

# THE OPPORTUNITY PROJECT

## 2021 PROBLEM STATEMENT

CITY OF CORAL GABLES

### Helping Small Businesses Thrive in a Digital Economy

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**THE CHALLENGE** – Develop digital tools that help small business leaders and their workforces to enhance their online presence and ability to process data and information relevant to their businesses in real time, thereby allowing them to be competitive in the digital ecosystem

**EXECUTIVE CHAMPION** – Ed Santamaria, Assistant City Manager, City of Coral Gables

**THE PROBLEM** – In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, many small businesses struggled to stay afloat. As of May 2021, the number of U.S. small businesses that were open had decreased by 33.8% compared to January 2020. Those that stayed open faced reduced revenues, as well as increased expenses and new operational realities given health and safety restrictions. During the pandemic, much of the economy also transitioned online. However, only 29% of small businesses in Florida report benefiting from online sales, highlighting inequities in preparation for this shift. Given these challenges, economic recovery will also not be straightforward for smaller scale operations. However, small businesses play a critical role in the economy, with 60% of net new job gains in Florida since 2012 having come from companies with less than 100 employees, confirming the pivotal role of these organizations to the state's economy.

**THE OPPORTUNITY** – Pre-COVID, the local business community in Coral Gables -- and many places nationwide -- was not adequately prepared to operate in a digital environment. For example, in March of 2020, the City of Coral Gables business assessment survey on preparedness to operate in the pandemic economy found that only 37% of our businesses were using social media platforms to obtain the information needed to guide their business decision regarding COVID-19. As economic recovery begins, there is now an opportunity to build digital capacity within small businesses through training, services, and tools that will ensure their resilience and competitiveness post-pandemic. This may include identifying small businesses in need of digital support, as well as increasing digital literacy and creating opportunities for small businesses to connect with the latest technologies (e.g., Internet of Things, Cloud, Artificial Intelligence, Blockchain, and others). Despite the City's effort to introduce these platforms, our team still has insufficient data on digital literacy and computer skills of the small business workforce. Such economic and demographic data with indicators of the digital literacy of the local workforce will help our team target educational strategies to help small businesses and their extended communities.

**VISION FOR SPRINT OUTCOMES** – Small businesses in South Florida will become more integrated into the innovative business ecosystem by incorporating technology into their workflows, enabling equitable growth, social equity and greater opportunities for small business owners and employees. We hope this sprint will contribute to creating new business opportunities and jobs in the community through the application of technology, as well as improve quality of service for customers and business competitiveness with a combination of digital literacy, process efficiencies, and cyber-infrastructure. Additionally, the sprint could provide the digital infrastructure and capacity for companies to process the

volume and speed of data with the latest technology to be effective in a highly competitive international business ecosystem.

**TARGET END USERS** – Primarily small business owners, their employees, and economic development professionals, as well as visitors and residents

#### RELATED DATA SETS

- [Census Business Builder](#)
- [Small Business Pulse Survey](#)
- [Coral Gables Smart City Hub public platform](#) and [digital library](#) with numerous datasets and open APIs from GIS maps, real time Internet of Things sensors, transparency portals, citizen engagement portals, e-Gov digital tools and apps, and other sources
- [Reopening of the Economy Report](#)

#### LEAD POINT OF CONTACTS

- Julian H. Perez, AICP, CFM, Economic Development Director
- Raimundo Rodulfo, P.E., PMP, Information Technology Director