecosystem that work to support small businesses (e.g., lenders, community organizations). They also interact with small businesses at every point throughout the entrepreneurial journey and help connect them with appropriate resources (e.g., financial capital, contracting opportunities, business development) to grow and achieve success. Through their collaborative relationships with external partners (e.g., resource and community partners) as well as OFO and SBA program offices that support their efforts in the field, district offices are equipped and able to facilitate the development of supportive conditions needed for entrepreneurship to thrive. As such, district offices have the potential to influence each of Isenberg's essential elements of a self-sustaining EE.

The current evaluation also draws on Vargo & Lusch's (2004) SDL framework from related literature, which has more empirical support compared to the largely untested EE frameworks. The SDL framework is a behavioral economics theoretical framework that explains value creation. This framework emphasizes the centrality of service in economic and social exchange, and views service as the fundamental basis of exchange and value creation. SDL proposes that:

- ◆ Value is co-created by multiple actors and always includes the beneficiary.
- ◆ Value co-creation is coordinated through actor-generated institutions and institutional arrangements (service systems and networks).
- ◆ Value is always uniquely determined by the beneficiary.

District offices essentially function as service providers, offering valuable services to both internal (e.g., program offices) and external (e.g., small businesses; resource partners) stakeholders. According to the SDL framework, performance indicators can be aligned with the principles of service, and may focus on aspects like customer satisfaction, service quality, and the co-creation of value between district offices and stakeholders. Recently, the SDL framework has been extended by researchers to encompass a broader ecosystem perspective that allows for a more holistic and dynamic perspective of value creation, which can be applied to the district offices' role within the entrepreneurial ecosystem. In this view, there is an emphasis on institutional arrangements that function as coordinating mechanisms linking components of the ecosystem (Vargo & Lusch, 2016).

³ For more information and to see a visual representation of the entrepreneurial ecosystem see: [The-entrepreneurship-ecosystem-strategy-for-economic-growth-policy-20110620183915.pdf \(innovationamerica.us\)](#)

The data collection efforts described below were informed by both Isenberg's (2010; 2011) framework and the SDL framework (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Specifically, Isenberg's (2010; 2011) framework guided data collections aimed at understanding the role of district offices in the entrepreneurial ecosystem and how they may function to strengthen local EEs, while the SDL framework was used to better understand the nuances of exchanges between district offices and other actors to create value. The design and method plan below describes how data were collected from multiple sources occupying different spaces within the system (i.e., OFO leadership, district office leadership and supervisory staff, other SBA leadership and supervisory level personnel, small business firms participating in the 8(a) program, resource partners, and community partners).

Informational Discussions

Informational discussions also guided the design, methods, and instrument development. In September 2023, PRE conducted six informational discussions with OFO headquarters and district office staff. The goal of these informational discussions was to learn more about project goals, background documentation, pre-existing data, and desired project outcomes. Additionally, these informational discussions served to support PRE's initial efforts to understand OFO's role within the SBA and the entrepreneurial ecosystem, and to provide context for the design of data collection instruments and protocols.

Secondary Data Usability Study

PRE examined pre-existing documentation for any usable data that could inform the research questions. The SBA provided data and documentation related to the Goals & Measures Activity Track Tool (GMATT), Power BI reporting dashboards, FY22-26 Strategic Plan, FY24 OFO Goals and Activity Definitions, OFO Customer Relationship Management System (CRM) Needs Analysis, Customer Experience (CX) Survey, sample District Operating Plans and Ecosystem Assessments, and other relevant background information. All documents were reviewed and deemed useful for understanding the current context of OFO and the district offices within the SBA, goals related to capital and contracting, prior evaluation efforts, perceived successes and challenges, and identification of specific external partners critical to certain district offices. These documents guided PRE's approach to designing additional data collection measures and were useful as a basis for creating specific items in newly developed instruments. However, since these documents do not answer the research questions and some lack standardized measures or detailed instructions for completion (e.g., the directions for the Ecosystem Assessments were vague and input from the project liaison indicated that staff could be using different frames of reference when completing the report), these data could not be used in place of collecting new data that follow best practices and standard psychometric principles.

Additionally, the SBA provided documentation detailing data collected through the GMATT system, and PRE met with the GMATT administrator to gain more insights about specific data elements that are available. These data sources provide quantitative information (e.g., number of SBDC Program Compliance Assessments, 8(a) Annual Reviews completed, public outreach activities with small businesses and lenders) related to meeting high level strategic objectives, which PRE reviewed to better understand program utilization (e.g., outreach, training, and

counseling services), surveillance reviews, and the number and types of small business contracts. Although valuable for informing progress towards high-level objectives, GMATT data do not fully answer the research questions; the data do not fully describe impact, outcomes, and the complexity of the work that OFO does and do not provide information related to customer-service activities.

Results of the secondary data usability study, wherein each available secondary data source was assessed for its potential benefit to the current evaluation, led PRE to determine that primary data collection activities would be designed and administered to supplement current gaps and used in conjunction with existing data in order to answer the research questions and ultimately provide an evidence base for new and improved performance metrics.

Primary Data Collection

Primary data collection instruments were developed in early 2024 and data were collected from March – June 2024. Data were collected from district office leadership and supervisory staff, OFO leadership, other SBA leadership and supervisory level personnel, small business firms participating in the 8(a) program, resource partners, and community partners. The SBA Lead Program Evaluator and OFO project liaison assisted in the purpose sampling selection and recruitment efforts. Table 1 details how each data collection activity related to the key research questions.

Table 1
Data Collection Tools and Associated Research Questions

Data Collection	RQ1	RQ2	RQ3	RQ4
District Office Leadership Interviews	X	X	X	X
District Office Leadership & Regional Administrator Survey	X	X	X	X
SBA Capital Focus Groups	X	X		X
SBA Contracting Focus Groups	X		X	X
SBA Measurement Focus Group	X			X
External Resource and Community Partner Focus Groups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small Business Development Center • Women’s Business Centers • Veterans Business Outreach Center • SCORE chapters • Community Navigators • Lenders • APEX Accelerators • Partners from an urban district • Partners from a rural district • Partners from an urban/rural mixed district 	X	X	X	
External Resource and Community Partner Survey	X	X	X	X
8(a) Focus Groups	X		X	
8(a) Survey	X		X	

Paperwork Reduction Act Clearance

In order to collect data from partners and stakeholders external to SBA (i.e., via an external survey and external focus groups), OMB approval using the *SBA Generic Clearance for Formative Data Collections for Evaluation, Research, and Evidence-Building (OMB 3245-0425)* was required for each instrument. PRE prepared the submission form required to facilitate the approval of an OMB Information Collection Request (ICR) and received approval (OMB Control No. 3245-0425/Expiration Date: 10/31/2025).

SBA Internal Data Collection

Data were collected from a variety of individuals within the SBA to better understand the role of district offices, how district offices and program offices work together, how district offices contribute to capital and contracting-related goals, and how current metrics are captured. The following sections detail instruments used to collect data from each source.

District office leadership and supervisory staff. A survey was sent from PRE to all district office leadership, supervisory staff, and regional administrators. The SBA sent communications informing invited participants about the survey effort. The survey inquired about characteristics of one's district/region, interactions with other entities (e.g., SBA program offices, resource /community partners, small businesses from underserved communities), contribution to capital and contracting-related goals, and metrics and was designed to inform all four research questions.

Additionally, district office leadership interviews were conducted with district directors and/or deputy district directors from six different district offices. PRE worked with the SBA to identify two districts serving rural populations, two serving urban populations, and two serving a mix of rural and urban populations. In these interviews, district office leaders discussed a variety of topics that informed all four research questions. These topics included but were not limited to: the district office's role in the local entrepreneurial ecosystems, establishing and maintaining relationships with external partners, gaining awareness of ecosystem needs, support and resources district offices provide to their ecosystem, as well as support and resources received from OFO. A purposive sampling technique was used to understand the perspectives, needs, resources, and challenges districts face when serving different communities. A complete list of all district office interview questions and survey items can be found in Appendices A and B, respectively.⁴

SBA leadership and supervisory level personnel. Two focus groups were conducted specific to capital access: one specific to contracting and one that covered both capital and contracting topic areas. The SBA identified appropriate individuals for each session. The capital-specific focus groups included leaders and program managers from OCA, OIT, and OII, and the contracting-specific group included leaders and program managers from GCBD. The last focus group included leaders and program managers from OED, OII, OWBO, and OVBD. All focus groups inquired about the relationship between district offices and program offices for each activity, ecosystem development, progress towards capital/contracting goals, and metrics. The

⁴ Note: Appendix B lists all survey items in conjunction with summary statistics.

capital-related focus groups informed RQ1, RQ2, and RQ4, while the contracting-related focus groups informed RQ1, RQ3, and RQ4. A complete list of all focus group questions for these groups can be found in Appendix C.

SBA staff familiar with measurement. Two focus groups were conducted with OFO leaders and program managers and OSMEI Performance Management Division personnel knowledgeable of metrics and measurement within the SBA. These sessions covered current data and metric tracking, gaps in data, current and desired utilization of GMATT and CRM data, confidence in the accuracy of data, reporting and data visualization, and opportunities to improve metrics. These focus groups were helpful in addressing RQ1 and RQ4. A complete list of all focus group questions for these groups can be found in Appendix D.

External Resource and Community Partner Data Collection

Resource and community partners were also sampled via a survey and focus groups as part of the evaluation.

Throughout this report, SBA-funded resource partners (i.e., SBDCs, WBCs, VBOCs, SCORE), and community partners and other stakeholders (e.g., lenders, APEX Accelerators, community navigators, economic development centers, non-profit/service organizations, local government officials, educational institutions) are **jointly referred to as “resource and community partners.”**

The SBA sent communications to district office directors requesting contact information for resource and community partners in their districts. PRE then used that information to send survey invitations and select a sample of individuals to invite to focus groups. Survey and focus groups inquired about relationships and satisfaction with SBA district and program offices, SBA services provided, and district office impact on capital and contracting in the community. Together, the survey and focus groups address aspects of all four research questions. A total of 10 focus groups were held (see Table 1 for a list of focus groups). A complete list of all focus group questions and survey items these groups can be found in Appendices E and F, respectively.⁵

8(a) Program Participant Data Collection

The last group sampled were current 8(a) program participants. The SBA provided PRE with a list of 8(a) program participants spread across the ten SBA regions and years in the program to create a purposive sampling strategy. A purposive sample of current 8(a) firms were invited to participate in a survey, and a select number were also invited to participate in focus groups. The focus groups were either composed of firms in the first half of the program (years 1–4) or second half (years 5–9). Questions in both the survey and focus groups inquired about 8(a) participants’ experiences in the program, relationships with district and program offices,

⁵ Note: Appendix F lists all survey items in conjunction with summary statistics.

expectations and successes around procuring federal contracts, and changes in their business since joining the program. The 8(a) instruments address RQ1 and RQ3. A complete list of all focus group questions and survey items for these groups can be found in Appendices G and H, respectively.⁶

Limitations Encountered

The design and methods of the current evaluation is not without limitations. First, data collection protocols were limited to 90 minutes for focus groups, 75 minutes for interviews, and approximately 15–20 minutes for surveys in an effort to prevent participant fatigue and respect participants' time. Given these time limitations, it was not feasible to ask an entirely exhaustive list of all possible questions related to the research questions. Therefore, the most important and relevant questions were prioritized.

Second, response rates, particularly for the external data collections, were expected to be low based on prior SBA efforts to gather customer data. The research team encouraged participation by leveraging the relationships between district offices and external invitees, but despite multiple invitations and reminders, participation remained low (see *Data Analysis* section for more discussion around response rates). Relatedly, the data quality in contact lists provided to PRE from district offices varied, with some clearly indicating a contact's affiliation (e.g., SBDC) and others only providing emails, which limited PRE's ability to do targeted recruiting for focus groups.

Lastly, the sampling technique was purposive, and as such, not fully representative of all SBA staff and external customers (e.g., funded resource partners, community partners/stakeholders, 8(a) firms). Although using a sample that is fully representative would lend confidence to the generalizability of results and would provide useful information, the current sampling technique allows for targeted insights relevant to the deliverables and evaluation goals and can serve as a useful foundation for any future, more in-depth study.

Data Analysis

The evaluation analytic approach utilized a 'mixed methods' strategy, meaning multiple types of data (i.e., quantitative and qualitative) were collected and analyzed. Quantitative data were generated from each of the three surveys (i.e., district office, resource/community partner, and 8(a)). Qualitative data were provided from every instrument, including interviews and focus groups, as well as open-ended questions on all surveys. The sections below detail the analytic approaches taken as well as high-level descriptive statistics from each instrument.

Quantitative Data: Analysis

PRE analyzed Likert-type survey questions (e.g., survey questions with response options ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree)) using statistical techniques for quantitative data. As a first step, PRE cleaned all quantitative data by inspecting for missing data, outliers, and straight line responding (i.e., participants who respond to all items with the

⁶ Note: Appendix H lists all survey items in conjunction with summary statistics.

same response option). However, there were no significant outliers or evidence of straight line responding found within the data. Descriptive analyses (i.e., frequencies, distributions, means, and standard deviations) were conducted for each quantitative survey item. Correlations were used to examine relationships between items. Since all measures are single items, reliability analyses (e.g., Cronbach's alpha) were not applicable. As noted above, a purposive sampling technique was used to deeply understand the experiences of specific groups (e.g., specific resource partners and district offices), and since generalizability is not a goal of the current evaluation, advanced statistical techniques (e.g., regression) were not performed. All quantitative analyses were conducted using the statistical software R.

Quantitative Data: Descriptive Statistics

As expected, response rates for the two external surveys (resource/community partners and 8(a) firms) were low (~ 9%). However, because the resource/community partner survey was sent to a larger number of individuals, the number of responses received was much higher (n = 459). The low number of 8(a) participants should be noted (n = 91) and results related to this group should be interpreted with caution. The response rate for the district office survey was higher than the average response rate for studies conducted within an organization (35.7%), at 47% (n = 67) (Anseel et al., 2010; Baruch & Holtom, 2008). Tables 2 – 4 display high-level descriptive statistics for each survey, and item-level descriptive statistics can be found in Appendices B, F, and H.

Table 2

District Office Leadership Survey: Descriptive Statistics

District Office Leadership Survey	
Participation Rate	47% (n = 67)
SBA Tenure	<1 year – 25+ years
Role Tenure	<1 year – 25+ years
Regions Represented	All 10
District Size	Small (population under 2 million): 23% Medium (population 2-10 million): 58% Large (population over 10 million): 17% Not sure: 3%
District Location	Urban: 18% Rural: 20% Mixed Urban/Rural: 61% Not sure: 2%
District Sectors: Diversity	Limited diversity, concentrated in specific sectors: 3% Moderately diverse with some representation across multiple sectors: 36% Very diverse, spanning various sectors: 61%
District Demographics: Diversity	Limited diversity, concentrated in certain age, race, gender groups, etc.: 12% Moderately diverse with some representation across age, race, gender, etc.: 48% Very diverse across age, race, gender, etc.: 40%

Table 3
Resource and Community Partner Survey: Descriptive Statistics

Resource and Community Partner Survey	
Participation Rate	9.3% (n = 459)
Regions Represented	All 10
% Capital and % Contracting	My organization provides small businesses with support and resources to access capital services: 90% My organization provides small businesses with support and resources to access contracting services: 47%*
Program Type	Non-profit/Service Organization: 25% Lending Institution: 22% SBDC: 20% SCORE: 10% APEX Accelerator: 8% WBC: 7% Educational Institution: 5% VBOC: 4% Community Navigator: 4% SBIC: 0.4% Community Center: 0.4% (*select all that apply)
SBA Funded?	Yes: 41% No: 54% Not sure: 5%
SBA Tenure	< 6 months – 10+ years

*Totals exceed 100% due to the question asking "Select all that apply"

Table 4
8(a) Survey: Descriptive Statistics

8(a) Survey	
Participation Rate	9.4% (n = 91*)
Year in Program	Year 1 – 4: 20% Year 5 – 10*: 24% Not sure: 56% *Note: Although typically a 9-year program, due to COVID-19, firms may be in year 10
Regions Represented	7* *Note: Firms from all regions invited
Length of Time in Business	< 1 year – 10+ years

Qualitative Data: Analysis

Qualitative data collected through interviews, focus groups, and open-ended survey items were coded for themes and analyzed using Excel and Dedoose (i.e., a web-based platform for analyzing qualitative and mixed-method research). This thematic analysis was an iterative process, involving multiple coders from PRE who read and created/updated coding categories that merged into themes. Coders followed an inductive coding process, whereby codes were derived from the data (i.e., there were no a priori codes established before examining the data). Independent coding schemes were developed for open-ended survey questions given their specificity (e.g., *What could your local SBA district office do to better support organizations like yours that help support small businesses in your community?*). However, given the similar nature of the focus group and interview protocols, the same coding scheme was applied across all transcripts. This approach supports data triangulation, as codes can be compared across groups to identify similarities and differences in the frequency with which each code appears.

Qualitative Data: Summary

Although much of the value of qualitative data lies in the rich contextual nature of responses, quantifying qualitative data by examining the frequency of codes can provide a useful overview of the data. Appendix I shows the frequency of codes for: interviews/focus groups, district office survey responses, resource/community partner survey responses, and 8(a) survey responses. Elsewhere throughout the report, qualitative data will primarily be referenced holistically, and themes will be supported with representative quotes.

Findings

RQ1: How do district offices leverage resources to strengthen local small business ecosystems?

Section Summary	
1	District offices assume 5 main roles: Relationship Manager, Convener, Program Expert and Knowledge Sharer, Ecosystem Connection, & Communicator.
2	District offices excel at forming and maintaining relationships with resource partners.
3	Maintaining specialized knowledge and expertise around SBA capital and contracting programs is challenging when district offices lack a lender relations specialist (LRS) and/or a business opportunity specialist (BOS).
4	District offices lack guidance and a cohesive strategy to best assist small businesses from underserved communities.

The Role of District Offices

District offices in the SBA sit within the OFO, which is responsible for connecting and delivering the Agency's programs, products, and services to America's small businesses. The 68 district offices within OFO are the main point of connection with small businesses, directly delivering most of the SBA's program offerings to small businesses and entrepreneurs in their communities. Evaluation activities revealed five key roles district offices play to strengthen local small business ecosystems. A detailed description follows the summary of the five key roles.

1. **Relationship Manager:** District offices work to build and maintain relationships, internally with SBA program offices and externally with various stakeholders in the entrepreneurial ecosystem, including with small businesses.
2. **Convener:** District offices work to strengthen the ecosystem by hosting, co-hosting, and leading events (e.g., trainings, conferences) that share information about SBA and non-SBA programs and resources and allow small businesses and other stakeholders to network. In this role district offices are often the catalyst bringing new initiatives and programming to the entrepreneurial marketplace.
3. **Program Expert and Knowledge Sharer:** District offices work with SBA program offices and resource/community partners, including local, state, or other federal agencies, to stay informed and up to date on the programs, services, and resources (both SBA and non-SBA) that are available within the ecosystem. They also provide technical assistance and support to stakeholders, including small businesses, in preparing, applying, and participating in SBA and other non-SBA programs.
4. **Ecosystem Connector:** District offices act as a navigator, connecting different members of the ecosystem. They connect resource and community partners with each other, as well as with SBA program offices. They also work directly with small businesses and provide them with referrals to appropriate resource/community partners, local, state, or other federal government agencies, other external stakeholders, or SBA program offices for information and assistance.
5. **Communicator:** Internally, district offices learn about SBA program offerings and transfer that information to stakeholders, keeping them aware of and up to date on the programs, services, and resources (both SBA and non-SBA) that are available within the ecosystem. Externally, they promote events (e.g., trainings) offered by resource/community partners and other stakeholders.

Relationship Management

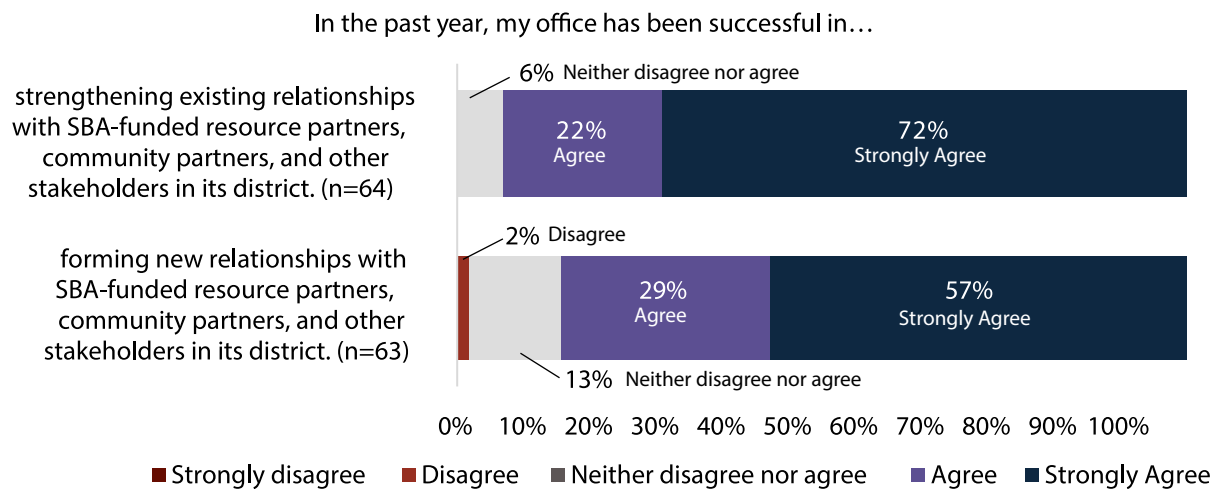
District office staff pride themselves on building and maintaining relationships with small businesses, resource partners, community partners, and other stakeholders (e.g., government agencies and officials) and being responsive to their needs and inquiries. Resource and community partner survey participants largely reciprocated these sentiments, expressing gratitude and appreciation for the availability and dedication of district office staff. When asked which aspects of their relationship with the SBA they were most satisfied with, 188 of the 343 open-ended survey responses (55%) provided by resource and community partners referenced

the strong collaborative relationship and/or the proactive collaboration and support received from their local SBA district office – a code appearing more frequently than any other.

While partners largely praised their long-standing relationships with district offices, they did note a challenge tended to arise when district offices experienced turnover in key staff positions. For example, some partners expressed challenges establishing relationships with new district office staff (e.g., a new Lender Relations Specialist (LRS), as these staff were not always proactive in getting to know the partners. Nevertheless, 94% of district office leadership survey respondents felt that their office had been successful in strengthening existing relationships (94% agreed or strongly agreed) and forming new relationships (86% agreed or strongly agreed) with resource and community partners in the last year (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

District Office Leadership Survey – Distribution of Responses to Relationship Management Items



In survey responses, district office leaders reported the strongest working relationships with SBDCs, SBA lenders, WBCs, and SCORE Chapters. They also noted that they would benefit from working more frequently with local news networks or other media agencies, other local, state, or federal agencies, economic development organizations, and incubators/growth accelerators. See Table 5 for a complete list of responses.

Table 5*District Office Leadership Survey – Frequency of Working Relationships*

District Offices' Strongest Working Relationships	
SBDCs	(n=60)
SBA lenders including CDFIs/CFIs/CDCs	(n=32)
WBCs	(n=30)
SCORE Chapters	(n=25)
District Offices Would Benefit from Working More Frequently With...	
Local news networks or other media agencies	(n=25)
Other local, state, or federal government agencies or officials	(n=24)
Economic development organizations	(n=23)
Incubators/growth accelerators	(n=17)

District offices also build and maintain relationships with SBA program offices. However, these relationships tend to be fairly unstructured, with district offices typically reaching out on an ad hoc basis when they either have a program-related question themselves or are unable to answer a program-related question posed by a resource/community partner or small business. Program offices may also be in contact with district offices to provide information and updates about their programs. District office leadership survey participants were asked how frequently they work with SBA offices and programs to support efforts to provide small businesses with access to capital, contracting opportunities, and counseling and training. As shown in Table 6, district office staff most frequently work with program offices to support access to capital.

Table 6*District Office Leadership Survey – Frequency of Interactions with SBA Program Offices*

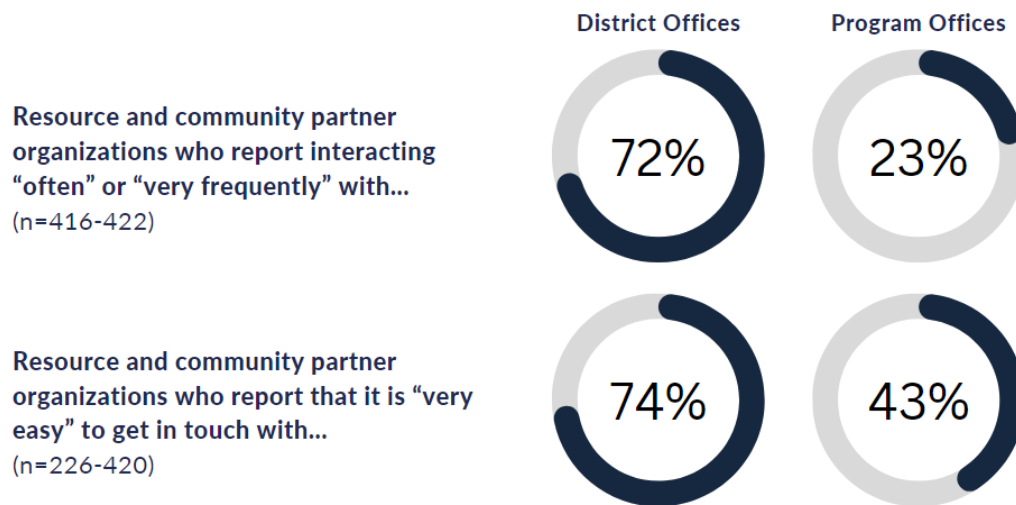
How frequently does your office work with other SBA offices, programs, and functions to support their efforts to provide small businesses with access to...	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Frequently	I don't know
capital	0%	10%	24%	34%	31%	0%
contracting opportunities	0%	10%	31%	31%	27%	0%
counseling and training	0%	19%	36%	22%	21%	1%

Lastly, compared to SBA program offices, resource and community partners reported stronger and more consistent interactions with their local district office. Specifically, they reported interacting more frequently with district offices and having an easier time getting in touch with district offices (see Figure 2). Survey respondents from the 8(a) program similarly reported working with district offices more frequently than program offices; however, they indicated that program offices were slightly easier to get in touch with than district offices (see Figure 3)⁷.

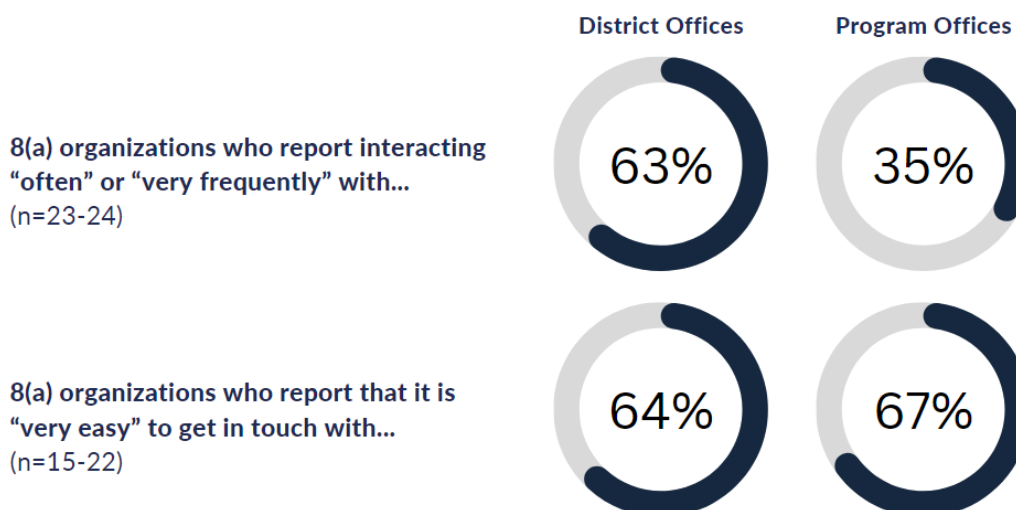
⁷ As mentioned earlier, the results presented in Figure 3 should be interpreted with the understanding that the 8(a) sample size is quite small.

Figure 2

Resource/Community Partner Survey – Interactions with SBA District Offices and Program Offices

**Figure 3**

8(a) Survey – Interactions with SBA District Offices and Program Offices



Convening

During interviews, district office leaders emphasized the importance of in-person connections made with small businesses, resource partners (i.e., SBDCs, VBOCs, WBCs, and SCORE), and community partners (e.g., community navigators, lenders, chambers of commerce). Sometimes these interactions occur at the district office, but often they are at events hosted or co-hosted by resource partners and district offices. Resource and community partner focus group participants noted that district office presence at events is one of the most valuable types of support, as district office presence tends to boost attendance.

However, with decreasing staff and limited travel budgets, district office staff struggle to attend events across their districts. Resource and community partners located geographically further from district offices, particularly in more rural areas, reported a desire for more in-person interactions. However, survey and focus group participants did express an awareness around limited staffing and budgets within district offices that limit what district offices can realistically accomplish.

“We are in a rural region that requires a bit of travel for face-to-face interaction. I understand that federal budget places severe limits on SBA staff travel at this time.”

- Resource/Community Partner Survey Participant (SBDC)

More information about events related to capital access and contracting can be found in RQ2 and RQ3, respectively.

Program Expertise and Knowledge Sharing

District offices work to provide technical assistance and support to stakeholders in preparing, applying, and participating in SBA and other non-SBA programs. This assistance often includes training and counseling around contracting and capital access. For example, district offices may provide support to a small business looking to prepare for a loan or apply for a federal contract, small local financial institutions as they navigate the process to apply to become an SBA lender, or economic development organizations as they decide what SBA loan would work for a particular client.

Resource and community partners frequently rely on district offices for their knowledge of SBA programs, regularly coming to them with questions about the programs, recent updates, or client (e.g., small business) issues. However, district offices note inconsistencies in receiving timely program updates internally from SBA program offices, making it challenging to fulfill this expectation.

Since district offices are the direct connectors to the community delivering SBA programs, resource and community partners will go to them with program-specific questions. While resource and community partners consistently expressed appreciation for district office staff’s willingness to provide assistance navigating program challenges, discrepancies emerged in terms of district office staff knowledge. For example, while some resource and community partner survey and focus group participants felt their district office was very knowledgeable about capital and contracting programs, others expressed disappointment at their lack of technical expertise (e.g., Standard Operating Procedure [SOP] help).

“I feel the employees at the district office are not very knowledgeable about the program. I find it easier to bypass them and go directly to SBA Headquarters.”

- Resource/Community Partner Survey Participant (Lending Institution)

“Very friendly staff and easy to contact. All are very knowledgeable about the programs and answer questions in a timely manner.”

- Resource/Community Partner Survey Participant (Lending Institution)

As will be discussed in the subsequent sections (RQ2 & RQ3), district office staff experience challenges having expertise in both capital access and federal contracting-related areas. Resource and community partners note they suspect challenges remaining current and knowledgeable in all programs likely relates to staffing shortages within district offices (e.g., not all district offices have a Business Opportunity Specialist [BOS] and/or LRS). Nevertheless, resource and community partners appreciate district office staff willingness to reach out to program offices or other partners in the community to find answers to questions.

Ecosystem Connection

District office staff spend a lot of time acting as a navigator and facilitating connections within and across their ecosystems. Resource partners, in particular, noted this effort and commented on the benefits to the ecosystem that result from district offices' work.

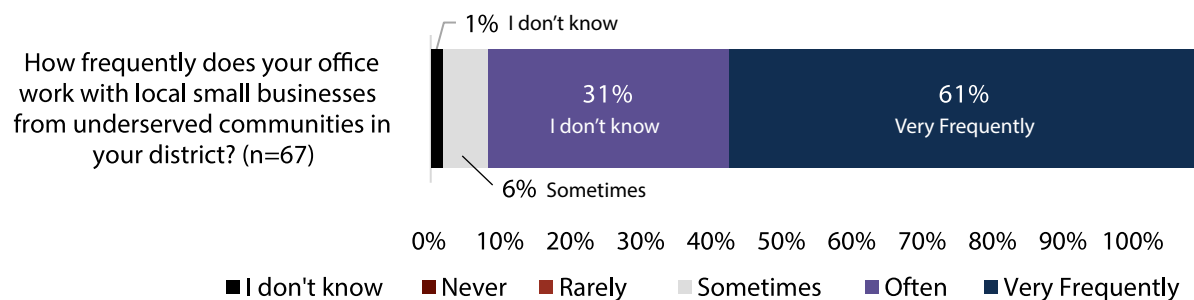
“Not only does the district office host resource partner meetings, they host ecosystem meetings for the entire state. They lead research projects and have worked really hard to build a very inclusive system where everybody connects and communicates about projects and programs and sends a lot of referrals throughout the whole state.”

- Resource/Community Partner Focus Group Participant (VBOC)

Both district office leadership and resource/community partners shared that district offices are committed to assisting small businesses in underserved communities. Almost all district office leadership survey respondents (92%) reported working with local small businesses from underserved communities either “often” or “very frequently” (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

District Office Leadership Survey – Distribution of Responses to Underserved Communities Item

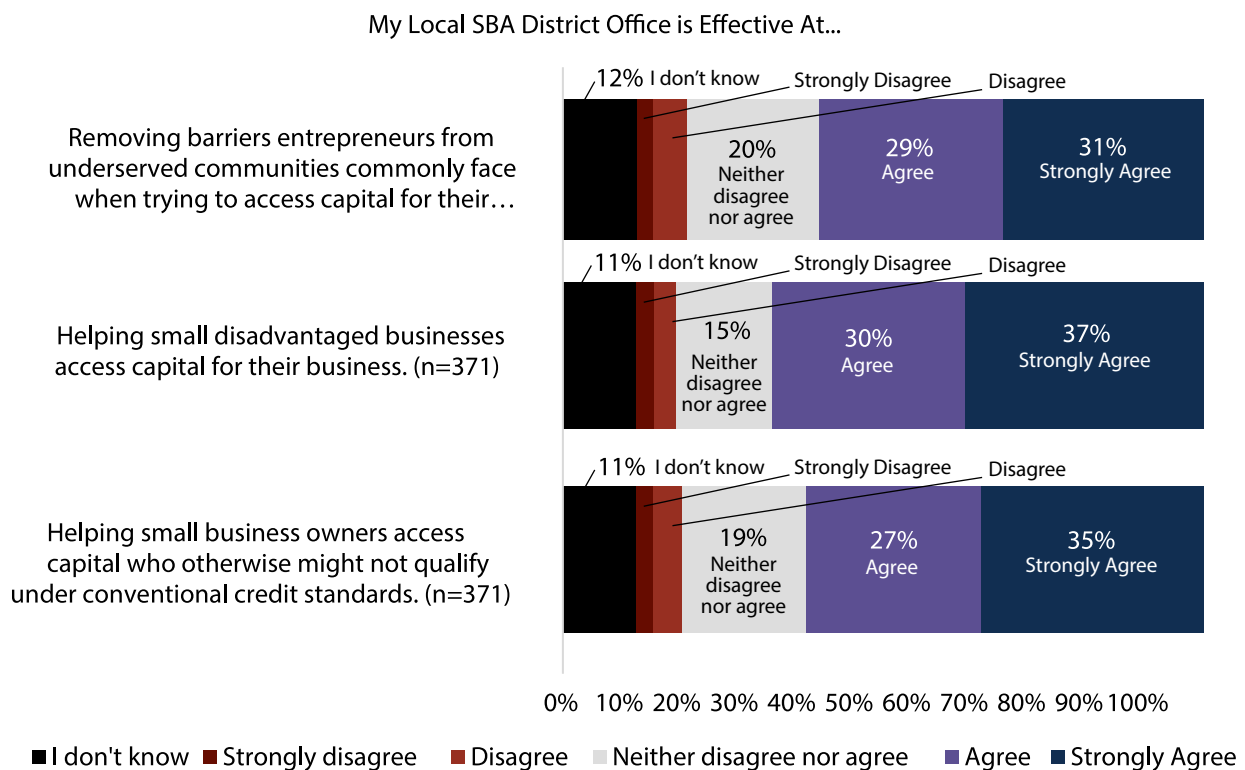


However, a cohesive strategy for reaching and serving these businesses is lacking and district offices have attempted to develop their own approaches, with varying levels of success. District offices note that having access to additional data (e.g., demographic data) and information related to customers in their districts would support their ability to identify communities in need. An ecosystem toolkit currently under development by OFO Headquarters (HQ) may address this need.

Despite not having a standardized approach or strategy, resource and community partners report that district offices have a positive impact on their local economies, including helping to serve underserved markets. For example, with respect to capital access, over half of resource and community partner survey respondents reported that their local SBA district office is effective at removing barriers to capital access for entrepreneurs from underserved communities, helping small, disadvantaged businesses access capital, and helping small business owners access capital who otherwise might not qualify under conventional credit standards (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

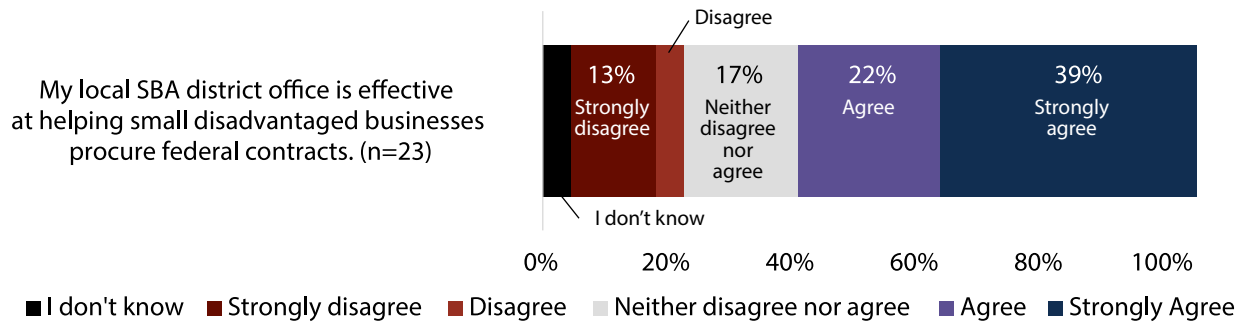
Resource/Community Partner Survey – Distribution of Responses to Items About District Office Effectiveness in Helping Underserved Communities Access Capital



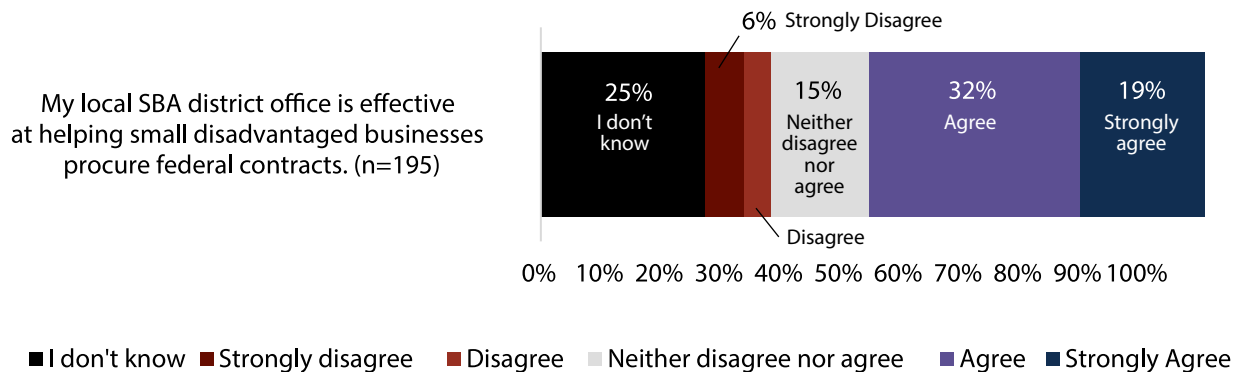
With respect to contracting, 61% of surveyed 8(a) firms and 51% of surveyed resource and community partners reported that their local SBA district office is effective at helping small, disadvantaged businesses procure federal contracts. See Figures 6 and 7 for the distribution of all responses.

Figure 6

8(a) Survey – Distribution of Responses to Item About District Office Effectiveness in Helping Underserved Communities Procure Federal Contracts

**Figure 7**

Resource/Community Partner Survey – Distribution of Responses to Item About District Office Effectiveness in Helping Underserved Communities Procure Federal Contracts



Communication

Internal communication between SBA program offices and district offices has improved in recent years; however, district offices expressed a desire to continue to improve the timeliness of information transferred from program offices. The establishment of program liaisons offers a promising avenue of improvement, as this role has the opportunity to streamline requests and communications, reducing burden on both sides. However, it appears not all program liaisons function the same way and district offices desire more structure and standardization around the role.

“We use the liaison system within OFO. The OCA [liaison] structure works actually very well. He’s like a funnel for that information. I think that if there’s some improvements that would be one thing – to leverage that structure a little more.”

- District Office Interview Participant

Externally, the frequency and consistency of communications sent to resource/community partners and small businesses varies substantially between district offices. While some resource and community partners feel adequately informed of SBA news, events, and resources, others do not. With shrinking numbers of staff, some district offices no longer feel they have the bandwidth to produce consistent communications (e.g., monthly newsletters).

Resource and community partners noted that the quantity of communications is not as important as the content of the communications. In other words, resource and community partners do not want to receive an overwhelming amount of information from the SBA, rather they prefer a system where they can opt-in to communications that are pertinent to their work (e.g., lenders only want to receive information about SBA programs and events relevant to them and their customers).

Mapping the District Office Role

District offices are a critical connector between local ecosystems and the rest of the SBA and assume a complex role, interacting both internally with other SBA program offices and externally with resource/community partners, other stakeholders, and small businesses. A visual representation of district offices’ role delivering SBA capital and contracting-related programs (i.e., process maps), as well as their role in resource/community partner and 8(a) firms’ experiences with the SBA (i.e., customer journey maps) can be found in Appendices J – N. Note, each map is specific to capital access or contracting, but taken together, offer a more holistic picture of the role district offices serve in the SBA and the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Another useful tool to understand the role of OFO and district offices is the Theory of Change developed as part of this evaluation effort (Appendix O). The Theory of Change visually depicts the role of OFO and district offices within the SBA and the entrepreneurial ecosystem, including underlying assumptions and how district office inputs and activities translate into outputs and outcomes.

RQ2: How do district office efforts contribute to the SBA's capital deployment and servicing goals and performance metrics?

Section Summary

1

District offices support the SBA's capital access goals by interacting with SBA program offices, resource/community partners, and directly with small businesses. District offices share information about relevant SBA and non-SBA programs, provide technical assistance and training, and connect resource/community partners with each other and with small businesses.

2

District offices work to expand the number of lenders in their communities and increase the visibility and use of SBA loan programs, support the success of lenders, and improve access to capital for small businesses.

3

While some resource and community partners feel that their district is well-equipped to provide technical assistance related to capital, others shared the perception that their district office does not possess the capital-related knowledge needed to help with their inquiries.

The Role of District Offices in Capital Deployment

The Office of Capital Access (OCA) designs and updates programs that help make capital available to small businesses through banks and lending partners. In particular their programs focus on expanding capital access to small businesses that are unable to access capital through conventional sources and providing disaster assistance through loans. These programs include the 7(a), 504, and Microloan Programs, Surety Bonds, and the Program for Investment in Micro-Entrepreneurs (PRIME). District offices then assist in the implementation of these programs in a few ways.

First, district offices work directly with small businesses to provide information, technical assistance, and training specific to capital access. For example, small businesses may contact their local district office to request support and assistance related to borrowing. District offices may also refer small businesses that are ready for capital to appropriate lending sources (SBA or non-SBA) and assist or refer small businesses that are not ready for capital to appropriate ecosystem resources to become better prepared.

Second, district offices recruit and build relationships with potential lending partners (e.g., small local financial institutions) to expand the supply of lenders in their area. They also work to maintain existing relationships with lending partners by providing updates, training, technical assistance, and collaborating on events. If a district office has an LRS, they will typically lead these relationship management activities with lenders; however, in the absence of an LRS, other district office staff will attempt to fulfill these duties.

“I know that we have capital goals. I’m aware of them because I haven’t had a strong LRS, or any LRS...But that has not been a focal point of my time. We’re trying to switch that because obviously, we have all these 8(a) firms. A lot of them need capital, so we need to shore that up.”

- District Office Interview Participant

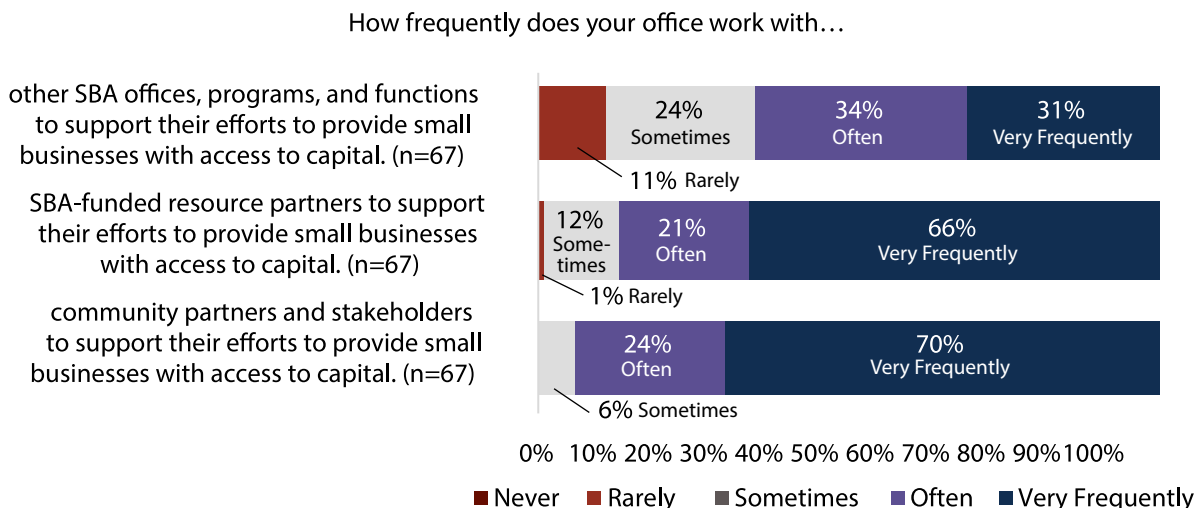
Third, district offices also collaborate with resource/community partners (e.g., WBC) to host events that provide small businesses with education and training (e.g., access to capital, SBA loan programs). District offices often promote these events through their various communication channels, and through these events, district offices connect various members of the ecosystem (e.g., SBA program offices with lenders; lenders with small businesses). Third, district offices share SBA capital-related program information and updates with resource/community partners (including lenders), and these partners turn to district offices when they have capital-related questions.

At times, district offices further serve as liaisons between SBA program offices focused on capital access and resource/community partners (including lenders), as well as small businesses. For example, program offices provide training and updates to district offices about their programs, as well as data about lending in their area. District offices relay this information and use it to provide assistance to interested and existing lenders and small business borrowers. District offices also escalate issues or questions from these groups to the appropriate SBA program office and then convey their response back to the inquiring party.

As shown in Figure 8, although most district office leadership survey respondents report that they regularly work with other SBA program offices to support capital access, approximately twice as many (66–70%) report working with resource and community partners “very frequently”.

Figure 8

District Office Leadership Survey – Distribution of Responses Items About District Office Interactions with Others for Capital-Related Purposes



The following two sections detail successes and opportunities for district offices to improve their services related to capital access and draw on data provided by district offices (via a survey and interviews), SBA program offices (via focus groups), and resource/community partners (via a survey and focus groups). Of the 459 respondents to the resource/community partner survey, 90% (n = 413) report that they work to provide support to access capital services.

District Office Successes Related to Access to Capital

SBA program offices specializing in access to capital recognize and express appreciation for district offices building and maintaining relationships with resource and community partners. During focus groups these offices often credited district offices with effectively increasing the supply of lenders and, thereby, capital in their local areas. They also noted the positive impact district offices have on increasing awareness of, and participation in, SBA capital-related programs within the ecosystem. As one focus group participant shared, “Sourcing new lenders, that’s a big one in terms of marketing the programs, getting nonprofits interested in participating.” Another added, “Just by being able to recruit and get the participation of a bank in a particular state puts many more dollars out there doing good, and that’s a useful and beneficial role.”

“Our program offices are relying on these field offices to really make those connections between the small businesses trying to find help and the professionals and the industries that can help them. Bringing those professionals into events where they can get in front of those small businesses and say, “This is how you can move forward. This loan or this surety bond could be a great option for you.”

- SBA Program Office Focus Group Participant (Access to Capital)

SBA program office participants also discussed their reliance on district offices to conduct “boots-on-the-ground” work to support their capital-related programs. For example, district offices provide training to lenders and ensure compliance, support territory expansion requests by talking with potentially impacted lenders, organize matchmaking events to connect lenders with small businesses, and answer small business’s questions about loans and policies. These efforts on the ground also include facilitating connections between various members of the ecosystem. SBA program office participants appreciate being asked to attend and participate in events that district offices and their partners host, as it provides them with an opportunity to connect with lenders and small businesses who are interested in, or currently participating in, their programming.

Resource and community partners involved with access to capital are also, overall, very satisfied in their relationships with district offices. Among survey participants who reported that their organization helps provide access to capital for small businesses, 84% reported being satisfied with the amount of collaboration that they have with their district office. Sixty-three percent of those who provided a comment about why they were satisfied cited their district office’s responsiveness and willingness to work collaboratively to resolve issues.

"I think our local district office is great at meeting our needs. They're extremely available. They're willing to help. They go try to find the information if they don't know it. I don't know that there's much they can do better."

- Resource/Community Partner Focus Group Participant (Lending Institution)

Additionally, lenders in focus groups credited much of their success to interactions with district offices. They reported that support provided by their district office helped increase their visibility in the community, serve a larger number of clients, provide better customer service to those clients, and even compete with larger banks. They referenced their district offices' efforts resulting in opportunities for lenders to connect with small businesses about their services (e.g., through events, referrals), ultimately leading to more successful business outcomes for lenders.

"[Since working with the SBA], we moved up. We're in the top 10 now in the lender ranking. The best part of that is we beat Capital One and Chase."

- Resource/Community Partner Focus Group Participant (Lending Institution)

These sentiments aligned with results from the resource/community partner survey, which further demonstrated the perceived impact district offices have on their communities and ecosystems. When prompted with: "Since starting to work with the SBA on capital access..."

- ◆ **70%** agree their local district office is effective at increasing awareness of different loan programs within the community (e.g., microloans, 7(a) loans, 504 loans, export loans).
- ◆ **57%** report that the number of small businesses applying for loans at their organization has increased.
- ◆ **50%** report that the percentage of loans their organization issues to underserved small businesses has increased.
- ◆ **24%** report that the average number of business days to process small non-delegated loan applications has decreased.

Taken together, data provided by SBA program offices focus groups and resource/community partners focus group and survey responses reinforce each other, underscoring the value of district offices in expanding the capital-access ecosystem (e.g., by recruiting new lenders), supporting the success of lenders, and improving access to capital for small businesses.

District Office Challenges and Opportunities for Improvement Related to Access to Access

While a district office's capacity to focus on access to capital is considered during the district office goal setting process, a lack of staff specialized in access to capital (e.g., LRS) can make prioritizing activities that support expanding access to capital challenging. District office leaders shared that when these more specialized positions run vacant, other district office staff (e.g., district director, deputy district director) often must assume the role and responsibilities. Not only can these vacancies lead to gaps in knowledge, but they also lead to higher workloads for other

staff members, decreasing the time those staff have to dedicate to other tasks and responsibilities (e.g., district operations and outreach).

While district office staff try to fill the void left by vacancies, some also interpret these changes as signals from the SBA indicating agency priorities and where they should direct their attention. For example, one district office leader said, “if the agency says that we’re not going to give you that resource, in a lot of ways, you’re saying that that’s not an important thing to you... It’s like, “You don’t really need an LRS” ...You’re telling me that you don’t want me to concentrate on that. You want me to concentrate on BOS stuff. You want me to concentrate on 8(a) stuff.” Not all participants shared this sentiment, but understanding potential ramifications around staffing changes can help OFO better communicate targeted messaging related to work prioritization if staffing vacancies continue to arise.

Both SBA program offices and resource/community partners recognize the link between a lack of staffing and more specialized knowledge. In focus groups as well as open-ended survey responses, resource/community partners who expressed dissatisfaction with their district office suggested their dissatisfaction stemmed from inconsistent or limited communications from their district office and a perception that their district office was not equipped with knowledge needed to be helpful.

“The district office does not understand the lending side of SBA. Difficult to answer a question which you personally do not do. They can read SOP and state facts, but not apply it as a procedure. They do not want to state anything wrong, so they don’t provide much direction.”

- Resource/Community Partner Survey Participant (Lending Institution)

It should be noted, however, that only 9% of resource/community partner survey participants who only work in capital (i.e., do not work in both capital and contracting) reported being “dissatisfied” with their district office. Those who were on the satisfied end of the spectrum shared positive perceptions about district office staff knowledge. Therefore, the challenge with district office staff lacking capital-related technical knowledge is not agency wide, yet the differences between district offices adept in capital-related programs and those lacking knowledge are stark.

“We have some district offices that I would say are absolutely best performers and are very involved, engaged, knowledgeable about our programs, how things work...other district offices, not so much. Where I’ve got a very involved district office, I’ve got highly involved lenders that are participating...where I don’t have sufficient lenders participating in the program, it’s generally where district offices don’t seem to prioritize our program at all.”

- SBA Program Office Focus Group Participant (Access to Capital)

Another challenge stems from the shift in the role of district offices over the years from providing access to capital to a greater emphasis on marketing and connecting small businesses with opportunities to access capital. Focus group participants from both SBA program office and resource/community partners identified the need to clarify the role of district offices within the SBA. Internally, providing clarity can help program offices work more effectively with district offices, and externally, communicating the role customers (e.g., resource/community partners, small businesses) can help facilitate more purposeful interactions (e.g., reducing the number of irrelevant requests being made of district offices) and greater customer satisfaction. This clarity in role will be needed to establish metrics relevant to the work, and intended work, of district offices as it relates to capital. Opportunities to better capture district office efforts are detailed in RQ4.

Lastly, district offices note that internal communication with program offices has improved since the establishment of program liaisons; however, both district offices and program offices agreed there was room for improvement. For example, while program offices attempt to ensure that district offices are the first to receive updates and training related to their programs, it is not always feasible. A focus group participant from an SBA program office remarked that even when district offices receive information in a timely manner, “sometimes it’s so much at once. You’re drinking out of the fire hose, and they miss stuff, and they feel left out, but they’re not left out.” Therefore, opportunities to better streamline internal communications may be fruitful.

RQ3: How do district office efforts contribute to the SBA’s small business contracting goals and performance metrics?

Section Summary	
1	District offices support contracting by recruiting small businesses to the various certification programs, provide education on small business set-asides, manage 8(a) portfolios, and provide business development and program administration support to small businesses.
2	District offices forge strong relationships with APEX Accelerators and other resource/community partners, which help small businesses more effectively secure federal contracts.
3	There is a lack of clarity around the BOS role and responsibilities, both among SBA staff and among resource/community partners and 8(a) participants.

The Role of District Offices in Contracting

GCBD is responsible for developing policies, regulations, and statutory changes, as well as administering programs and certifications that help small businesses meet requirements to be eligible to receive federal contracts. GCBD and related program offices (e.g., government contracting, certification programs) focus on expanding participation of small, disadvantaged, and women-owned businesses within the federal contracting space. Specific programs include the 8(a) Business Development Program, the HUBZone Program, Women-Owned Small Business (WOSB) Certification, Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business (SDVOSB)

Certification, Empower to Grow, the Small Mentor-Protégé Program, and Size Standards. While SBA program offices own these programs, district offices play an important support role by increasing awareness about and actively recruiting for these programs. Compared with other certification programs, district offices occupy a larger role in the 8(a) program, as they also provide business development and program administration support for participating firms. Some district offices have staff (BOSs) who are responsible for providing this assistance. Assuming they have sufficient bandwidth, BOS staff also provide businesses outside of the 8(a) program with contracting-related support. In the absence of BOS staff, district offices allocate other, non-specialized, staff to support with contracting. PRE has developed a process map (Appendix J) that visually depicts the beginning to end workflow and interactions that occur both internal and external to the SBA to bring contracting and certification programs from their origin in program offices to small businesses.

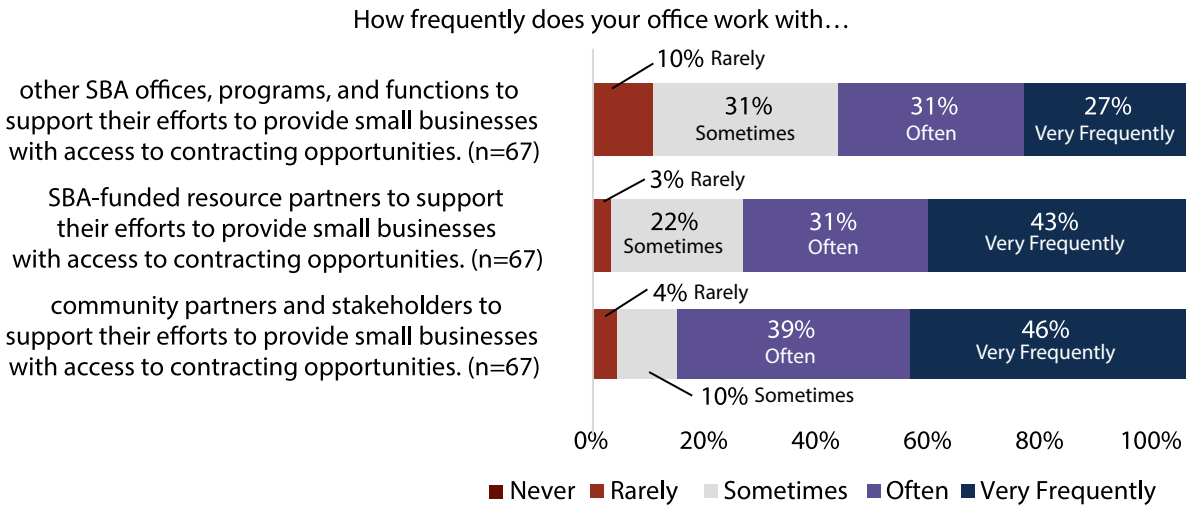
Most of the resource and community partners involved with contracting have long-standing relationships with the SBA (e.g., SBDCs, WBCs, APEX Accelerators), and district offices work to maintain and strengthen these relationships. Unlike with capital-focused activities where district offices continually recruit lenders, district offices do not tend to continually recruit resource or community partners into SBA contracting programs. However, district offices do work to form new relationships within the community (e.g., with federal, state, and local governments) to support connections between small businesses and available contracting opportunities or other resources to help build their businesses. Additionally, district offices work with individuals involved in procurement activities to both educate them on small business set-asides and connect them to small business contract opportunities.

District offices also perform outreach via events (e.g., industry days, matchmaking events) and communications that spread information and awareness about contracting programs and certifications to resource/community partners and small businesses in their districts. They may collaborate or co-host events with resource or community partners, such as an SBDC or an APEX Accelerator to provide small businesses with education and training (e.g., federal contracting, readiness, SBA program overviews). As the face of the SBA within their communities, district offices also receive questions and inquiries about specific aspects of contracting from both small businesses and resource/community partners. If a district office has a BOS on staff, they handle most of the contracting-related work; however, as noted above, in the absence of a BOS, other district office staff will attempt to fulfill these duties.

Since SBA program offices own certification programs, these offices have more direct contact with small businesses compared to capital-related SBA program offices. As shown in Figure 9, only 27% of district office leadership survey participants reported working “very frequently” with SBA program offices to provide small businesses with access to contracting opportunities, but approximately 45% work “very frequently” with both SBA-funded resource partners and community partners for that purpose. Note that district office leadership participants reported working more frequently with these same groups to support capital access (see Figure 8).

Figure 9

District Office Leadership Survey – Distribution of Responses Items About District Office Interactions with Others for Contracting-Related Purposes



A major program within contracting at the SBA is the 8(a) Business Development Program, which, as described earlier, is a nine-year training program for socially and economically disadvantaged small business owners to become more competitive in the federal contracting space. District office staff (e.g., BOS) manage 8(a) portfolios, work directly with 8(a) firms and other small businesses to provide business development, counseling, and assistance, and drive 8(a) program compliance.

The following two sections detail successes and opportunities for district offices to improve their services related to contracting and draw on data provided via district office leadership (via survey and interviews), SBA program offices (via focus groups), resource/community partners (via survey and focus groups), and current 8(a) firms (via survey and focus groups). Of the 459 respondents to the resource/community partner survey, 47% (n = 216) report that they work to provide support to access to contracting services. A total of 91 current 8(a) firms participated in the survey.

District Office Successes Related to Contracting

Many of the successes and challenges found related to capital access also apply to the contracting context. For example, SBA program offices acknowledge and appreciate the critical role district offices play “on the ground”, connecting with small businesses and making them aware of contracting opportunities. One focus group member shared, “Our district offices aren't getting credit when they're making those types of opportunities happen.” Bringing more awareness and recognition to impactful activities district offices engage in is a primary focus of PRE's metrics recommendations (see *RQ4* and *Recommendation #5*).

Data collected indicate that district offices are just as responsive to resource/community partner inquiries about contracting as they are to capital-related inquiries. Likewise, district office staff appear equally willing to provide assistance for any contracting-related matter. Among

resource/community partner survey participants who solely support contracting (i.e., are not also involved in capital), 80% reported being “somewhat satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the amount of collaboration they have with their district office. Within this subset, 36% of written-in supplemental comments indicated they were pleased with the level of responsiveness from their district office.

Hosting, co-hosting, and supporting contracting-focused events is another way district offices support expanding access to contracting, and resource/community partners report finding these events valuable, with 29% of those who are satisfied with the level of collaboration with their district office specifically mentioning their contentment with events.

“I have had an excellent relationship that has led to contract awards from vendors out of the [district office]. The team has been responsive and is always eager to have our agency participate in their small business outreach events. They are also extremely knowledgeable and responsive to any inquiries our teams may have.”

- Resource/Community Partner Survey Participant (Federal Agency)

APEX Accelerators in particular reported finding value in their collaboration with district offices to promote contracting opportunities among small businesses. APEX Accelerator focus group participants noted that district office promotion of events (e.g., district office support leads to higher attendance) and referrals provided by district offices are two of the most impactful ways district offices support them.

In terms of outcomes, both program offices and resource/community partners shared that district offices are invaluable when it comes to making contracting available and a feasible reality for small businesses. Among resource/community partner survey respondents, 41% reported that their organization is more effective in helping small businesses obtain federal contracts since starting to work with the SBA. Resource and community partners also see the benefits of district office involvement extending into the underserved community, to expand equitable entrepreneurship. While not all surveyed resource/community partners have visibility into these efforts, 51% of survey respondents “agree” or “strongly agree” that their local SBA district office is effective at helping small, disadvantaged businesses procure federal contracts.

Although there was not a large representation of 8(a) firms in the current study, through open-ended survey responses and focus groups, they generally shared being satisfied with how the 8(a) program has supported them in building relationships, accessing and attending events, receiving training and education, and working closely with the SBA to develop their businesses. They also value the credibility and name recognition they receive from partnering with the SBA, the knowledge and expertise possessed by SBA and district office staff, and the ability to collaborate with others.

“[The 8(a) program] doesn’t guarantee you work, but it gives you greater opportunity.”

- 8(a) Focus Group Participant

Two factors appear to have a large impact on participants’ overall satisfaction with the 8(a) program. First, a participant’s relationship with their BOS (if one is present) is important, as they can help the 8(a) firm navigate the program, answer questions about federal contracting, and assist in networking opportunities. Second, the expectations a firm holds upon entering the program can impact their perception of the whole program. Specifically, focus group data indicated that firms who view the 8(a) program and certification as an avenue to seek out more work, but plan to remain independent in their pursuit of contracts tend to view the program more favorably than those who expect contracts to be handed to them as a result of their participation. The top three motivating reasons 8(a) survey respondents cited for applying to the 8(a) program were to access business development services (n = 16), to increase access to contracting opportunities in the federal marketplace (n = 14), and to grow technical competence to engage agencies about federal contracts (n = 13).

District Office Challenges and Opportunities for Improvement Related to Contracting

As with capital, district offices face more challenges related to providing contracting services (e.g., facilitating connections, answering questions) when there is no specialized member (e.g., BOS) on staff. When staff with this specialized skillset are absent, district offices tend to prioritize other tasks for which they have more expertise (e.g., capital access, counseling). At the same time, the remaining staff (often the district director or deputy district director) do their best to handle contracting-related issues and needs as they arise. This bifurcation in office leaders’ attention, as they assume the responsibilities from vacated positions, impacts their ability to focus on strategic efforts. For example, one district office operating plan included the following description:

“[Our district office] has operated without a Supervisory BOS and Administrative Officer since those positions were vacated [some years ago]...All those duties are being absorbed by the District Director, Deputy District Director, and Lead Lender Relations Specialist (LLRS). If those positions were filled, leadership could dedicate more time strategically focused on district operations and outreach.”

In interviews, district office leaders further expressed the need for more staff specialized in contracting so they can better assist small businesses, especially those from underserved communities. One interviewee shared, “We need more resources to assist other socioeconomic categories of small businesses. Our BOS is most of the time focused and overburdened on annual 8(a) reviews...Women-Owned, HUBZones, Service Disabled and Veteran-Owned small businesses need more technical assistance to win federal contracts.” Resource and community

partners echoed comments about the limited number of specialized staff, noting the resulting delays in technical assistance and certification approvals.

Additionally, district offices noted the complexity of contracting programs and the challenge that complexity poses for them and their staff, with one participant sharing, “Contracting in this state, we don’t do enough of it. We don’t do a lot of it. Again, I think it goes to the complexity...I think [it] really holds us back a bit.” SBA program offices also recognize the complexity of the contracting programs and expressed concern over the knowledge and skill gaps of district offices BOSs who are on the frontlines with small businesses.

In a focus group, one SBA program office participant shared an experience visiting a WBC in an urban area that had many disadvantaged business enterprises competing locally, but not transitioning into the federal marketplace. When inquiring about why these businesses were not making that next step, the feedback received was that the firms are intimidated by the perceived complexity of the process. District office leaders added that when certain types of contracting are not already popular in their state or region, it can be difficult to make progress towards SBA contracting goals. Relatedly, alignment between district offices and all levels of government (e.g., state, local) is particularly important for contracting.

“Our state historically has not fully engaged in exporting or federal contracting. Even the state-level team, the governor’s Office of Economic Development – they’re not held to the same objectives that we are. I think one of the things I’ve realized over the last few years is if you don’t have that in concert – the federal, state, county, and local relationships, you’re not going to get access to that bigger pool of stakeholders. We need everybody singing in the choir to be able to maximize these small businesses becoming part of the federal supply chain.”

- SBA District Office Interview Participant

District offices along with resource/community partners (e.g., APEX Accelerators) also expressed a desire to more clearly define the roles and responsibility of BOS staff. A district director shared in an interview, that even though they were in the same office as a BOS, they were unsure what exactly the BOS did on a daily basis and if those tasks were what the BOS *should* be doing. Similarly, participants in the APEX Accelerator group were unsure if a BOS/district office should be doing more than providing small businesses with referrals to their services. This lack of clarity presents an opportunity to refine and socialize the role of a district office/BOS both internally and externally to align with SBA strategic goals and promote efficiency within the role by eliminating unnecessary tasks.

The number of 8(a) firms participating in the current evaluation is low, so data cannot support strong claims about the 8(a) experience. However, from focus group and survey responses, there appear to be several challenges 8(a) firms face, which may be opportunities for improvement in the future. PRE recommends conducting an additional study specific to 8(a) with a larger sample size before any data-driven decisions can be made.

The first challenge emerging from the current evaluation is related to the complexity of joining the 8(a) program. As shown in Table 7, 35% of 8(a) firms reported that the process of becoming an 8(a) certified business was either “somewhat” or “extremely” complex.

Table 7

8(a) Survey – Distribution of Responses to Item About Complexity of Becoming 8(a) Certified

	Extremely Complex	Somewhat Complex	Neither Complex nor Simple	Somewhat Simple	Extremely Simple	I don't know
How complex was the process of becoming an 8(a) certified business? (n=43)	9%	26%	9%	9%	0%	47%

As mentioned above, firm expectations upon entering the 8(a) program, particularly around the number and ease with which they will get contracts, seem to influence whether a participant has a positive or negative experience. While most firms surveyed did not have any expectations about the number of contracts they would win upon becoming 8(a) certified, 14% reported that they have received “significantly fewer” contracts than expected, 37% did not have any expectations of receiving contracts when first joining, and 17% have not yet applied for a federal contract since joining the program. Additionally, 79% report that they have won four or fewer contracts since joining the 8(a) program and 42% have not yet won any contracts.

Lastly, 8(a) firms reported a desire for increased mentorship and to be better connected with other 8(a) firms. Participants in the 8(a) program also requested more communication about events, more personalized communications with opportunities that would serve their business, as well as more training and counseling support. Some of these experiences are related to the presence and/or strength of a relationship with a BOS, which, as described earlier, varies between districts. In order to better understand contracting within the SBA and how district offices contribute to contracting-related goals, metrics should be revised to better capture these efforts and incorporate the perspective of 8(a) firms as well as resource and community partners (see *RQ4* and *Recommendation #5* for more details about metrics).

RQ4: How can district offices' administrative data be used to demonstrate direct and indirect contributions to the SBA's capital access and contracting programs and performance metrics?

Section Summary	
1	SBA leadership within HQ, OFO, and program offices see value in collecting and reporting metrics related to district offices.
2	There is an opportunity to improve and expand upon current metrics to better capture district office activities, outcomes, and impact.

Goal of Metrics

The literature review, informational discussions, and two focus groups concentrated on metrics all informed PRE's approach to enhancing performance metrics within district offices. Although there has not been much research into best practices related to measuring entrepreneurial ecosystems, Johnson et al. (2022) have argued for capturing both individual and contextual data. This concept integrates with Isenberg's (2010; 2011) Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Framework that asserts the government's role is to remove barriers to entrepreneurial activities and provide supportive conditions needed for entrepreneurship to survive. Similarly, within the SDL framework (Vargo & Lusch, 2004), performance indicators should align with the principles of service and may focus on aspects like customer satisfaction and service quality.

Applying these concepts to the SBA, effective metrics should consider the complex and dynamic nature of entrepreneurial ecosystems, which includes data from multiple sources (e.g., from the SBA as well as external resource/community partners, and small businesses) and tracking changes over time. These metrics should consider ways in which district offices act in service to small businesses expanding access to capital and contracting opportunities and how they remove barriers small businesses might face. This dynamic and multi-source approach to collecting metrics also aligns with sentiments shared during informational and measurement-related focus groups. During those sessions, participants shared that the current "counting" activities done within GMATT do not capture the totality of the ecosystem or how district offices contribute to it.

Current Metrics

District office staff expressed that existing data do not capture the breadth of the work that they do in the field. They also shared that much of their work contributes to the success of program offices, but some of those success indices are attributed to the program office rather than the district office, which leaves the impact of some district office efforts and contributions unrecognized. For example, district offices work to recruit local lending institutions to become new SBA lenders; however, this effort and its impact (e.g., increased lending dollars) often get credited to the Office of Capital Access.

Data that is currently collected in GMATT focuses on the frequency of activities (e.g., events), but these data are not linked to outcome data that can reveal trends between efforts and outcomes over time. A missing piece preventing the linking of activity to outcome data is the ability to track customers (e.g., resource/community partners, small businesses) throughout all of their interactions with the SBA. The new CRM system, mySBA, will include client tracking to make this more feasible. For example, tracking the number of district office supported events a lender attends and then examining that data in relation to the number of loans that lender makes to small businesses would provide more insights into the effectiveness of capital-related events.

While the implementation of mySBA is still pending, district office staff report there are opportunities to improve metrics. As shown in Table 8, only 20% of district office and regional leadership surveyed strongly agree that they accurately track and measure their contributions to the SBA's small business capital goals, and only 8% strongly agree they accurately measure contributions to the SBA's small business contracting goals. When asked in interviews and focus groups about the biggest barriers district offices face, challenges with metrics and capturing impact was the second most frequently discussed topic by district office leadership (surpassed only by staffing shortages) and was the third most frequently discussed topic by program office staff (surpassed only by staffing shortages and district offices processing accurate and specialized knowledge).

Table 8

District Office Leadership Survey – Distribution of Responses to Items About Metrics

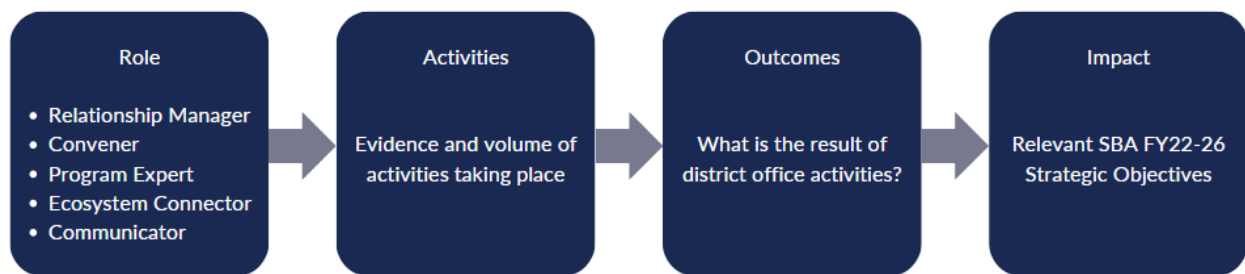
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	I don't know
My office has processes to accurately track and measure its contributions to the SBA's capital access goals (i.e., ensuring that all entrepreneurs have access to capital to start and grow their business). (n=64)	8%	9%	14%	34%	20%	2%
My office has processes to accurately track and measure its contributions to the SBA's small business contracting goals (i.e., helping build back an inclusive and proficient small business contracting base ready to compete for federal procurement opportunities). (n=63)	5%	11%	30%	47%	8%	3%

Opportunities to Improve Metrics

SBA staff, both within and outside of OFO identified opportunities to improve current metrics. Additionally, data collected from resource/community partners and 8(a) firms allowed the evaluation team to refine existing and develop new metric recommendations to capture district office activities and impact. An example of a potential metric can be found in Appendix P.

The proposed metrics align with the five key roles of district offices described in *RQ1* (i.e., relationship manager, convener, program expert and knowledge sharer, ecosystem connector, and communicator) and relate these roles to activities, outcomes, and impact (see Figure 10).

Figure 10
Metric Alignment



A central component of the recommended metrics is to add specificity, while limiting the burden placed on district office staff. For example, proposed metrics would maximize drop-down menu selections by adding more detailed options that would allow for more nuanced insights, limit and/or potentially eliminate the need for text narrative, and leverage automation whenever possible (e.g., using online event registration to count attendance; automatically sending customers surveys using tracking data captured in mySBA).

Reporting and visualizing metrics also presents an opportunity for improvement. Some of the proposed metrics can be integrated to create a summary indicator. For example, combining all data related to outreach and contact with different community partners could be compared against target goals and funneled into a reporting dashboard (e.g., Power BI) to create a visual representation for each relationship (e.g., strong = green, moderate = yellow, relationship needs attention = red). Dashboard reports could also be created in a way that links activity and outcome data together to “tell the story” of district offices. Developing an easily interpretable reporting format such as this would help direct district offices’ efforts and demonstrate impact.

In addition to dashboards, key metrics can be combined to create an advanced visualization. PRE will be creating an advanced data visualization in the form of a mind map that will take into account proposed recommended metrics to highlight the interactions between district offices within OFO and all the members of the ecosystem they reach (Appendix Q).

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Summary of Findings

District offices are uniquely positioned to connect SBA headquarters and program offices with customers the agency serves (e.g., resource/community partners, small businesses). District office leaders, through interviews and open-ended survey responses, shared their strong commitment to the mission of helping small businesses start, grow, be resilient, and get connected with other entrepreneurs and resources in their communities. Likewise, resource and community partners also shared the perception that district offices are strongly committed to these goals and appreciate the time and effort district office staff are willing to put in to be responsive towards their needs. These partners are keenly aware of the many responsibilities district offices juggle and their limited bandwidth given staffing numbers.

Despite challenges posed by limited staffing, district offices tend to excel at forming and maintaining relationships (e.g., with resource and community partners). However, district offices tend to prioritize relationships with resource partners (i.e., SBDCs, WBCs, VBOCs, and SCORE) and select community partners (e.g., APEX Accelerators, lenders, community navigators) over other community partners (e.g., chambers of commerce). Nevertheless, district offices were praised for connecting members of the ecosystem via referrals (e.g., referring small businesses to APEX Accelerators) and hosting/co-hosting events and trainings to better support small businesses' access to capital and contracting opportunities.

District offices sometimes struggle aligning with SBA program offices to develop specialized knowledge about capital and contracting, which in turn translates to challenges providing effective assistance when customers have in-depth technical questions about SBA programs. This lack of technical expertise is most pronounced when a district office does not have specialized staff, such as an LRS or BOS, to handle capital and contracting-related inquiries.

Overall, district offices tend to demonstrate more confidence and comfort contributing to capital deployment compared to contracting-related goals in the SBA. This sentiment was shared by resource and community partners, who expressed through both survey responses and focus group discussions, that district office staff tend to have greater competence and knowledge relating to capital and capital-focused programs offered by the SBA.

Both district office and program office leaders in the SBA shared that OFO would benefit from capturing more relevant and insightful metrics linking district office activities to outcomes in order to demonstrate the impact district offices have on SBA capital and contracting goals, as well as the larger entrepreneurial ecosystem. These metrics should capture data from multiple sources (e.g., district office staff, customers, resource partner data that can be shared) to provide accurate assessments. Lastly, manually entering data takes time, which district staff are already short on; therefore, limiting the burden of data capture and harnessing automation where possible will be important moving forward.

Limitations of Generalizability

Before moving onto the conclusions, a discussion of the limitations of the current evaluation is needed to provide proper contextualization. It should be noted that generalizability of findings was not the goal of the current evaluation efforts, and thus, these findings should not be interpreted as generalizable across all districts. As discussed in the *Design and Methods* section, a purposive sampling technique was used to provide targeted insights into the research questions (e.g., how do district offices support resource and community partners in increasing access to capital within their communities?), and ultimately, can serve as the foundation for future, more in-depth studies, should the SBA choose to pursue one.

The findings and recommendations included in this report are reflective of the perspectives of individuals sampled. Within the SBA these include individuals occupying leadership and program manager roles in district and regional offices, as well as within OFO and offices specific to capital and contracting. Additionally, a subset of district offices were included in interviews, and again, this data collection was limited to those in supervisory positions, meaning that the direct perspectives of individuals in certain roles (e.g., BOS, LRS, Economic Development Specialist (EDS)-type positions) were not captured. Outside of the SBA, the evaluation team collected survey data from resource and community partners across the country and spoke with 73 partners during focus groups. Although substantial efforts were made to connect with current 8(a) firms throughout the country, both via survey and focus groups, there was limited participation. Nevertheless, the insights gained from the current evaluation activities can be used to understand trends in experiences and identify opportunities for future research studies.

Conclusions

District offices play a key role within the SBA and are vital to the successful deployment of capital and contracting-related programs. Externally, district offices deliver these programs to their individual districts and act as a connector, connecting members of the whole entrepreneurial ecosystem. As described throughout the report, there are opportunities to improve the experiences and effectiveness of district office staff, which will have positive ripple effects on SBA program offices, resource and community partners, and small businesses.

"We're all one big SBA, and we need them, they need us, and we need each other to build on each other's success."

- SBA Program Office Focus Group Participant (Access to Capital)

The evaluation team has identified five data-supported recommended areas of focus to begin making positive impacts and changes throughout OFO. Although findings are not generalizable, similar sentiments, including strengths and challenges were found throughout the 10 regions in which district offices operate. District offices are unique and face unique challenges; therefore, changes adopted need to allow for customizability within districts. Some important differences found between district offices that will impact how change management efforts should be approached are: the presence/absence of certain staff (e.g., LRS, BOS), primary industries served within a district (e.g., agriculture, technology), the geographic spread of a district is (i.e.,

how many square miles is the district), and population characteristics of a district (e.g., urban, rural).

Development of Recommendations

Recommendations were developed based on several criteria: 1) frequency (e.g., similar sentiments were consistently shared), 2) triangulation of data (e.g., similar sentiments shared by multiple groups), 3) importance (e.g., findings that are likely to have a greater impact on the SBA and/or district offices' performance), and 4) feasibility (e.g., actions that are feasible given the current structure and resources within the SBA).

The recommendations below work in concert with each other to build structure into district offices and district office staff roles in order to create a culture of customer service and enable staff to better meet their goals of strengthening small business ecosystems, as well as increasing access to capital and contracting opportunities.

Recommendation #1: Clarify the Role of District Offices and District Office Staff Positions

Summary Statement of Findings: District office staff juggle many tasks, but they are not always clear on how to prioritize or most effectively structure their time. As the face of the SBA, district offices receive a wide variety of questions and requests that are not always relevant to the work of they do within the SBA, often because customers (e.g., resource/community partners and small businesses) are not clear on the role of district offices and do not know where to direct questions.

Recommended Actions:

- ◆ Determine the extent to which district offices should function as generalists versus technical experts.
- ◆ Detail desired roles and responsibilities of district offices and district office staff positions (determine the most impactful activities district offices engage in).
- ◆ Determine how these roles may change in the absence of specialized roles (e.g., how do district offices without a BOS re-distribute that workload among the rest of the staff?).
- ◆ Develop a regional-level support framework to assist offices lacking dedicated positions (e.g., determine how to effectively leverage contracting expertise between offices that do not have BOS staff and those that do).
- ◆ Consider how desired roles align with current OFO goals and objectives; revise goals/objectives and/or role descriptions as needed.
- ◆ Designate district office staff time to devote to activities that have the largest impact.
- ◆ Communicate roles and responsibilities to SBA program offices.
- ◆ Market the responsibilities of district offices so resource and community partners and small businesses know the expectations they should have in their interactions with the SBA.

Expected Outcomes: By providing additional structure, clear expectations, and boundaries around the district office and district office staff roles, staff will have a better direction on how to spend their time, understand how to distribute tasks among staff, and will more easily be able to prioritize competing demands on their time. These efforts should also result in a reduction in non-relevant requests being made of district office staff, both from SBA program offices and external customers (e.g., resource

Recommendation #1: Clarify the Role of District Offices and District Office Staff Positions

partners). Ultimately, these changes will help district offices better achieve SBA capital, contracting, and outreach goals and result in better customer service.

Resource Estimation: Leadership will need to meet to align on the purpose of district offices and district office staff roles. There will also need to be a change management effort to update and socialize job descriptions and mechanisms to funnel unnecessary tasks elsewhere. Marketing and communication materials to share roles and responsibilities both internally and externally will need to be developed.

Recommendation #2: Develop New and Improve Existing Avenues of Communication, Both Internally and Externally

Summary Statement of Findings: Internally, communication between district offices has been improving, but many remain unaware of efforts and resources created within other offices to strengthen their entrepreneurial ecosystems (e.g., lender visit checklists created by individual district offices). This lack of awareness can lead to duplicated efforts between district offices. Additionally, communication between program offices and district offices can lag, as district offices do not receive program-related information as quickly as they need to serve business owners. Program offices do not want to burden district office staff, who they know are already limited in time and resources, with additional communications. However, the impact is that small businesses may be notified about SBA program updates before district offices. Externally, there is variation in the type and consistency of communications between district offices and resource/community partners and small businesses (e.g., email blasts, social media, statewide resource guides, information on the SBA website). Within offices, reduced staffing has impacted external communications, leaving some resource/community partners wondering if, for example, they were removed from a newsletter distribution list or if the district office stopped producing them.

Recommended Actions:

- ◆ Implement a mechanism (e.g., tool, platform, peer learning circles, lunch and learns) for district offices to communicate with each other; guidance about what should be communicated and when.
- ◆ Create a process for delivering consistent updates from program offices to district offices regarding programs and changes to programs; clear protocols about what should be shared, when, and through what mediums.
- ◆ Clarify and better socialize the role of SBA program liaisons; ensure consistency between programs.
- ◆ Develop a robust learning management system (LMS) for training district office staff to learn about SBA programs.
- ◆ Develop standardized templates and track expectations around district office communications with customers and provide support to do so (e.g., social media, newsletters, email blasts).
- ◆ Coordinate with other SBA offices (e.g., OPCL) to produce streamlined external communications.

Recommendation #2: Develop New and Improve Existing Avenues of Communication, Both Internally and Externally

Expected Outcomes: By improving communication between district offices, staff can share knowledge and best practices. Better communication channels between district offices and program offices will lead to better alignment between the two – district office staff will be more up to date on all SBA program offerings and can better assist customers with their questions. Externally, more targeted communications will also help establish more effective working relationships with resource and community partners.

Resource Estimation: Research into the best internal communication tools and platforms will be needed, along with alignment meetings between OFO and program leadership to determine thresholds for sending communications. Ongoing trainings may be needed to keep district staff informed of program updates. Metrics around internal and external communications can be used to establish goals and expectations around district office outreach to customers.

Recommendation #3: Increase Efficiency within District Offices

Summary Statement of Findings: District offices struggle to manage their workload with limited staffing. Given these staffing limitations, there are opportunities for neighboring district offices to more effectively share resources and expertise (e.g., when one district office has a BOS on staff and a nearby office does not). Technology and automation can also be better harnessed and utilized to reduce the time required to accomplish tasks (e.g., automating when customer service surveys are sent). Finally, applying more standardization between district offices is important because without standardized practices, district offices do not approach tasks consistently across offices, thereby decreasing efficiency.

Recommended Actions:

- ◆ Develop standardized processes and procedures to implement throughout district offices (e.g., templates for site visits and contact lists).
- ◆ Adopt technology-related tools and automation to support efficiency where possible.
- ◆ Invest in professional development trainings that align with intended roles of district office staff.
- ◆ More effectively share resources between neighboring district offices (e.g., specialized staff expertise).
- ◆ Utilize better customer tracking methods.

Expected Outcomes: By developing standardized processes and procedures, district offices can better serve their customers in a timely manner and create additional bandwidth to focus on other impactful duties. Investing in efficiency will also help reduce redundant efforts (e.g., district offices that have already spent the time creating a resource can share that resource with other offices, thereby saving them time). Utilizing better and more automated customer tracking methods will yield higher quality data and has the potential for increased district office impact.

Resource Estimation: This recommendation requires a one-time effort to develop standardized processes and procedures (e.g., templates and process documents). In addition, recurring data entry

Recommendation #3: Increase Efficiency within District Offices

by district office staff will be needed. Data entry and tracking should be designed to be minimally burdensome. Professional development training will be required on an as-needed basis.

Recommendation #4: Develop a Strategic Ecosystem Building Plan at the District Office Level

Summary Statement of Findings: District offices are committed to serving all members of their communities; however, some have challenges identifying and reaching small business owners from underserved communities. There is no strategic plan or guidance to help district offices effectively build an equitable ecosystem. District office staff also noted desiring access to more customer data to better enable them in this effort.

Recommended Actions:

- ◆ Develop strategies to better serve underserved communities. Create and socialize the desired customer journey*, thereby providing district office staff a roadmap they can follow to ensure positive customer experiences, including time built in for follow-up and relationship building.
- ◆ Develop an SBA-wide understanding of “underserved communities”.
- ◆ Provide district offices with customer data, including demographic data. Track and display relevant data in a user-friendly format to easily alert district office staff to contacts/organizations who may need attention.
- ◆ Improve accessibility features of online tools internally (e.g., toolkits; customer tracking information) to assist district offices in more equitably serving their communities.
- ◆ Increase travel budgets so district office staff can attend more in-person events in more rural, less populated areas located further away from district office buildings.

Expected Outcomes: By providing district offices with an equity-focused ecosystem building plan, district office staff will be better equipped to support equitable entrepreneurship in their communities and identify customers who may need more support. These plans should also allow for customization based on the unique characteristics of a district, which will further their effectiveness.

Resource Estimation: One-time effort to create/revise tool accessibility, define terms, and create strategy. Ongoing effort to track and monitor data and meet changing customer needs.

*Note: The customer journey maps provided in Appendices L and M can be used as a starting point to create an ecosystem building plan focused on equitable entrepreneurship.

Recommendation #5: Revise and Implement Strategic Metrics that Are Aligned to District Office Roles and Relevant Strategic Objectives

Summary Statement of Findings: OFO struggles to effectively “tell the story” of their interactions and demonstrate their impact with current metrics. Data collected in GMATT is burdensome to enter, not all data is effectively used (e.g., written-in comments), and results are not displayed in a way that links district office activities to outcomes.

Recommended Actions:

- ◆ Refine existing and develop new metrics.
- ◆ Determine which metrics are feasible to implement in the immediate future and make a timeline for developing the rest.
- ◆ Example metrics include: Tracking the number of times a district office interacts with a lender and, in turn, the number of SBA loans the lender makes.
- ◆ Link metrics measuring activities and outputs to assess impact; visualize these data in dashboards in such a way that allows for easy interpretation and action.

Expected Outcomes: By tracking high-quality, relevant data district offices will be able to better demonstrate their impact and how their efforts contribute to SBA goals and objectives.

Resource Estimation: The resources required will depend on the specific metrics adopted. Some metrics may be easily integrated with the new mySBA platform. Whenever possible, metrics should be automated to reduce the burden placed on district office staff.

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Appendix A: District Office Interview Instrument

1. Let's start by having you share a little more about your experience and role at the SBA.
 - a. What resources or services does your office provide?
 - i. Are there any barriers to providing these resources or services?
2. One of the questions that our evaluation is looking to answer for the SBA is, "How district offices are leveraging resources to strengthen local small business [or entrepreneurial] ecosystems?" Can you first share how you define and understand the term entrepreneurial ecosystem? [If definition needed: "Networks of businesses, organizations, and advocates who strive to help small businesses succeed in an SBA district's geographic area." (USDS, 2023).]
 - a. Can you also tell us more about your district or local ecosystem (e.g., size, location)?
 - i. Who are the key groups, such as small businesses, resource partners, community partners, government agencies or officials, and customers, involved in your local ecosystem? In other words, who do you work with or serve?
 1. What is the process of forming connections or partnerships with these individuals or groups (e.g., who initially reaches out to who)?
 - b. Tell us more about how your office maintains a relationship with these key groups in your local ecosystem and what these relationships look like on a day-to-day basis:
 - i. How often do you communicate and through what means?
 - ii. What do you most regularly communicate about?
 - iii. How do you keep these connections, particularly those from underserved communities, informed about the services and resources offered by the SBA?
 - iv. How do you stay informed about their needs as well as the services and resources they offer to the ecosystem?
 - v. How could relationships with these connections be improved (e.g., in terms of communication or resources provided)?
 - c. [If small businesses weren't directly mentioned in the previous line of questioning] Can you talk more about your relationship with small businesses in your local ecosystem?
 - d. [Probe, if needed] What unique challenges does your district office face in terms of providing resources and services to key groups in your local ecosystem?
 - e. Reflecting on this conversation, what would you say is your district's role in its local small business ecosystem?
 - i. How could its role be strengthened?
 - f. From your perspective, how is your district doing in terms of creating a strong network of businesses, organizations, and advocates in your local area to help small businesses succeed?
 - i. To what extent does your district measure or track the success of its local ecosystem?
 - ii. What other metrics would be helpful to track?

- iii. [If factors related to equity weren't directly mentioned] Can you talk more about your office's efforts to support equity with your local ecosystem?
 - g. What kind of support do you receive from OFO headquarters to support relationships with key small businesses, partners, and customers within your local ecosystem?
 - i. How satisfied are you with the level of support you receive from OFO headquarters?
 - ii. What resources could OFO headquarters provide to better support your office's efforts?
 - h. How do you and your office interact with other SBA program offices?
 - i. What kind of support do you receive from the program offices to be able to promote their products?
 - ii. How satisfied are you with the level of support you receive from other program offices?
 - iii. What resources could other program offices provide to better support your district's efforts?
- 3. Another goal of this evaluation is to look at how district offices are contributing to the SBA's capital access and contracting goals and performance metrics.
 - a. Can you first share with us how familiar you are with the agency's capital and contracting goals?
 - b. How are these goals communicated to your district (e.g., who communicates these goals, in what format are they communicated, are there specific targets your office is expected to hit, etc.)?
 - c. Now we'd like to dive deeper into each of these goals and how your office contributes to them. Let's start with the SBA's capital access goals. The main objective of this goal is to **"Ensure that all entrepreneurs have access to capital to start and grow their business."** *(Paste into chat)*
 - i. How is your office working towards this capital access goal?
 - 1. To what extent does your office measure or track progress towards capital access goals?
 - 2. Are there any barriers to measuring or tracking these contributions?
 - d. Now think about the SBA's contracting goals. The main objective of this goal is to **"Build back an inclusive and proficient small business contracting base ready to compete for all federal procurement opportunities."** *(Paste into chat)*
 - i. How is your district working towards this contracting goal?
 - 1. To what extent does your district measure or track progress towards contracting goals?
 - 2. Are there any barriers to measuring or tracking these contributions?
- 4. Do you engage in any special outreach efforts to better understand the needs in underserved communities?
 - a. What tools are available to identify and connect with underserved communities?

- i. How do you leverage these tools to connect with underserved communities and better serve their needs?
- 5. Are there any other ways your district works with small businesses, resource partners, community partners, government officials, etc. that we haven't touched on?
 - a. [If applicable] To what extent does your district measure or track these interactions?
- 6. Is there anything else you think we missed or that you would like us to know about your district office's work?

Appendix B: District Office Survey Instrument and Data Summary

District Office Survey Item-Level Distributions

Table B.1

*The below table displays distributions for non-Likert-type items. Questions with instructions to “select all that apply” only display the number of responses, not percentages.

District Office Leadership Survey	
What is your current role?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional Administrator: 6% (n = 4) Office leadership including Associate Administrator, Deputy Associate Administrator, District Director, Deputy District Director: 77% (n = 55) Director, Branch Manager, or other Program Supervisory role: 17% (n = 12) Supervisory Business Opportunity Specialist (SBOS) : 0% (n = 0) Supervisory Lender Relations Specialist (SLRS) : 0% (n = 0) Supervisory Economic Development Specialist (SEDS) : 0% (n = 0) Lead Business Opportunity Specialist (LBOS), Business Opportunity Specialist (BOS), or Business Development Specialist (BDS) : 0% (n = 0) Lead Lender Relations Specialist (LLRS) or Lender Relations Specialist (LRS) : 0% (n = 0) Lead Economic Development Specialist (LEDS), Economic Development Specialist (EDS), or Outreach and Marketing Specialist (OMS) : 0% (n = 0) Senior Area Manager (SAM) : 0% (n = 0) Other: 0% (n = 0)
What is your current GS level?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GS-14: 41% (n = 29) GS-15: 54% (n = 38) SES/SL: 0% (n = 0) Other (please specify): 1% (n = 1) Prefer not to respond: 3% (n = 2)
In which region do you currently work?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Region 1 (CT, MA, ME, NH, RI, VT): 7% (n = 5) Region 2 (NJ, NY, PR, USVI): 12% (n = 8) Region 3 (DC, DE, MD, PA, VA, WV): 12% (n = 8) Region 4 (AL, FL, KY, GA, MS, NC, SC, TN): 13% (n = 9)

District Office Leadership Survey	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Region 5 (IL, IN, MI, MN, OH, WI): 9% (n = 6) Region 6 (AR, LA, NM, OK, TX): 9% (n = 6) Region 7 (IA, KS, MO, NE): 10% (n = 7) Region 8 (CO, MT, ND, SD, UT, WY): 9% (n = 6) Region 9 (AZ, CA, GU, HI, NV): 13% (n = 9) Region 10 (AK, ID, OR, WA): 6% (n = 4)
What is the approximate size of your district?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small (population under 2 million): 23% (n = 15) Medium (population 2-10 million): 58% (n = 38) Large (population over 10 million): 17% (n = 11) I'm not sure: 3% (n = 2)
How would you describe the location of your district?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Urban: 18% (n = 12) Rural: 20% (n = 13) Mixed Urban/Rural: 61% (n = 40) I'm not sure: 2% (n = 1)
How would you describe the diversity of sectors (e.g. tech, retail, food and hospitality, manufacturing, agriculture, etc.) among the local small businesses that you and your resource/community partners currently serve?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited diversity, concentrated in specific sectors: 3% (n = 2) Moderately diverse with some representation across multiple sectors: 36% (n = 24) Very diverse, spanning various sectors: 61% (n = 40)
How would you characterize the diversity among the local small businesses that you and your resource/community partners work with in terms of age, race, gender, and other relevant demographics?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited diversity, concentrated in certain age, race, gender groups, etc.: 12% (n = 8) Moderately diverse with some representation across age, race, gender, etc.: 48% (n = 32) Very diverse across age, race, gender, etc.: 40% (n = 27)
Please select up to three of the following groups with whom your office would benefit from working with more frequently.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SBDCs: (n = 8) SCORE: (n = 4) VBOCs: (n = 4) WBCs: (n = 4) Community navigator hubs and spokes: (n = 4) SBA lenders including CDFIs/CFIs/CDCs: (n = 8) APEX Accelerators: (n = 15) Local non-profits/social service organizations: (n = 10)

District Office Leadership Survey	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic development organizations: (n = 23) • Incubators/growth accelerators: (n = 17) • HBCUs: (n = 2) • MSIs: (n = 2) • Educational institutions: (n = 16) • Faith-based organizations: (n = 12) • Community centers: (n = 2) • Other SBA programs, offices, and functions (e.g., OCA, OII, ODA, OIT, ODR&R, GCBD, Procurement Center Representatives, Commercial Market Representatives): (n = 10) • Other local, state, or federal government agencies or officials: (n = 24) • Local news networks or other media agencies: (n = 25) • Local small businesses in the district: (n = 3) • Other, please specify:
Please select up to three of the following groups with whom your office has the strongest working relationship.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SBDCs: (n = 60) • SCORE: (n = 25) • VBOCs: (n = 11) • WBCs: (n = 30) • Community navigator hubs and spokes: (n = 3) • SBA lenders including CDFIs/CFIs/CDCs: (n = 32) • APEX Accelerators: (n = 10) • Local non-profits/social service organizations: (n = 2) • Economic development organizations: (n = 7) • Incubators/growth accelerators: (n = 2) • HBCUs: 0% (n = 0) • MSIs: 0% (n = 0) • Educational institutions: (n = 1) • Faith-based organizations: 0% (n = 0) • Community centers: (n = 1) • Other SBA programs, offices, and functions (e.g., OCA, OII, ODA, OIT, ODR&R, GCBD, Procurement Center Representatives, Commercial Market Representatives): (n = 2)

District Office Leadership Survey	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Other local, state, or federal government agencies or officials: (n = 5)• Local news networks or other media agencies: 0% (n = 0)• Local small businesses in the district: (n = 4)• Other, please specify: 0% (n = 0)

District Office Survey Item-Level Means

Table B.2

*Means calculated excluding missing data and "I don't know"/"Not applicable"

Survey Item	Response Options	Mean	Standard Deviation	Sample Size
How long have you worked in your current role (in years)?	0 = Less than 1 year 1 = 1 year 2 = 2 years	4.91	5.51	66
How long have you worked for the SBA (in years)?	... 25 = 25 or more years	11.57	8.51	66
How frequently does your office work with SBA-funded resource partners to support their efforts to provide small businesses with access to...capital?		4.51	0.77	67
How frequently does your office work with SBA-funded resource partners to support their efforts to provide small businesses with access to...contracting?	1 = Never 2 = Rarely 3 = Sometimes 4 = Often 5 = Very frequently 6 = I don't know	4.15	0.87	67
How frequently does your office work with SBA-funded resource partners to support their efforts to provide small businesses with access to...counseling and training?		4.67	0.66	67
How frequently does your office work with community partners and stakeholders to support their efforts to provide small businesses with access to...capital?		4.64	0.6	67
How frequently does your office work with community partners and stakeholders to support their efforts to provide small businesses with access to...contracting?	1 = Never 2 = Rarely 3 = Sometimes 4 = Often 5 = Very frequently 6 = I don't know	4.27	0.83	67

Survey Item	Response Options	Mean	Standard Deviation	Sample Size
How frequently does your office work with community partners and stakeholders to support their efforts to provide small businesses with access to...counseling and training?		4.39	0.7	67
How frequently does your office work with other SBA offices, programs, and functions to support their efforts to provide small businesses with access to...capital?		3.87	0.98	67
How frequently does your office work with other SBA offices, programs, and functions to support their efforts to provide small businesses with access to...contracting?	1 = Never 2 = Rarely 3 = Sometimes 4 = Often 5 = Very frequently 6 = I don't know	3.75	0.97	67
How frequently does your office work with other SBA offices, programs, and functions to support their efforts to provide small businesses with access to...counseling and training?		3.45	1.04	66
How frequently does your office work with...other local, state, or federal government agencies or officials with stated interest in small business development and support?		4.29	0.78	66
How frequently does your office work with...local news networks or other media agencies?	1 = Never 2 = Rarely 3 = Sometimes 4 = Often	3.38	0.95	65
How frequently does your office work with...local small businesses in your district?	5 = Very frequently 6 = I don't know	4.66	0.57	67
How frequently does your office work with...local small businesses from underserved communities in your district?		4.56	0.61	66
My office is important to the success of...its SBA-funded resource partners (e.g., SBDCs, SCORE, VBOCs, WBCs).	1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree	4.61	0.66	64
My office is important to the success of...its community partners and other stakeholders.	3 = Neither disagree nor agree 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly agree	4.5	0.69	64
My office is important to the success of...other SBA programs, offices, and functions.	6 = Not applicable	4.56	0.67	63

Survey Item	Response Options	Mean	Standard Deviation	Sample Size
My office is important to the success of...other local, state, or federal government agencies or officials with stated interest in small business development and support.	1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neither disagree nor agree 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly agree 6 = Not applicable	4.14	0.73	64
My office is important to the success of...local small businesses in its district.		4.65	0.51	63
My office is important to the success of...local small businesses from underserved communities in its district.		4.67	0.54	63
My office has a strong understanding of the needs of...its SBA-funded resource partners (e.g., SBDCs, SCORE, VBOCs, WBCs).		4.67	0.56	64
My office has a strong understanding of the needs of...its community partners and other stakeholders.		4.33	0.64	64
My office has a strong understanding of the needs of...other SBA programs, offices, and functions.	1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neither disagree nor agree 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly agree 6 = Not applicable	4.12	0.81	64
My office has a strong understanding of the needs of...other local, state, or federal government agencies or officials with stated interest in small business development and support.		4.08	0.8	64
My office has a strong understanding of the needs of...local small businesses in its district.		4.5	0.64	64
My office has a strong understanding of the needs of...local small businesses from underserved communities in its district.		4.45	0.69	64
The resources and programs that my office provides meet the needs of...its SBA-funded resource partners (e.g., SBDCs, SCORE, VBOCs, WBCs).	1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neither disagree nor agree 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly agree 6 = Not applicable	4.25	0.82	64
The resources and programs that my office provides meet the needs of...its community partners and other stakeholders.		3.94	0.87	64

Survey Item	Response Options	Mean	Standard Deviation	Sample Size
The resources and programs that my office provides meet the needs of...other SBA programs, offices, and functions.		4	0.93	64
The resources and programs that my office provides meet the needs of...other local, state, or federal government agencies or officials with stated interest in small business development and support.	1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neither disagree nor agree 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly agree 6 = Not applicable	3.8	0.88	64
The resources and programs that my office provides meet the needs of...local small businesses in its district.		3.98	0.9	64
The resources and programs that my office provides meet the needs of...local small businesses from underserved communities in its district.		3.86	0.94	64
My office does a good job staying informed about the programs and services that are offered to local small businesses by...its SBA-funded resource partners (e.g., SBDCs, SCORE, VBOCs, WBCs).		4.64	0.68	64
My office does a good job staying informed about the programs and services that are offered to local small businesses by...its community partners and other stakeholders.	1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neither disagree nor agree 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly agree 6 = Not applicable	4.41	0.66	64
My office does a good job staying informed about the programs and services that are offered to local small businesses by...other SBA programs, offices, and functions.		4.42	0.69	64
My office does a good job staying informed about the programs and services that are offered to local small businesses by...other local, state, or federal government agencies or officials with stated interest in small business development and support.		4.09	0.71	64

Survey Item	Response Options	Mean	Standard Deviation	Sample Size
In the past year, my office has been successful in...forming new relationships with SBA-funded resource partners, community partners, and other stakeholders in its district.	1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neither disagree nor agree 4 = Agree	4.41	0.78	63
In the past year, my office has been successful in...strengthening existing relationships with SBA-funded resource partners, community partners, and other stakeholders in its district.	5 = Strongly agree 6 = Not applicable	4.66	0.6	64
My office has created a strong network of businesses, organizations, and advocates who help local small businesses succeed in our district.	1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree	4.48	0.69	64
My office is responsive to the evolving needs of the local entrepreneurial community.	3 = Neither disagree nor agree 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly agree 6 = Not applicable	4.19	0.87	64
There are high levels of local community engagement in events that my office and its SBA-funded resource partners, community partners, and other stakeholders coordinate.		4.41	0.83	64
My office is effective in increasing the awareness of SBA programs and services related to capital access for...its SBA-funded resource partners (e.g., SBDCs, SCORE, VBOCs, WBCs).	1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree	4.61	0.58	64
My office is effective in increasing the awareness of SBA programs and services related to capital access for...its community partners and other stakeholders.	3 = Neither disagree nor agree 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly agree 6 = Not applicable	4.51	0.56	63
My office is effective in increasing the awareness of SBA programs and services related to capital access for...other SBA programs, offices, and functions.		3.95	0.78	59

Survey Item	Response Options	Mean	Standard Deviation	Sample Size
My office is effective in increasing the awareness of SBA programs and services related to capital access for...other local, state, or federal government agencies or officials with stated interest in small business development and support.	1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neither disagree nor agree 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly agree 6 = Not applicable	4.16	0.72	64
My office is effective in increasing the awareness of SBA programs and services related to capital access for...local small businesses in its district.		4.41	0.73	64
My office is effective in increasing the awareness of SBA programs and services related to capital access for...local small businesses from underserved communities in its district.		4.33	0.78	64
My office is effective in increasing the awareness of SBA programs and services related to contracting for...its SBA-funded resource partners (e.g., SBDCs, SCORE, VBOCs, WBCs).		4.33	0.8	64
My office is effective in increasing the awareness of SBA programs and services related to contracting for...its community partners and other stakeholders.		4.05	0.9	64
My office is effective in increasing the awareness of SBA programs and services related to contracting for...other SBA programs, offices, and functions.		3.88	0.83	57
My office is effective in increasing the awareness of SBA programs and services related to contracting for...other local, state, or federal government agencies or officials with stated interest in small business development and support.	6 = Not applicable	3.98	0.79	64
My office is effective in increasing the awareness of SBA programs and services related to contracting for...local small businesses in its district.		4.05	0.93	64

Survey Item	Response Options	Mean	Standard Deviation	Sample Size
My office is effective in increasing the awareness of SBA programs and services related to contracting for...local small businesses from underserved communities in its district.		3.97	0.98	64
The resources and programs that my office provides support to the SBA in meeting its goals related to...capital access (i.e., ensuring that all entrepreneurs have access to capital to start and grow their business).	1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neither disagree nor agree 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly agree 6 = I don't know	4.64	0.63	64
The resources and programs that my office provides support to the SBA in meeting its goals related to...small business contracting (i.e., helping build back an inclusive and proficient small business contracting base ready to compete for federal procurement opportunities).		4.39	0.79	64
My office has processes to accurately track and measure its contributions to the SBA's capital access goals (i.e., ensuring that all entrepreneurs have access to capital to start and grow their business).	1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neither disagree nor agree 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly agree 6 = I don't know	3.63	1.15	63
My office has processes to accurately track and measure its contributions to the SBA's small business contracting goals (i.e., helping build back an inclusive and proficient small business contracting base ready to compete for federal procurement opportunities).		3.39	0.97	61
My office receives the support it needs from other SBA program offices to be able to promote their programs and services.	1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neither disagree nor agree 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly agree 6 = Not applicable	3.31	0.93	62
OFO headquarters provides my office with support to meet the needs of local small businesses.		3.51	0.9	63
My office reaches out to OFO headquarters for support when needed.		4.10	0.8	63

Appendix C: SBA Capital and Contracting Focus Group Instrument

1. Let's start by having you share a little more about your role and the program you support at the SBA.
 - a. What types of [access to capital/contracting] services does your office or program provide?
 - b. How (if at all) does your office or program also support [access to capital/contracting] for small businesses?
2. Who would you say is your office or program's primary [capital/contracting] "customer". In other words, who do you primarily serve?
 - a. Can you talk more about your office or program's process to serve these customers?
 - i. How do these customers connect with your office or program? How often? Has this changed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?
 - ii. Who do you work with to be able to serve these customers (e.g., other SBA offices, SBA-funded resource partners, community partners, other stakeholders)?
 - iii. What would a successful connection with a customer look like for your office or program?
 - iv. What happens after a successful connection has been made with the customer? Is the customer referred to a lender, resource partner, other external stakeholder, or another program or office within the SBA?
 1. How long do relationships with customers typically last?
3. Now we would like to talk more specifically about your understanding of the role of district offices and your office or program's relationship them. First, what is your understanding of what district office staff do on a daily basis?
 - a. What does this relationship look like on a day-to-day basis?
 - i. How is contact typically initiated?
 - ii. How often do you communicate and through what means?
 - iii. What do you most regularly communicate about?
 - iv. How do communications differ between different district offices (e.g., by size, location)?
 - v. How do you communicate about changes and change management with district offices.
 - b. How does your office or program keep district offices informed about the programs and services it provides?
 - c. How do district offices keep you informed about feedback from resources/community partners, lenders, and small businesses?
 - i. How would you like district offices to keep you informed about feedback from resource/community partners, lenders, and small businesses?

4. From your perspective, how are district offices doing in terms of creating a strong network of businesses, organizations, and advocates in their local areas to help small businesses obtain the [capital/contracting opportunities] they need to succeed?
 - a. What are they doing well?
 - b. What could they be doing differently to strengthen these local networks and help more small businesses obtain the [capital/contracting opportunities] they need to succeed?

5. We'd like to also learn more about how your office or program works with district offices to meet the SBA's goals.
 - a. The main objective of the [capital access goal is to, "**Ensure that all entrepreneurs have access to capital to start and grow their business.**" (Paste into chat)/ The main objective of the contracting goal is to, "**Build back an inclusive and proficient small business contracting base ready to compete for all federal procurement opportunities.**" (Paste into chat).] How familiar do you think district offices are with this goal? Is there any lack of alignment?
 - b. How does your office or program work with district offices to meet the SBA's goals specific to [capital access/contracting]?
 - c. To what extent does your office or program track contributions to the SBA's goals specific to [capital access/contracting]?
 - i. To what extent does your office or program capture contributions from district offices specific to these goals?
 - ii. What data or metrics do you feel would be most important to capture in order to demonstrate how district offices are contributing to broader SBA goals?
 - iii. How would you go about capturing those desired data or metrics?
 - iv. To what extent can these data or metrics be shared back to district offices? What are the largest barriers to tracking and sharing data back with district offices?
 - v. Do you know of any data that may be collected by district offices that would be helpful for your office to access?
 - d. Can you provide an example of a successful interaction or collaboration with a district office that lent to your office or program's ability to meet a goal?
 - e. What support do you provide DOs to facilitate their ability to promote your office or program's programmatic goals?
 - i. What resources could your office or program provide DOs to better support their efforts to promote your products?
 - f. How can communication and coordination with the field be improved to better attain these goals?

6. Is there anything else you think we missed or that you would like us to know?

Appendix D: Measurement Focus Group Instrument

1. *[Skip this question if facilitator is already familiar with all participants in a given group.]*
Let's start by having you share a little more about your experience and role at the SBA.

2. One goal of this evaluation is to look at how district offices contribute to the SBA's broader goals and performance metrics.
 - a. How do district offices directly or indirectly help meet the SBA's contracting goals, specifically, **"Build back an inclusive and proficient small business contracting base ready to compete for all federal procurement opportunities"**? (Paste into chat)
 - i. To what extent are district office contributions to contracting goals currently measured or tracked?
 - ii. How are these performance metrics established?
 - iii. Do you have ideas about how to better measure or track district office contributions to contracting goals?
 1. What barriers, if any, are there to doing so?
 - b. How do district offices directly or indirectly help meet the SBA's capital access goals, specifically **"Ensure that all entrepreneurs have access to capital to start and grow their business"**? (Paste into chat)
 - i. To what extent are district office contributions to capital access goals currently measured or tracked?
 - ii. How are these organizational performance metrics established?
 - iii. How does the field distinguish which activities specifically support the capital goal?
 - iv. Do you have ideas about how to better measure or track district office contributions to capital access goals?
 1. What barriers, if any, are there to doing so?
 - c. Are there other ways district offices contribute to the SBA that aren't part of the SBA's current goals and performance metrics?
 - i. Do you have any ideas for how these contributions could be tracked and shared with others at the SBA?

3. What has been your experience so far with the systems used to gather and track metrics (e.g., GMATT, the new mySBA platform)?
 - a. We know mySBA hasn't launched yet, are there any other platforms or methods outside of GMATT currently used to track OFO metrics?
 - b. How and by whom is data entered and tracked in these systems?
 - c. How well do you think the systems capture the impact or results and impact of the work OFO does?
 - d. What specific business outcomes would you like to be able to track?
 - i. Probe: Impacts specific to capital, contracting, and 8(a).
 - e. What new insights do you hope to be able to learn through the data generated by the new mySBA platform?
 - i. What aspects or elements of GMATT would be helpful to incorporate into the mySBA platform?

- f. What other metrics would you need in order to understand how district offices can drive more assistance and resources to small businesses?
 - g. What currently are the biggest barriers to capturing needed metrics?
- 4. We know that each time a customer—whether it is an SBA-funded resource partner, community partner, or a small business—interacts with a district office, there are several steps in the lifecycle of this working relationship, from the first interaction to the final interaction. Considering this lifecycle related to how customers interact with district offices:
 - a. Is there a part of the customer relationship that is being captured particularly well in current measures and tracking tools?
 - b. Is there a part of the lifecycle that isn't being captured well or could use improvement?
 - i. What are the barriers to being able to capture this additional data?
 - c. We know OFO also focuses on equity in each district office's entrepreneurial ecosystem. How does equity play into current measures and tools? Do you have any ideas for how equity could be better integrated or captured?
- 5. How are data from district offices reported and shared throughout OFO and the wider SBA (e.g., dashboards, written reports)?
 - a. To what extent do you think the communication tools you described are effective in sharing OFO's contributions?
 - b. How could the visualization and reporting of data be made more effective?
 - c. How are data from district offices currently shared with other SBA program offices?
 - i. In what other ways could data from district offices be shared with other SBA program offices?
- 6. Is there anything else you think we missed or that you would like us to know?

Appendix E: External Resource and Community Partner Focus Group Instrument

In compliance with the Paperwork Reduction Act, OMB approval using the *SBA Generic Clearance for Formative Data Collections for Evaluation, Research, and Evidence-Building (OMB 3245-0425)* was received and can be viewed at: <https://omb.report/omb/3245-0425>

External Resource and Community Partner Focus Group Instrument

1. Let's start by having you share a little bit about your organization, its goals, and your role.
 - a. How do you serve small businesses?
 - i. What type of resources or support do you provide small businesses? (e.g., capital, contracting, development, etc.)
2. Can you walk us through your organization's history with the SBA and your local SBA district office, to the extent that you know?
 - a. When did your organization start working with [the SBA?
 - b. Why was your organization initially interested in working with the SBA?
 - i. What resources or support was your organization looking to gain and/or provide?
 - c. What was the process of forming a relationship with the SBA?
 - i. Who did you initially connect with at the SBA? (e.g., a person, program, office, etc.)
 1. How did you get connected with them? Did someone connect you?
 2. Has your main point of contact at the SBA changed over time?
 - ii. What barriers or bottlenecks, if any, were experienced in the process of forming a relationship with the SBA?
3. Let's talk a bit more about your relationship with your local SBA district office.
 - a. What does this relationship look like on a day-to-day basis?
 - i. How is contact generally initiated? (e.g., does someone from the SBA typically reach out to you or do you typically reach out to them?)
 - ii. How often do you communicate and through what means?
 - iii. What do you regularly communicate about?
 - iv. How has your relationship with your local SBA district office grown or changed over time?
 - v. What difficulties has your organization experienced, if any, in terms of connecting with your local SBA district office?
 - b. What resources or support has your local district office provided your organization since starting to work with them?
 - i. What do you most need from the SBA in terms of support or resources?
 - ii. Are there any examples of particularly impactful support or resources they have provided you?
 - iii. How does your local SBA district office keep you updated about the services and resources the SBA offers?

- c. What barriers or bottlenecks, if any, has your organization experienced in the process of working with your local SBA district office to receive resources or support?
- 4. What changes have you noticed as a result of working with your local SBA district office?
 - a. How have your needs changed over time? How has the SBA been able to support any change in needs?
 - b. How has this relationship directly or indirectly impacted the services and support you provide?
 - c. How does your organization track or measure its impact on small businesses or others you support?
 - d. To what extent does your organization track or measure how the SBA contributes to your organization's efforts? Is there anything in particular that could be measured or tracked?
- 5. From your perspective, how is your local SBA district office doing in terms of creating a strong network of businesses, organizations, and advocates in your local area to help small businesses succeed?
 - a. What are they doing well?
 - b. What could they be doing differently to strengthen this local network?
- 6. To what extent does your local SBA district office help your organization connect with other organizations and advocates for small businesses within your community?
 - a. How do you stay informed about small business resource needs?
- 7. In general, how well is your local SBA district office able to meet your needs?
 - a. Is there anything about your organization's current relationship or the process of forming a relationship with the SBA that you wish was different?
 - b. If you or your organization started working with the SBA prior to COVID-19, how has the pandemic changed your experience or relationship with the SBA?
- 8. Is there anything else you think we missed or that you would like us to know?

Appendix F: External Resource and Community Partner Survey Instrument and Data Summary

In compliance with the Paperwork Reduction Act, OMB approval using the *SBA Generic Clearance for Formative Data Collections for Evaluation, Research, and Evidence-Building (OMB 3245-0425)* was received and can be viewed at: <https://omb.report/omb/3245-0425>

External Resource and Community Partner Survey Item-Level Distributions

Table F.3

*The below table displays distributions for non-Likert-type items. Questions with instructions to “select all that apply” only display the number of responses, not percentages.

Resource and Community Partner Survey	
Which of the following describes your organization or the type of work you do with the SBA? Please select all that apply.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My organization provides small businesses with support and resources to access capital services: (n = 413) • My organization provides small businesses with support and resources to access contracting services: (n = 216)
Which program do you work for? (Select all that apply)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small Business Development Centers (SBDC): (n = 90) • Women's Business Centers (WBC): (n = 34) • Veterans Business Outreach Centers (VBOC): (n = 17) • SCORE: (n = 47) • Community Navigator: (n = 17) • APEX Accelerator: (n = 35) • Small Business Investment Company (SBIC): (n = 2) • Lending Institution: (n = 100) • Faith-Based Institution: (n = 0) • Educational Institution: (n = 21) • Non-Profit/Service Organization: (n = 113) • Community center: (n = 2) • Other, please specify: (n = 108)
Which SBA programs does your organization support? (Select all that apply)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7(a) Loan Program: (n = 236) • 504 Loan Program: (n = 224) • Microloan Program: (n = 185)

Resource and Community Partner Survey	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surety Bonds: (n = 41) • Program for Investment in Micro-Entrepreneurs (PRIME): (n = 46) • Export Loans: (n = 75) • Disaster Assistance Loans: (n = 95) • 8(a) Business Development: (n = 118) • Historically Underutilized Business Zone (HUBZone): (n = 130) • Women-Owned Small Business (WOSB) Certification: (n = 159) • Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business (SDVOSB) Certification: (n = 123) • 7(j) Training and Technical Assistance: (n = 50) • Size Standards: (n = 49) • Native American Outreach: (n = 58) • Growth Accelerator Fund: (n = 28) • Emerging Leaders: (n = 73) • All Small Mentor-Protégé Program: (n = 65) • State Trade Expansion Program (STEP): (n = 55) • Boots to Business (B2B) & Reboot: (n = 109) • Federal and State Technology (FAST) Partnership Program: (n = 40) • Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR): (n = 122) • Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR): (n = 103) • Other, please specify: (n = 79)
Does your organization receive funding directly from the SBA?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No: 54% (n = 233) • Yes: 41% (n = 179) • I don't know: 5% (n = 20)
How did you or your organization first learn about working with the SBA?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From another organization already working with the SBA: 17% (n = 74) • From the SBA website: 0% (n = 2) • From a media advertisement (e.g., email, flyer, radio): 0% (n = 0) • By attending a community event: 2% (n = 9) • Directly contacted by the SBA: 13% (n = 54) • By reaching out and contacting my local SBA district office: 10% (n = 44) • Other, please specify: 26% (n = 111) • Not applicable: 9% (n = 37) • I don't know: 23% (n = 98)

Resource and Community Partner Survey	
Considering your needs right now, how would you prefer to learn about services and resources offered by the SBA to small business owners? (Select all that apply)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email: (n = 370) • Phone: (n = 39) • Virtual meetings: (n = 228) • In-person meetings: (n = 203) • SBA website: (n = 212) • Other, please specify: (n = 26)
What was the reason(s) your organization was motivated to work with the SBA? (Select all that apply)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To grow our customer base: (n = 104) • To increase revenue: (n = 71) • To help small businesses: (n = 343) • To provide more equitable access to capital and/or contracting services for small businesses: (n = 224) • Other, please specify: (n = 53) • I don't know: (n = 33)
How long has your organization worked with the SBA?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less than 6 months: 1% (n = 6) • 6 months to less than 1 year: 1% (n = 6) • 1 year to less than 2 years: 1% (n = 5) • 2 years to less than 5 years: 6% (n = 27) • 5 years to less than 10 years: 8% (n = 34) • 10 or more years: 75% (n = 317) • I don't know: 7% (n = 30)
From the time of first contact with the SBA, how long did it take for your organization to start working with the SBA?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less than 1 month: 22% (n = 94) • 1 month to less than 3 months: 6% (n = 24) • 3 months to less than 6 months: 5% (n = 19) • 6 months to less than 1 year: 5% (n = 21) • 1 year or more: 2% (n = 9) • I don't know: 60% (n = 255)
Which of the following was your organization's first point of contact at the SBA? (*for those who responded that they only work with capital)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local District Office: 58% (n = 131) • Office of Capital Access (e.g., Office of Financial Program, Office of Performance Systems Management, Office of Financial Assistance, Office of Credit Risk Management, Office of Surety Guarantees): 1% (n = 2) • Office of International Trade: 0% (n = 1) • Office of Investment and Innovation: 0% (n = 1)

Resource and Community Partner Survey	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Office of Disaster Recovery and Resilience (formerly, Office of Disaster Assistance): 0% (n = 1) Other SBA program office, please specify: 3% (n = 6) I don't know: 37% (n = 83)
Which of the following was your organization's first point of contact at the SBA? <i>(*for those who responded that they only work with contracting)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local District Office: 78% (n = 32) Office of Government Contracting and Business Development (e.g., Office of Government Contracting, Office of Business Development (8(a)), Office of HUBZone Program, Office of Women's Business Ownership, Veteran Small Business Certification Program): 2% (n = 1) Other SBA program office, please specify: 5% (n = 2) I don't know: 15% (n = 6)
Which of the following was your organization's first point of contact at the SBA? <i>(*for those who responded that they work with both capital and contracting)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local District Office: 55% (n = 85) Office of Capital Access (e.g., Office of Financial Program, Office of Performance Systems Management, Office of Financial Assistance, Office of Credit Risk Management, Office of Surety Guarantees): 0% (n = 0) Office of Government Contracting and Business Development (e.g., Office of Government Contracting, Office of Business Development (8(a)), Office of HUBZone Program, Office of Women's Business Ownership, Veteran Small Business Certification Program): 3% (n = 5) Office of International Trade: 0% (n = 0) Office of Investment and Innovation: 1% (n = 1) Office of Disaster Recovery and Resilience (formerly, Office of Disaster Assistance): 0% (n = 0) Other SBA program office, please specify: 13% (n = 20) I don't know: 28% (n = 44)
SBA district offices are broken into regions based on the state they serve. Please select your organization's region/state from the following list.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Region 1 (CT, MA, ME, NH, RI, VT): 8% (n = 33) Region 2 (NJ, NY, PR, USVI): 4% (n = 18) Region 3 (DC, DE, MD, PA, VA, WV): 10% (n = 41) Region 4 (AL, FL, KY, GA, MS, NC, SC, TN): 12% (n = 51) Region 5 (IL, IN, MI, MN, OH, WI): 16% (n = 69) Region 6 (AR, LA, NM, OK, TX): 12% (n = 51) Region 7 (IA, KS, MO, NE): 13% (n = 56)

Resource and Community Partner Survey	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Region 8 (CO, MT, ND, SD, UT, WY): 9% (n = 37) • Region 9 (AZ, CA, GU, HI, NV): 9% (n = 40) • Region 10 (AK, ID, OR, WA): 6% (n = 26)
Does your organization track any metrics (e.g., number of loans issues, number of successful contract proposals) related to helping small businesses that could be shared with the SBA?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No: 43% (n = 178) • Yes: 57% (n = 232)

External Resource and Community Partner Survey Item-Level Means

Table F.4

*Means calculated excluding missing data and “I don’t know”/“Not applicable”

Survey Item	Response Options	Mean	Standard Deviation	Sample Size
Please indicate what percent of time your organization devotes to providing support to access capital services (*for organizations who indicated they work with both capital and contracting)		41.69	25.20	169
Please indicate what percent of time your organization devotes to providing support to access contracting services (*for organizations who indicated they work with both capital and contracting)		25.40	21.78	168
Please indicate what percent of time your organization devotes to administrative duties and all other tasks (*for organizations who indicated they work with both capital and contracting)	Scrolling percent bar: 0 – 100%	41.19	26.85	167
Please indicate what percent of time your organization devotes to providing support to access capital services (*for organizations who indicated they only work with capital)		57.50	28.06	242
Please indicate what percent of time your organization devotes to administrative duties and all other tasks (*for organizations who indicated they only work with capital)		38.44	26.09	241

Survey Item	Response Options	Mean	Standard Deviation	Sample Size
Please indicate what percent of time your organization devotes to providing support to access contracting services (*for organizations who indicated they only work with contracting)	Scrolling percent bar: 0 – 100%	63.11	28.83	45
Please indicate what percent of time your organization devotes to administrative duties and all other tasks (*for organizations who indicated they only work with contracting)		41.70	26.81	43
How long have you worked for your current organization?	0 = Less than 1 year 1 = 1 year 2 = 2 years ... 25 = 25 or more years	9.79	7.19	433
How complex was the process of beginning to work with the SBA?	1 = Extremely complex 2 = Somewhat complex 3 = Neither complex nor simple 4 = Somewhat simple 5 = Extremely simple 6 = I don't know	3.42	1.31	237
How frequently does your organization interact with your local SBA district office?	1 = Never 2 = Rarely 3 = Sometimes 4 = Often 5 = Very frequently 6 = I don't know	3.99	0.86	422

Survey Item	Response Options	Mean	Standard Deviation	Sample Size
How has your organization's frequency of contact with your local SBA district office changed over time?	1 = Interactions have become significantly less frequent over time. 2 = Interactions have become somewhat less frequent over time. 3 = The amount of interaction has remained similar over time. 4 = Interactions have become somewhat more frequent over time. 5 = Interactions have become significantly more frequent over time. 6 = I don't know.	3.33	0.99	404
How frequently do you personally use each of the following methods to communicate with your local SBA district office? (Email)		4.14	0.82	420
How frequently do you personally use each of the following methods to communicate with your local SBA district office? (Phone)	1 = Never 2 = Rarely 3 = Sometimes	3.02	1.03	412
How frequently do you personally use each of the following methods to communicate with your local SBA district office? (Virtual Meetings)	4 = Often 5 = Very frequently	3.08	1.08	413
How frequently do you personally use each of the following methods to communicate with your local SBA district office? (In-person Meetings)		2.92	0.93	414

Survey Item	Response Options	Mean	Standard Deviation	Sample Size
How easy is it to get in touch with someone from your local SBA district office when needed?	1 = Very difficult 2 = Somewhat difficult 3 = Neither difficult nor easy 4 = Somewhat easy 5 = Very easy 6 = I don't directly contact my local SBA district office.	4.59	0.80	417
How helpful was the formal training that you received from your local SBA district office?	1 = Not at all helpful 2 = Somewhat unhelpful 3 = Neither unhelpful nor helpful 4 = Somewhat helpful 5 = Very helpful 6 = I do not recall.	4.73	0.59	215
How helpful was the informal training that you received from your local SBA district office?	6 = I do not recall. 7 = Training was offered but I did not attend.	4.68	0.61	344
How satisfied are you with the amount of collaboration between your organization and your local SBA district office?	1 = Very dissatisfied 2 = Somewhat dissatisfied 3 = Neither dissatisfied nor satisfied 4 = Somewhat satisfied 5 = Very satisfied	4.37	1.01	421
How frequently does your organization interact with SBA program offices?	1 = Never 2 = Rarely 3 = Sometimes 4 = Often 5 = Very frequently 6 = I don't know	2.84	1.09	381

Survey Item	Response Options	Mean	Standard Deviation	Sample Size
How has your organization's frequency of contact with SBA program offices changed over time?	1 = Interactions have become significantly less frequent over time. 2 = Interactions have become somewhat less frequent over time. 3 = The amount of interaction has remained similar over time. 4 = Interactions have become somewhat more frequent over time. 5 = Interactions have become significantly more frequent over time. 6 = I don't know.	3.31	0.84	211
How frequently do you personally use each of the following methods to communicate with SBA program offices? (Email)		3.98	0.86	226
How frequently do you personally use each of the following methods to communicate with SBA program offices? (Phone)	1 = Never 2 = Rarely 3 = Sometimes	2.62	1.02	223
How frequently do you personally use each of the following methods to communicate with SBA program offices? (Virtual Meetings)	4 = Often 5 = Very frequently	2.84	1.11	224
How frequently do you personally use each of the following methods to communicate with SBA program offices? (In-person Meetings)		2.28	1.03	224

Survey Item	Response Options	Mean	Standard Deviation	Sample Size
How easy is it to get in touch with someone from an SBA program office when needed?	1 = Very difficult 2 = Somewhat difficult 3 = Neither difficult nor easy 4 = Somewhat easy 5 = Very easy 6 = I don't directly contact SBA program offices.	3.84	1.24	219
How has the number of customers (e.g., small businesses) your organization serves changed since working with the SBA?	1 = The number of customers has significantly decreased. 2 = The number of customers has somewhat decreased. 3 = There has been no change to the number of customers we serve. 4 = The number of customers has somewhat increased. 5 = The number of customers has significantly increased. 6 = I don't know.	4.10	0.88	334
On average, how many business transactions (e.g., loans) does your organization complete for SBA clients per month?	Scrolling percent bar: 0 – 100%	11.2	8.11	230

Survey Item	Response Options	Mean	Standard Deviation	Sample Size
My local SBA district office is effective at increasing awareness of different loan programs within the community (e.g., microloans, 7(a) loans, 504 loans, export loans).		4.08	1.04	345
My local SBA district office is effective at helping small, disadvantaged businesses access capital for their business.	1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neither disagree nor agree 4 = Agree	4.07	1.02	329
My local SBA district office is effective at removing barriers entrepreneurs from underserved communities commonly face when trying to access capital for their businesses.	5 = Strongly agree 6 = I don't know	3.92	1.04	328
My local SBA district office is effective at helping small business owners access capital who otherwise might not qualify under conventional credit standards.		3.98	1.05	329
Since starting to work with the SBA the number of small businesses applying for loans at my organization has...	1 = Significantly decreased 2 = Somewhat decreased 3 = Not changed	3.80	0.99	232
Since starting to work with the SBA the percent of loans my organization issues to underserved small businesses has...	3 = Somewhat increased 5 = Significantly increased 6 = Not applicable	3.71	0.87	196
Since starting to work with the SBA the average number of business days to process small non-delegated loan applications has...	7 = I don't know	2.75	1.03	165

Survey Item	Response Options	Mean	Standard Deviation	Sample Size
Since starting to work with the SBA...	1 = My organization is significantly less effective in helping small businesses obtain federal contracts. 2 = My organization is somewhat less effective in helping small businesses obtain federal contracts. 3 = There has been no change in how effective my organization is in helping small businesses obtain federal contracts. 4 = My organization is somewhat more effective in helping small businesses obtain federal contracts. 5 = My organization is significantly more effective in helping small businesses obtain federal contracts. 6 = Not applicable. 7 = I don't know about changes related to this.	3.83	0.84	127
My local SBA district office is effective at helping small, disadvantaged businesses procure federal contracts.	1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neither disagree nor agree 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly agree 6 = I don't know	3.73	1.12	146

Appendix G: 8(a) Focus Group Instrument

In compliance with the Paperwork Reduction Act, OMB approval using the *SBA Generic Clearance for Formative Data Collections for Evaluation, Research, and Evidence-Building* (OMB 3245-0425) was received and can be viewed at: <https://omb.report/omb/3245-0425>

1. Let's start by having you share a little bit about yourself and your business.
2. How many years has your business been a part of the 8(a) program?
 - a. Why was your organization initially interested in participating in the 8(a) program?
 - i. What were you hoping to get out of the 8(a) program?
 - b. What has been your experience maintaining your certification (if applicable)?
 - i. What kind of support do you receive from the SBA or your local SBA district office to maintain your certification?
3. Let's talk a bit more about your experience with your local SBA district office.
 - a. How often do you interact with your local SBA district office? Through what means do you interact?
 - i. How is contact generally initiated?
 - ii. What do you regularly communicate about?
 - iii. How has your relationship with your local SBA district office or Business Opportunity Specialist grown or changed over time?
 - iv. How have your needs changed over time? How has the SBA been able to support any change in needs?
 - v. What difficulties has your organization experienced, if any, in terms of connecting with your local SBA district office?
 - b. What resources or support has your local district office provided your organization since joining the 8(a) program? Are there any examples of particularly impactful support or resources they have provided you?
 - i. How does your local SBA district office keep you updated about the services and resources the SBA offers to businesses like yours?
 1. How would you like to be kept updated about these services and resources?
 - c. What barriers or bottlenecks, if any, has your organization experienced in the process of working with your local SBA district office to receive resources or support?
4. What changes have you noticed in your business as a result of joining the 8(a) program and working with your local SBA district office? How has this directly or indirectly impacted your business?
 - a. How has being involved in the 8(a) program helped prepare you to compete for federal and other contracts?
 - i. Upon joining the 8(a) program, how quickly were you expecting to start receiving federal contracts?
 1. How, if at all, did your experience differ from your expectations?

- ii. How long after joining the 8(a) program did you receive your first federal contract award?
 - iii. Approximately how many federal contracts have you competed for?
 - iv. Approximately how many federal contracts have you been awarded?
 - v. What is the approximate value of those contracts?
 - vi. If you have been awarded a contract since joining the 8(a) program, what challenges, if any, did you experience trying to understand the terms of the contract?
 - 1. Are there any additional resources you would like to navigate the contract process?
 - b. Next, we want to talk about your experiences with other resources and types of support provided by the SBA.
 - i. What has been your experience with business development services offered by the SBA?
 - ii. What about access to training and technical assistance?
 - iii. Access to mentorship opportunities?
 - iv. Support receiving federal surplus property on a priority basis?
 - v. And lastly, support increasing capacity?
 - c. What resources and support systems do you expect will be provided to you once you leave the program?
 - i. What else could the SBA be doing to help you succeed after completing the 8(a) program?
5. From your perspective, how is your local SBA district office doing in terms of helping your business and other small businesses in your local area succeed?
- a. What are they doing well?
 - b. What could they be doing differently to better support you and other businesses?
6. In general, how well does the 8(a) program meet your needs?
- a. Is there anything you would change about the 8(a) program?
 - b. If you joined the 8(a) program prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, how has the pandemic changed your experience in 8(a)?
7. Is there anything else you think we missed or that you would like us to know?

Appendix H: 8(a) Survey Instrument and Data Summary

8(a) Survey Item-Level Distributions

In compliance with the Paperwork Reduction Act, OMB approval using the *SBA Generic Clearance for Formative Data Collections for Evaluation, Research, and Evidence-Building (OMB 3245-0425)* was received and can be viewed at: <https://omb.report/omb/3245-0425>

Table H.5

*The below table displays distributions for non-Likert-type items. Questions with instructions to “select all that apply” only display the number of responses, not percentages.

8(a) Survey	
How did you or your organization first learn about working with the SBA? (Select all that apply)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From another organization already participating in the 8(a) program: (n = 8) • From the SBA website: (n = 10) • From an APEX Accelerator (formerly, Procurement Technical Assistance Centers): (n = 6) • From a Small Business Development Center (SBDC): (n = 33) • From a SCORE business mentor: (n = 6) • From a Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC): (n = 3) • From a Women’s Business Center (WBC): (n = 3) • From a media advertisement (e.g., email, flyer, radio): (n = 1) • By attending a community event: (n = 4) • Directly contacted by the SBA: (n = 16) • By reaching out and contacting my local SBA district office: (n = 8) • Other, please specify: (n = 20) • I don't know: (n = 9)
Considering your needs right now, how would you prefer to learn about services and resources offered by the SBA to small business owners? (Select all that apply)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email: (n = 49) • Phone: (n = 3) • Virtual meetings: (n = 29) • In-person meetings: (n = 26) • SBA website: (n = 27) • Other, please specify: (n = 4)

8(a) Survey	
What was the reason(s) your organization was first motivated to apply to the 8(a) small business development program? (Select all that apply)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To increase access to contracting opportunities in the federal marketplace: (n = 14) To receive contracting preferences: (n = 10) To access business development services: (n = 16) To gain access to mentorship opportunities: (n = 8) To receive federal surplus property on a priority basis: (n = 1) To increase capacity: (n = 11) To increase revenue: (n = 12) To be competitive: (n = 12) To grow technical competence to engage agencies about federal contracts: (n = 13) To grow technical competence in the business development process: (n = 12) Other, please specify: (n = 10) I don't know: (n = 9)
From the time of your application submission, how long did it take for your organization to be approved for the 8(a) program?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Less than 1 month: 5% (n = 2) 1 month to less than 3 months: 14% (n = 6) 3 months to less than 6 months: 5% (n = 2) 6 months to less than 1 year: 16% (n = 7) 1 year to less than 2 years: 2% (n = 1) 2 or more years: 7% (n = 3) I don't know: 51% (n = 22)
Which of the following was your organization's first point of contact at the SBA when you were trying to learn about the 8(a) program?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local District Office/Business Opportunity Specialist: 42% (n = 16) Office of Government Contracting and Business Development: 3% (n = 1) Office of Business Development (i.e., 8(a)): 11% (n = 4) Other, please specify: 13% (n = 5) I don't know: 32% (n = 12)
SBA district offices are broken into regions based on the state they serve. Please select your organization's region/state from the following list.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Region 1 (CT, MA, ME, NH, RI, VT): 4% (n = 1) Region 2 (NJ, NY, PR, USVI): 0% (n = 0) Region 3 (DC, DE, MD, PA, VA, WV): 0% (n = 0) Region 4 (AL, FL, KY, GA, MS, NC, SC, TN): 13% (n = 3) Region 5 (IL, IN, MI, MN, OH, WI): 4% (n = 1) Region 6 (AR, LA, NM, OK, TX): 17% (n = 4) Region 7 (IA, KS, MO, NE): 29% (n = 7)

8(a) Survey	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Region 8 (CO, MT, ND, SD, UT, WY): 13% (n = 3) • Region 9 (AZ, CA, GU, HI, NV): 21% (n = 5) • Region 10 (AK, ID, OR, WA): 0% (n = 0)
Have you or staff in your organization received training (e.g., briefings, informational sessions) from your local SBA district office?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes: 48% (n = 11) • No: 26% (n = 6) • I don't know: 26% (n = 6)

8(a) Survey Item-Level Means

Table H.2

*Means calculated excluding missing data and "I don't know"/"Not applicable"

Survey Item	Response Options	Mean	Standard Deviation	Sample Size
In what year of the 8(a) small business development program is your business?	1 = Year 1 2 = Year 2 3 = Year 3 4 = Year 4 5 = Year 5 6 = Year 6 7 = Year 7 8 = Year 8 9 = Year 9 10 = Year 10 11 = I don't know	8.46	3.63	48
How long had your organization been in business when it was accepted into the 8(a) program?	1 = Less than 1 year 2 = 1 year to less than 2 years 3 = 2 years to less than 5 years 4 = 5 years to less than 10 years 5 = 10 or more years 6 = I don't know	3.64	1.39	28
How complex was the process of becoming an 8(a) certified business?	1 = Extremely complex 2 = Somewhat complex 3 = Neither complex nor simple 4 = Somewhat simple 5 = Extremely simple 6 = I don't know	2.35	0.98	23

Survey Item	Response Options	Mean	Standard Deviation	Sample Size
Since joining the 8(a) program, the number of federal contracts my organization has won is...	1 = Significantly fewer than I was expecting. 2 = Somewhat fewer than I was expecting. 3 = About what I was expecting. 4 = Somewhat greater than I was expecting. 5 = Significantly greater than I was expecting. 6 = I did not have any expectations when first joining the program. 7 = I have not applied for a federal contract since joining the program.	2.69	1.30	16
Please estimate how many federal contracts your organization has won since joining the 8(a) program.	0 = 0 1 = 1 2 = 2 ... 20 = 20+ 21 = I don't know	3.68	5.60	19
Since joining the 8(a) program, please indicate how your organization's needs have changed with respect to support needed in each of the following areas: Accessing contracting opportunities in the federal marketplace	1 = Significantly less support needed in this area now 2 = Somewhat less support needed in this area now 3 = There has been no change in the support needed in this area 4 = Somewhat more support needed in this area now	3.36	1.50	14
Since joining the 8(a) program, please indicate how your organization's needs have changed with respect to support needed in each of the following areas: Receiving preference in contracting opportunities	5 = Significantly more support needed in this area now 6 = Not applicable	3.69	1.49	13

Survey Item	Response Options	Mean	Standard Deviation	Sample Size
Since joining the 8(a) program, please indicate how your organization's needs have changed with respect to support needed in each of the following areas: Accessing business development services		3.69	1.40	16
Since joining the 8(a) program, please indicate how your organization's needs have changed with respect to support needed in each of the following areas: Accessing mentorship opportunities		4.00	1.20	15
Since joining the 8(a) program, please indicate how your organization's needs have changed with respect to support needed in each of the following areas: Receiving federal surplus property on a priority basis	1 = Significantly less support needed in this area now 2 = Somewhat less support needed in this area now 3 = There has been no change in the support needed in this area 4 = Somewhat more support needed in this area now 5 = Significantly more support needed in this area now 6 = Not applicable	3.20	1.48	10
Since joining the 8(a) program, please indicate how your organization's needs have changed with respect to support needed in each of the following areas: Increasing capacity		3.67	1.40	15
Since joining the 8(a) program, please indicate how your organization's needs have changed with respect to support needed in each of the following areas: Increasing revenue		3.87	1.36	15

Survey Item	Response Options	Mean	Standard Deviation	Sample Size
Since joining the 8(a) program, please indicate how your organization's needs have changed with respect to support needed in each of the following areas: Increasing competitiveness		3.50	1.26	16
Since joining the 8(a) program, please indicate how your organization's needs have changed with respect to support needed in each of the following areas: Growing technical competence to engage agencies about federal contracts	1 = Significantly less support needed in this area now 2 = Somewhat less support needed in this area now 3 = There has been no change in the support needed in this area 4 = Somewhat more support needed in this area now 5 = Significantly more support needed in this area now 6 = Not applicable	3.87	1.46	15
Since joining the 8(a) program, please indicate how your organization's needs have changed with respect to support needed in each of the following areas: Growing technical competence in the business development process.		3.87	1.19	15
How frequently does your organization interact with your local SBA district office?	1 = Never 2 = Rarely 3 = Sometimes 4 = Often 5 = Very frequently 6 = I don't know	3.86	1.23	14

Survey Item	Response Options	Mean	Standard Deviation	Sample Size
How has your organization's frequency of contact with your local SBA district office changed over time?	1 = Interactions have become significantly less frequent over time. 2 = Interactions have become somewhat less frequent over time. 3 = The amount of interaction has remained similar over time. 4 = Interactions have become somewhat more frequent over time. 5 = Interactions have become significantly more frequent over time. 6 = I don't know.	3.17	1.29	18
How frequently do you personally use each of the following methods to communicate with your local SBA district office? (Email)		3.56	1.26	16
How frequently do you personally use each of the following methods to communicate with your local SBA district office? (Phone)		2.76	1.25	17
How frequently do you personally use each of the following methods to communicate with your local SBA district office? (Virtual Meetings)	1 = Never 2 = Rarely 3 = Sometimes 4 = Often 5 = Very frequently	2.83	1.20	18
How frequently do you personally use each of the following methods to communicate with your local SBA district office? (In-person Meetings)		2.76	1.09	17

Survey Item	Response Options	Mean	Standard Deviation	Sample Size
How easy is it to get in touch with someone from your local SBA district office when needed?	1 = Very difficult 2 = Somewhat difficult 3 = Neither difficult nor easy 4 = Somewhat easy 5 = Very easy 6 = I don't directly contact my local SBA district office.	4.09	1.48	22
How helpful was the training that you received from your local SBA district office?	1 = Not at all helpful 2 = Somewhat unhelpful 3 = Neither unhelpful nor helpful 4 = Somewhat helpful 5 = Very helpful 6 = I do not recall. 7 = Training was offered but I did not attend.	4.80	0.42	10
My local SBA district office is effective at helping small, disadvantaged businesses procure federal contracts.	1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neither disagree nor agree 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly agree 6 = I don't know	3.73	1.42	22
How satisfied are you with the amount of collaboration between your organization and your local SBA district office?	1 = Very dissatisfied 2 = Somewhat dissatisfied 3 = Neither dissatisfied nor satisfied 4 = Somewhat satisfied 5 = Very satisfied	3.82	1.37	22
How frequently does your organization interact with SBA program offices?	1 = Never 2 = Rarely 3 = Sometimes 4 = Often 5 = Very frequently 6 = I don't know	2.94	1.3	18

Survey Item	Response Options	Mean	Standard Deviation	Sample Size
How has your organization's frequency of contact with SBA program offices changed over time?	1 = Interactions have become significantly less frequent over time. 2 = Interactions have become somewhat less frequent over time. 3 = The amount of interaction has remained similar over time. 4 = Interactions have become somewhat more frequent over time. 5 = Interactions have become significantly more frequent over time. 6 = I don't know.	3.50	1.31	12
How frequently do you personally use each of the following methods to communicate with SBA program offices? (Email)		3.71	1.25	7
How frequently do you personally use each of the following methods to communicate with SBA program offices? (Phone)	1 = Never 2 = Rarely 3 = Sometimes 4 = Often 5 = Very frequently	3.09	1.30	11
How frequently do you personally use each of the following methods to communicate with SBA program offices? (Virtual Meetings)		3.23	0.83	13
How frequently do you personally use each of the following methods to communicate with SBA program offices? (In-person Meetings)		2.67	0.89	12

Survey Item	Response Options	Mean	Standard Deviation	Sample Size
How easy is it to get in touch with someone from an SBA program office when needed?	1 = Very difficult 2 = Somewhat difficult 3 = Neither difficult nor easy 4 = Somewhat easy 5 = Very easy 6 = I don't directly contact SBA program offices.	4.43	1.16	14

Appendix I: Qualitative Data Summary

District Office Open-Ended Survey Item Codes

Tables I.1 and I.2 below summarize codes applied to six open-ended survey items included in the district office leadership and regional administrator survey. The questions in Table I.1 pertain to capital and the questions in Table I.2 pertain to contracting. The question prompts are listed as column headers and codes are in the left column. Numbers in each cell represent the total number of times the code appeared in written responses. This coding scheme is not hierarchical, meaning there is only one level of coding applied to the passages.

Table I.1

Survey Question			
	Please briefly describe how your office tracks and measures its contributions to the SBA's capital access goals (i.e., ensuring that all entrepreneurs have access to capital to start and grow their business).	Please briefly describe what your office needs to accurately track and measures its contributions to the SBA's capital access goals (i.e., ensuring that all entrepreneurs have access to capital to start and grow their business).	How could your office better measure its contributions to the SBA's capital access goals (i.e., ensuring that all entrepreneurs have access to capital to start and grow their business)?
Codes			
Count Outreach/Training/Attendance	14	0	0
Count Lenders	2	0	0
Loan Volume/Reports	12	0	1
OFO Strategic Plan & Performance Metrics	2	0	0
YOY Data	1	0	0
Lender Recruitment & Awards	1	0	0
GMATT	13	0	0
Power BI	4	0	0
CAFS	3	0	0
Qualitative Discussions	2	0	0
Resource Partner Reports	2	3	0
Performance Reviews	1	0	0
CRM	0	3	8
Assess unmet needs	0	1	2
View referrals	0	1	0
Better utilize resource partner data	0	0	8
Follow-up for impact	0	5	9

Survey Question	Please briefly describe how your office tracks and measures its contributions to the SBA's capital access goals (i.e., ensuring that all entrepreneurs have access to capital to start and grow their business).	Please briefly describe what your office needs to accurately track and measures its contributions to the SBA's capital access goals (i.e., ensuring that all entrepreneurs have access to capital to start and grow their business).	How could your office better measure its contributions to the SBA's capital access goals (i.e., ensuring that all entrepreneurs have access to capital to start and grow their business)?
Codes			
Link outreach/training to loans	0	0	2
Better goals to track to	0	0	3
Better counts/trends	0	0	5
More data from program offices	0	0	2
Collect more detailed information (e.g., demographics)	0	0	3
Better reporting/visualizations	0	0	1
Accuracy & timeliness of data	0	0	1
Loan Denial information	0	0	3
Benchmark with other programs	0	0	1
More resources	0	0	3
Survey customers	0	0	1

Table I.2

Survey Question	Please briefly describe how your office tracks and measures its contributions to the SBA's small business contracting goals (i.e., helping build back an inclusive and proficient small business contracting base ready to compete for federal procurement opportunities).			Please briefly describe what your office needs to accurately track and measures its contributions to the SBA's small business contracting goals (i.e., helping build back an inclusive and proficient small business contracting base ready to compete for federal procurement opportunities).			How could your office better measure its contributions to the SBA's small business contracting goals (i.e., helping build back an inclusive and proficient small business contracting base ready to compete for federal procurement opportunities)?		
Codes									
Count Outreach/Training/Attendance	7			0			1		
Count Contracts/Dollars	9			1			1		
YOY Data	1			0			0		
Government/Partner Data	2			2			8		
GMATT	9			2			0		
Power BI	0			1			0		
Annual Reviews	2			1			0		
CRM	0			2			11		
User-friendly	0			0			3		
Increase Awareness	0			0			1		
Follow-up for impact	0			1			4		
Better goals to track to	0			0			3		
Data from HQ	1			1			1		
Accuracy & timeliness of data	0			1			3		
More resources	0			1			8		

External Resource & Community Partner Open-Ended Survey Item Codes

Table I.3 below summarizes codes applied to five open-ended survey items included in the external resource and community partner survey. The question prompts are listed as column headers and codes are in the left column. Numbers in each cell represent the total number of times the code appeared in written responses. This coding scheme is not hierarchical, meaning there is only one level of coding applied to the passages.

*Note: Analyses described in the body of the report that are specific to capital or contracting are reflective of separating responses based on whether participants indicated they work to provide access to capital or contracting services.

Table I.3

Survey Question	Please describe why you are [insert selected response from Partner_Q23] with the amount of collaboration between your organization and your local SBA district office.	What could your local SBA district office do to better support organizations like yours that help support small businesses in your community?	Thinking about all of your work and interactions with the SBA so far, what do you consider to be particular strengths or benefits of working with the SBA?	Considering all interactions with the SBA, from first contact through the present day, which aspects of the relationship or process have you been most satisfied with?	Considering all interactions with the SBA, from first contact through the present day, which aspects of the relationship or process have you been least satisfied with?
Codes					
Frequent Updates	23	36	15	9	3
Responsiveness	187	11	69	81	25
Inconsistent or Limited Communication	37	6	0	1	37
Clear Communication	64	16	27	35	22
Digital Accessibility	2	7	2	12	17
Geographic and Time-zone Challenges	3	8	0	0	7
Meeting Scheduling	1	4	0	0	3
Event Coordination and Engagement	48	26	14	20	3
In-Person Engagement	14	29	7	16	10
Strong Collaborative Relationship	110	13	52	124	0
Coalition Building	43	42	28	18	2
Strained or Negative Relationship	25	0	0	1	16

Survey Question	Please describe why you are [insert selected response from Partner_Q23] with the amount of collaboration between your organization and your local SBA district office.	What could your local SBA district office do to better support organizations like yours that help support small businesses in your community?	Thinking about all of your work and interactions with the SBA so far, what do you consider to be particular strengths or benefits of working with the SBA?	Considering all interactions with the SBA, from first contact through the present day, which aspects of the relationship or process have you been most satisfied with?	Considering all interactions with the SBA, from first contact through the present day, which aspects of the relationship or process have you been least satisfied with?
Codes					
Proactive Collaboration and Support	59	36	43	65	2
Desire for More Collaboration	37	18	0	1	9
Training and Informative Sessions	37	38	21	13	9
Technical Assistance	66	7	19	21	4
Resource and Staffing Limitations	22	34	1	1	24
Funding Access or Processing	7	33	69	28	47
Knowledge and Expertise	58	10	84	38	10
Access to SBA Resources and Programs	0	1	22	13	10
Effectiveness and Efficiency	16	4	3	4	21
Program Effectiveness	7	3	41	9	4
Benefits of External Partnerships	1	4	9	6	0
Program Confusion	2	23	2	1	25
Impact on Small Businesses	11	7	26	11	2
Policy Changes	0	2	0	0	16
Bureaucracy	2	12	0	0	54
Staff Turnover	15	1	0	2	5
Awareness of Staff Roles	0	0	0	0	2

Survey Question	Please describe why you are [insert selected response from Partner_Q23] with the amount of collaboration between your organization and your local SBA district office.	What could your local SBA district office do to better support organizations like yours that help support small businesses in your community?	Thinking about all of your work and interactions with the SBA so far, what do you consider to be particular strengths or benefits of working with the SBA?	Considering all interactions with the SBA, from first contact through the present day, which aspects of the relationship or process have you been most satisfied with?	Considering all interactions with the SBA, from first contact through the present day, which aspects of the relationship or process have you been least satisfied with?
Codes					
SBA Reputation and Brand Recognition	0	0	28	3	0
Other	3	7	3	3	9
NA	5	126	28	15	102

8(a) Open-Ended Survey Item Codes

Table I.4 below summarizes codes applied to six open-ended survey items included in the 8(a) participant survey. The question prompts are listed as column headers and codes are in the left column. Numbers in each cell represent the total number of times the code appeared in written responses; the low numeric values are reflective of the small sample size.

This coding scheme is also not hierarchical, meaning there is only one level of coding applied to the passages. Note, as these questions largely mirror the questions asked in the external resource/community partner survey and responses fell into similar categories, a nearly identical coding scheme as Table I.2 has been applied.

Table I.4

Survey Question	How else have your needs changed since joining the 8(a) program?	Please describe why you are [insert selected response from Partner_Q23] with the amount of collaboration between your organization and your local SBA district office.	What could your local SBA district office do to better support 8(a) organizations like yours?	Thinking about all of your work and interactions with the SBA so far, what do you consider to be particular strengths or benefits of working with the SBA?	Considering all interactions with the SBA since your organization joined the 8(a) program, which aspects of the relationship or process have you been most satisfied with?	Considering all interactions with the SBA since your organization joined the 8(a) program, which aspects of the relationship or process have you been least satisfied with?
Codes						
Frequent Updates	0	0	0	0	0	0
Responsiveness	0	5	0	3	4	1
Inconsistent or Limited Communication	0	2	0	0	0	1
Clear Communication	0	1	1	0	2	0
Digital Accessibility	0	0	0	1	1	0
Geographic and Time-zone Challenges	0	0	0	0	0	0
Meeting Scheduling	0	0	1	0	0	0
Event Coordination and Engagement	0	2	0	0	2	0
In-Person Engagement	0	0	0	0	1	0
Strong Collaborative Relationship	0	4	1	7	4	0
Coalition Building	2	1	0	1	3	0

Survey Question	How else have your needs changed since joining the 8(a) program?	Please describe why you are [insert selected response from Partner_Q23] with the amount of collaboration between your organization and your local SBA district office.	What could your local SBA district office do to better support 8(a) organizations like yours?	Thinking about all of your work and interactions with the SBA so far, what do you consider to be particular strengths or benefits of working with the SBA?	Considering all interactions with the SBA since your organization joined the 8(a) program, which aspects of the relationship or process have you been most satisfied with?	Considering all interactions with the SBA since your organization joined the 8(a) program, which aspects of the relationship or process have you been least satisfied with?
Codes						
Strained or Negative Relationship	0	0	0	0	0	0
Proactive Collaboration and Support	0	5	2	7	3	0
Desire for More Collaboration	0	1	0	0	0	0
Training and Informative Sessions	0	0	2	0	4	1
Grant and Funding Opportunities	1	0	1	0	0	0
Technical Assistance	0	0	1	1	4	0
Resource and Staffing Limitations	1	1	1	1	0	1
Funding Access or Processing	0	0	0	0	0	1
Knowledge and Expertise	2	2	1	4	2	0
Effectiveness and Efficiency	0	4	1	1	2	0
Program Effectiveness	0	0	0	4	1	0
Benefits of External Partnerships	0	1	0	0	0	0
Program Confusion	0	0	0	1	0	0
Impact on Small Businesses	0	2	0	0	1	0
Policy Changes	1	0	0	0	0	0
Bureaucracy	0	0	0	0	0	0
Staff Turnover	0	0	0	0	0	0

Survey Question	How else have your needs changed since joining the 8(a) program?	Please describe why you are [insert selected response from Partner_Q23] with the amount of collaboration between your organization and your local SBA district office.	What could your local SBA district office do to better support 8(a) organizations like yours?	Thinking about all of your work and interactions with the SBA so far, what do you consider to be particular strengths or benefits of working with the SBA?	Considering all interactions with the SBA since your organization joined the 8(a) program, which aspects of the relationship or process have you been most satisfied with?	Considering all interactions with the SBA since your organization joined the 8(a) program, which aspects of the relationship or process have you been least satisfied with?
Codes						
Awareness of Staff Roles	0	1	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0	2	0	0

Interview and Focus Group Discussion Codes

Table I.5 below summarizes codes applied to the various interviews and focus groups conducted over the course of the evaluation. The codes are listed in the left column, with bolded codes representing the highest order codes, sometimes followed by lower order codes which are indented. Some codes have a third level, and this lowest order code is written in italics. Lower order codes also assume their higher order code (e.g., a passage coded as “Expectations” under the “8(a) Journey” will also be coded as “8(a) Journey”). If a passage only fits a higher-order code, but not a lower-order code it was only coded with the highest order code.

DO = District Office

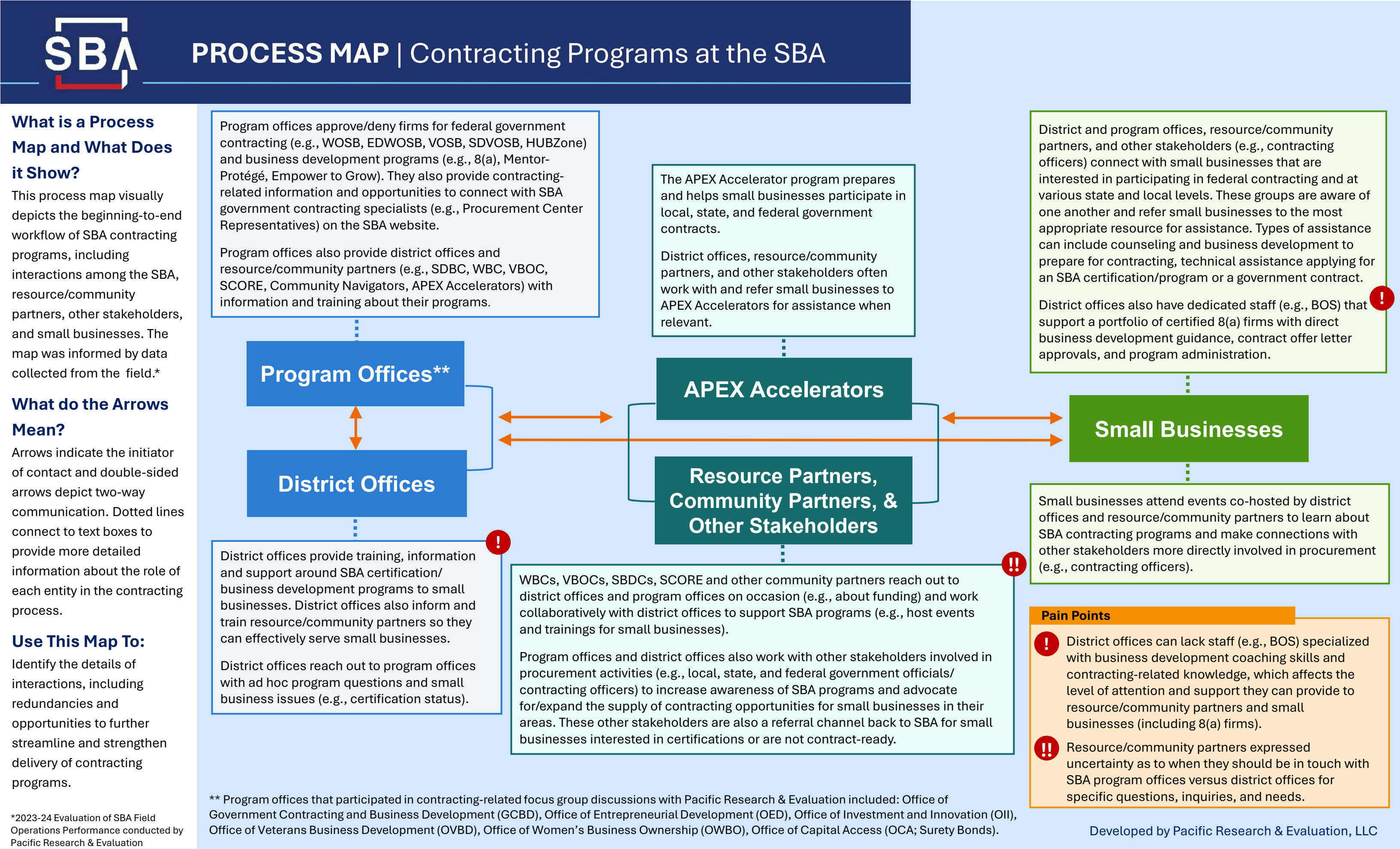
Table I.5

	External Resource/Community Partner Focus Groups	8(a) Focus Groups	SBA Capital/Contracting Focus Groups	SBA District Office Interviews	SBA Measurement Focus Groups
8(a) Journey	0	48	2	0	0
Contracts	0	10	0	0	0
Expectations	0	12	0	0	0
Experience with Tools/Resources Provided	0	13	0	0	0
Maintaining Certification	0	5	0	0	0
Time in Program	0	8	0	0	0
Barriers/Mitigating Strategies	154	50	82	142	47
Communication/Collaboration	19	3	6	12	0
Distance	1	0	0	0	0
Having Knowledge/Proper Information	7	3	13	7	1
Job Characteristics	0	0	2	4	0
Metrics/Capturing Impact/Tools	9	0	12	25	35
OFO HQ Support	0	0	0	2	0
Other/Misc	20	0	6	19	1
Processes/Organization/Strategy	0	1	5	11	2
Recognition/Getting Credit	0	0	3	3	7
Staffing	6	0	13	26	1
Technology	0	0	5	5	0
Time/Workload/Capacity	1	3	9	10	0
Tools/Resources/Budget	10	3	5	17	0
Turnover/Retirement	8	0	3	1	0

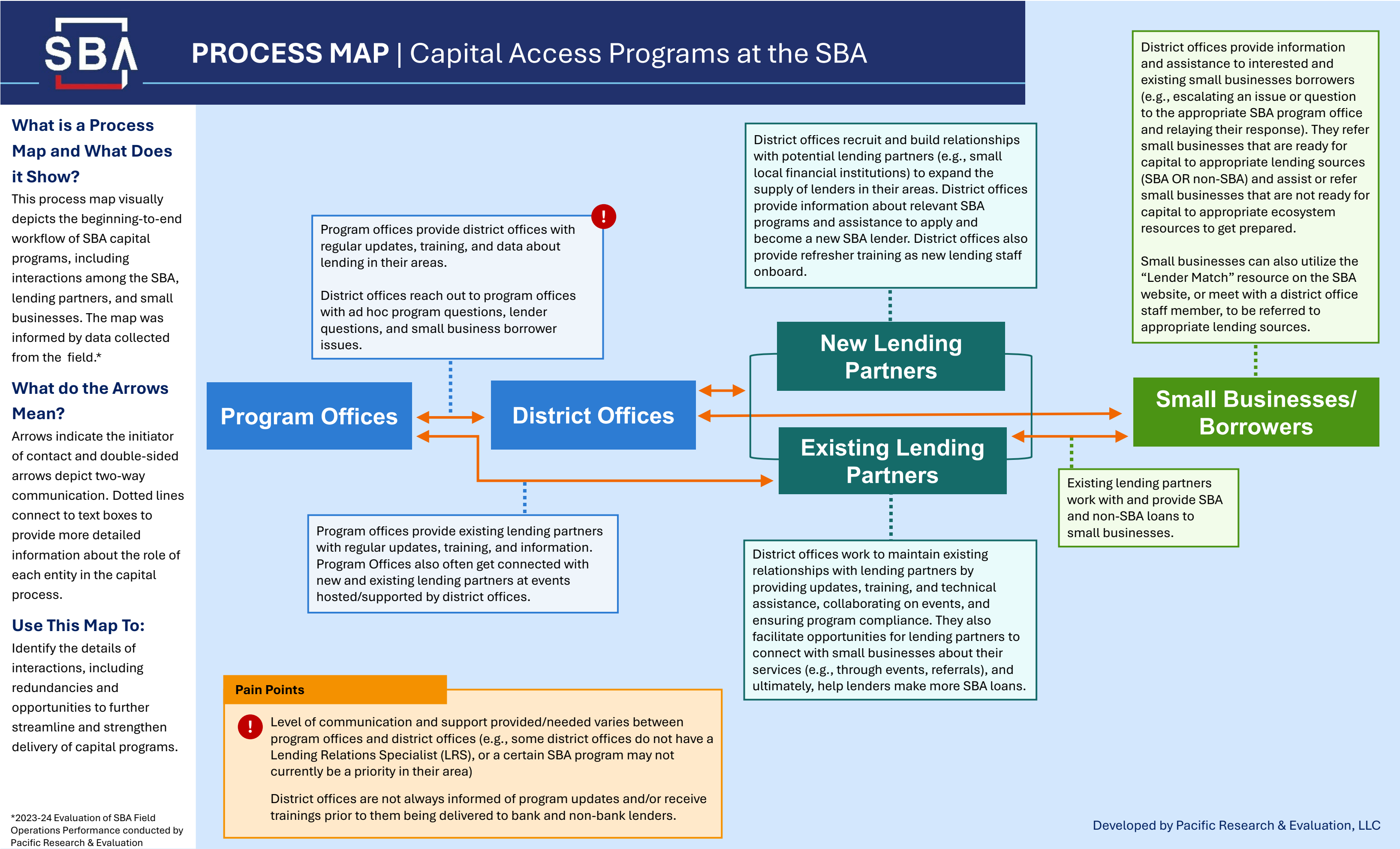
	External Resource/Community Partner Focus Groups	8(a) Focus Groups	SBA Capital/Contracting Focus Groups	SBA District Office Interviews	SBA Measurement Focus Groups
As an SBA Partner	73	0	0	0	0
In 8(a) Program	0	37	0	0	0
COVID-19	18	5	9	9	3
Change Over Time	35	4	20	7	3
Communication/Collaboration	194	41	81	78	0
with Customers/Stakeholders	0	0	22	45	0
with District Offices	148	20	49	4	0
with OFO HQ	2	1	3	17	0
with Other Agencies	2	1	1	3	0
with Other SBA Offices/Programs	11	1	6	9	0
with SBA Partners	31	7	0	0	0
with Others/Contracting Offices (8a only)	0	11	0	0	0
Customer Journey	103	9	5	17	0
Forming Connection	3	0	1	5	0
History with SBA	36	0	0	0	0
Initial Interest	10	8	1	0	0
Maintaining Connection	10	1	2	12	0
Tools/Resources Provided by DOs	42	0	0	0	0
Customers/Stakeholders	0	0	12	4	0
DO role/activities	113	10	67	47	24
DO Responsibilities/Perceptions of what DOs do	99	9	34	42	21
DO to DO Differences	5	0	20	4	2
Perception of DO Value/Necessity/Meeting Needs	9	1	13	0	3
Within DO Differences	0	0	0	1	0
Entrepreneurial/Small Business Ecosystem	30	0	9	18	1
Characteristics/Relationships within Ecosystem	0	0	0	8	0
Familiarity	0	0	1	1	0
Equity/Underserved Communities	18	0	2	14	5
External Partner role/activities	61	0	0	0	0
Internal SBA Capital Process	0	0	47	14	6
Internal SBA Contracting Process	0	0	46	9	13
Metrics/Capturing Impact	48	7	60	84	81

	External Resource/Community Partner Focus Groups	8(a) Focus Groups	SBA Capital/Contracting Focus Groups	SBA District Office Interviews	SBA Measurement Focus Groups
8a Program Impact	0	7	0	0	0
Current Goals/Metrics/Tools	0	0	19	35	35
<i>Capital (Current)</i>	0	0	16	12	7
<i>Contracting (Current)</i>	0	0	2	13	16
<i>OFO HQ (Current)</i>	0	0	0	2	0
<i>Other/General/Ecosystem (Current)</i>	0	0	1	8	12
Engaging with DOs on Metrics	1	0	12	0	4
Outcomes/Output vs Outcomes	2	0	2	11	12
Perceptions of DO Contributions to Metrics/Goals	1	0	11	0	0
<i>Capital Goals/Metrics</i>	0	0	6	0	0
<i>Contracting Goals/Metrics</i>	0	0	1	0	0
Recommended/Unique Goals/Metrics/Tools	12	0	13	35	30
<i>Capital (Rec/Unique)</i>	0	0	3	5	8
<i>Contracting (Rec/Unique)</i>	0	0	5	3	13
<i>Other/General (Rec/Unique)</i>	0	0	3	27	30
SBA Partner Data	32	0	0	0	0
<i>Data Related to DOs/Qualitative Impact of DOs</i>	32	0	0	0	0
<i>Partner Data/Impact</i>	32	0	0	0	0
Understanding of Metrics/Goals	0	0	3	3	0
Other/Misc	21	14	4	2	0
Participant Background/Demographics	63	7	14	11	12

Appendix J: Contracting Process Map

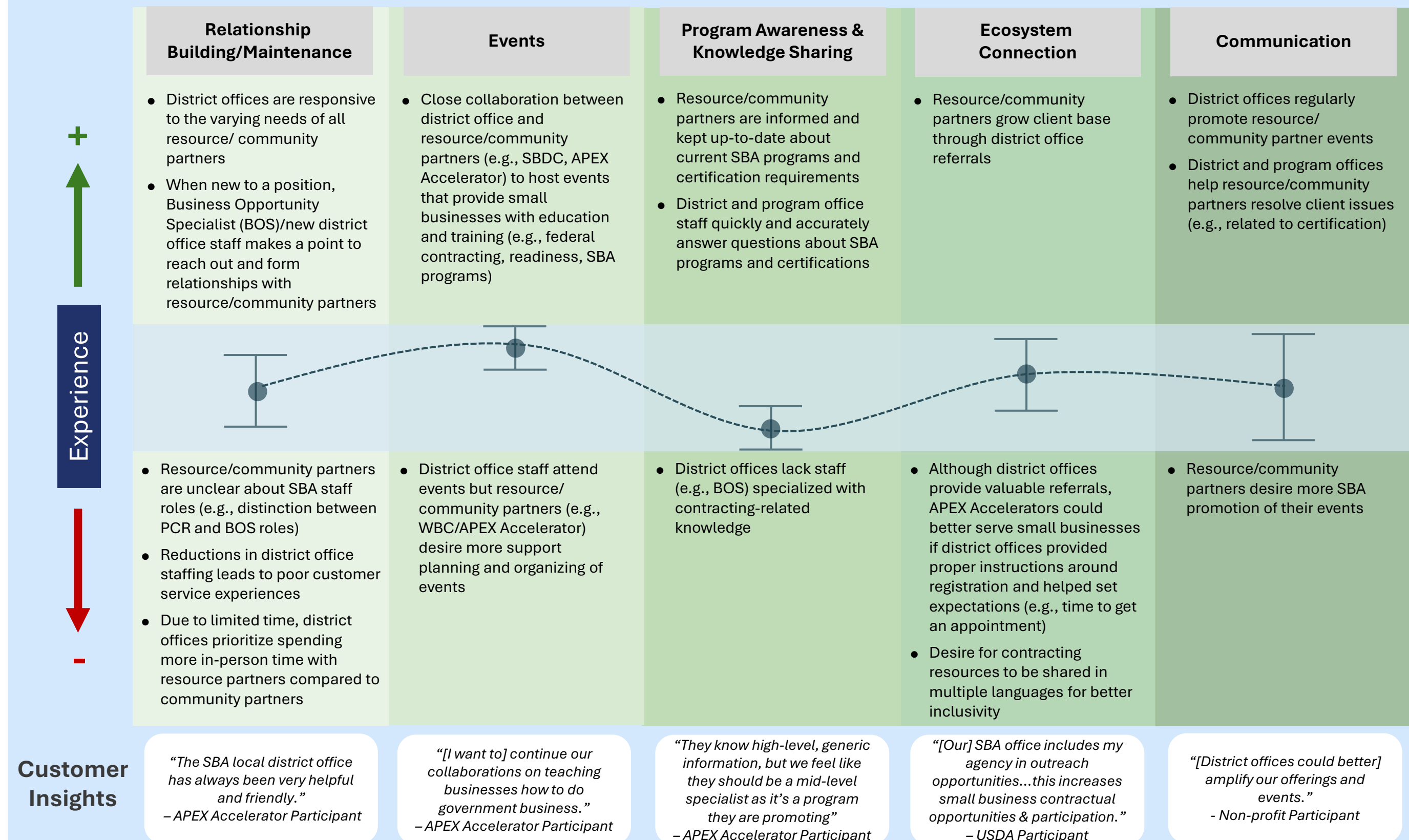


Appendix K: Capital Process Map



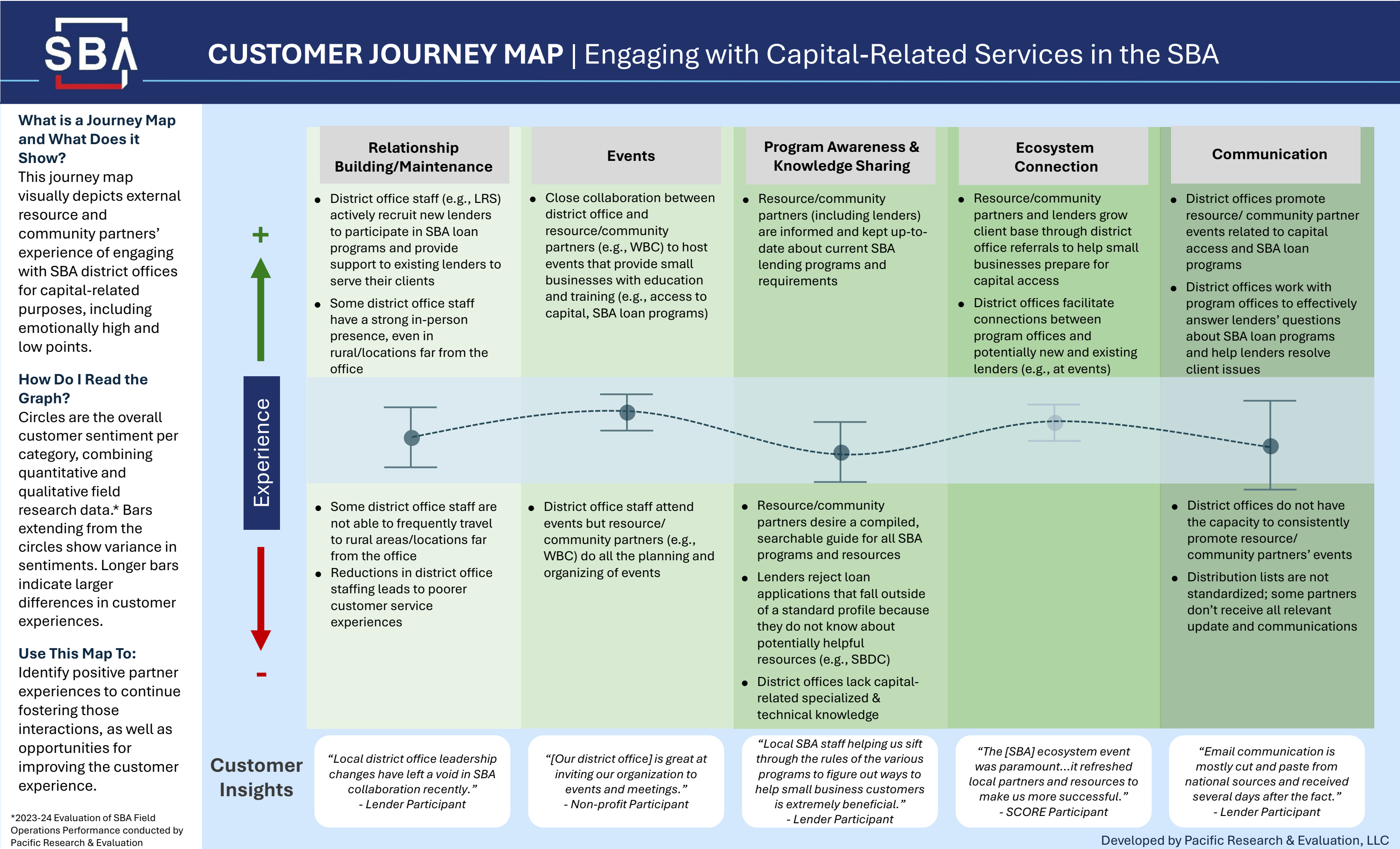


*2023-24 Evaluation of SBA Field Operations Performance conducted by Pacific Research & Evaluation

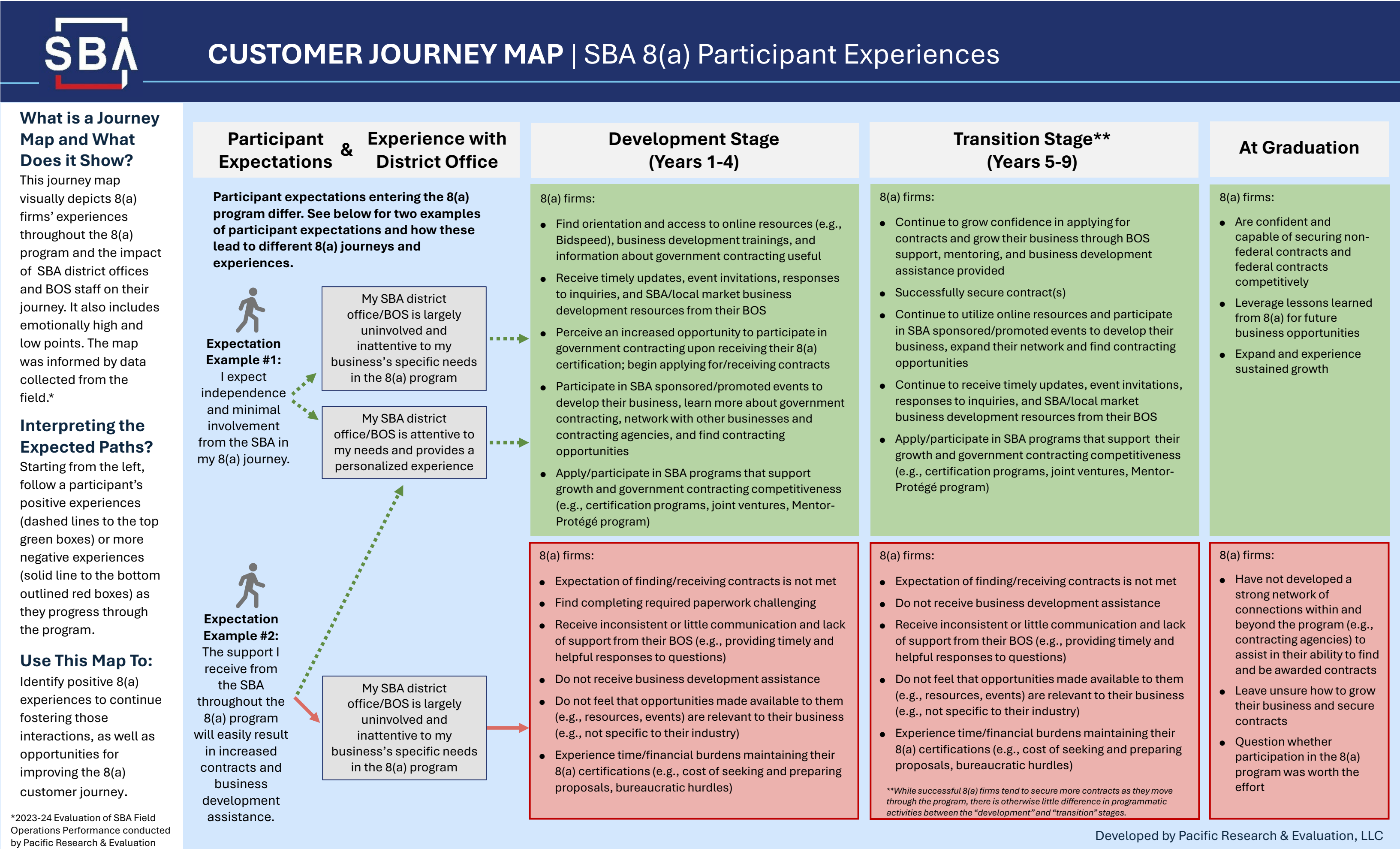


Developed by Pacific Research & Evaluation, LLC

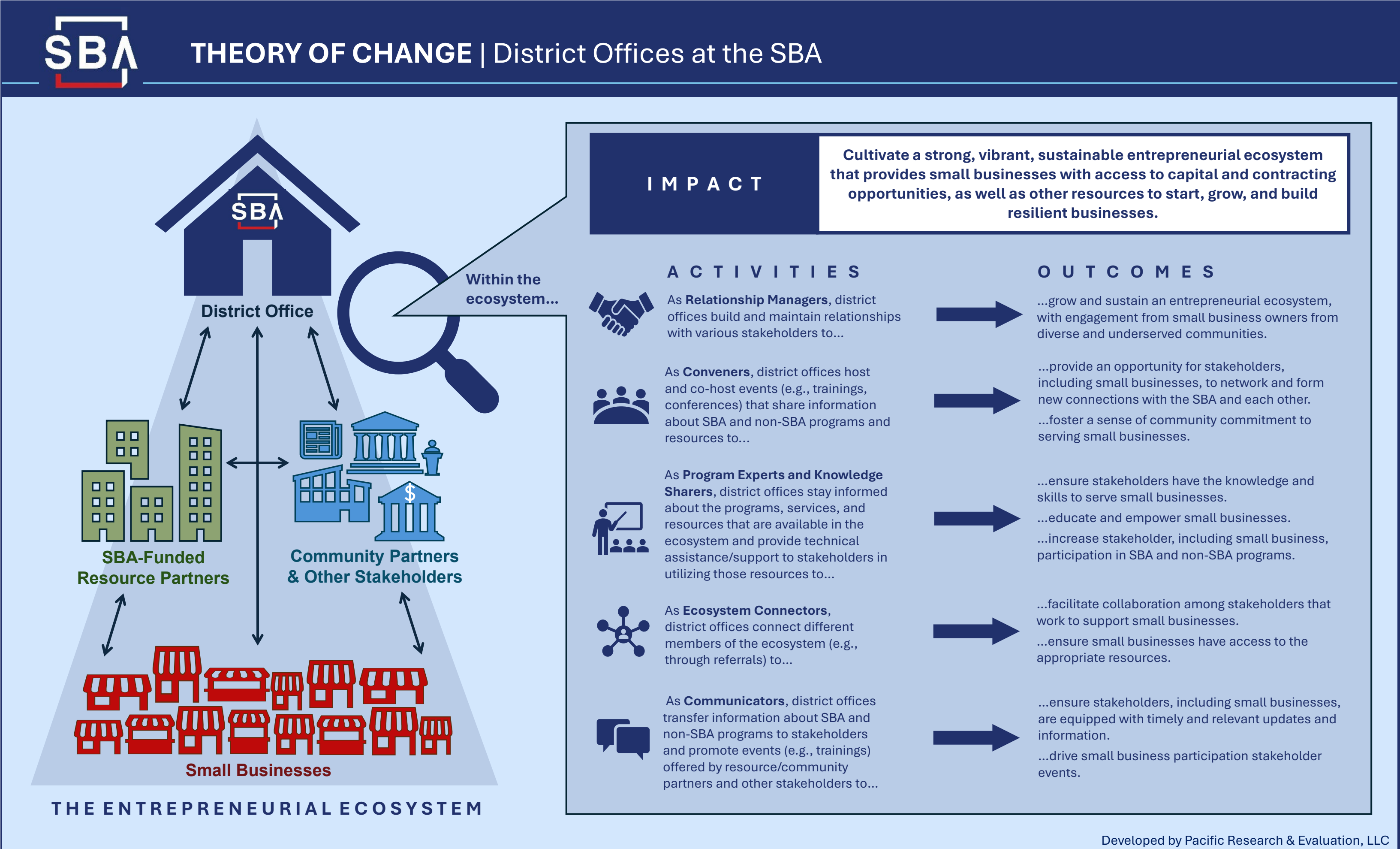
Appendix M: Capital Customer Journey Map



Appendix N: 8(a) Customer Journey Map



Appendix O: Theory of Change



Developed by Pacific Research & Evaluation, LLC

Appendix P: Metrics/Indicators

The entrepreneurial ecosystem literature identified that connectivity between ecosystem members influences the vibrancy of the entrepreneurial ecosystem, helps reduce barriers for small businesses and entrepreneurs, and enables successful entrepreneurship. District office staff provide various services to strengthen their entrepreneurial ecosystems and contribute to the SBA's capital deployment/servicing and small business contracting goals. Based on the findings from this evaluation, SBA district offices play five key roles that collectively strengthen local small business ecosystems and contribute to the SBA's capital deployment/servicing and small business contracting goals.

One of the key roles is that of convener, whereby district offices convene meetings and events (e.g., by hosting, co-hosting, or leading) to connect resource and community partners. The table and example metrics below may serve the SBA in its efforts to develop strategically aligned measures that link district office activities with outcomes and impacts. Table P.1 demonstrates the types of data that can be collected to better understand the impact of district offices serving as conveners. The "Measure" column includes data that can be collected (via the "Data Collection Method") and combined to measure specific "Outcomes". For example, the number of events, along with information about the host, format and location of events are important indicators of the scope of events.

Table P.1
Potential "Convener" Data

Outcome	Measure	Data Collection Method
Event scope	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Number of events ○ District office hosted (Y/N) ○ Host affiliation (if not district office hosted; e.g., SBDC, WBC) ○ Format (e.g., in-person, virtual, hybrid) ○ Location (e.g., rural, urban, mixed) 	unified platform
Attendee satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Overall satisfaction with event ○ Experience relative to expectations ○ Estimated number of new connections made at event 	survey

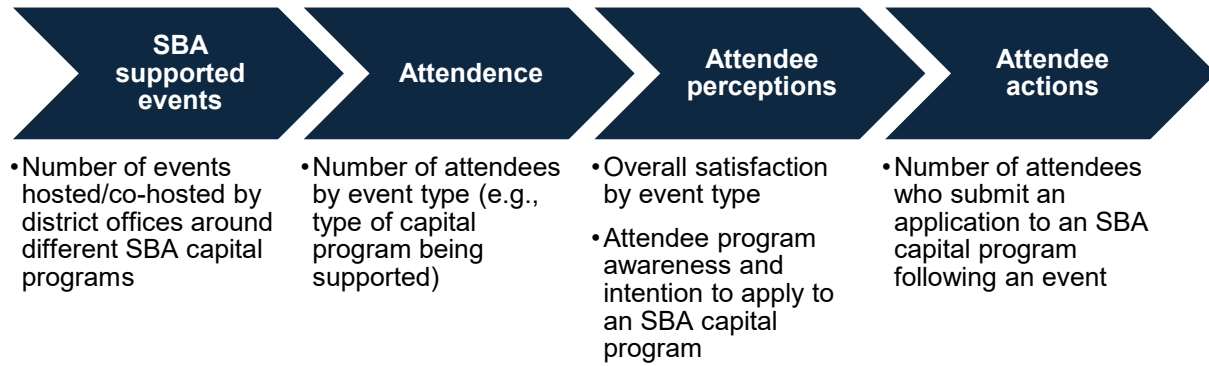
The convener metrics can also be combined with attendee post-event intentions (e.g., do they intend to apply to an SBA program following the event?) and more downstream events (e.g., number of attendees who submit an application to an SBA program following an event) to better understand the impact of district offices. Equipping district offices with convener metrics will allow the SBA to create and support more targeted, relevant, and useful events for both external partners and small businesses. Knowledge of these data can also help district offices in goal-setting efforts.

The example below illustrates how metrics can be used to track the progress and outcomes of district office strategies. This example shows: 1) what type of events are most well-attended, 2) what event types attendees are most/least satisfied with, and 3) whether certain event types

lead to more applications. These data could be analyzed annually and if, for example, the number of applications is below the desired threshold, district offices can create new strategies around events or update their goals to better reflect a realistic target.

Convener Example

Why are hosting events critical to capital-related goals?



Appendix Q: Advanced Visualization



MIND MAP | The SBA Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

What is a Mind Map and What Does it Show?

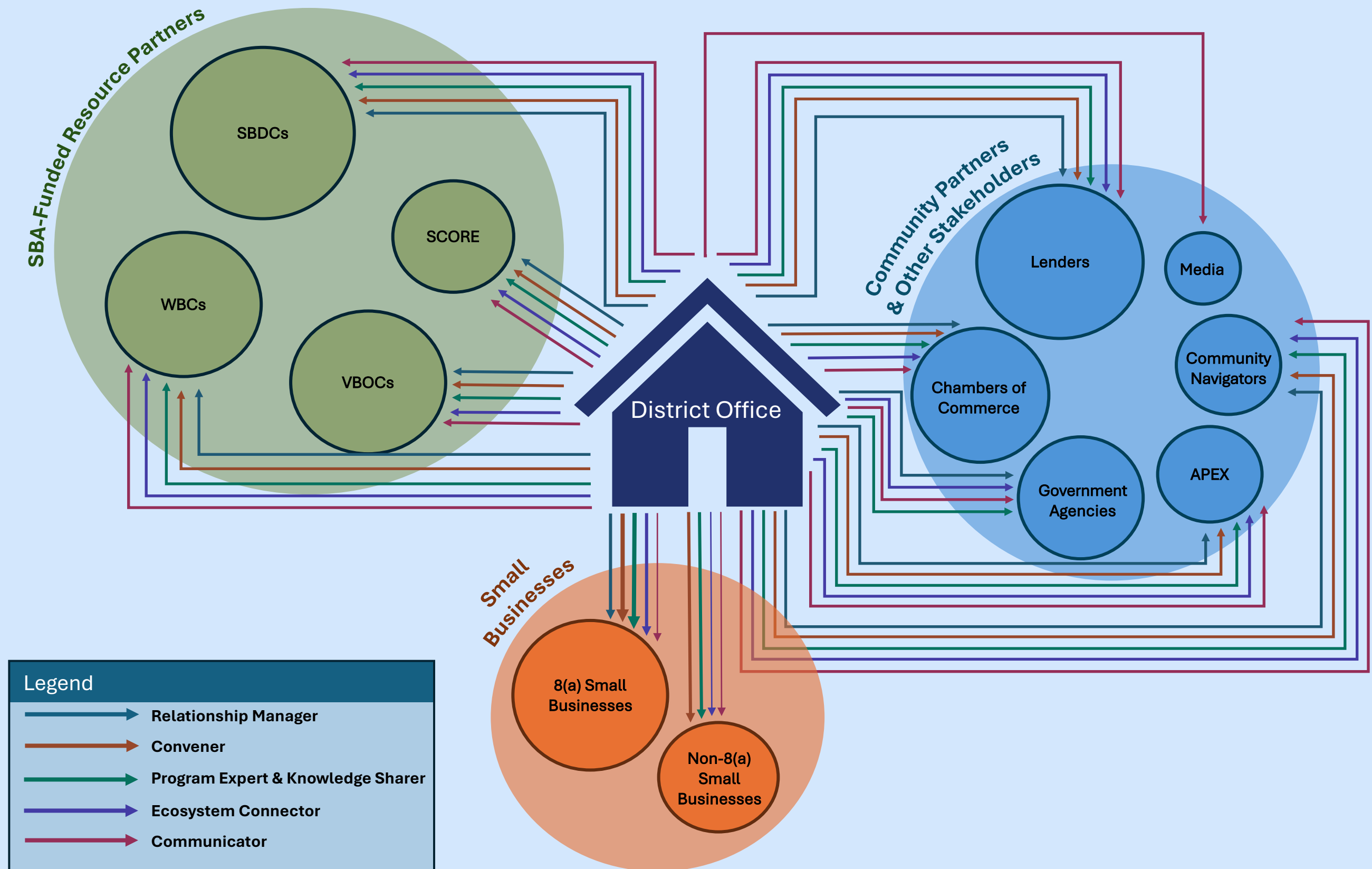
This mind map highlights district office interactions with key players in their local entrepreneurial ecosystem. Note that relationships were determined from evaluation findings.*

Each line (see Legend) represents a different role that a district office may play in their relationship with an ecosystem member. Line thickness represents the frequency with which a district office engages with a customer in a particular role.

Ecosystem members (represented by outlined circles) are grouped into three groups:
 Green = SBA-funded resource partners
 Blue = Community partners & other stakeholders
 Orange = Small businesses

Larger opaque circles correspond to stronger relationships between the district office and that group overall. Larger outlined circles correspond to stronger relationships between the district office and that ecosystem member relative to others within the same group.

*2023-24 Evaluation of SBA Field Operations Performance conducted by Pacific Research & Evaluation



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