



CAMBRIDGE LOCAL FIRST COVID RESPONSE

Hello! My name is **Theodora Skeadas**, and I am the executive director of **Cambridge Local First**, a non-profit network of 400+ local and independent businesses here in Cambridge. Our mission is to support, promote, and celebrate a “local economy community” by educating the public and government about the significant environmental, economic, and cultural benefits of a strong local economy. Further, this issue is a personal one, as my grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles, and many cousins, are life-long small business owners in Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, Georgia, and Alabama.

In accordance with our **three-pronged value proposition**, our ongoing efforts center on small business assistance, education to the public, and advocacy:

1 First, on small business assistance:

- We supported the first **Live Local Shopping Hour**, to give retailers an opportunity to sell their goods directly to shoppers.
- We are connecting businesses with needed resources.
- We have offered trainings on the following subjects:
 - Technical assistance as businesses transition their services to online platforms like Zoom.

- Grants and loans to which our members can apply.
- Employment law.
- Regulation changes.
- Revenue generation strategies.
- Rent negotiation.
- We are organizing weekly community conversations on Thursdays.
- We are organizing a **fundraiser for Scout Magazines**, a critical partner of ours.
- We are disseminating critical information, including grants, loans, and services to our members daily.
- We are supporting rent release efforts.
- We are actively amplifying small businesses across social media, with a focus on the business owners and their families.
- We are sharing information about online food delivery platforms with our members, so they can transition to online delivery.
- We are amplifying existing organizing efforts among different industries, including restaurants and hospitality, and farmers, ranchers, and fishermen.
- We are working with a local startup, Community Phone, to offer free talking, texting, and office number forwarding to our members.
- We are helping our members identify creative sources of funding including crowdfunding, with MainVest.
- We are partnering with Somerville counterparts to support Somerville-based businesses.
- Our website lists **resources for small businesses** and is updated daily.
- Translating the terms of the federal stimulus package into understandable and actionable terms for our business members.
- We have built a **visualization of open local businesses** in Cambridge, which tracks delivery, take out, online sales, and fundraising campaigns.

2] Second, on education:

- We are amplifying the **COVID Biz Link**, student-produced volunteer clearinghouse for folks interested in supporting the local biz ecosystem.
- Our **newly remade website** now houses Cambridge's directory of open local businesses.
- We have created a **Love Letters to Cambridge Local Business Facebook group**, where we are encouraging community members to post photos of them with local orders.
- We are maintaining an online list of **open small businesses**, amplifying open businesses to the public, and encouraging them to consume locally.

- We are amplifying small businesses across social media to the public. Our driving message is three-fold:
 - **(1)** Order food takeout from local restaurants!
 - **(2)** Order merchandise from local businesses!
 - **(3)** Buy gift cards now for later use, and donate to GoFundMe campaigns for businesses and their employees!
- We are partnering with our local media -- namely the Cambridge Day and Scout Cambridge -- to highlight the stories of our businesses to the public.
- We are generating data and insights from the **COVID-19 Impact Survey**, which was sent to all of our members.
- We are supporting, and amplifying, the **Sustainable Business Network of Massachusetts' directory** of local businesses in the Boston and the greater Boston area that remain open for business during this time.
- We are organizing a **Harvard Club panel** of business and non-profit stakeholders in this ecosystem to discuss our efforts through a combination of technology and advocacy approaches.
- We are disseminating information to the public over **frequent newsletters**.
- We organize weekly **community conversation** that engaged folks across all relevant stakeholder groups and served as the predecessor to today's conversation.

3 Third, on advocacy:

- National level: We are co-organizing two national advocacy efforts:
 - First, is the Save our Economy Now! effort, in partnership with the **American Independent Business Alliance** and **American Sustainable Business Council**. This is a national campaign to encourage the federal government to adopt these **five recommended steps**.
 - We've had hundreds of businesses and nonprofits sign on as partners, and nearly 1,000 folks have signed our **Change.org petition**.
 - We are working with the **American Sustainable Business Council** (ASBC) to bring diverse leaders nationally together to identify policy recommendations for state and local legislators on reopening the economy.
 - We're partnering with the Institute for Local Self-Reliance (ILSR) to forward a campaign that **recommends five steps** on what the federal government needs to do to enable small businesses to survive the coronavirus crisis.

- Local level:
 - We will be serving on the **City Manager Small Business Advisory Committee**, where we will provide expert advice and help draft best practices that the City can incorporate into its “Small Business Back to Business” plan.
 - We are working closely with elected officials and government agencies, in particular Vice Mayor Alanna Mallon and Pardis Saffari from the Economic Development Division of the Cambridge Community Development Department, to push for policies that support our small businesses.
 - We are working with the City Council to finalize a policy order on online delivery apps that caps the fees and requires transparency.
 - We are working with the City Council to identify grant resources for small businesses.
 - We are an active member of the Cambridge Nonprofit Coalition, discussing shared best practices and resources across non-profits working on the front lines in Cambridge.

4] Fourth, Cambridge Local First-commissioned projects

- **Somerville Expansion** - Given the recognition that Somerville Local First (SLF) ceased its operations, and there is a need for local business representation in this climate, we are considering broadening our reach into the Somerville geography. To begin exploring the proposition, we recently initiated a “Somerville Expansion Task Force” on our Board. We also began reaching out to key Somerville stakeholders (the Somerville Economic Development Department, the Somerville Chamber, the two Somerville main street business associations, last SLF ED, and the SLF founder, among others) to get their feedback. They have been unequivocally supportive and enthused thus far.
 - After a consultation last Friday with eight Somerville business owners and nonprofit EDs, we have crafted a **Google Form** that asks Somerville businesses to highlight their interest in joining a Cambridge/Somerville Local First.
- **Scout Magazines** - This task force is exploring a union with Scout Magazines.
- **Mobile App** - This task force is exploring the development of or partnership with a mobile application that services small businesses.

- **Summer internship:** We're working with the **American Sustainable Business Council** (ASBC), the **American Independent Business Alliance** (AMIBA), and the **Sustainable Business Network (SBN) of MA** on a shared ten-week summer internship on bolstering resilient local economies. The internship project proposal is [here](#).
- **Volunteers:** We're now working with 30 volunteers to undertake a series of projects, including social media amplification, data collection and cleaning, blog generation, member outreach, and more.
- **Data analytics:** We're working with the **Harvard College Data Analytics Group** on a three-week data project:
 - Variable correlation visualizations - looking to better understand the relationship between the population and vitality of local and independent businesses in Cambridge, and various factors that might correlate with (and ideally causally impact) their success.
 - User engagement analysis - review and generate visual insights (user engagement, etc.) from any/all of our three social media accounts and website.
 - Infographic generation.
 - Data journalism - with the end result of the data insights generated, we can reach out to Cambridge media for news article publications.

JOIN THE MOVEMENT #SHOPSMALL



OUR STORY

Hello! My name is Theodora Skeadas, and I joined **Cambridge Local First** as its Executive Director just over a year ago. My, it's been quite a journey! As context, Cambridge Local First is a non-profit network of 400+ local and independent businesses here in Cambridge. Our mission is to support, promote, and celebrate a "local economy community" by educating the public and government about the significant environmental, economic, and cultural benefits of a strong local economy. Further, we are part of a network of independent business associations (IBAs) around the country, working to amplify local economies in our respective regions.

This past month, we at Cambridge Local First have **worked tirelessly to support Cambridge's local businesses**. In accordance with our **three-pronged value proposition**, our ongoing efforts center on small business assistance, education to the public, and advocacy. We are determined to support our members.

Yet, this is a dire moment for our small businesses, which constitute the bedrock of our economy. Many are closing, and **some estimates** suggest that 40% of our local businesses will fail to reopen following this crisis, and an additional 25% within the year. Further, entrepreneurship in general has been declining in America for decades. In the 1950s and 1960s, there were over 150,000 new businesses created annually. This number was less than 20,000 in 2018.

Small business ownership is an integral part of upward economic mobility; it yields shared prosperity and wealth reinvestment, specifically for immigrant, minority, and low-income families. It directly correlates with poverty alleviation and serves as a cash transfer intervention. As such, we are working closely with immigrant, minority, and low-income-owned businesses, including business owners Omar Bouibegh of Baraka Cuisine, Rogera Toussaint of MTM Executives, Cathy Wang of BUILT, Keisha Greaves of Girls Chronically Rock, and Rosi Amador of Amador Bilingual Voiceovers. For example, we launched a campaign for Omar Bouibegh's restaurant over social media that engaged nearly 3,000 people and yielded a quadrupling of his sales. Omar was born in Fes, Morocco, and his restaurant marries French gastronomy with North African regional cuisine.

Our small businesses have displayed incredible resilience, innovation, and malleability amidst these challenging times. They have had to reinvent themselves, transitioning their services to online platforms, learning website management and video conferencing, adopting online consulting practices, and familiarizing themselves with employment law. With limited resources, many have adapted to their vastly changed environment.

Ultimately, we aim to provide meaningful support to small business owners during this challenging time, to help them stay in business throughout this crisis, and thrive in the days that follow.