



PROJECT PROPOSAL

Operationalizing Inclusive Economic Development FY 2026–2027 – Expanding
Entrepreneur Coaching Infrastructure through the Chatham County Innovation Lab
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Background

In 2019, Chatham County commissioned a comprehensive **Minority Entrepreneur and Small Business Needs Assessment**, which identified structural and historical barriers preventing Black, Hispanic, and other marginalized communities from fully participating in the county’s economic growth. Key recommendations included the need for a trusted messenger, a coordinated entrepreneurial support infrastructure, and culturally responsive strategies to strengthen equitable participation in the local economy.

In response, WEBB Squared launched the BIPOC Business Hub, now known as the **Chatham County Innovation Lab**, an initiative rooted in culturally responsive coaching, grassroots engagement, and deep trust within historically underrepresented communities. The Innovation Lab brings together partners from government, nonprofit, higher education, and the private sector to strengthen the county’s small business ecosystem and expand access to opportunity for entrepreneurs who have historically faced barriers to capital, networks, and technical assistance.

With support from Chatham County over the past three fiscal years, the Innovation Lab has become an important part of the county’s entrepreneurial infrastructure. Through individualized coaching, ecosystem convenings, and community-informed research, we help entrepreneurs build sustainable businesses while identifying structural barriers that limit economic participation.

In FY 2026–2027, WEBB Squared proposes **deepening the Innovation Lab’s impact by formalizing our entrepreneur coaching framework into a replicable training model** that can be shared with ecosystem partners, community mentors, and business leaders.

Beginning in 2026, childcare-focused initiatives previously explored through the Innovation Lab have transitioned into a separate entity, **WEBB KIDDZ**, allowing the Innovation Lab to concentrate fully on entrepreneurship development and ecosystem capacity building.

This next phase will strengthen the county’s entrepreneurial support system while expanding WEBB Squared’s capacity to serve more entrepreneurs through a trained network of coaches and partners.

Project Goals

In FY 2026–2027, the Chatham County Innovation Lab will focus on strengthening the coaching infrastructure that supports minority entrepreneurs across the county.

Key goals include:

- Design and publish the WEBB Squared Entrepreneur Coaching Manual, documenting our culturally responsive coaching framework.
- Launch a Train-the-Trainer initiative that equips ecosystem partners, business leaders, and volunteer mentors to support entrepreneurs using the Innovation Lab framework.
- Expand the Innovation Lab’s coaching capacity and reach, enabling WEBB Squared to support more entrepreneurs through trained mentors and aligned partners.
- Continue providing direct coaching while connecting entrepreneurs to technical assistance through the Innovation Lab’s network of ecosystem partners as they navigate business formation, growth, and procurement opportunities.
- Strengthen ecosystem collaboration by sharing insights, training tools, and evaluation findings with Innovation Lab partners.

FY 2026–2027 Strategic Objectives and Activities

1. Coaching Framework Development

WEBB Squared will design and publish a comprehensive Entrepreneur Coaching Manual documenting the organization’s culturally responsive approach to business coaching.

The manual will include training modules on:

- Entrepreneurial mindset and leadership
- Business model development
- Financial literacy and pricing strategies
- Operational systems and time management
- Procurement readiness and vendor contracting
- Navigating capital and financing pathways

Impact

Formalizing this framework will allow WEBB Squared to train mentors and partners to deliver consistent, high-quality coaching while preserving the culturally responsive approach that has made the Innovation Lab effective.

Measurable Outcomes

- Completion and publication of the WEBB Squared Coaching Manual
- Development of at least 5 core training modules
- Distribution of training materials to Innovation Lab partners

2.Train-the-Trainer Program

The Innovation Lab will launch a **Train-the-Trainer initiative** designed to expand coaching capacity across Chatham County.

Participants will include:

- Innovation Lab ecosystem partners
- Local business leaders
- Retired professionals interested in mentorship
- Community-based organizations
- Economic development partners

Participants will receive training in:

- WEBB Squared’s entrepreneur coaching methodology
- culturally responsive mentorship practices
- supporting entrepreneurs through different stages of business growth

Impact

This initiative will create a distributed coaching network, allowing more entrepreneurs to receive high-quality support while strengthening collaboration across the county’s entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Measurable Outcomes

- Train at least **5 community mentors and ecosystem partners**
- Deliver **3–4 Train-the-Trainer workshops**
- Expand coaching capacity to support **30-40 entrepreneurs annually**

3. Direct Entrepreneur Coaching and Technical Assistance

WEBB Squared will continue providing individualized coaching and technical assistance to entrepreneurs across Chatham County.

Through the Innovation Lab, we provide direct support to entrepreneurs navigating:

- business formation and licensing
- financial management and pricing strategies
- marketing and customer development
- procurement readiness and contract opportunities
- business expansion planning

Many of the entrepreneurs we support are solo founders managing multiple aspects of their businesses. Coaching provides the guidance, accountability, and ecosystem connections needed to help entrepreneurs stabilize and grow their businesses.

Impact

Personalized coaching helps entrepreneurs transition from informal businesses to formal enterprises, strengthen revenue stability, and prepare for long-term growth.

Measurable Outcomes

- Provide **200+ hours of entrepreneur coaching annually**
- Support **30–40 entrepreneurs through Innovation Lab services**
- Assist **3–5 entrepreneurs with procurement or vendor opportunities**

4. Data-Driven Evaluation and Knowledge Sharing

The Innovation Lab will continue convening partners across Chatham County's entrepreneurial ecosystem, including economic development organizations, community colleges, chambers of commerce, and nonprofit partners.

Through these convenings we strengthen communication, improve referrals, and ensure that entrepreneurs can more easily access the resources available across the county.

Activities include:

- ecosystem convenings and roundtables
- collaborative workshops and training events
- outreach to historically underserved communities
- community listening sessions to identify emerging barriers

Impact

Coordinated collaboration across sectors strengthens the county's entrepreneurial infrastructure and improves access to opportunity for historically underrepresented entrepreneurs.

Measurable Outcomes

- Host 2-3 ecosystem convenings annually
- Facilitate 3–6 entrepreneur workshops or training events
- Expand Innovation Lab partnerships across Chatham County

5. Data-Driven Evaluation and Knowledge Sharing

WEBB Squared will continue tracking participation and outcomes through the Innovation Lab's data systems.

This evaluation approach allows us to monitor progress, identify gaps in the entrepreneurial ecosystem, and share insights with partners and county leadership.

Evaluation activities include:

- tracking entrepreneur participation and coaching hours
- documenting business outcomes and success stories
- producing annual reports and ecosystem insights

Impact

Real-time tracking enables data-informed decision-making and supports continuous improvement toward measurable inclusive economic development outcomes.

FY 2026–2027 Program Goals and Measurable Outcomes

Chatham County Innovation Lab

During the FY 2026–2027 funding period, WEBB Squared will continue strengthening the Chatham County Innovation Lab while deepening the systems that allow the program to serve more entrepreneurs over time. Building on the lessons and outcomes from previous years, our focus will be on **codifying and expanding our coaching framework** so that more mentors, ecosystem partners, and community leaders can support entrepreneurs through a shared model.

A central priority will be the development of a **WEBB Squared Coaching Manual**, which will document our coaching methodology, training approach, and analysis of common barriers facing minority entrepreneurs in Chatham County.

This manual will allow us to **train additional mentors and ecosystem partners** to support entrepreneurs through a consistent framework while maintaining program quality.

By expanding the number of individuals equipped to mentor and coach entrepreneurs, the Innovation Lab will increase its capacity to support the county’s growing small-business community.

Measurable Outcomes for FY 2026–2027

Through the Chatham County Innovation Lab, WEBB Squared anticipates achieving the following outcomes:

Entrepreneur Engagement

- Provide coaching and Innovation Lab services to **30–40 minority entrepreneurs** navigating early-stage and growth-stage business development.

Coaching System Development

- Design and complete the WEBB Squared Coaching Manual documenting our coaching framework, methodologies, and training approach.

Train-the-Trainer Initiative

- Train **at least 5-10 mentors, ecosystem partners, and business leaders** using the coaching framework so they can support entrepreneurs through the Innovation Lab.

Technical Assistance Connections

- Continue connecting entrepreneurs to specialized technical assistance through the Innovation Lab’s network of ecosystem partners, including legal, financial, and business development resources.

Entrepreneur Business Outcomes

- Support entrepreneurs in achieving milestones such as:
 - Business registration and licensing
 - Contract procurement
 - Access to capital preparation
 - Revenue stabilization or expansion

Ecosystem Strengthening

- Continue convening Innovation Lab partners to share insights from the coaching framework and deepen collaboration across the county's small-business ecosystem.

Addendum A: Entrepreneur Outcomes and Stories

Chatham County Innovation Lab

The following examples illustrate the types of outcomes generated through coaching, ecosystem partnerships, and collaborative technical assistance provided through the Chatham County Innovation Lab. These stories demonstrate how entrepreneurs are moving from informal or early-stage businesses toward more stable enterprises that contribute to Chatham County's growing small-business economy.

Licensed Home Bakery Business

Through step-by-step guidance from WEBB Squared, one entrepreneur transitioned from baking informally in her home kitchen to becoming a licensed home bakery. With coaching in business planning, licensing, and marketing, she began securing wholesale contracts with coffee shops in Siler City, expanding her customer base and formalizing her business operations. She has since secured a multi-year vendor contract with a local business, creating a more stable and predictable income stream.

Virtual Administrative Services Business

An entrepreneur launched a virtual administrative services company to serve small business clients with a goal of securing a multi-year contract with a regional organization to help stabilize her business income and positioning her business for future growth. As her business developed, WEBB Squared contracted with her to provide administrative support for our organization. This reflects our commitment to regenerative economics, an approach that prioritizes purchasing services from entrepreneurs within our network whenever possible. By circulating resources within the local business ecosystem, we help strengthen minority-owned enterprises while modeling equitable and inclusive business practices.

Bookkeeping Services Business

An entrepreneur who previously worked as a bookkeeper for a large corporation launched her own independent bookkeeping business while continuing her full-time employment. Through coaching and business development support, she has secured one organization client and is steadily building a portfolio of small business clients, positioning the company for continued growth.

Commercial Cleaning Services Business

An entrepreneur operating a commercial cleaning business has expanded into larger contracts by submitting proposals for mixed-use retail and office developments in the Chatham region. With support in business strategy, procurement readiness, and proposal development, the company is positioning itself to secure larger commercial contracts and increase revenue.

Food Businesses and Mobile Food Vendors

Entrepreneurs who previously launched food trucks and small brick-and-mortar food businesses through WEBB Squared coaching remain active and operating, demonstrating the long-term sustainability of the businesses supported through the Innovation Lab.

Hair Care Business Expansion

A long-time local hair stylist and small business owner has worked with WEBB Squared to prepare for business expansion through bank financing. Through coaching focused on financial management and business planning, the entrepreneur is now prepared to pursue a commercial loan to expand operations, representing an important step toward long-term business growth.

Latina Cooperative Doula Business

Through outreach and ecosystem partnerships in Siler City, 11 Latina entrepreneurs came together to form a cooperative doula business serving families in the community. With support from WEBB Squared and Innovation Lab partners, the group has formally registered the cooperative business, creating new opportunities for culturally responsive maternal support services while generating income for the participating entrepreneurs.

Economic Impact

While many of the entrepreneurs supported through the Innovation Lab initially generate income through self-employment, several are moving toward larger contracts, expanded services, and employer-based businesses.

These outcomes contribute to:

- Increased household income for participating entrepreneurs
- Expanded access to professional services within the local economy
- Stronger minority-owned enterprises in Chatham County
- Long-term potential for local job creation

Together, these stories demonstrate how the Chatham County Innovation Lab is helping minority entrepreneurs formalize businesses, stabilize income, and participate more fully in the county's growing small-business economy.

Results Snapshot

Chatham County Innovation Lab

Through coaching, ecosystem collaboration, and technical assistance delivered through the Chatham County Innovation Lab, WEBB Squared supported minority entrepreneurs in strengthening and formalizing their businesses during the past year. Key outcomes include:

- **Entrepreneurs Served**- 30+ minority entrepreneurs engaged through coaching, workshops, and ecosystem convenings
- **Businesses Formalized** - Entrepreneurs supported in obtaining business registrations, licensing, and operational systems
- **Income Stabilization** - Several entrepreneurs secured multi-year service contracts or expanded customer bases that stabilized business income
- **Business Expansion** - Entrepreneurs pursuing commercial contracts, brick-and-mortar operations, food trucks, and bank financing
- **New Cooperative Business Formation** - 11 Latina entrepreneurs formed and registering a cooperative doula business in Siler City
- **Ecosystem Collaboration**: - Expanded Innovation Lab partner network supporting entrepreneurs through specialized technical assistance

Chatham County Innovation Lab

FY 2026–2027 Program Budget Request

Organization: WEBB Squared
Program: Chatham County Innovation Lab
Funding Request: \$100,000

WEBB Squared is requesting \$100,000 to support the next phase of the Chatham County Innovation Lab, with the understanding that funding levels may align with prior-year support.

BUDGET CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION	AMOUNT REQUESTED
Contracted Program Staff	Contracted program staff responsible for coordinating Innovation Lab activities, providing entrepreneur coaching, managing ecosystem partnerships, and facilitating workshops and convenings.	\$60,000
Executive Leadership & Coaching Framework Development	Portion of Executive Director time dedicated to Innovation Lab leadership, ecosystem coordination, and development of the WEBB Squared Coaching Manual and Train-the-Trainer framework.	\$20,000
Innovation Hub Workspace – 79°West	Lease for workspace and convening location at 79°West Innovation Hub used for entrepreneur coaching, partner meetings, and Innovation Lab programming.	\$19,800
Program Materials, Workshops & Convenings	Materials, training resources, and costs associated with entrepreneur workshops, mentor training sessions, and Innovation Lab partner convenings.	\$200
TOTAL REQUEST		\$100,000

Budget Narrative

The requested funding will support the continued operation and expansion of the Chatham County Innovation Lab, a collaborative initiative designed to strengthen the county's entrepreneurial ecosystem by supporting minority entrepreneurs and strengthening connections across business support organizations.

The majority of funds will support contracted program staff responsible for delivering coaching services, coordinating Innovation Lab activities, and connecting entrepreneurs to technical assistance through the Lab's network of ecosystem partners.

Funding will also support executive leadership and program development, including the design of the WEBB Squared Coaching Manual, which will document our coaching methodology and allow WEBB Squared to train mentors, business leaders, and ecosystem partners through a shared framework.

County funding also supports WEBB Squared's lease at 79°West Innovation Hub, which provides a dedicated workspace and convening site for Innovation Lab programming, entrepreneur meetings, and partner collaboration.

Additional costs related to materials, workshops, and Innovation Lab convenings are supplemented through foundation grants and other organizational resources.