



Southern Opportunity and Resilience Fund

National and Local Community Lenders Announce Multi-Million Dollar Fund to Support Small Business and Nonprofit Recovery Across the South

The Southern Opportunity and Resilience (SOAR) Fund aims to support the recovery of small businesses and nonprofits with access to flexible, affordable capital and free business support services across 15 southern states

March 3, 2021 – A diverse group of community finance organizations today announced the Southern Opportunity and Resilience (SOAR) Fund, which aims to raise \$150 million to provide affordable capital and free business support to small businesses and nonprofits in 15 southern and southeastern states to help them navigate and rebuild from the Covid-19 health and economic crisis.

[The SOAR Fund](#) was created by community lenders in the South to provide economic recovery loans to small businesses in their communities at a time when they are facing unprecedented health and economic challenges. The loans are designed to reach the smallest of small businesses and those that have been historically underbanked – the type of businesses that this coalition of lenders have been serving for decades. These businesses often struggle to access capital from traditional sources but are critical to providing jobs and supporting economic recovery in communities across the South.

“The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated an already uneven recovery from the Great Recession. Southern states had slower economic growth, lower labor force participation, and higher unemployment than the rest of the country, partially driven by the historic lack of corporate and philanthropic investment in the region,” said George Ashton, managing director at Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), which manages the Fund. “The SOAR Fund, with support from leading banks, foundations, and corporations, will tackle these issues head-on by addressing structural barriers to economic opportunity by providing capital to Southern small businesses and nonprofits that need it now.”

The portal for small businesses is scheduled to open in April and will offer flexible, affordable loans of up to \$100,000 to small businesses and nonprofits with fewer than 50 full-time employees. The Fund replicates similar models that have succeeded in New York and California by working with and through local Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs).

All interested small business owners and nonprofits can review program eligibility, product terms, and indicate interest at www.TheSoarFund.org, which will notify business owners once the application portal is live. Once the application portal launches, eligible applicants will be matched with a participating lender that will assist the business owner with the application and provide advisory support.

Catalytic initial grants and loans are being provided by Capital One, Microsoft, the F.B. Heron Foundation, Fidelity Charitable with support from CapShift, the Heifer Foundation, Mercy Investment Services, Woodforest National Bank, Ceniarth, and the Jacksonville, Florida-based Chartrand Family.

“By investing in the Southern Opportunity and Resilience Fund, we are enabling recovery and economic stability to historically under-served businesses and communities through a robust network of CDFI partners to deliver targeted business support services,” said Theresa Bedeau, Community Impact & Investment at Capital One. “Capital One is proud to support SOAR as its entrepreneurs build their businesses and nonprofits, establish financial well-being and secure their futures.”

“We’re pleased to partner and invest in the Southern Opportunity and Resilience (SOAR) Fund with the goal to increase access to capital and support for underserved community businesses and nonprofits,” said Tahreem Kampton, Corporate Treasurer at Microsoft. “Microsoft is committed to addressing racial injustice in our society, ecosystems, and communities. Many small businesses across the country and in our southern and southeastern states have struggled economically due to Covid-19. We are glad to support this collaborative effort to help provide opportunities in communities that have been historically underserved.”

Thirteen CDFIs will originate loans purchased by the Fund, including Access to Capital for Entrepreneurs (ACE), Accion Opportunity Fund, Ascendus, BCL of Texas, Black Business Investment Fund, Communities Unlimited, LiftFund, NCIFund, NDC’s Community Investment Loan Fund, Pathway Lending, People Fund, Southern Bancorp Community Partners, and TruFund Financial Services. As a collaborative, these lenders have full reach across the region, have served on the front lines of the economic crisis and have decades of experience providing high-touch lending and advisory services to small businesses and nonprofit organizations. The CDFIs will be supported by leading technical assistance and business support organizations including Winrock International, LISC’s local offices and national rural program, and Small Business Majority, which will help with outreach, education, and hands-on business advisory services. Calvert Impact Capital is arranging and LISC Fund Management is managing the Fund.

“TruFund is proud to be a member of the SOAR Fund Partnership,” said James H. Bason, President and CEO of TruFund Financial Services, a participating CDFI. “We are committed to rebuilding a stronger more resilient small business ecosystem particularly in communities that have suffered from the lack of access to affordable

capital and whose vulnerabilities are now exacerbated by COVID-19 and the related economic impact.”

“Small businesses are not only essential to the fabric of our communities — creating jobs, providing valuable services and powering local economies — but they are also essential to the entrepreneurs who start them and the people they employ, in this case people who are historically underserved and adversely affected by the pandemic. It is imperative, then, that we help small businesses adapt, reopen safely and rebuild,” said Patricia McCall, Vice President of Corporate Affairs and Global Strategy at Winrock International. “SOAR offers potential business partners and donors an opportunity to join in this important mission.”

“We encourage all small business owners and nonprofits who need support to visit the website, learn about the Fund and sign up so you’re pre-registered once we launch the program,” said Patrick Davis, Vice President of Strategy at Community Reinvestment Fund, USA (CRF).

When the Fund opens, CRF’s Connect2Capital platform will allow applicants to sign up online and get matched to a lender in less than five minutes.

The SOAR Fund covers: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia and the District of Columbia.

For more information, visit www.TheSoarFund.org.

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About the SOAR Fund

The Southern Opportunity and Resilience Fund (SOAR) provides access to flexible, affordable capital and free business support services to small businesses and nonprofits through trusted community-based organizations. These organizations have decades of experience supporting historically under-resourced small businesses, including those in low-income and rural communities and owned by women and people of color.

SOAR is a collaborative partnership of local and national community finance organizations created to address the needs of historically disenfranchised communities as they navigate and rebuild from the COVID-19 crisis. SOAR includes leaders from across sectors including local community lenders, national and state-based nonprofit organizations, corporations, philanthropic donors, and investors - all who are passionate about an equitable recovery across the region.