

Battle Creek Unlimited responds to COVID-19 with \$1.6 million in local support



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BATTLE CREEK, MICH - In the wake of the corona virus outbreak, Battle Creek Unlimited (BCU) provided approximately \$1.6 million in direct support to 161 small businesses and nonprofits in the Battle Creek region, impacting 872 jobs. This financial assistance, in the form of loans and grants, was made possible by generous donations from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Consumers Energy Foundation, Chemical Bank, and Battle Creek Unlimited.

On March 19, days after Governor Whitmer's executive order shuttered restaurants and bars, BCU announced its Emergency Loan Fund. Financed with \$500,000 from BCU's own revolving loan fund, the Direct Investment Fund (DIF), the Emergency Loan Fund was designed to provide an emergency cash infusion with favorable repayment terms, affording small businesses time to not only apply for SBA programs but also time to weather a multiple month shutdown. BCU also launched a COVID-19 resource website to provide local companies with information on available assistance.

As demand for loan requests from local companies grew, Chemical Bank donated \$10,000 and BCU repurposed money from its Downtown Real Estate Improvement Fund, bringing the loan fund to almost \$1 million. The loan fund provided 29 companies with loans totaling \$955,000, impacting 363 jobs.

As the crisis worsened, BCU recognized that small businesses in Battle Creek were hardest hit by the pandemic. On April 16, BCU announced the COVID-19 Emergency Microgrant Fund for Small Businesses & Nonprofit Organizations. Funded by a donation of \$250,000 from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the microgrant fund provided cash grants to nonprofit organizations and small businesses. Priority was given to companies owned by women, minorities, and people of color as well as nonprofits whose mission serves those communities.

A \$200,000 donation from the Consumers Energy Foundation as well as additional donations of \$75,000 from the Kellogg Foundation and \$75,000 from BCU raised the microgrant fund to \$600,000. This enabled BCU to expand the program to include small businesses and nonprofit organizations in Springfield, Emmett Charter Township, Bedford Charter Township, and Pennfield Charter Township. In total, BCU made 132 grants, including 25 to local nonprofit organizations and 81 to small businesses owned by women, minorities and people of color, impacting 509 jobs.

During the crisis, BCU also supported the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) with the Michigan Small Business Relief Program. The MEDC provided the Southwest Michigan region with \$800,000 to distributed among seven counties. BCU served as the lead organization for the greater Battle Creek region, collecting and vetting 96 applications. This resulted in \$126,600 in grants to 16 businesses, impacting 183 jobs.

As companies begin to return to work, BCU will adapt to the new business landscape. Staff have been working from home since late March and business travel has been put on hold for the near future. At same time, BCU President & CEO Joe Sobieralski believes Battle Creek is well positioned for what comes next.

“We have two large projects which are eager to break ground as soon as possible. We have seen requests for information on available buildings and space remain steady throughout this crisis,” said Mr. Sobieralski. “Moreover, there may be opportunities to attract new businesses to the area as companies rethink their supply chains. Given our location, workforce, existing company base and resources, Battle Creek is well positioned to come out the other side of this crisis even stronger than it was before.”

“As we begin to reopen, and position Battle Creek for recovery, reflection sets in. I am proud of my team, thankful for the work the City of Battle Creek does, and grateful for the wonderful partnerships we have in this community and beyond,” stated Mr. Sobieralski. “I look forward to the day we can go downtown to enjoy a beer at one of the amazing establishments. Until that day, stay healthy, stay strong, and know this is just temporary.”

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ABOUT BATTLE CREEK UNLIMITED

Established in 1972, Battle Creek Unlimited (BCU) is a private, non-profit corporation which serves as the economic development arm for the City of Battle Creek and manages the Fort Custer Industrial Park. The Fort Custer Industrial Park is home to over 80 businesses, including 25 international companies, and employs over 13,000 people. BCU's mission is to build a strong community by driving strategic investment and job creation.

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