

TCR TRACK 2 PROPOSAL

Understanding Community Economic Well-being through Experiences of Support by Black Entrepreneurs

Extant research has established the impacts of racial discrimination and segregation on the contemporary lives of Black consumers in the United States. From homeownership and wealth gaps (Perry, 2019) to decreased wellbeing (Williams & Collins, 2001), racial disparities persist. Such disparities are rooted in the nation's racialized history of slavery, genocide, and segregation (Gaskin et al. 2004), which have had compounding, multigenerational effects on wealth, opportunity, and consumption for Black Americans (Alexis, 1971; Park et al., 2019; Williams, 2017). Unfortunately, the Covid-19 pandemic further exacerbated such inequities, with Black communities not only facing higher rates of infection and death, but also greater economic vulnerability due to constrained access to resources (Vasquez Reyes 2020). Moreover, Black entrepreneurs were significantly more likely to close their business due to reduced customer patronage, face difficulty paying bills due to the impact of Covid-19, and experience difficulty gaining access to financial interventions (e.g., Federal payroll protection program (PPP)) (Choi et al. 2022). Researchers found that minority businesses were the least likely to receive PPP loans because the traditional banks responsible for the distribution of funds favored established customers and businesses, which blocked access to many black entrepreneurs (Liu & Parilla 2020). This perpetuated the lack of sustainable and equitable tools and resources to propel innovation and Black entrepreneurship.

To combat such systemic financial vulnerability, local municipalities have implemented community-based programs aimed at bolstering the economic outlook for Black citizens through workforce readiness/access, job creation, and entrepreneurship development programs (Brookings, 2021). Birmingham, AL is a municipality that is targeting the systemic issues faced by Black entrepreneurs by instituting programs that provide localized uplift to the economic security of those prepared to leverage these programs' benefits. However, systemic barriers continue to stymie the reach of such programs, often limiting their effectiveness. In cities like Birmingham that have a long history of racial segregation, divestment, and blight, the sociohistorical climate for which Black citizens must live within are still rooted in racial discrimination that may shape perceptions of economic opportunity and access (Connerly, 2002, 2005; Wilson, 1977). Thus, the barriers and the required interventions to community economic development are more complex, including the generational traumas that carry collective memories of enslaved people. These barriers to entrepreneurship require intervention strategies that include both psychological well-being and financial resources.

Our track group seeks to understand such interventions; specifically, how Black entrepreneurs experience support from various interventions and their perceptions of effectiveness in facilitating Black

entrepreneurship. Our track will consist of five academic scholars across three business disciplines to explore how a city plagued with racial divestment can improve the economic outlook of its citizens through entrepreneurship intervention. Our plan for post-conference is to provide the Birmingham city officials with actionable insights from our analysis, as well as submit an academic article to a journal. Each team member brings complementary knowledge and experience about the research topic. Dr. Ekpo has interest in researching the Black wealth gap and the strategies implemented to remedy it. Dr. Thornton has research interest in the social dynamics of small business supply chain operations. Dr. Alexander has research interests in small business development and was a resident of Birmingham, managing a new venture office for a large bank at the *Innovation Depot* in Birmingham. Drs. Laura and Timothy Madden both have research interests in entrepreneur psychological well-being.

Track Team:

- Akon E. Ekpo, Assistant Professor, Marketing, Loyola University Chicago, Quinlan School of Business
- LaDonna M. Thornton, Assistant Professor, Supply Chain, Auburn University, Harbert College of Business
- Katherine Alexander, Assistant Professor, Management, Loyola University Chicago, Quinlan School of Business
- Laura Madden, Associate Professor, Management, East Carolina University, College of Business
- Timothy Madden, Associate Professor, Management, East Carolina University, College of Business

Our team has committed to work on this project between now and the 2025 TCR conference. Our timeline for this project is as follows:

High-level tasks	Timeframe
Virtual meetings to discuss: Entrepreneurship literature Identification of theoretical gap(s) Finalization of the study’s research question(s)	September – November 2024
Meet with Birmingham officials to finalize focal constituency Begin data collection protocols for interviews/observations Begin data collection	December 2024 – February 2025
Meet with full team to discuss preliminary findings & take any corrective actions	March 2025
Continue data collection	April – May 2025
Data analysis workshop	June 12-15, 2025, during TCR conference
Finalize analysis	July – August 2025
Report findings & insights for Birmingham officials	September 2025

Finalize academic journal selection Begin journal manuscript drafting	
Working draft of manuscript	September – December 2025
Prepare manuscript for submission to academic journal	January 2026

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