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How Does the Infrastructure and Support of Two Progressive Startup Communities Compare for
African American Entrepreneurs and Small Businesses? A Comparative Study of Atlanta,
Georgia and Charlotte, North Carolina

By

Leroy Carson, Jr.

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Of

Doctorate of Business Administration

In the Robinson College of Business

Of

Georgia State University

GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY
ROBINSON COLLEGE OF BUSINESS
2022

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ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation was prepared under the direction of the LEROY CARSON, JR Dissertation Committee. It has been approved and accepted by all members of that committee, and it has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Business Administration in the J. Mack Robinson College of Business of Georgia State University.

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My family roots can be traced to enslaved man in Orangeburg, South Carolina named Ervin. He had a son named Abednego, who was also a slave. His son, Henry, was a sharecropper who gave birth to my grandfather, a totally free man named Robert. Robert moved his family from the segregated South, to Brooklyn, New York. It is through Robert that my number one mentor, father, and model of manhood, Leroy B. Carson, was born. He has ALWAYS been a shining example of what is possible when one combines willingness to work with identifiable goals. He, along with my son, Ethan Robert Carson (born April 1, 2005), remained my balancing forces that kept my head level during this whole educational journey. I salute them both for their sacrifices and bearing any collateral damage that was a byproduct of me being somewhat locked away, and barely available, for three years. I can't say enough how much I appreciate the cost they had to pay. My father, who will be 90 this year; and my son, who turned 17 last month, are both at critical ages and stages of their lives, and I recognize my inability to invest in them as much as I would have like to over these past three years. My sister, Tracy, remains a constant source of positive energy and encouragement; and to all of them, I love and appreciate them for pushing me when I needed to be pushed; and pulling when I was close to being finished.

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ABSTRACT

How Does the Infrastructure and Support of Two Progressive Startup Communities Compare for African American Entrepreneurs and Small Businesses? A Comparative Study of Atlanta, Georgia and Charlotte, North Carolina

by

Leroy Carson, Jr.

April 2022

Chair: Dr. Wesley J. Johnson

Major Academic Unit: Doctorate in Business Administration

This study provides unique insight into the impact of entrepreneurial ecosystems on African American small business owners and startups. I leveraged Resource Based Theory in conjunction with the OECD/EROSTAT Framework for Entrepreneurship Indicators to identify areas of greatest need across two sampled cities. Quantitative analysis was used to interpret and analyze interviews from a statistically sufficient sampling from Atlanta, Georgia and Charlotte, North Carolina. Qualitative analysis was used to interpret the input from entrepreneurship ecosystem interviewees who, collectively, have the greatest impact and influence on the resources allocated to this community. The quantitative analysis was substantiated by the qualitative analysis, allowing me to affix the appropriate assumptions to the findings from data gathered from both cities. This study offers some great insight into how to pair this theory and framework to examine efficiency and effectiveness within entrepreneurial ecosystems. Regarding the specific results of this study, it was determined that access to, and availability of, capital to a specific entrepreneurial ecosystem is a primary concern that needs to be resolved for the sustainability of

this community. Also, centralized mapping of the availability of these resources should be a priority to ensure maximum utilization through awareness of active and available resources.

Keywords: African American Entrepreneurs, entrepreneurial ecosystem impacts, entrepreneurial resources

I INTRODUCTION

A city's entrepreneurial ecosystem can be a major determinant of the success rate of its startup business community. By using this measure as a means of analysis, one can determine what elements are crucial to an entrepreneur's success in the business development pathway from the idealization phase through the startup and sustainability phases. In this study I examined the impact of African American entrepreneurs taking a concept from ideation to successful business launch, and the implication of local support systems on business sustainability. I first examined Atlanta, Georgia, a city often cited as a center for African American entrepreneurial success. My analysis broadened my understanding of the breadth of support network and infrastructure provided to the entrepreneurial community in Atlanta. After analyzing factors responsible for Atlanta's reputation successes, I explored a similar southeastern city, Charlotte, North Carolina. to enhance my understanding of the elements necessary for a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem. I identified and analyzed factors that could also provide insight to general market understanding of these concepts.

Previous studies have principally examined what forces create the most dynamic ecosystem with a focus on their direct and indirect impacts on small business development (Fairlie, 2021). This study seeks to provide insight into unique elements of Atlanta's African American entrepreneurial ecosystem that can be replicated, and generate thriving entrepreneurial communities, in cities comparable to Atlanta. My survey results and interviews indicate that there are challenges for African American entrepreneurs within Atlanta and other cities in accessing the support necessary to establish and grow small businesses. I identified where deficiencies existed within these two entrepreneurial ecosystems amongst practitioners, scholars, and providers in Atlanta and Charlotte. and data necessary for policy makers to make more informed choices in the future regarding where and how, to educate and employ available resources to the African

American entrepreneurial community. The information for this study's analysis came from primary data sources. Interviews were conducted with senior government agency personnel, mayors, and nonprofit leaders to identify and gain perspective. Those findings were coded and evaluated through the NVivo software package to identify, isolate, and record key patterns in practice. I conducted a survey based on selected findings obtained from the literature review and respondents resided in Atlanta and Charlotte. Data collected from the surveys was analyzed through a linear regression analysis to determine correlation between certain elements and entrepreneurial success. I gained insight on which elements within a city's ecosystem contribute the most to the success of startup businesses within the African American community.

I targeted a city that had a comparable degree of success to African American small business startups in Atlanta. Atlanta is anticipated to serve as the highest performing city in this segment of entrepreneurship for the purposes of this analysis. The Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas (SMSA) was one of the primary qualifiers that aligned Charlotte with Atlanta for this study. The SMSA of Charlotte-Concord-Gastonia, NC-SC Metro Area (Charlotte) served well as a comparable city for the analysis conducted on the impact of the influence of the local entrepreneurial ecosystem had on the success rate of African American entrepreneurship. The SMSA is developed by the United States Census Bureau and maintained through their periodic tables. According to the U.S. Census Bureau website, the SMSAs are defined and determined by the United States Office of Management and Budget (OMB). I chose Charlotte because it is close to Atlanta's SMSA size and makeup in overall population based on publicly available 2019 U.S. census data and represents a similar Southeastern city.

I.1 Statement of the Problem

African American small businesses and startups are experiencing a slower growth rate than other business run by members of other ethnicities in the US (Fairlie, 2021). I sought to examine what role does the African American entrepreneurial ecosystem play in enabling their ability to startup and sustain a business. I also sought to determine whether weaknesses within this system contributed to this community's growth lagging behind its peers. The aim of this study is to examine what role does the entrepreneurial ecosystem play in the success of African American small business and startups. Atlanta provides an ideal environment to test the relationship between local support systems and their impact on the success or failure of the African American entrepreneurial community because of Atlanta's strong reputation for supporting African American businesses. Likewise, Charlotte provides a comparable city to supplement these findings as it, too, has a legacy of leadership from the African American entrepreneurial community with certain economic factors that mirror those in Atlanta.

I.2 Background

Many people consider Atlanta to be "The Black Mecca" of the United States (Hobsin, 2017). The city's longstanding civil rights history, unique clustering of historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), and accomplishments by many African American after the Jim Crow era that plagued a deeply segregated south in the 1950s, lends to this city's powerful reputation. Atlanta had one of America's most successful African American business communities during that period which developed a flourishing commerce district on Auburn Avenue in the heart of Atlanta (Inwood, 2011). The Auburn Avenue corridor has a rich legacy of creating and sustaining great African American businesses born out of Atlanta's rich entrepreneurial ecosystem. These early

entrepreneurial successes within Atlanta proper, created an environment that generated similar economic vitality throughout surrounding counties.

This study seeks to understand which elements contribute to Atlanta's African American business community flourishing more than similarly situated cities within the region. Insight was gained through data collected from interviews with, and surveys from, individuals within Atlanta and Charlotte. The crux of the study will examine the composition and success of Charlotte's African American entrepreneurial ecosystems in comparison to that of Atlanta's. I also examine what role government intervention plays in the success or failure of African American entrepreneurial ecosystems within these two cities. As Li , Liu, Wang, Xia , Zhu X (2020) point out, government has a critical role in ensuring regional development of small business. Having a flourishing support system that enables the development and sustainability of small businesses can be critical to overall regional economic outcomes (Acs, Stam, Audretsch & O'Connor, 2017).

Acs, Estrin, Mickiewicz & Szerb (2018) emphasized the importance of robust entrepreneurial ecosystems to the health of an overall economy. These sub-interconnected systems can offer a combination of factors necessary for small business owners to flourish. They ensure that adequate levels of resources are available to create potentially sustainable enterprises (Adner, 2017). I cannot emphasize enough the importance of these ecosystems to creating flourishing commerce and stable economies. Many scholars believe the economy is a more sophisticated ecosystem controlling for myriad types of inputs and exchanges (Ardner 2017).

Flourishing ecosystems are necessary for successful entrepreneurial communities (Acs, Stam, Audretsch & O'Connor, 2017; Adner, 2017; Inwood, 2011). Understanding how to create efficiencies across regional districts is essential to helping the overall economy (Alvedalena and Boschma, 2017). Limited focus has been placed on understanding what disparities can be created

when successful models are not shared, and best practices are not established by policy makers and those responsible economy vitality (Alessandra Colombelli & Emilio Paolucci & Elisa Ughetto, 2017). Hence the increased importance of not only understanding interregional effects, but also intracommunity inefficiencies can cause long term societal harms. Examining Atlanta's success as a producer of African American entrepreneurs is helpful in providing insight to similar groups within the region. This study will assess how Atlanta's African American entrepreneurial ecosystem works and highlight necessary elements and resources. Critical to this assessment is understanding efficiencies to be captured, recorded, and explained in a manner that other similarly situated economic ecosystems can replicate.

Moreover, third parties play an interesting role in establishing efficiencies within Atlanta's African American entrepreneurial ecosystem. Clearly identifying where Atlanta hosts these type of economic development centers provides unique insight into to how to maximize these resources in other cities. Colleges and universities are a good example of where business development facilities can be established by economic developers and are common to most geographic areas. These academic institutions can provide the proper environment to extend entrepreneurial activity and educate and promote the skills necessary to sustain new business development and growth (Markley, Lyons & Macke, 2015). For example, the U.S. Commerce Department hosts its Atlanta-based Minority Business Development Center (MBDC) at Georgia Tech University. Likewise, the Small Business Administration (SBA) has assigned the University of Georgia to manage their seventeen Small Business Development Centers (SBDA) throughout Georgia. Seven of those locations are situated on seven state college and university campuses across Georgia. The other ten centers are spread out across the state as independent resource development centers.

I.3 Area of Concern

There is a gap in current literature available on the success rate of African American startups in the Southeastern portion of the United States as compared to that of Atlanta. While there is a plethora of scholarly literature on entrepreneurial ecosystems, there is a dearth of peer reviewed literature regarding the disparities in success rates of African American small business owners across similarly situated cities based on the efficiency and availability of resources within their local ecosystems.

I.4 The Research Questions

Using a mixed methods approach, I addressed the following research questions:

1. How can urban entrepreneurial ecosystems support African American startup success?
 - a. Data: qualitative interviews
 - b. Method: analytical coding using NVivo software.
2. How does the infrastructure and support for Atlanta startups compare to a similarly situated southeastern city that has less African American entrepreneurial startup success?
 - a. Data: survey consisting of a subset of smaller targeted questions to narrowly focus on, and understand the perspective of entrepreneurs in the other city
 - b. analysis: linear regression model using SPSS software

II LITERATURE REVIEW

This study examines whether stronger entrepreneurial ecosystems factor into the success rate of African American startup businesses in two southeastern cities. As I researched why I associate the term ecosystem with entrepreneurship, I noticed an interesting correlation. The term “ecosystem” was coined by the botanist Tansley in 1935 and refers to a biological principle that organisms are a byproduct of their milieu and therefor have a shared destiny that is codependent to the health and vibrancy of that environment (Currie, 2011; Tansley, 1935). The Tansley (1935) botanist study expounded on modern vegetation theory offering a biological rationale for why organisms are interrelated to their environment in a structure that he referred to as an ecosystem. Over time, this system of interrelationships that support a common destiny have been attributed to similar conditional structures that have comparable circumstantial codependences.

II.1 Business Ecosystems

The term “business ecosystem” is attributed to Moore (1993) and his scholarly article “Predators and Prey: A New Ecology of Competition.” This article set the foundation for future discussions and theoretical development of business ecosystems. Moore’s business model is displayed below in Table 2.1. The initial theory suggested that market innovation is not a single actor activity but a part of an interconnected grouping of business undertakings that determines the success of the whole. This theoretical structure has two components, cooperative and competitive challenges, that can be measured against fMy constructs: birth, expansion, leadership, and self-renewal. Co-evolution can be the basis for progress, and the reason for failure, when efficiencies are not created, captured, and implemented across these codependent communities. Ecosystem analysis offers great information for strategic planning (Penttilä, Raval, Dahl & Björk, 2020).

<i>Table 2.1 The Evolutionary Stages of a Business Ecosystem</i>		
	Cooperative Challenges	Competitive Challenges
Birth	Work with customers and suppliers to define the new value proposition around a seed innovation.	Protect My ideas from others who might be working towards defining similar offers. Tie up critical lead customers, key suppliers, and important channels.
Expansion	Bring the new offer to a large market by working with suppliers and partners to scale up supply and achieve maximum market coverage.	Defeat alternative implications of similar ideas. Ensure that My approach is the market standard in its class through dominating key market segments.
Leadership	Provide a compelling vision for the future that encourages suppliers and customers to work together to continue improving the complete offer.	Maintain strong bargaining power in relation to other players in the ecosystem, including key customers and valued suppliers.
Self-Renewal	Work with innovators to bring new ideas to existing ecosystems.	Maintain high barriers to entry to prevent innovators from building alternative ecosystems. Maintain high customer switching costs to buy time to incorporate new ideas into My own products and services.

Source: Moore (1993)

The interconnected business environment must work in unison to be successful (Moore, 1993; Penttilä et al., 2020). Business leaders should be cognizant of the network components of these systems to help nourish their business and build a more sustainable customer base. As such, these types of networked systems can be huge value creators for businesses (Demil, Lecocq, & Warnier, 2018). Integrating ecosystem elements and nuanced business strategies is critical to long term entrepreneurial success (Moore, 1993; Penttilä, Ravald, Dahl & Björk, 2020; Demil et al., 2018).

Business ecosystems can empower its participants by sharing key information that is a byproduct of the relationship between their components (Wulf & Butel, 2017). Everything that is learned from this symbiotic relationship should fuel strategy (Moore, 1993; Penttilä, et al., 2020; Demil, et al., 2018). These shared learning experiences increase the opportunity to maximize efficiencies through innovation (Wulf & Butel, 2017). There are many things that organizational strategists can glean from business ecosystem data and there are multiple ways to analyze this data. The Tian, Ray, Lee, Cao & Ding (2008) BEAM framework for business ecosystem analysis and modeling is an interesting example. Table 2.2 demonstrates the model's ability to weigh the joint impact of different firms within a business ecosystem. This is important because, these types of models can be modified and used to evaluate other forms of ecosystems within a given business sector. Tian et al., (2008) shows an aggregate look at businesses within a specific ecosystem whose interactivity is measured independently on its impact overall. Keep in mind My earlier definition of ecosystem from its originator professor Sir Arthur George Tansley in 1935, that organisms are a byproduct of their milieu and therefor have a shared destiny that is codependent to the health and vibrancy of that environment (Currie, 2011; Tansley, 1935).

II.2 Entrepreneurial Ecosystems

As the concept of ecosystems continues to inferentially impact business subjects, it should come as no surprise that its impact reached the entrepreneurial arena. The term entrepreneurial ecosystem, and the accompanying theoretical framework, is associated with Isenberg, the founding executive director of the Babson Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Platform. His groundbreaking research was titled "How to Start an Entrepreneurial Revolution" (2010).

Table 2.2 Framework for Business Ecosystem Analysis

Concept	Definition	Properties
Resource	Elements such as monetary, human capacity, machine, software, and power that can be consumed during the execution of business activities or invested to realize a service.	Owner Unit cost
Activity	A task that consumes resources	Resource consumption
Decision	The selection of a course of action among variations, such as pricing and capability allocation	Objective Decision variable set Strength at Related decision variable
Metric	Performance indicator of a business object (activity, business entity, or service ecosystem)	Business object Value
Role	A set of connected activities and decisions in a service ecosystem	Activity list Decision list Metric list
Business Entity	A general term used for enterprises, business entities, and regulators	Goals Graphic properties
Business Model	The role in relationships of a company, its customers, partners, and suppliers, as well as the flow of goods, information, and money among these parties and the financial benefits to those involved.	Partnership Decision making structure. Decision making mechanism

Source: Tian, Ray, Lee, Cao & Ding (2008)

Entrepreneurial ecosystems are one of the most critical elements of local economic development (Audretsch, Belitski, & Cherkas, 2021; Isenberg, 2010; Isenberg, 2014). Policy makers and the scholarly community have compiled empirical data confirming that these multifaceted, interconnected, groups of business initiators and owner relationships, coupled with their local support systems, are an essential part of regional economic growth designed to ensure

institutions are positioned to support and encourage additional entrepreneurial activities (Audretsch, et al., 2021; Isenberg, 2014).

Varied resources are necessary to significantly impact the level of entrepreneurial activity in a geographic region (Audretsch, et al., 2021; Isenberg, 2010; Isenberg, 2014). Therefore, it is critical that policy makers and institutions continue to evaluate how their programs fit the current needs of the entrepreneurial community and adjust accordingly when needed. Policy matters in stimulating economic activity emanating from entrepreneurial undertakings (Stam, 2015; Audretsch, et al., 2021). Elected officials and individuals responsible formulating the regional legislative and regulatory agenda must align their goals with the entrepreneurial community's ability to sustainably drive economic activity that normally accounts for a large portion of GDP and employment of the labor force in most markets (Feld, 2012; Stam, 2015). This is illustrated in Table 2.3, which identifies a set of attributes that result in a successful startup community. I incorporated elements of this approach and criteria as I formulated the questionnaire for my study's survey. These principles provide the basis for regional governance of entrepreneurial activities as they relate to economic development. The goal is to stimulate more high-quality, new businesses that positively influence the region's economy and create additional entrepreneurial opportunities (Stam, 2015; Isenberg, 2014).

As illustrated in Table 2.4, Isenberg (2010) espoused nine values that he thought would assist policy makers in developing efficient entrepreneurial ecosystems. While he did not subscribe to a specific formula or sequence, his guidance serves as a model for theoretical principles rather than measurable constructs. These nine principal factors should provide the core elements employed by governing communities in developing entrepreneurial ecosystems. These core elements are "leadership, culture, capital markets, and open-minded customers" (Isenberg 2010).

I continue to highlight Dr. Daniel J. Isenberg’s 2010 and 2014 empirical works because, in many ways, he is considered the father of entrepreneurship ecosystem theory and those two efforts constitute its origin. There appears to be a correlation between efficiencies in entrepreneurial ecosystems and an economy’s growth rate, health, and societal condition (Acs, Estrin, Mickiewicz & Szerb, 2018; Stam, 2015). Economists should factor entrepreneurship, and the vitality of supporting institutions, as central to the analysis and messaging to the broader business community (Acs, et al., 2018; Audretsch, et al., 2021; Stam, 2015).

Understanding the theoretical composition of an entrepreneurship ecosystem enables economic development teams, and their leadership, to understand what societal drivers are necessary to spur greater entrepreneurial activity and the impact on the overarching community that supports and benefits from such activity (Adner, 2017). Defining entrepreneurial ecosystems enables scholars, policy makers, and economic development teams to better understand how to enhance these economic staples (Adner, 2017; Isenberg, 2010; Feld, 2012; Stam, 2015; Tian et al., 2008).

Table 2.3 Nine Attributes of a Successful Start-up Community

Attribute	Description
Leadership	Strong group of entrepreneurs who are visible, accessible, and committed to the region being a great place to start and grow a company.
Intermediaries	Many well-respected mentors and advisors giving back across all stages, sectors, demographics, and geographics as well as a solid presence of effective, visible, and integrated accelerators and incubators.
Network Destiny	Deep, well-connected community of startups, entrepreneurs, and engaged and visible investors, advisors, mentors, and supporters. Optimally, these people and organizations are comprised of individual and entities from various sectors, demographics, and levels of culture engagement. All participants must be willing to give back to the community.

Government	Strong government support and understanding of startup economic growth period Additionally, policy support incorporating economic development, tax benefits, and investment vehicles.
Talent	Broad and deep talent pool for all employee levels in various sectors within the enterprise areas. Universities are an excellent source for startup talent and should be well-connected to the community.
Support Services	Professional services (legal, accounting, real estate, insurance in consulting) are integrated, accessible, effective, and appropriately priced.
Engagement	Large numbers of events allowing entrepreneurs and the supporting community to connect and form highly visible, and authentic partnerships (e.g., meet up, pitch days, startup weekends, boot camps, hackathons, and competitions)
Companies	Large companies that are a city's economic anchor should create specific departments and programs to encourage cooperation with high growth startups.
Capital	Strong, dense, and supportive community of venture capitalists, Angel and seed investors, and other forms of financing should be available, visible and accessible across sectors, demographics, and geography.

Source: (Feld, 2012; Stam, 2015)

Table. 2.4 Nine Prescriptions for Creating an Entrepreneurship Ecosystem

I.	Stop Emulating Silicon Valley
II.	Shape the Ecosystem Around Local Conditions
III.	Engage the Private Sector from the Start
IV.	Favor the High Potentials
V.	Get a Big Win on the Board
VI.	Tackle Cultural Change Head-On
VII.	Stress the Roots.
VIII.	Don't Overengineer Clusters; Help Them Grow Organically

IX. Reform Legal, Bureaucratic, and Regulatory Frameworks

Source: Isenberg (2010)

In all cases, these ecosystems require work to ensure that they remain self-nourishing. Partner alignment is a conscious effort that requires assessment, planning, and community development (Adner, 2017; Isenberg, 2010; Isenberg, 2014). As an economic generator, I focus on the existence and sustainability of viable entrepreneurial ecosystems.

II.3 African American Entrepreneurial Ecosystems

According to the US Census Bureau, half of the citizens of the United States of America (USA) are employed by a small business and 99% of the country's firms are small businesses. Small business and new business development are a key part of the USA's economy, with all sectors of this dynamic entrepreneurial-based society requiring maximum efficiency for the country to remain prosperous and progressive as a global economic leader. Harvard University Professor and scholar Dr. James F. Moore, the father of business ecosystems theory, emphasized the importance of a society's economic success to realizing an effective and efficient business ecosystem. Subsequently, Dr. Daniel J. Isenberg, the father of entrepreneurial ecosystems theory, suggests that this concept still requires efficiency. New views and adjustments are being made to existing theoretical precepts to identify the best drivers and support mechanisms to help these multifaceted, interconnected, and interrelated groupings of business initiators, owner relationships, and their regional support systems and ensure their continued success in generating and sustaining new enterprises in the USA.

Most current research suggests that African American entrepreneurs need the most enterprise development assistance. According to the Fairlie and Sameeksha (2021) industry respected annual National Report on the Early-Stage entrepreneurship in the United States, African

Americans report limited progress over the last 10 years in comparison to white, Asian, and Latino communities. This report is produced by scholars funded through, and in the name of, the Kauffman Foundation. The 2020 numbers are an anomaly in comparison to 2019, and most previous years, in that African American's (listed as Black) jumped from last place to second place among these fMy groups in enterprise creation (Fairlie, and Sameeksha, 2021). Hopefully the COVID 19 pandemic does not decrease, or suspend, the gains that happened Tin 2020. Most literature suggests that because of the historical position of the African American community, and its continued recovery from the vestiges of American slavery, segregation, and systemic policies that have created societal disadvantages, increasing the knowledge of entrepreneurial ecosystems could help this community and benefit the entire country. Growth in any segment in the performance of creating enterprises and fueling overall employment can have positive impacts on the USA's economy.

While there is some great empirical work being conducted on this segment of the enterprise creation marketplace by noted and respected scholars, at leading institutions and notable research firms, there is still a dearth of insight into the constitution and impact of African American Entrepreneurial Ecosystems. This research category provides great opportunities for research development. There are many notable studies that helped me shape my research target and inspired me to join their scholarly community in diligently minimizing the knowledge gaps in the support mechanisms and entrepreneurial ecosystems for the African American small business community. Great works like Reuben & Queen (2015) share many other concerns that plague those studying the progress of the African American community in their success rate with small businesses. In this empirical scholarly study these researchers show how African Americans have a greater propensity for entrepreneurship however, they lack the skill set and resources to sustain long term

enterprises. Gibson, Harris, Walker & McDowell (2014) found when examining the interest and attitudes of African American college students in business programs that there was a high level of interest in students wanting to become entrepreneurs. It indexed even higher in African American students that came from families that own businesses. These researchers noted that their findings were consistent with most other studies on this topic for this community; however, there are systematic barriers that challenge African American businesses from being created, especially since the category of African American entrepreneurial ecosystems has not been firmly established. Most research for this segment of the American population is focused on disparity in resources, lack of capital, and limits in legacy obtainment of businesses in United States (Acs, Estrin, Mickiewicz & Szerb, 2018). That is not to say that there are not many African American business success stories, but rather to indicate there has not been enough documentation and empirical studies in what works and how to create more of it. The goal of my study will be to examine how to obtain perceived success in building strong African American support in ecosystems and compare it to similar cities within the same geographical region. The goal will then be to distill data using both qualitative in quantitative research methods to both survey and interview members of these communities within two demographically similar cities. I anticipate being able to address the topic of how does the infrastructure and support for Atlanta's African American startup community compared to similar cities in the Southeastern portion of the United States of America? This will enable me to draw some parallels to the current state of African American entrepreneurial ecosystems as well as identify opportunities for additional research.

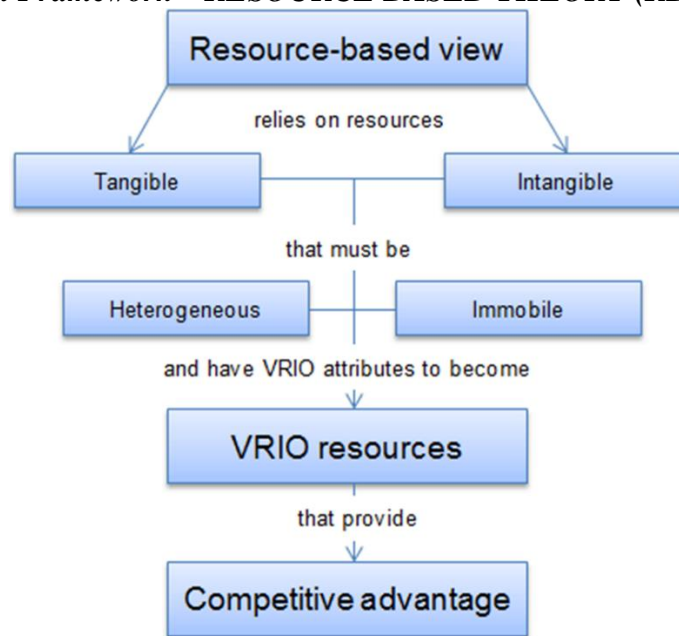
This research should be able to provide a contribution to the African American startup community, its policy makers and economic resource allocators, as well as the scholarly community. The goal of the study is to identify general factors applicable to many settings that

will empower and enable stakeholders of this community and its planners to make significant adjustments that lead to improvements in the overall success rate of African American startups and entrepreneurs. It will directly benefit these future business owners when they are assessing the best location to support an entrepreneurial initiative. Understanding what ecosystem elements should be present can create more informed location choices. Also, support and resource allocators can gain additional understanding of what elements will best attract, support, and encourage more entrepreneurs to the community. The scholarly community should also benefit from this research. It should substantiate what entrepreneurial elements are essential for African American small business owners to thrive and develop. This will add to the greater body of knowledge on entrepreneurial ecosystems that currently is lacking exploration on disparities in outcomes between two markets of this study population. I will leverage the findings to substantively extend its reliance through Resource Based Theory. The Theoretical Foundation I will build my analysis for this study will be based on Resource Based Theory (Peteraf & Barney, 2003). The basis of this theory is that synergies can be gained when certain resources are combined and leveraged. This theory also suggests that several types of resources need to be present to lead to success.

III METHOD

My research philosophy is based on RBT wherein entities gain a competitive advantage predicated on the availability of certain resources (Petteraf et al., 2003). The principal concept undergirding my research design integrates RBT with the OECD/EROSTAT Framework for Entrepreneurship Indicators model, as illustrated in Table 3.2 (OECD /Eurostat, 2007; OECD /Eurostat, 2008).

Table 3.1 Theoretical Framework – RESOURCE BASED THEORY (RBT)



Source: Wernerfelt, 1984; Barney, 1986; Barney, 1991; Petteraf & Barney, 2003.

This combined framework enabled me to use empirical means to measure and assess the amount of entrepreneurial activity. Studies using RBT usually look at strategic resources that typically are VRIN (Warnier, Weppe & Lecocq, 2013). VRIN is an acronym, which stands for valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (Talaja, 2012; Warnier et al., 2013). VRIO, an acronym for value, rarity, imitability, and organization, was a component of the modeling consideration for this study, which aided me in answering my research questions (Wernerfelt,

1984; Barney, 1991; Barney, 2001; Petterraf & Barney, 2003). There is intersubjectivity amongst scholars regarding the impact of resources available in RBT, suggesting that myriad resource types can positively contribute to performance in firms and entities (Warnier, Weppe & Lecocq, 2013).

III.1 Mixed Methods Research Design

The study uses a mixed methods approach. This methodology allows a researcher to address more complicated questions and provide richer insights (Yin, 2017). The duration of the study was a full year, which included the preparatory work, proposal defense, data collection, analysis, and documentation. The qualitative section utilized semi-structured interviews with government agency leaders, nonprofit executives, and former mayors of the two cities; and I utilized the constant comparative method to code my data. Results were analyzed through axial coding, thematic analysis, and pattern coding using NVivo software.

The quantitative section of the study utilizes a multivariable regression analysis to determine whether correlation exists between ecosystem factors and success amongst African American entrepreneurs and startups. I collected 10% of the active and available targeted respondents, creating sufficient participation to ensure statistical relevance results. I used SPSS software to process and build graphical representation of my statistical analysis.

III.1.1 Concept and Constructs

Using RBT as my premise, both the qualitative and quantitative methodologies deployed for this study collectively measures the performance and sustainability of African American entrepreneurship against its ecosystems. I leveraged elements established in the entrepreneur's performance factors section of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Framework for Entrepreneurship Indicators modeling as the basis for measuring this study's constructs (Ahmad & Hoffmann, 2008). This framework and its components were

rigorously developed by a team of scholars to create a global standard for the OECD to have a consistent means of measure for global entrepreneurial activity (Ahmad et al., 2008; Ahmad & Seymour, 2007). This model provides the essential constructs needed to accurately compare the African American entrepreneurial ecosystems observed for this study. The constructs highlighted below in **Table 4.0** provide the basis for questions in my interview protocol and survey questionnaire.

III.1.2 Qualitative Research

The semi-structured interview questions were designed from the gold highlighted sections of the OECD/EROSTAT Framework for Entrepreneurship Indicators in **Table 3.2**. The interviews included governmental agency leaders, nonprofit executives, and former mayors from both cities. The interviews examined how infrastructure and support systems affect the success of the African American startup community. The overall objective of the interviews was to understand how these key stakeholders helped this community succeed. We conducted sixteen interviews, eight per city.

Table 3.2 OECD/EROSTAT Framework for Entrepreneurship Indicators

DETERMINANTS						ENTREPRENEURIAL PERFORMANCE	IMPACT
REGULATORY FRAMEWORK	MARKET CONDITIONS	ACCESS TO FINANCE	R&D AND TECHNOLOGY	ENTREPRENEURIAL CAPABILITIES	CULTURE	FIRMS	JOB CREATION
ADMINISTRATIVE BURDENS TO ENTRY	ANTITRUST LAWS	ACCESS TO DEBT FINANCING	R&D INVESTMENT	TRAINING AND EXPERIENCE OF ENTREPRENEURS	RISK ATTITUDE IN SOCIETY	EMPLOYMENT	ECONOMIC POWER
ADMINISTRATIVE BURDENS TO GROWTH	COMPETITION	BUSINESS ANGELS	UNIVERSITY/ INDUSTRY INTERFACE	BUSINESS IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION (SKILLS)	ATTITUDE TOWARDS ENTREPRENEURS	WEALTH	POVERTY REDUCTION
BANKRUPTCY REGULATIONS	ACCESS TO THE DOMESTIC MARKET	ACCESS TO VC	TECHNOLOGY COOPERATION BETWEEN FIRMS	ENTREPRENEURSHIP INFRASTRUCTURE	DESIRE FOR BUSINESS OWNERSHIP		FORMULARIZING THE INFORMAL SECTOR
SAFETY, HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATIONS	ACCESS TO FOREIGN MARKETS	ACCESS TO OTHER TYPES OF EQUITY	TECHNOLOGY DIFFUSION	IMMIGRATION	ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION (MINDSET)		
PRODUCT REGULATION	DEGREE OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT	STOCK MARKETS	BROADBAND ACCESS				
LABOR MARKET REGULATION	PUBLIC PROCUREMENT		PATENT SYSTEM STANDARDS				
COURT AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK							
SOCIAL AND HEALTH SECURITY							
INCOME TAXES; WEALTH BEQUEST TAXES							
BUSINESS AND CAPITAL TAXES							

Key		
Survey (Likert Scale)	Quant	
Interview	Qual	
Both Survey & Interview		

SOURCE: The OECD/EROSTAT Framework for Entrepreneurship Indicators

THE INTERVIEW STRATEGY INVOLVES FIVE THEMATIC APPROACHES:

- I. I asked what role did **culture** play in supporting African American startups during their administration. My focal points were on attitudes towards entrepreneurship, overall desires to become business owners, entrepreneurship education, and risk attitude in society during that period.
- II. I discussed **entrepreneurial capabilities** during their tenure. My focal points were on firms developed, employment generated, and wealth created through entrepreneurship.

- III. I discussed the **impact** of entrepreneurial activity during their tenure. My focal points were on job creation, economic empowerment, poverty reduction, and how and what initiatives impacted formalization of the informal entrepreneurial economic sector.
- IV. I discussed what role they played in helping African American entrepreneurs gain **Access to finances.**
- IV. I discussed what role **R&D and technology** played in the support of African American startups during their leadership. I specifically discussed the role of universities, professional organizations, technology cooperation between firms, and overall R&D investment available in the marketplace during that period.
- V. I discussed the impact of the **regulatory framework** in supporting African American startup success during their leadership. I also covered their perception of the administrative burdens to entry and growth for African American startup entrepreneurs.

III.1.3 Quantitative Research

The quantitative portion of my study measured African American entrepreneurs' perceptions of whether their local entrepreneurial ecosystem supported their success. I was able to have access to some of the most dynamic entrepreneurship databases in both cities; and I collected 10% of the active and available targeted respondents, creating sufficient participation to ensure statistically relevant results. Based on the OECD/EROSTAT Framework for Entrepreneurship Indicators showcased in **Table 4.0**, the survey addresses questions in the following categories:

- I. What impact did/does the city's regulatory framework have on starting and sustaining their business?
- II. How did the city's market conditions impact their business?
- III. How accessible is funding for this demographic and its special needs in their city?

IV. How does the city's entrepreneurial ecosystem make available R&D and innovative technologies?

V. How available is training and technical assistance for entrepreneurs in their city?

The aggregate data produced from this survey was processed through SPSS to perform the multivariable regression analysis. We tested the following set of hypotheses:

III.1.4 Hypotheses

H¹ – Cities that contain a challenging **Regulatory Framework** will have a negative effect on the success rate of African American entrepreneurs as measured by the number of sustainable businesses.

H² – Cities that contain challenging **Market Conditions** will have a negative effect on the success rate of African American entrepreneurs as measured by the number of sustainable businesses.

H³ – Cities that contain challenges to **Access to Finances** for African American entrepreneurs will display negative results in the success rate of African American entrepreneurs as measured by the number of sustainable businesses.

H⁴ – Cities that contain challenges for entrepreneurs to participate in **R&D and the technological advances** of that city or their respective industries, will display negative results in the success rate of African American entrepreneurs as measured by the number of sustainable businesses.

H⁵ – Cities that contain a challenge in developing and enhancing **Entrepreneurial Capabilities** will have a negative effect on the success rate of African American entrepreneurs as measured by the number of sustainable businesses.

H⁶ – Cities that contain **Cultures** that do not support entrepreneurship will have a negative effect on the success rate of African American entrepreneurs as measured by in the number of sustainable businesses.

The aggregated data from the surveys was run through the SPSS analytics software to conduct a multivariable linear regression to identify correlation between specific elements of the local entrepreneurial ecosystem and the success of African American entrepreneurs. After performing my statistical analysis, I tested my assumptions through the key stakeholder interviews. The stakeholders included former mayors, local federal agency leaders and the senior executives of some of the most respected nonprofit organizations servicing this community. Collectively this group of interviewees represented some of the greatest influencers on the outcomes towards success as shared with me in prior research I have conducted with African American entrepreneurs in these and similar cities. The combined analysis allowed me to provide ideas that I can resolutely conclude the study with.

IV FINDINGS

This study involved quantitative methods to obtain statistically relevant perspectives from entrepreneurs in Atlanta and Charlotte, and qualitative methodology through interviews with key stakeholders, local officials, and influencers from these communities. In my qualitative methodology I used a digital survey with a five-point Likert scale to assess African American entrepreneurs and small business owners' perspectives on the impact of their city's entrepreneurial ecosystem on the success of their businesses. Likewise, in my qualitative methodology, I asked a similar set of questions to eight strategic leaders and stakeholders in each market about their entrepreneurial ecosystems. The results reflect my independent findings regarding each city and an aggregated assessment of the information collected.

IV.1 THE CITY OF ATLANTA

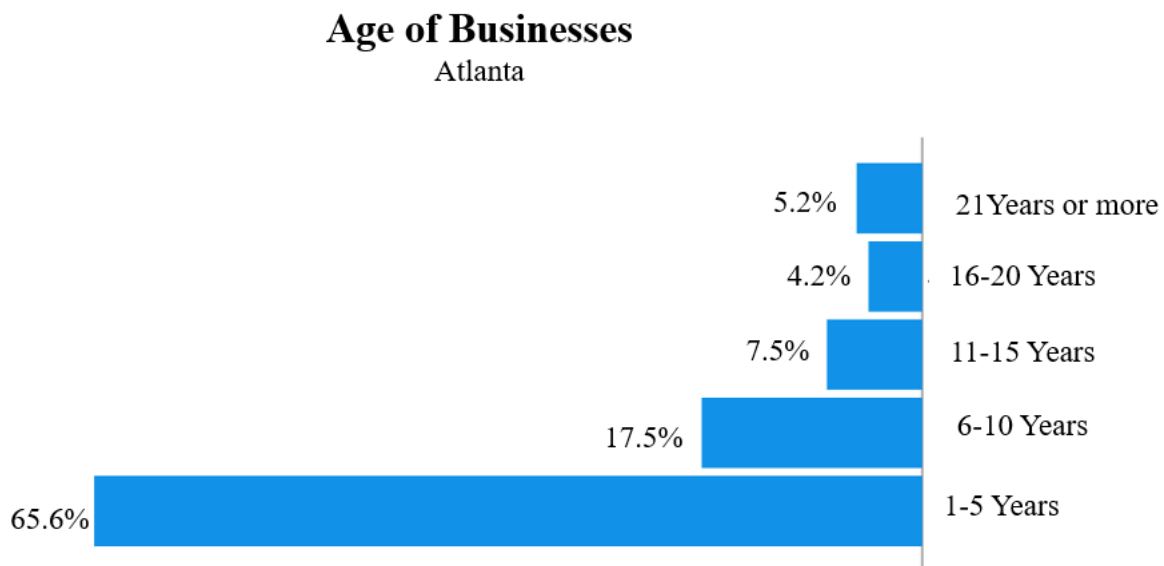
IV.1.1 Quantitative Findings

My survey sample represented over 10% of the active and digitally responsive African American entrepreneurial and small business community members made available through city databases that serviced this targeted sample's members. As I met with influential city stakeholders, I realized that no matter how large their aggregate database was, no entity could account for more than 2000 regularly active participants from this community in their normal digital servicing activity. My goal was to reach and examine the response of ≥ 200 qualified respondents, which would represent 10% of the community that is digitally responsive and available and would provide statistical sufficiency for observation and analysis. I slightly surpassed my goal and obtained enough survey responses to represent Atlanta with sufficient statistical accuracy.

The sample of African American entrepreneurs, small business owners, and startups in Atlanta was comprised of a diverse group of interviewees. Over a six-month period, I had several

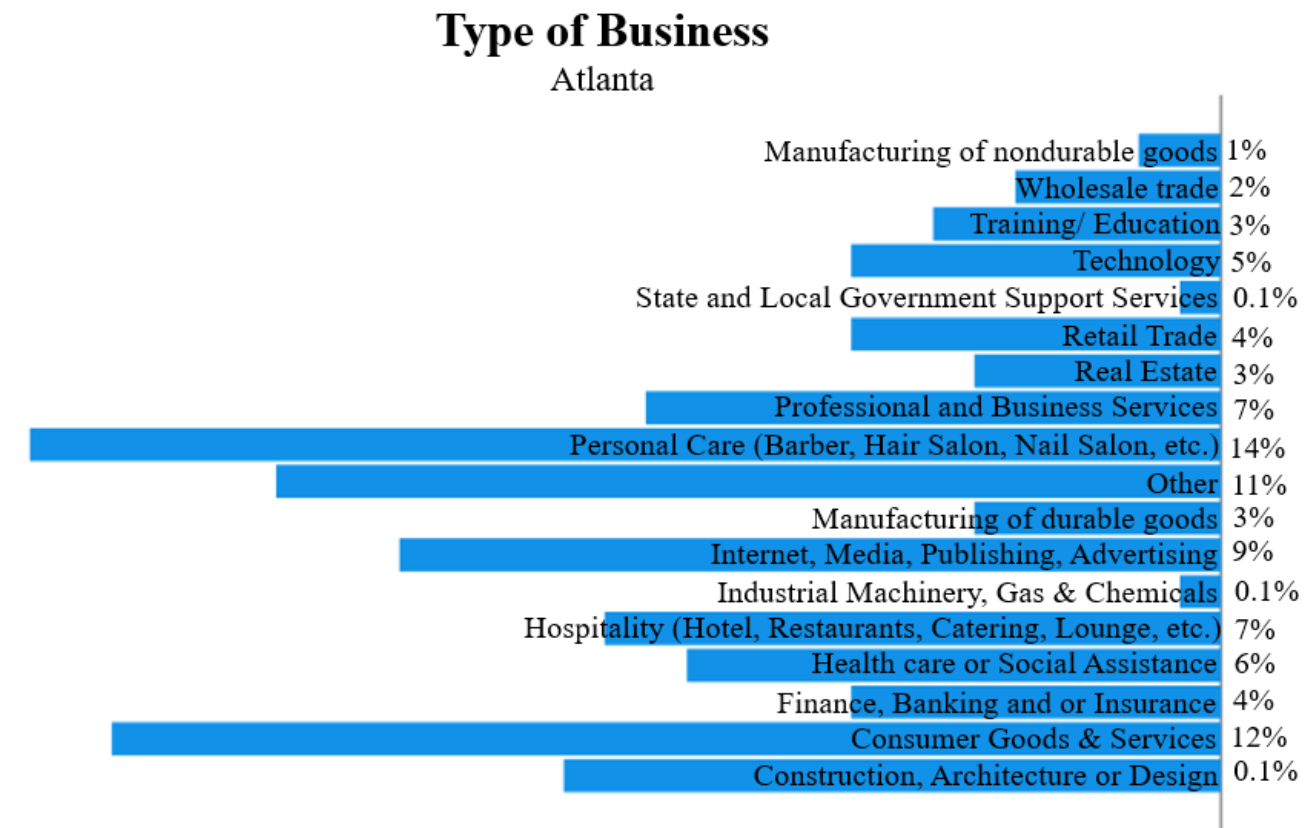
agencies, chambers of commerce, and support entities digitally distribute my survey to their entire database, inclusive of this community. Over 80% of the interviewees had been in business between 1-10 years. As Figure 4.1A illustrates, most of the interviewees in this sample had been in business between 1-5 years. At least 18 industries were represented.

Figure 4.1A Atlanta Survey Interviewees – Age of Businesses



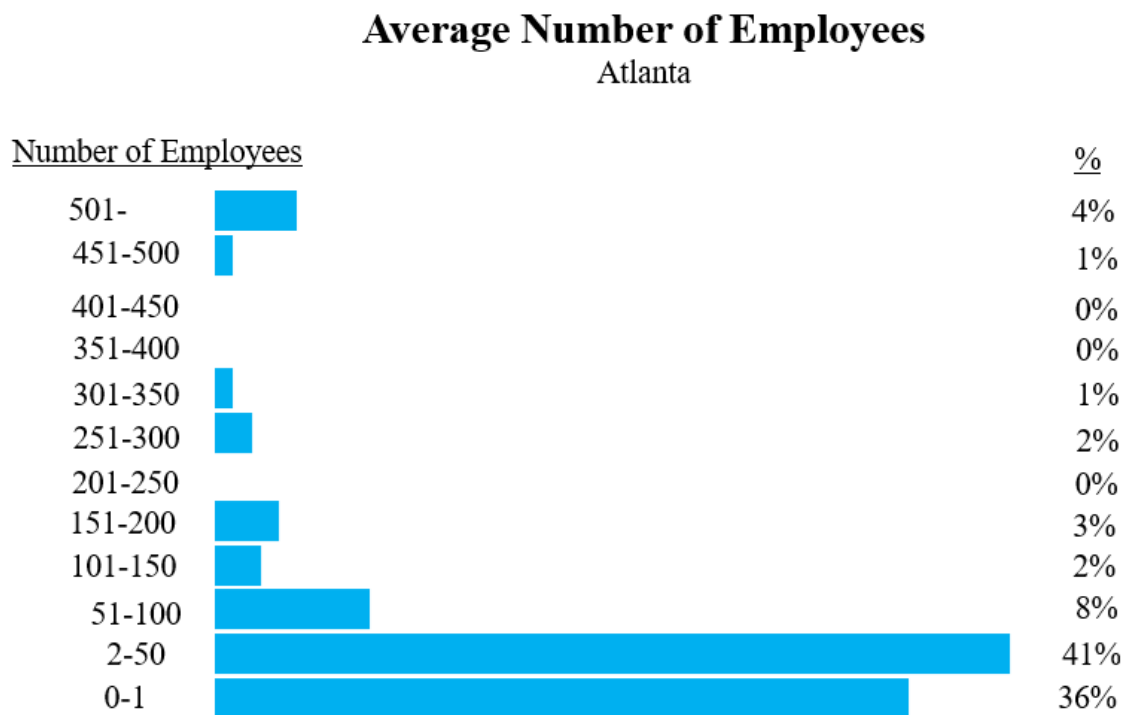
Personal Care business owners were a large portion of my interviewees. I found a surprisingly high number of Consumer Goods, Internet and Construction, Architecture, and design companies. It also appeared that most African American small businesses reported to have between 1-50 employees. Many of the ecosystem key stakeholders indicated that this was the average size of entrepreneurs in this community. Circumstances like the COVID-19 pandemic exposed both issues and opportunities that impacted this community based on this average business size.

Figure 4.1B Atlanta Survey Respondents – Types of Businesses



As indicated in Figure 4.1C, as many as 36% of Atlanta businesses have only 0-1 employees. As I discuss later in this study, that could create challenges for approximately a third of this community, as they would fail to qualify for certain programming and assistance due to their size. Less than 20% of survey respondents reported having over 100 employees. An even smaller number of respondents reported having more than 500 or more employees. This group was not a focus of this study. It helped substantiate the relatively small size of this community's average employment base per business unit, however, leans towards a different set of entrepreneurs that the SBA designates as a small business if it has (≤ 500 employees). This study's focus leaned towards entrepreneurs and startups with < 500 employees.

Figure 4.1C Atlanta Survey Respondents – Average Number of Employees



Regression Analysis. My examination of both cities involved studying six categories within their ecosystems. Those six factors included: access to finance, regional regulatory framework, access to capital, conditions of the market, research and development and culture. The survey and interview questions explored: the impact of regulatory frameworks, market conditions, and this community's access to finance, and research and development. These all worked as my independent/causal variables allowing me to examine their impact on other factors that collectively made up my dependent variable (the outcome of interest). I explored the impact of the city's entrepreneur ecosystem on the success of African American Small businesses, whether success was measured by two factors that included longevity of business (as measured in age of business) and the number of employees obtained over time. My analysis of Atlanta used a multivariable linear regression model derived from data acquired through survey results. **Table 4.4, the**

Coefficient table illustrates that for every unit increase in Access to Finances is an associated .662 unit increase in the Number of Employees in Atlanta businesses. Likewise, for every unit increase in Entrepreneurial Capability there is an associated decrease in the Number of Employees for Atlanta of -.787 unit.

Table 4.4 Coefficients Table - Number of Employees for Atlanta

	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
Constants	.659	.776		.849	.397
Regulatory Framework	.063	.307	.019	.206	.837
Market Conditions	.376	.292	.120	1.286	.200
Access to Finance	.662	.270	.214	2.455	.015
Research and Development	.549	.034	.174	1.809	.072
Entrepreneurial Capability	-.787	.289	-.253	-2.718	.007
Culture	-.045	.188	-.020	-.237	.813

These were the only two variables that measured under .05, making them the only two significant predictors of success as measured by an increase in employees in. A coefficient of $\leq .05$ Sig represents significance. These two variables reflect which elements of the city's entrepreneurial ecosystem demonstrated the most statistically significant impact on African American small businesses and entrepreneurs' successes as measured by increased employment. One can also interpret from the above results that the entrepreneurial ecosystem variables of regulatory frameworks, market conditions, research and development, and culture did not demonstrate significant enough statistical value, and may have limited or no direct impact in success, as

interpreted through the increase of employment in my regression modeling. These predictors represent the slopes on my histogram of the Dependent variable of Number of Employees. This Coefficient chart does not have any multicollinearity issues. Most of the Tolerance values are over .2. This means that this chart is reliable in its statistical value. The VIF scores were ≥ 2.5 , reinforcing my assumption that there were no multicollinearity issues. As I checked for the assumption of independence, I had some concern with the model's Durban Watson score being 2.094. In this case, independence could be established; however, the residuals could be correlated. The concern could be autocorrelation where one of the independent variables predicts another. I was keenly aware of this as I progressed through the study's other regression analysis.

IV.1.2 Qualitative Findings

I was able to gather a powerful group of interviewees whose insight helped to provide an in-depth perspective on the city's entrepreneurial ecosystem. This group was comprised of current and past leaders and major influencers in Atlanta's entrepreneurial ecosystem. As indicated in Table 4.61, this group included former Atlanta mayors, non-profit senior executives, and government agency leaders who allowed me to conduct one-hour, one-on-one interviews to explore their perspectives on the impact of this city's entrepreneurial ecosystem on African American entrepreneurs and small businesses. Ultimately, I sought to understand whether Atlanta's entrepreneurial ecosystem aided these businesses' success, and if so, to what degree. We first examined this data to identify themes.

Table 4.61 Atlanta Interviewees

Interviewee #1	Former Mayor	Atlanta, Georgia	1ATL
Interviewee #2	Former Mayor	Atlanta, Georgia	2ATL
Interviewee #3	Former Mayor	Atlanta, Georgia	3ATL
Interviewee #4	Former Mayor	Atlanta, Georgia	4ATL
Interviewee #5	Director	SBA's SBDC – Morehouse College location	5ATL
Interviewee #6	VP, Innovation & Entrepreneurship	H.J. Russell Innovation Center for Entrepreneurs	6ATL
Interviewee #7	Director, Diversity Engagement and Program Development Research Faculty	Atlanta MBDA Center & Enterprise Innovation Institute Georgia Institute of Technology	7ATL
Interviewee #8	President & CEO	The Edge Connection	8 ATL

Thematic Analysis. Given the diversity of my interviewees, and the various roles and interactions they have all had with this community, I was able to obtain a robust set of feedback to use as data. These semi-structured interviews used a standard set of questions provided in the index of this dissertation. I prepared questions relative to stakeholder group. The first area I explored was finances. Several of the interviewees expressed extreme concern about this entrepreneur community's access to capital. In the NVivo coding diagrams, the blue circles represent thematic codes, and the multicolored circles represent interview participants as new NVivo cases. The arrows annotated with the verb "codes" Point from the codes to the interview participant cases in which those themes were coded. If a case does not have an arrow, that indicates that the thematic code was neither present nor coded in that case. As far as direct feedback from interviewees, I have listed a few of their ideas and suggestions as follows:

“African American entrepreneurs have unfortunately, have traditionally been deficient in one or more of the five necessities necessary to obtain financing for their business: The 5C's of credit, conditions, capital, collateral, cash flow, and credit. Historically, the African American small business and startup community does not traditionally have access to that”

A Government Agency Leader

“I think the average amount of capital that was funded by the average small business or startup outside of traditional means through friends and family was somewhere around 60k. However, that average was lowered down to like, 10k, by African Americans, because of the wealth gap, because of the lack of education, because of all the resources.”

A Government Agency Leader

Interviewees inferred that African American startups and small business owners continuously seek nontraditional solutions to finance their ventures. They also implied that elected officials should be more committed to resolving disparities that exist within this community and lack of market availability of resources. In Atlanta I have seen different approaches to attempt to assist this community's inability to readily attract, and access, capital. Some interviewees shared innovative solutions their administration deployed when they were in office:

“I launched something called the Engage fund, where I got large corporations to commit \$1.5 million each for a total of \$15 million for early-stage investment in the city of Atlanta.”

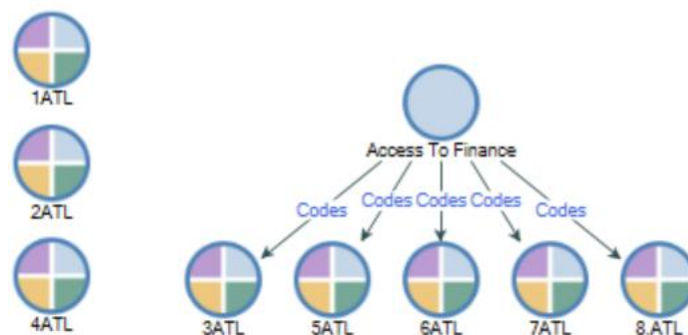
A Former Mayor of Atlanta

“If you were an investor coming from anywhere in the world, you didn't have to have an appointment. You could come to City Hall and meet with the mayor anytime. I had two offices, I had a ceremonial office, and I had a working office. I'd stop what I'm doing in one office and go to the ceremonial one, and spend 10 minutes with them...”

A Former Mayor of Atlanta

Access to Finance. Figure 4.10 illustrates the concern shared by these interview participants. Five out of the eight former mayors, nonprofit and governmental senior agency leaders expressed concern and the need to develop and deploy special programming. The coding from these interview transcripts provided the following key areas of interest and concerns:

Figure 4.10 ACCESS TO FINANCE – Atlanta



Many of these interviewees continuously sought programming solutions to help equal the playing field to provide equity for African American entrepreneurs and small business owners in their ability to access capital.

“My leading technology innovators were at the forefront of this.

They created a lot of women entrepreneur initiatives”

A Former Mayor of Atlanta

These interviewees did their best to leverage their influence to create greater access, and more opportunities, for financial support to this community. The help typically came from larger firms that had access to significant resources and could afford to invest in this community. An interviewee suggested the following:

“I know certain companies like Google and others in that space have created innovation funds that are specifically targeting African Americans and other minorities firms from this standpoint.”

A Nonprofit Leader

Because of the timeframe of this study, access to finances was impacted by the effects of the COVID 19 pandemic. I established specific criteria with each interviewee at the beginning of their session to distinguish when they were referring to pre-pandemic, pandemic, or post-pandemic availability and access to financing and capital for this community. Each participant provided key inferences and points of distinction about the way the pandemic influenced market accessibility to

financing and raising capital. It appears that the pandemic era had a positive impact on this community's ability to seek, and obtain, funding, but not without challenges. Some interviewees said the following:

"There has never been, to my knowledge, and I'm not a historian with policies, programs, stuff like Covid funding programming or another time where there were truly real grants, being given out, or access to capital to this community, with them not having to comply with some type of bureaucracy field list of things you need to do to access it."

A Government Agency Leader

"Post COVID, there is a ton of grants out there, many of them targeting the black community, black women, blacks, and the rest in the restaurant business."

A Nonprofit Organization Leader

"It's almost like you talk about the Five Percenters, there's a 5% of African American companies, they get that money, the rest of them don't get it, because the qualifications to do so are very stringent and the amount of capital that is needed."

A Government Agency Leader

The only other time the African American small business and startup community has ever had access to credit is over the last year, based on something that's not within My control, “a pandemic,” was really because society couldn't turn his head to everybody.”

A Government Agency Leader

Entrepreneurial Culture. According to Atlanta interviewees, the city offers a rich culture supportive of overall entrepreneurship and additional programming to diverse communities like this one.

Figure 4.11 CULTURE ANALYSIS – The City of Atlanta

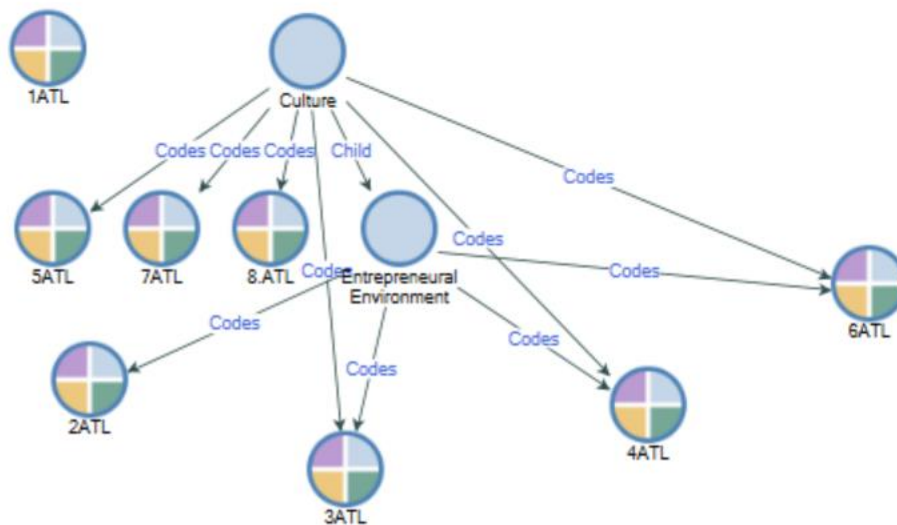


Figure 4.11 illustrates strong interviewee responses to questions about the entrepreneurial culture within Atlanta’s entrepreneurial ecosystem. Almost all interviewees felt strongly about the intrinsic value that the city placed on its small business and startup community. They pointed to great opportunities for leaders and entities promoting enterprise creation to lean forward and

continue to develop and deploy innovative solutions to enable this community to continue to thrive.

Some of my interviewees made the following comments:

“Well, I think the growth of the middle class, I mean, the business, the entrepreneurship, the expansion of business opportunity for Blacks in Government, and as a result of being in government and experience and access that people like Maynard and Andy open doors for, I think, that expanded the middle class.”

A Former Mayor of Atlanta

“I think Atlanta brands its self-entrepreneurial more so than any other city does. They claim it in such a way that it is so”

A Government Agency Leader

“I think there's more verbal support for I think entrepreneurs of color right now. There's a lot of great messaging going on out there. Again, there's a lot of organizations that you can go to, to get help. I think there's a lot of individual experts who are willing to provide help.”

A Nonprofit Senior Leader

“This is a very simple theory that Atlanta started out as a railroad town where 11 railroads that crisscrossed the city. Okay, so what happens with a railroad? in addition to goods and services coming and going, people are coming and going. So, people are

coming with new ideas that incorporated into the overall activity that was going on, and Atlanta was a welcoming place. So, they were being embraced and the new ideas took root.

A Former Mayor of Atlanta

“I think at least in Atlanta, Georgia, with the environment and the resources that are here.... I think they make it a little bit easier for black entrepreneurs to thrive versus if they were somewhere else.”

A Nonprofit Senior Leader

“What’s happening in Atlanta is bigger than a set of personalities. We keep doing this entrepreneurship thing generation after generation”

A Former Mayor of Atlanta

“Regionally, I think there's a lot of positive energy around entrepreneurship and I think there's a lot of opportunity.”

A Senior Nonprofit Leader

“Well, I think that's part of the culture of Atlanta, which is why it makes sense in the world. I mean, there's really Atlanta and Washington DC, in terms of communities that support black entrepreneurs in a decisive way, path-breaking way”.

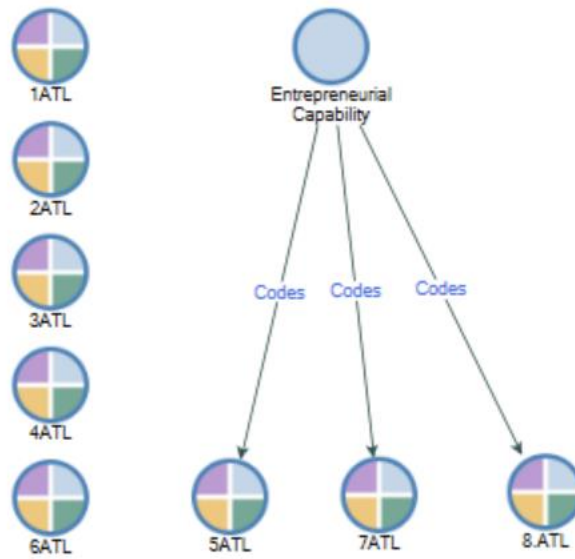
A Former Mayor of Atlanta

Entrepreneurial Capability. Our interviewees inferred that an entrepreneur's capability plays a role in small business and startup success. Learning how to navigate through both prosperous and lean is essential time for all businesses, but especially for African American ones. Most of the former mayors, nonprofit, and senior government agency leadership stakeholders remained relatively neutral as far as their concerns on this topic. As you can see below in **Figure 4.13** the principal observations came from three of the eight interviewees. Some of their market observations about entrepreneurial capabilities, perseverance, and business failure included:

“I think it is a journey for lot of African American entrepreneurs where they create great designs, great products and there could even be consumer demand for it, but when it comes to in particular financing and then as well as understanding the state that many of these small businesses are in and the lack of empathy and understanding from larger entities”.

A Nonprofit Senior Leader

Figure 4.13 ENTREPRENEURIAL CAPABILITY – The City of Atlanta

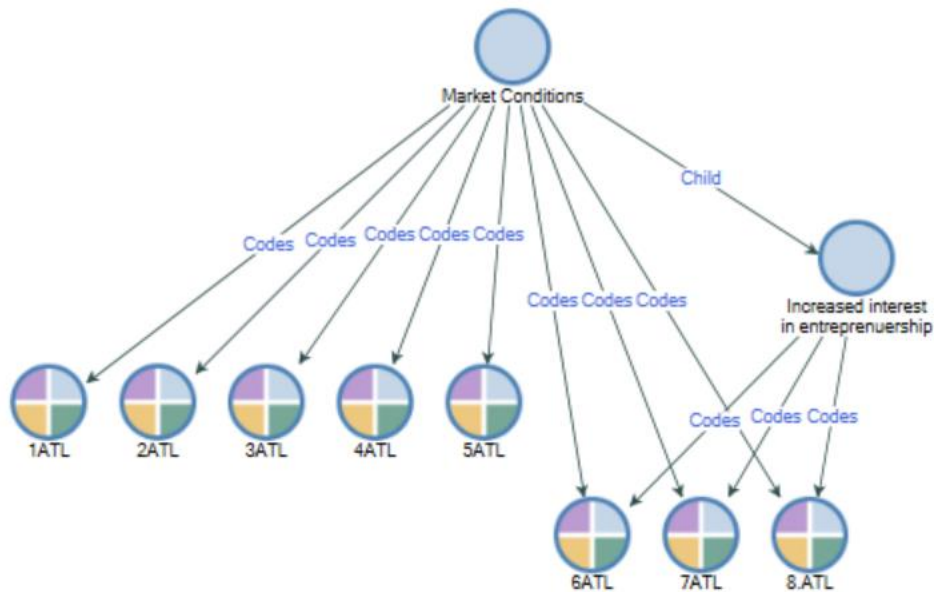


“You have African Americans that are starting, a lot of companies that are tech based that are solving problems, from using some of the most prolific technology and the methodologies for artificial intelligence, data driven solutions”.

A Government Agency Leader

Market Conditions. As **Figure 4.14** indicates, all the interviewees had a lot of input on the impacts of market condition on African American small business success related to the ecosystem. Three of these informants emphasized the increased interest of entrepreneurship within this market.

Figure 4.14 MARKET CONDITION – The City of Atlanta



All of Atlanta’s participating former mayors provided significant input, as did government agency and nonprofit organizational leaders. Drawing from what interview participants said, Maynard Jackson, Atlanta’s and the South’s first African American mayor, played a pivotal role in ensuring that Atlanta’s entrepreneurial ecosystem system was equitable. One participant shared that he once successfully argued to the city’s key stakeholders and gate keepers:

“I would always argue to folks whom challenged equitable splits of investments of billions of dollars coming to Atlanta, I would simply suggest that each billion invested will generate 10 billion to our local economy. Most business leaders are quick to figure out the benefit to their own interests and quickly resolve initial concerns”

A Former Mayor of Atlanta

The feedback from interviewees was wide ranging on this topic. I heard statements like:

“Most governmental contracts; city, county, state, federal, for everything, it's hard to really imagine because so many people believe that the government is limited in its outreach. But just think about the number of contracts that go into every city, state, and county government, from providing paper products, road repairs, light bulbs, and cleaning services.”

A Former Mayor of Atlanta

“There are several different ecosystems in Atlanta. So many operating silos.”

A Government Agency Leader

“So, the vast majority of opportunities and still to this day are bounded by historical uses. Someone's grandfather had the contract in 1930 and his son carried it on in 1950 and his grandson carried it in 1970. So, you see many of these contracts are so institutionalized that they are never really changed unless someone makes a major mistake.”

A Former Atlanta Mayor

“The entire arc of my life is bounded by the things that I utilize, the things that I eat, the things that I use, the roads that I drive on, the air I breathe. All those things in essence are city contracts, state contracts, county contracts, US government contracts”.

A Former Mayor of Atlanta

“There are a number of companies successful in Atlanta, who don't necessarily have their businesses in Atlanta”

A Government Agency Leader

“I think people are more willing now to consider entrepreneurship pathways, especially with the whole great resignation kind of phenomena.”

A Nonprofit Senior Leader

“My assessment is that Atlanta has always been the leading place for minority entrepreneurs. It is one of the few places where you can bring and build your dreams directly in the center of the action.”

A Former Mayor of Atlanta

“During my eight years in office, the city of Atlanta both raised and spent over \$3 billion on sewer-on-sewer repairs. Much of that money was spent with minority partners and engineering firms.”.

A Former Mayor of Atlanta

“I raised and spent close to \$6 billion in eight years of the time that I was in office. (This is with a 40% participation rate)”.

A Former Mayor of Atlanta

Regulatory Environment. Many of my interviewees inferred that the regulatory climate in the city of Atlanta often works in favor of minorities, and African Americans in particular. This city has a tremendous legacy and remains a pioneer in the development, enforcement, and innovation in the creation of minority participation standards and requirements to do businesses with the local and state governments. As Figure 4.15 indicates, all the city’s former mayors weighed in on this topic because their leadership has been critical in maintaining this city’s reputation for the highest standards and resisting any legal challenges to minority participation requirements. The mayors were very vocal and provided feedback such as:

“I raised two and half billion dollars privately. And black folk and female entrepreneurs, mostly black got 41% of that two and a half billion dollars.”

A Former Mayor of Atlanta

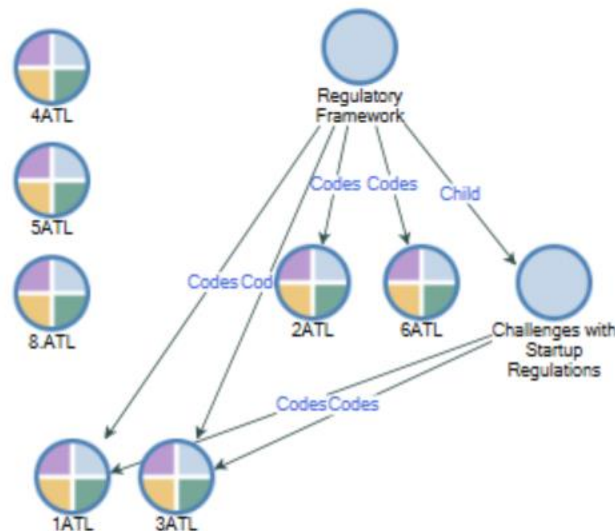
“So, My job was to be sure that I removed any hurdles and obstacles that were created and one of those is to regularize and standardize procedures in the way that everyone knows what the rules are, and not to play favorites.”.

A Former Mayor of Atlanta

“If you want to you want to invest money in our city, I believe that you should be able to get a permit as expediently as possible.”.

A Former Mayor of Atlanta

Figure 4.15 REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS – The City of Atlanta



As indicated in Figure 4.16, research and development is the nomenclature I used to represent all things impacting the city’s entrepreneurial ecosystem which were generated by, or affiliated with, the university and collegiate communities. I examined the role these educational

institutions play in utilization of, and contribution to, the success rate of African American small businesses and startups. Except for two survey interviewees, everyone else placed a heavy emphasis on the contributions from that community. Figure 4.16 depicts the stakeholders that had the most to contribute to that discussion. I heard feedback such as:

“I'm telling you is Atlanta has always benefited from the Atlanta University Center and the progressive black thought process that flowed from that through everything in Atlanta.”

A Former Mayor of Atlanta

“Think about how W.E.B. Du Bois is the greatest black intellectual that we've ever had. He's teaching at Atlanta University.”

A Former Mayor of Atlanta

“I used professors from various colleges and universities. To give us advice and counsel with one providing the first major study on web on how to develop the Beltline in a way that would improve the health of the people who live in Atlanta was just the environment, I knew the environment”

A Former Mayor of Atlanta

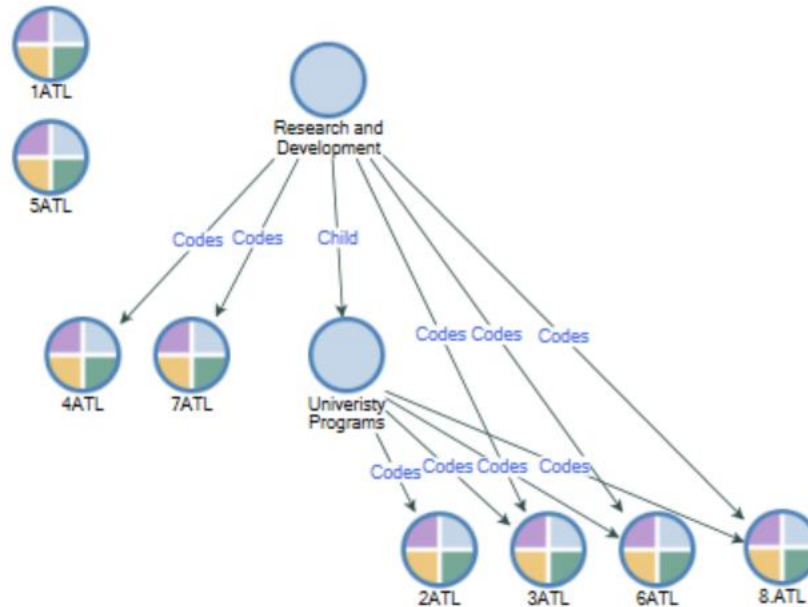
“I think that the city of Atlanta is literally surrounded by outstanding universities. And it's the reason why the city will continue to dominate in the next 10 years.”

A Former Mayor of Atlanta

“If you think of Peachtree Street, the most well-known street in Atlanta City, as you know. In the southeast, you have Georgia State University, which is doing phenomenally well and did incredibly well under President Becker. And then southwest, you have Morehouse, Spelman, Clark, Atlanta, ITC, Morris Brown. You drive north on a peach tree, and then you have Georgia Tech to the left, which is one of the leading technology schools in the world. You keep driving, and then in the northeast part of the city, you got Emory University, which is another phenomenal institution. All these institutions are just pouring out highly talented individuals into My workforce, which is one of the reasons why regional and corporate headquarters are choosing Atlanta again and again.”

A Former Mayor of Atlanta

Figure 4.16 RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT – The City of Atlanta



“Georgia Tech has one of the most robust economic developments in the country. With us having an MBDA program there, along with other business, entrepreneurial programs, and community entrepreneurship”

A Government Agency Leader

“Entrepreneurship development on university campuses is huge. It is not just Georgia Tech. You look at Morehouse. Morehouse has a major center, Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center, and the Russell Center, while it’s not a university is connecting to the university, because that’s where that’s where the talent is. That’s where the students are. That should be my next generations of business owners to come into the universities.”

A Government Agency Leader

In a word frequency inquiry of the transcripts from the Atlanta interviews of former mayors, non-profits senior executives, and local and national government agency leaders, I uncovered many centralized ideas. While “Maynard” wasn’t the most frequently used word, this former mayor (Maynard Jackson) was a part of every conversation. I see it appear in this word cloud. Words like “African”, and “Business” really deserved to be grouped together with “American.” African American was the nomenclature I used when referring to Black Americans. It undoubtedly showed up as the top word in my above frequency display because it referenced the start of each question and was a part of each answer. Also, worth noting that “minority” and “construction” showed up frequently due to the large influence of government-enforced and regulated participation goals on all of Atlanta’s construction work controlled by its mayors. Given that my Atlanta set of interviews were evenly split, with former city mayors comprising 50% of the interview pool, their strong ideas and perceptions of their own administrations’ contributions is seen in all the thematic coding illustrations exhibited above.

IV.2 THE CITY OF CHARLOTTE

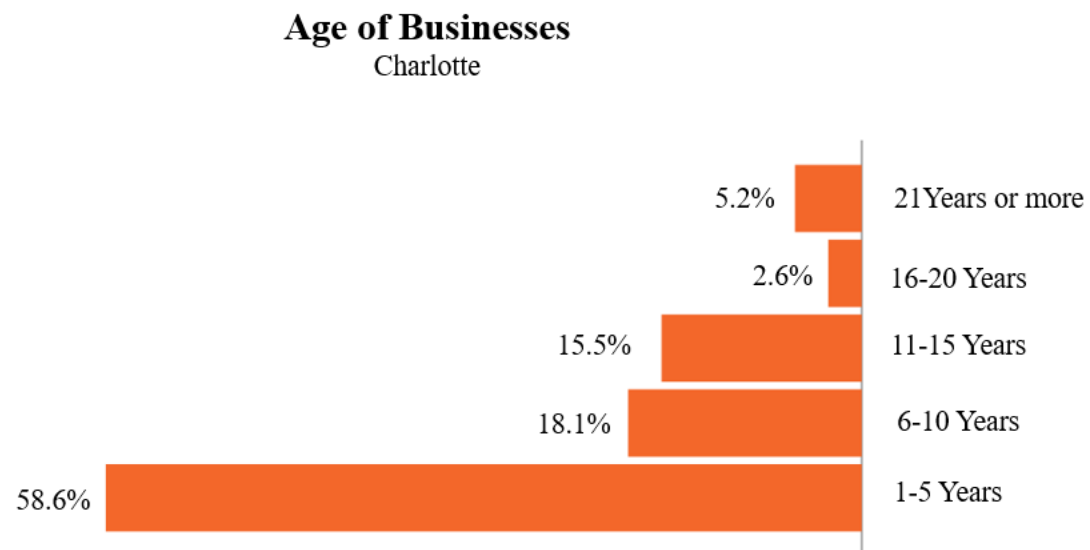
IV.2.1 Quantitative Findings

Similar to Atlanta, I was able to obtain qualified responses from slightly over 10% of the active and digitally responsive African American entrepreneurial and small business community members in the city of Charlotte. I did not differ my approach at all. The city’s key stakeholders similarly suggested that their databases could only account for a small portion of consistent digital activity from this community. In Charlotte’s case there were 1000 potential participants. Therefore, my goal was to reach and examine the responses from ≥ 100 qualified respondents. This would

represent 10% of the community that is digitally responsive and available and provide statistical sufficiency for observation and analysis.

The Charlotte sample was also comprised of a diverse group of respondents. Over the same period that I acquired Atlanta's results, I engaged Charlotte's city, state, and federal agencies, chambers of commerce, and support entities to help digitally distribute my survey to their entire database to help saturate communication to this community. Slightly over 76% of the respondents had been in business between 1-10 years. As Figure 4.18 illustrates, most of the respondents had been in business between 1-5 years, were from 18 industries, with Health Care business owners the dominate response group. I also received a strong response from the city's professional business services, consumer goods, construction, and architecture entrepreneurial communities. Most of this sample reported to have between 1-50 employees, with more than 80% of the businesses employing less than 50 employees.

Figure 4.18 Charlotte Survey Respondents – Age of Businesses



Charlotte's ecosystem stakeholders also confirmed that the current nature of the business mix in their city has a smaller average ratio of employees per firm than some of the other small business

communities. Average size per firm impacts overall participation rate in local and federal programming. Some support programming uses firm size as a qualifier for participation. Less than 15% of survey respondents reported having over 100 employees, with even fewer respondents employing 500 or more employees.

Figure 4.19 Charlotte Survey Respondents – Types of Businesses

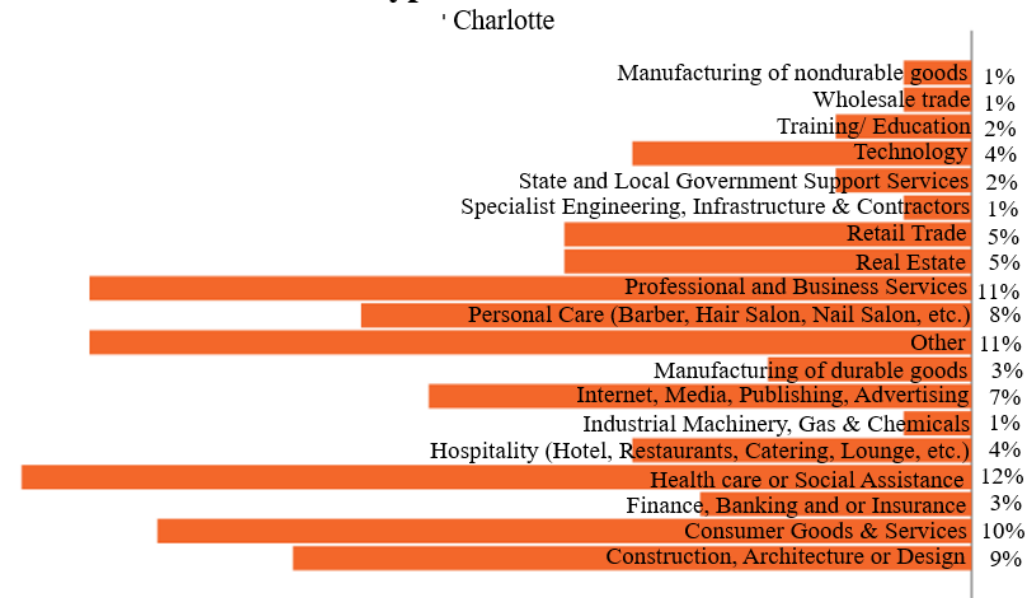
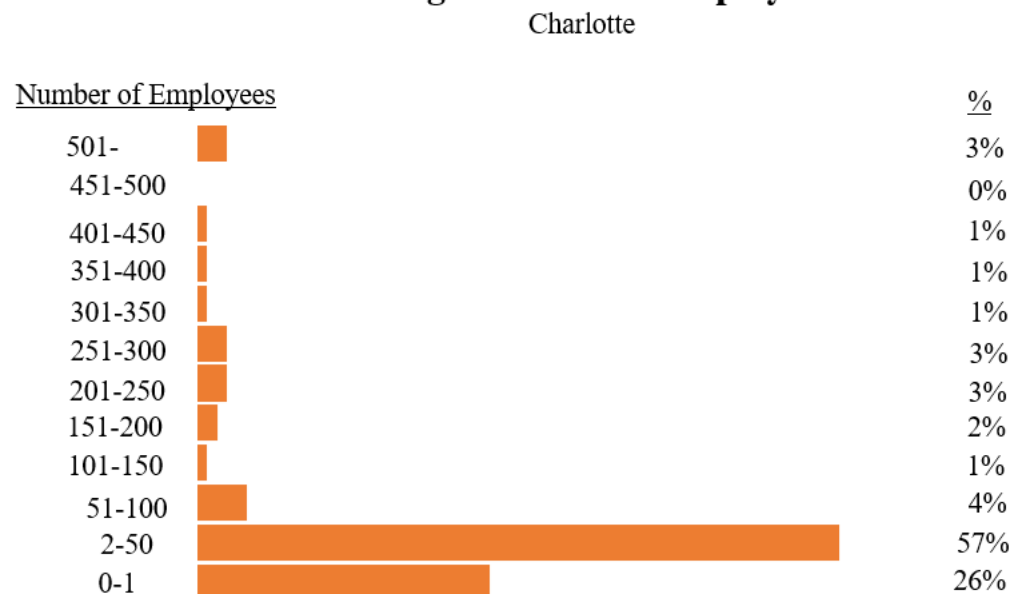


Figure 4.20 Charlotte Survey Respondents – Average Number of Employees



Regression Analysis. I used the same set of assumptions and variables for Charlotte as Atlanta's regression analysis and ran the regression sequence in the same order. In utilizing data acquired from surveys conducted in Charlotte I obtained the following: I first examined the ANOVA portion of the regression output shown in Table 4.21. I looked at the effects that the predictor variables had on the outcome of interests variable, Age of Business; and the variance can be explained by my regression model being statistically significantly different from zero with $p = .016b$.

Table 4.21 ANOVA and Model Summary Multiple Linear Regression - Age of the Business in Charlotte

	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean of Square	F	Sig
Regression	19.240	6	3.207	2.742	.016b
Residual	126.325	108	1.170		
Total	145.565	114			
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
	.364a	.132	.084	1.082	1.909

The **Table 4.22** Coefficient table illustrates that the entrepreneurial ecosystem variables of Regulatory Framework, Research and Development, and Access to Finance have the greatest impact on the desired outcome of success measured by an increase in the Age of Business. Access to Finance showed a .013 (Sig.), Research and Development showed a .004 (Sig.), and Regulatory Framework showed a .039 (Sig.) in this coefficient table. All three of those variables measured under .05, making them the only ones that proved to be a significant predictor of success as measured by the age of business in Charlotte.

Table 4.22 Coefficient Table – Age of Business for the city of Charlotte

	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
Constants	.747	.452		1.653	.101
Regulatory Framework	.369	.177	.256	2.085	.039
Market Conditions	.070	.180	.049	.391	.696
Access to Finance	-.448	.178	-.335	-2.520	.013
Research and Development	.525	.176	.359	2.981	.004
Entrepreneurial Capability	-.141	.165	-.110	-.853	.396
Culture	-.011	.105	-.011	-.100	.920

The above coefficient table indicates that for every unit increase in Access to Finance, or every 1 unit increase to access to finance, there is an associated negative .448 unit decrease in the age of businesses in Charlotte. Likewise, for each unit increase in Regulatory Frameworks is an associated .369 unit increase in the age of businesses in Charlotte; and similarly for each unit increase in Research and Development is an associated .525 unit increase in the age of businesses in Charlotte. These three variables reflect what elements of the city's entrepreneurial ecosystem showed the most statistically significant impact on African American small businesses and entrepreneurs' success as measured by the age of business in Charlotte. One can also interpret from the above results that Entrepreneurial Capability, Market Conditions, and Culture did not show a significant enough statistical value and may have limited or no direct impact on success as interpreted through the age of business in Charlotte. These predictors represent the slopes on my histogram of the Dependent variable. Based on my findings in Table 4.23 Coefficient chart, there are no multicollinearity issues. All these variables have Tolerance values over .2. This means that

this chart has reliable statistical value. The VIF scores were ≥ 2.5 and < 10.0 reinforcing my assumption that there were no multicollinearity issues. As I checked for the assumption of independence, I had no concern with this model's Durban Watson, which was 1.94. Independence was established and the residuals are uncorrelated.

Table 4.23 Coefficient Table – Age of Business for the city of Charlotte

	Correlations			Collinearity Statistics		
	B	Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	.747					
Regulatory Framework	.369	.201	.197	.187	.532	1.881
Market Conditions	.070	.094	.038	.035	.519	1.927
Access To Financing	-.448	-.023	-.236	-.226	.454	2.204
Research and Development	.525	.219	.276	.267	.555	1.801
Entrepreneurial Capability	-.141	.089	-.082	-.076	.482	2.076
Culture	-.011	.039	-.010	-.009	.669	1.496

As Table 4.24 ANOVA and Model Summary illustrates, the regression on Age of Business in Charlotte showed a P Value of .000^b indicating significance. The R Square in this Model Summary illustrated that 26.4% of the variance in the Number of Employees for Charlotte is accounted for by the collective impacts of the independent variables of Access to Financing, regional Regulatory Framework, Entrepreneurial Capabilities, Market Conditions, Research and Development, and Culture. The P Value in this model indicated that some of the predictor variables had an impact on the outcome of interest's variable, when looking at success as measured in the number of employees that a firm had.

Table 4.24 ANOVA and Model Summary Multiple Linear Regression - Number of Employees Charlotte

	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean of Square	F	Sig
Regression	157.413	6	26.235	6.451	.000
Residual	439.231	108	4.067		
Total	596.643	114			

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
	.514	.264	.223	2.017	2.276

The Table 4.25 Coefficients table illustrates that the entrepreneurial ecosystem variables of Market Conditions, Research and Development, and Entrepreneurial Capability have the greatest impact on the Number of Employees in Charlotte. Market Conditions showed .008, while Research and Development showed .006, and Entrepreneurial Capacity showed .003 ratings. These three variables measured $< .05$ proving that they could be significant predictors of success as measured in the age of businesses.

Table 4.25 Coefficients Table – Number of Employees - Charlotte

	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
Constants	-1.267	.843		-1.503	.136
Regulatory Framework	.549	.330	.189	1.665	.099
Market Conditions	.898	.335	.307	2.682	.008
Access to Finance	.086	.332	.032	.261	.795
Research and Development	.918	.328	.310	2.796	.006
Entrepreneurial Capability	-.924	.308	-.357	-3.001	.003
Culture	-.007	.196	-.004	-.037	.970

The above Coefficient table indicates that for every unit increase in Market Conditions there is an associated .898 unit increase in the number of employees in a business. Likewise, for each unit increase in Research and Development is associated with a .918 unit increase in the number of employees in a business; and similarly for each unit increase in Entrepreneurial

Capability is an associated negative .924 unit decrease in number of employees in a business. These three variables reflect which elements of the city's entrepreneurial ecosystem demonstrated the most statistically significant impact on African American small businesses and entrepreneurs' successes as measured by the age of business in Charlotte. One can also interpret from the above results that the entrepreneurial ecosystem variables of Regulatory Frameworks, Access to Finance, and Culture did not show a significant enough statistical value and may have limited, or no direct, impact on success as interpreted through the age of business in Charlotte. These predictors represent the slopes on my histogram of the Dependent variable. This Coefficient chart does not have any multicollinearity issues. In Table 4.26 below, these variables all had a Tolerance value that was $> .2$. This means that this chart has statistical value reliability. The VIF scores were ≥ 2.5 and < 10.0 , reinforcing my assumption that there were no multicollinearity issues. As I checked for the assumption of independence, I did not have a big concern with this model's Durban Watson, which was 2.276. Independence was established and the residuals are uncorrelated.

Table 4.26 Coefficients Table – Age of Business for the city of Charlotte

	Correlations			Collinearity Statistics		
	B	Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	-1.267					
Regulatory Framework	.549	.267	.158	.137	.532	1.881
Market Conditions	.898	.388	.250	.221	.519	1.927
Access To Financing	.086	.326	.025	.022	.454	2.204
Research and Development	.918	.379	.260	.231	.555	1.801
Entrepreneurial Capability	-.924	.093	-.277	-.248	.482	2.076
Culture	-.007	.167	-.004	-.003	.669	1.496

IV.2.2 QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

I had similar success in Charlotte in attracting an insightful group of current and past leaders and major influencers of the city's entrepreneurial ecosystem to participate in study interviews. A significant former mayor, senior non-profit executives, and local and national agency leaders provided me with one-on-one interviews to explore their perspectives on the impact of this Charlotte's entrepreneurial ecosystem on African American entrepreneurs and small businesses. Ultimately, I sought to understand if it aided these businesses' success, and if so, to what degree.

Table 4.28 Charlotte Interviewees

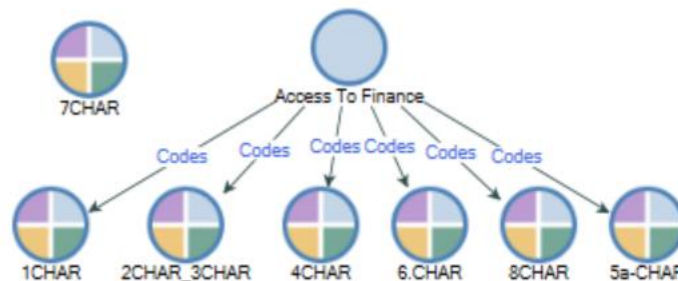
Interviewee #1	Former Mayor	City of Charlotte, NC	1CHAR
Interviewee #2	President & CEO	The National Institute of Economic Development	2CHAR
Interviewee #3	Director, Center for Professional Services	The National Institute of Economic Development	3CHAR
Interviewee #4	President & CEO	Urban League of Central Carolinas	4CHAR
Interviewee #5	President & CEO	Black Chamber of Commerce (City of Charlotte)	5CHAR
Interviewee #6	Program Manager	Charlotte Business INclusion Department of General Services	6CHAR
Interviewee #7	Former Mayor Candidate, Former Secretary of Transportation for the State of North Carolina	City of Charlotte, State of North Carolina	7CHAR
Interviewee #8	Founder & President	Non-Profit, Economic Development through entrepreneurial development	8CHAR

Thematic Analysis. Similar to the Atlanta results, the NVivo coding diagrams (the blue circles) represent thematic codes, and the multicolored circles represent interview participants as new

NVivo cases. The arrows annotated with the verb “codes” Point from the codes to the interview participant cases in which those themes were coded. If a case does not have an arrow, that indicates that the thematic code was neither present nor coded in that case.

Access to Finance. Similar to Atlanta, almost all of Charlotte’s non-profits senior executives, local and national government agency leaders, and the former mayor I interviewed expressed the need to development accessibility of financing and capital for this community. As you can see below in the thematic examination of where coding occurred, seven of eight interviewees weighed in.

Figure 4.29 ACCESS TO FINANCE – The City of Charlotte



Their passions and concerns were expressed in statements such as these:

“With an injection of capital, they can help grow those firms, particularly in areas I’m aware of a developer who said he is seeing a decline in plumbing and electrical and HVAC people and I are part of the venture capital effort, that if you can identify Entrepreneurs, either existing or those who are working in some larger structure that would be willing to come out, I can help fund them because I need to grow them to scale.”

A Former Charlotte Mayor

“Minority owned firms and women owned firms are more likely to be denied a bank loan or private investor funding.”

A Nonprofit Senior Leader

“My CDFI, where I have more relaxed on credit and standards to be approved for loan. So, we're trying to remove that barrier.”

A Nonprofit Senior Leader

“I think the irony is Charlotte's known as the second banking capital in the country and it's still tough for African American firms to get financing through the banks. .”

A Nonprofit Senior Leader

“You have the exception of having Mechanics and Farmers Bank, which is one of the oldest African American banks in the country. It's headquartered in Durham, and they have offices in Charlotte as well. That is filling some of that void.”

A Nonprofit Senior Leader

“So, the deployment is where I'm trying to get institutions to lean into it. Black businesses in this city are likely over mentored and undercapitalized because when I talk about capital and unlocking

capital, I leave it in this 'almost theory'. It's the assumption that the business itself is deficient and that's why they don't have the proper capitalization”

A Nonprofit Senior Leader

As Figure 4.30 indicates, there are varying perspectives regarding Charlotte’s entrepreneurial culture. Seven of eight interviewees contributed their insights, offering the following thoughts:

“Charlotte really wanted to be like in Atlanta in the sense that they wanted to be a part of the new growth of the community.”

A Former Charlotte Mayor

“Every southern city didn't grow as fast as ours did and, in that environment, another thing started to occur, African Americans started to become more politically powerful, more so than they were economically powerful. So, it changed the nature of city government.”

A Former Charlotte Mayor

“I started having district representation, which then brought more Blacks to the city council because the city was becoming increasingly Black, not as much as Atlanta was back then. Charlotte had what I call annexation, so, as the suburbs grew, the city limits also grew, which had the way of cooling the growth of African Americans in a city.”

A Former Charlotte Mayor

“Young entrepreneurs that are moving to Charlotte. Setting up camp, because it's new, they can see it as an up-and-coming community. And they get excited about that. So that young crowd, or that group of entrepreneurs, versus more seasoned folks who are growing up in corporate.”

A Nonprofit Senior Leader

“I think also, you know, as it relates to risk, African Americans must look at it differently, because of the racial wealth gap, you know, I don't have the same resources that their white counterparts have available to start and scale and grow a business. So, they must be extremely creative, I must find ways to finance which is a beautiful thing without ICAP - an Institute Capital where I can provide funding. But a lot of times, you know, I want it to give people shots, because I just don't have the same resources to make things happen.”

A Nonprofit Senior Leader

“I think, you know, African Americans have always had probably a higher interest in entrepreneurship, but I think the pandemic and the way they have been treated through corporate and has just kind of helped that interest to grow.”

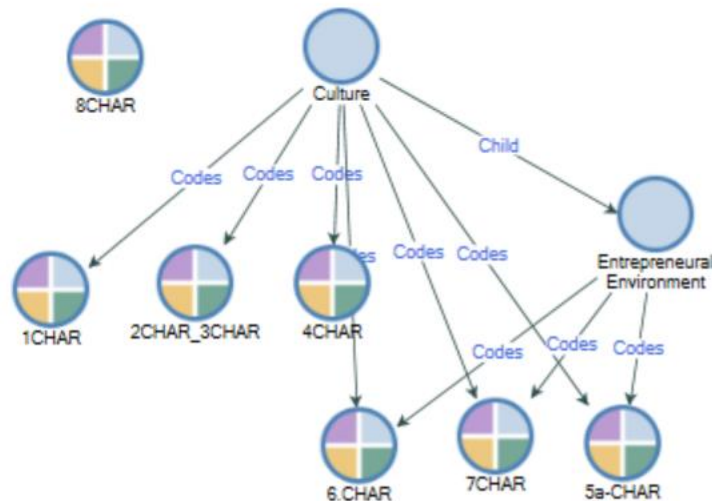
A Nonprofit Senior Leader

“If the corporate community says, “We’re going to have a strong minority business community, I will.” Because they will provide the capital. They will provide the procurement opportunities for them to have business. They will provide the social connections. It’s all based on corporate will so American only goes so far. They got to raise money from the community, which is what they’ve done, but they came from a corporation.”

A Nonprofit Senior Leader

Entrepreneurial Culture.

Figure 4.30 CULTURE – The City of Charlotte



“I think that COVID, the economic pandemic, really put a damper on a number of minority businesses.”

A Nonprofit Senior Leader

“I think people in general are starting to take more risks. And I mean professionals who, for whatever reason, have said, “I’ve got some experiences and education, or some access. And I think that I can do things for myself like, business-wise.”

A Nonprofit Senior Leader

“I will incubate you. I love to start but frankly, I will throw you out into the wilderness and you’ve got to figure out how to make it through the wilderness. If you’re successful, then you become one of my cherished children. That’s a model, I’m not sure that it’s the most encouraging model especially for women CEOs and founders of color because all people of color are struggling within most ecosystems to find their way, but it seems to be especially weak for black women. .”

A Nonprofit Senior Leader

“We have about 1400 certified firms in our system at any given time. Only 300 of them remain in a posture to consistently win proposals.”

A Government Agency Leader

My interviewees explored many dimensions of entrepreneurial capability as illustrated in Figure 4.31. The general consensus on this topic is that capability is not defined by one thing but

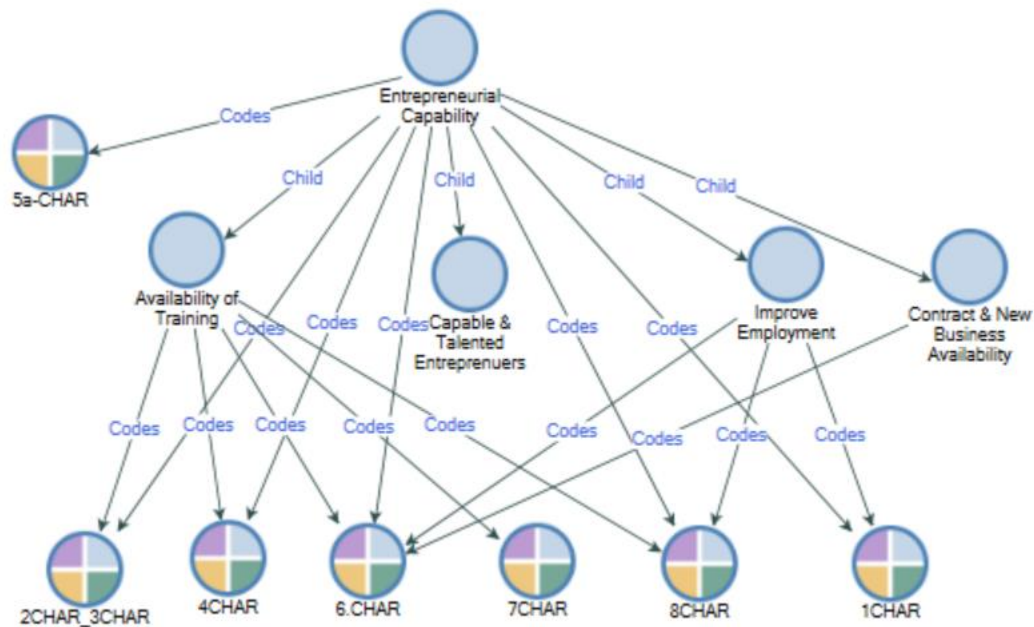
rather an array of areas ranging from training, ability to improve the local employment rate, the ability to locate and obtain continuous training and continue to attract new business while maintaining the existing. All eight of the interviewees were able to contribute value input on this topic. I heard feedback like:

“There is nobody that's going to help you unless you believe in yourself.”

A Former Mayor of Charlotte

Entrepreneurial Capability.

Figure 4.31 ENTREPRENEURIAL CAPABILITY – The City of Charlotte



“The PORTAL building where we're located is a good example of that. And providing the support place, an ecosystem for businesses to aggregate, to have resources and to grow their business. So, I think you've got pockets like that around town. That in my mind, for an entrepreneur to say I need resources there are plenty of places to go.”

A Nonprofit Senior Leader

“Successful entrepreneurship I think is generating more receipts, more taxes, creating different tax base, enabling more homeownership, enabling more Black businesses.”

A Senior Leader of a Nonprofit

“Successful businesses in Charlotte have an incredibly great network and often that network is outside of the city. ”

A Senior Leader of a Nonprofit

All interviewees weighed in on the market conditions for entrepreneurship of the city of Charlotte. As Figure 4.32 indicated, interviewees provided equal contributions to this discussion. Some of their feedback included:

“So, the attitude was that I had an obligation politically, morally and otherwise, those who handle the levers of power to distribute some of those resources to a larger community.”

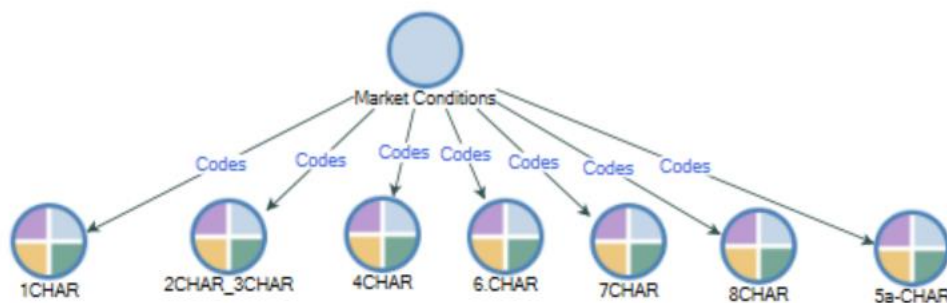
A Former Mayor of Charlotte

“I adopted some of the same tactics that Mayor Maynard Jackson did in supporting and building the minority entrepreneurial business community in Atlanta. ”

A Former Mayor of Charlotte

Market Conditions.

Figure 4.32 MARKET CONDITION – The City of Charlotte



“There is a culture shift that's also occurring from a corporate leadership perspective in Charlotte. Twenty years ago, you had these titans in corporate leadership, who were there because the headquarters was in Charlotte. Bank of America was headquartered in Charlotte. Wachovia was there. First Union was there and at the time so was their CEOs was. They lived there in the community. And one of the things it was a competitive thing between them, but their thought was, “We're going to help create black entrepreneurs.” So, in the case of the CEO of Bank of America during that time, anytime they built a new building, they made sure black entrepreneurs had an opportunity there. But that's what the older generation of CEOs in Charlotte used to do.”

A Senior Leader of a Nonprofit

“With the state of the world right now with the pandemic, and things that are going on, a lot of us being in people of color being impacted by, you know, layoffs by just culture shifts in corporate America, there's a huge appetite to start scale and grow a business.”

A Senior Leader of a Nonprofit

“I wanted to get My folks out of the mindset that they wanted just a small piece of what I had to offer, those guys that would come in and say I have 1 or 2 dump trucks, and I want to do business with the state. And I had to give them the reality check that if you don't have 20, 30, dump trucks, you can't do business with us because My job is too big.”

A Former North Carolina State Official

“The amount of money spent into the minority communities in scale is a drop in the bucket. I think you must do it at some scale to see where or not it has the larger impact. Numbers of participation like, my goal was 13% and it was not even 1 of all the 5 billion there was really at home the dollars where I could have a nominee participation.”

A Former North Carolina State Official

“I think regionally there's more. A part of it is this kind of structure of commerce in the region. In Charlotte, about two years ago, pre-pandemic, the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce, in his Regional Business Alliance merged. So now called the Charlotte Regional Business Alliance. So that covers 16 plus counties. And I think that there's a growing attitude for entrepreneurship within the region.”

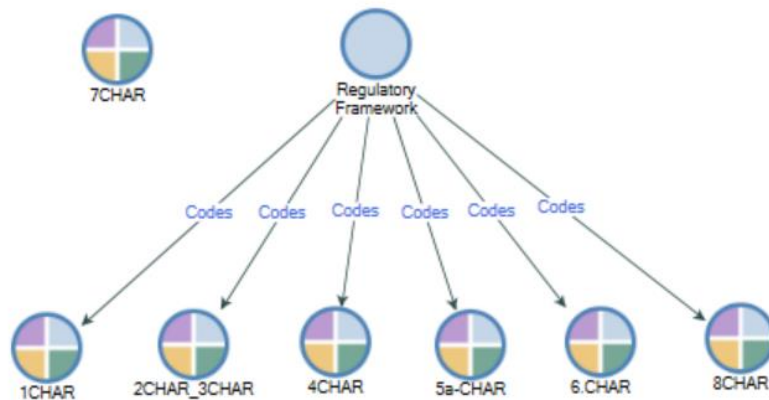
A Senior Leader of a Nonprofit

As Figure 4.33 indicates, seven of the eight interviewees lent input to this topic. Interviewees feedback did not display the passion on this subject that had been on other topics; however, there are still concerns that provided the following types of responses:

“Regulations have become less of an issue, the more you achieve political power.”

**A Leader of a Governmental Agency
Regulatory Framework.**

Figure 4.33 REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS – The City of Charlotte



“I do think a lot of businesses tend to run on the trial and error, unfortunately. They don't have the capital to do a feasibility study or regulatory study upfront and so they're bootstrapping their way through the regulatory process.”

A Senior Leader of a Nonprofit

“So, you hear a lot of times folks talk about construction count, but you cannot grow in capacity if you can't increase my contract amounts. There are certain thresholds you're not able to participate if you can't get a bond. There are regulations in the state that make it very difficult to waive the bonds. There are regulations that are in place that don't allow say the city to participate as a surety.”

A Government Agency Leader

Like Atlanta, the research and development portion of this study was utilized to explore entrepreneurial ecosystem activity that occurs on, and or affiliated with university and collegian campuses. As Figure 4.37 illustrates, most of the interviewee participants weighed in. Conversations tended to focus more on university programming and innovation partnerships. Those interviews yielded conversations like:

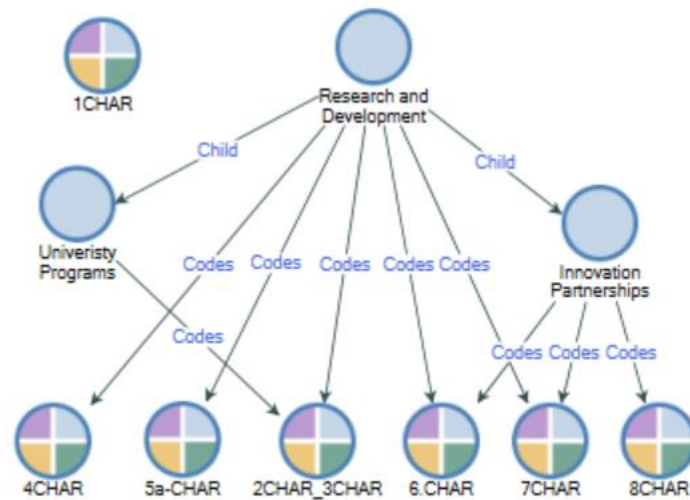
“Charlotte tends to operate in silos a lot. It would be great if we could all collaborate a little bit more.”

A Senior Leader of a Nonprofit

“I think that some of the colleges and universities have entrepreneurship programs”

A Senior Leader of a Nonprofit

Figure 4.34 RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT – The City of Charlotte



“The university and collegian community has been supportive of entrepreneurial efforts. But when you get decades and you're trying to turn around, you got to do more.”

A Senior Leader of a Nonprofit

“I think more can be done to at least highlight what is happening from an entrepreneur standpoint at university.”

A Senior Leader of a Nonprofit

“The university and collegian community could play a tremendous role. Right now, I think the universities are doing what they do which is educate. I also think they approach the entrepreneur ecosystem a lot of times from an academic standpoint, so the black business community or black communities become the focus of the research and it's a study and there is nothing after that.”

A Senior Leader of a Nonprofit

[illegible]

Source: Obtained by utilizing the NVivo 12 analytics software, examining the 1000 most frequently used words in the 8 transcripts, minimum length 3, with generalizations.

The word frequency search for Charlotte was dominated by “municipalities” and “construction” orientated language. When talking to most interviewees, they approached the balancing of opportunities among African American entrepreneurs Charlotte with the accessibility to the labor pool provided by local government through inclusion programming. Most conversations related to participation in key public projects and the capability of the study’s targeted subjects to qualify.

IV.3 COMBINED FINDINGS FOR ATLANTA AND CHARLOTTE

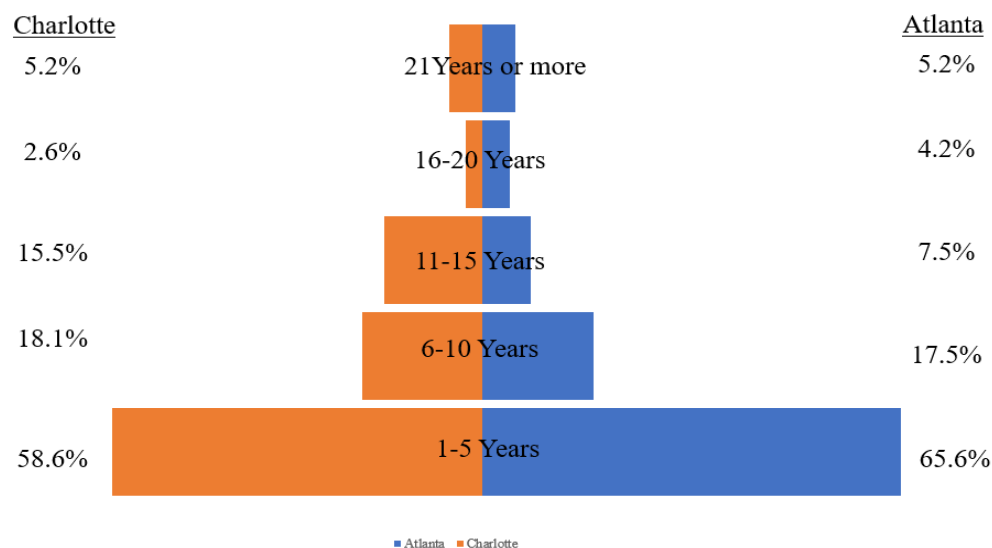
IV.3.1 Quantitative Findings

Overall, I was able to obtain a statistically sufficient sample size between the two cities to accurately support the assertions from this study. I received 10% of the active and digitally

responsive African American entrepreneurial and small business community made available through respected organizations' databases that serviced this targeted sample's members in both cities. The collective size of this available population was 3,000. I needed and obtained slightly >300 qualified respondents. I was able to slightly surpass my survey participant goal, tested my theories against six variables using a multiple variable linear regression model, and the data I captured proved sufficient for analysis.

Both cities provided a diverse group of respondents. Collectively, more than 80% of my aggregate respondents had been in business between 1-10 years. As Figure 4.36 illustrates, Atlanta had a more dominant share of these ≤ 10 years and under entrepreneurs, represented by 83.1% of respondents, while Charlotte represented 76.7% within their response pool.

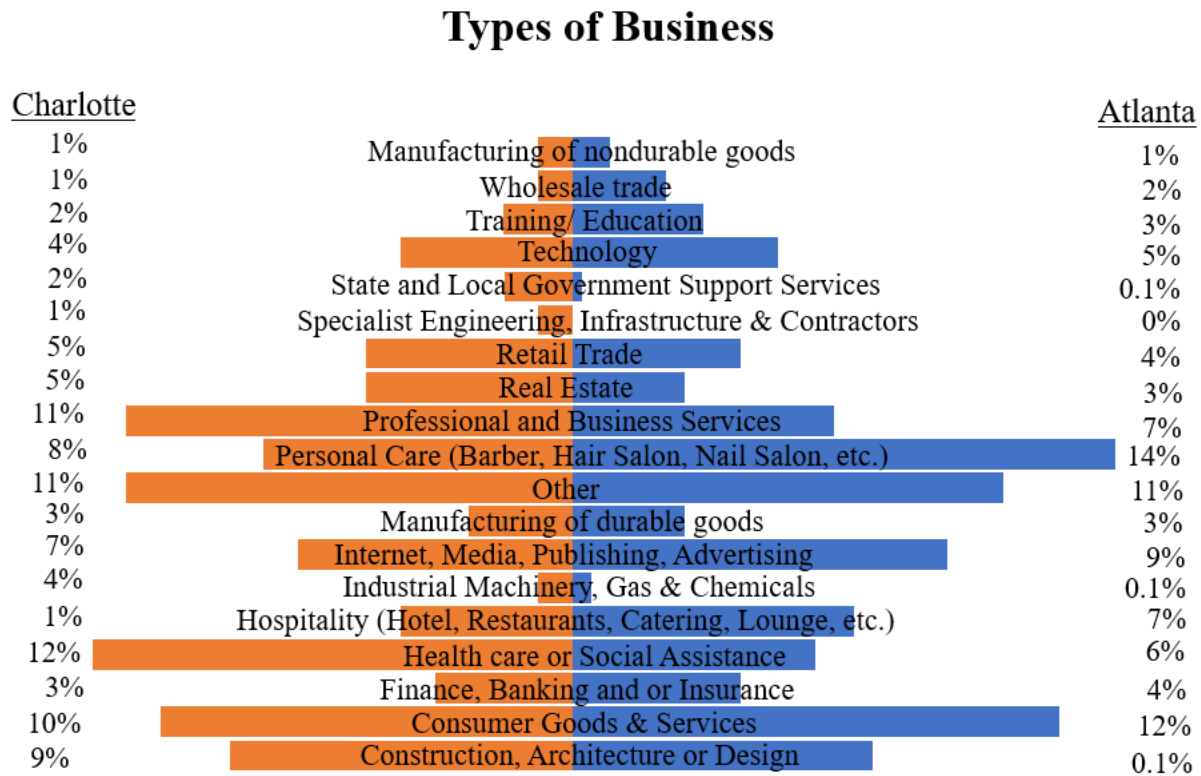
Figure 4.36 Survey Respondents in both Cities – Age of Businesses



My collective respondent pool was dominated by entrepreneurs in consumer goods, health services, professional business services, internet, construction, architecture, and design. As Figure

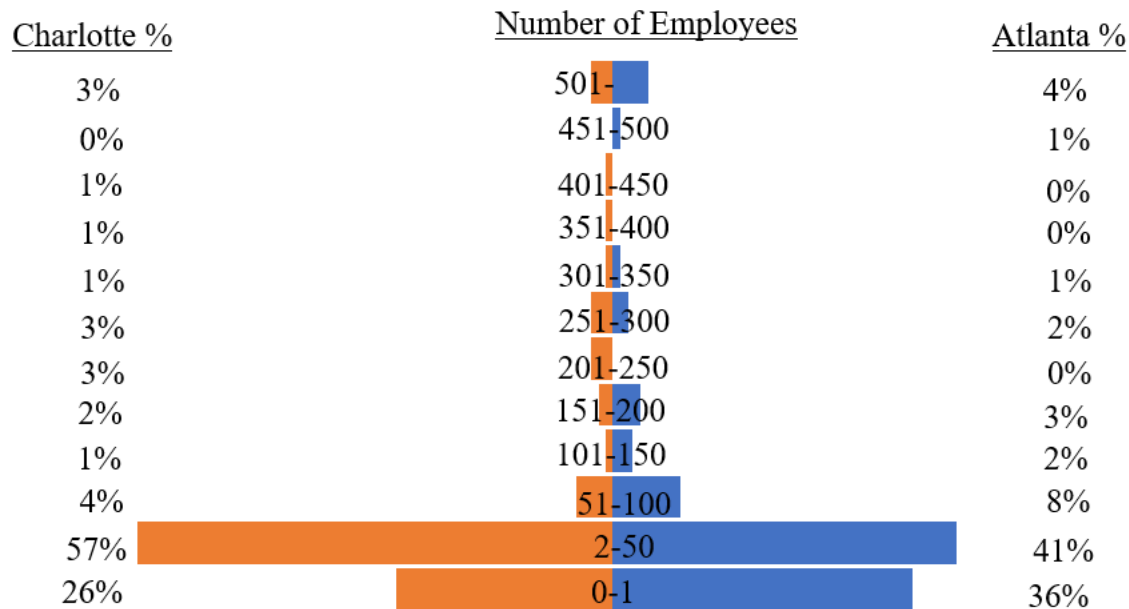
4.37 implies, I had a mixture of business and entrepreneurial perspectives from different industries, with each city providing substantial business diversity.

Figure 4.37 Survey Respondents in both Cities – Types of Businesses



Most African American businesses have less than 10 employees. Figure 4.38 demonstrates that Charlotte’s African American small business and entrepreneurship community is dominated by 83% small firms, while Atlanta boasts 77% of this community’s firms being the same size. If this sample accurately represents the true ratios within the total population of these communities, then neither city currently has more than 4% of their firms employing ≥ 500 people.

Figure 4.38 Survey Respondents from Both Cities – Average Number of Employees



Regression Analysis. After an individual examination of Atlanta and Charlotte, I ran a regression analysis against the aggregate data for the two cities. My goal was to gain some universal insight from the results. Keep in mind, they were paired together based on commonalities across their USA census SMA economic data and a less favorable rating from a 2014 HBR article regarding the upward mobility of US citizens born into poverty (Chetty, Raj, Nathaniel Hendren, Patrick Kline, and Emmanuel Saez. 2014). I analyzed the same six variables to assess the collective impact on these two entrepreneurial ecosystems and the success of African American entrepreneurs and small businesses.

I have enclosed the Coefficient tables illustrating my key dependent variables that were measured against the six independent variables in the multivariable aggregated data linear

regression model. **Table 4.40** provides an overview of the results against my hypothesis towards the close of this study.

Coefficients Table 4.40 – Age of Businesses

	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
Constants	1.543	.279		5.526	.000
Location	.101	.131	.043	.769	.442
Regulatory Framework	.190	.106	.134	1.799	.073
Market Conditions	-.138	.104	-.102	-1.327	.185
Access to Finance	-.269	.097	-.206	-2.761	.006
Research and Development	.189	.106	.137	1.788	.075
Entrepreneurial Capability	-.019	.099	-.015	-.196	.845
Culture	.074	.065	.078	1.139	.255

These coefficient tables were very insightful as they informed me that:

- For every unit increase in **Access to Finance** associated with -.269 unit decrease in the **Ages of Businesses** in an aggregate across both cities.
- For every unit increase in **Market Conditions** is associated with a .502 unit increase in the **Number of Employees** in an aggregate across both cities.
- For every unit increase in **Access to Finance** is associated with a.519 unit increase in the **Number of Employees** in an aggregate across both cities.

- For every unit increase in **Research and Development** is association with a .620 unit increase in the **Number of Employees** in an aggregate across both cities.
- For every unit increase in **Entrepreneurial Culture** is associated with a .060 unit increase in the **Number of Employees** in an aggregate across both cities.

Coefficients Table 4.41- Number of Employees

	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
Constants	.060	.595		.100	.920
Location	.042	.279	.008	.152	.879
Regulatory Framework	.226	.225	.071	1.002	.317
Market Conditions	.502	.221	.166	2.268	.024
Access to Finance	.519	.207	.177	2.502	.013
Research and Development	.620	.225	.200	2.755	.006
Entrepreneurial Capability	-.781	.211	-.267	-3.699	.000
Culture	-.060	.138	-.028	-.432	.667

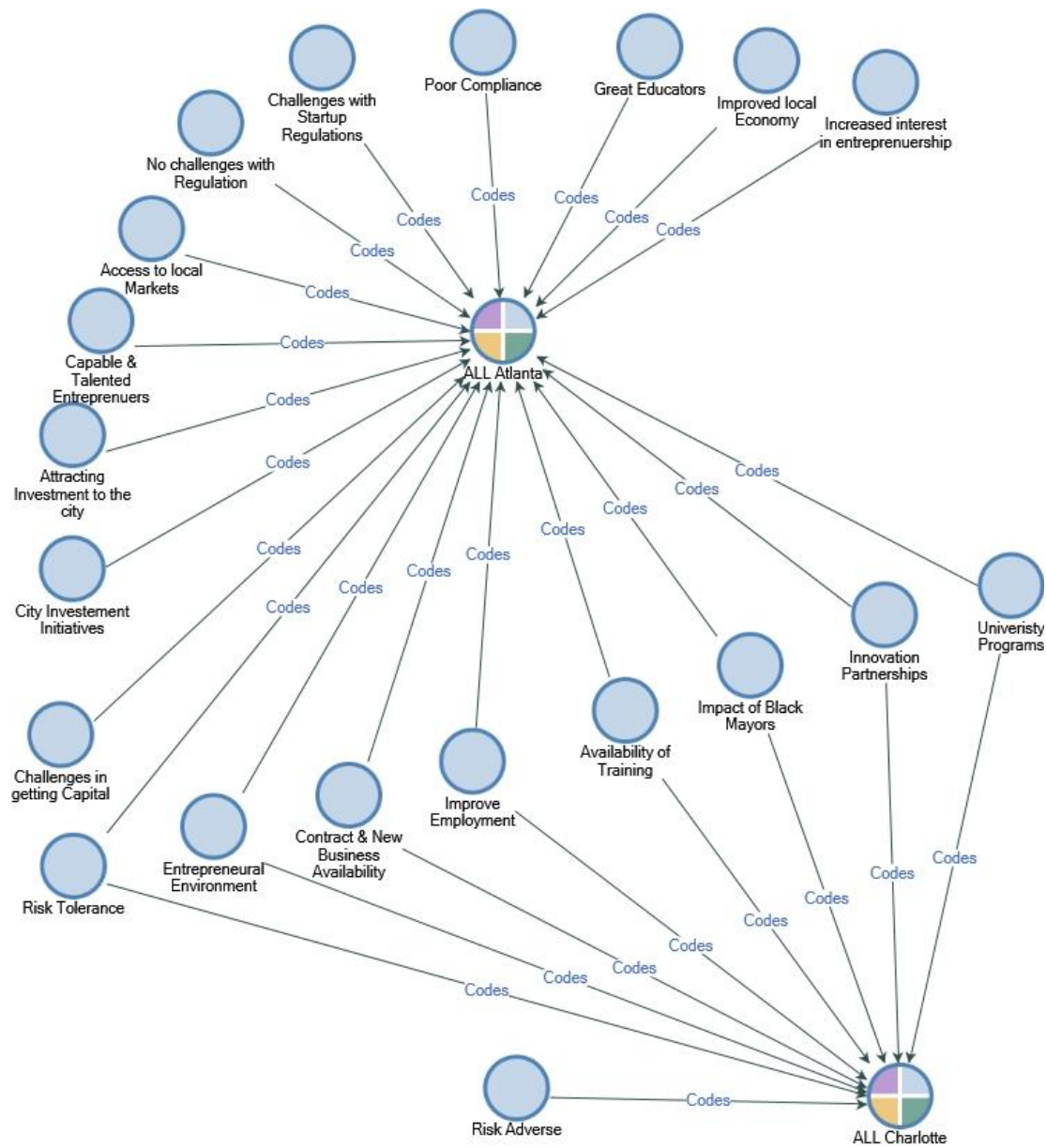
IV.3.2 Qualitative Findings

After interviewing key entrepreneurial ecosystem stakeholders and influencers in both cities, I uncovered a diverse set of concerns and opportunities that each thought was unique to their city. While each city had its own analysis done within each section of this study, I ran an aggregated query of the combined cities' data to determine convergent points of concern and opportunities, as well as to identify the central themes for each city. Using NVivo's thematic analysis on the combined data for these two cities, I was able to display the most dominant issues and opportunities conveyed to me during our interview sessions in Figure 4.42. The dominant themes central to both cities were:

- Risk Tolerance
- Entrepreneurial Environment
- Contract and new business availability
- Improve Employment
- Availability of training
- Impact of Black Mayors
- Innovation Partnerships
- University Programming

The factor that was of greatest impact was the effect of having a contiguous lineage of Black/African American mayors. Most interviewees provided consistent feedback that supported the notion that Black mayors were a central part of progress gained by this segment of the entrepreneurship community. Each former mayor communicated a different way of tackling some of the common issues, but they were all steadfast in the belief that they developed and enacted plans that helped increase the likelihood of success amongst this community. Figure 4.42 helps highlight some of those key themes.

Figure 4.42 INTERVIEWEE THEMES – The Cities of Atlanta & Charlotte



Source: *Obtained by utilizing the NVivo 12 analytics software, examining the 1000 most frequently used words in the 8 transcripts, minimum length 3, with generalizations.*



V DISCUSSION

The objective of this study was never to compare these two great cities to contrast them, but rather to establish some basis to identify, document, and analyze what two progressive cities, with similar characteristics, are doing to make progress in the entrepreneurial arena. Both cities share legacy of contiguous African American Mayors for more than 20 years, which have great track records of creating equity and opportunity for all within their region. Atlanta, with one of the world's busiest airports, is a true international hub, while Charlotte, is one of the main banking hubs in the United States. Despite these tremendous legacies, and too many accolades to mention, both cities are at the bottom of a 50-state ranking in opportunity of its citizenry moving out of poverty and into the middle class. One might assume in a country with so much free enterprise, and the opportunity for anyone to form a business, these factors could be an equalizer; however, while success can be seen in both cities, this has not translated into economic advancement for the impoverished to elevate to the middle class in either city. As I share the combined results, please focus on commonalities between these two cities and the progressive programming they both produce. Also note the shared concerns about the need to centralize communication to inform and increase awareness amongst citizens seeking resources from these cities' respective entrepreneurial ecosystems.

I structured this study to capture insights from African American entrepreneurs and small business owners and validate those findings through discussions with key stakeholders and influencers. I statistically quantified African American perspectives utilizing a multivariable regression analysis to test six key hypotheses. Statistics were developed by utilizing the SPSS to conduct a linear regression. The interviews covered a diverse group of senior leaders who significantly impacted local and regional entrepreneurs.

To explore this impact, I first had to identify an empirical method to consistently measure entrepreneurial activities in any given market. I did that by utilizing the OECD/EROSTAT Framework for Entrepreneurship Indicators showcased in Table 5.1. This framework was established by a panel of respected scholars, economists, and business development professionals, providing a comprehensive method to measure entrepreneurial activity in any market.

Table 5.1 Questionnaire & Survey Constructs

DETERMINANTS						ENTREPRENEURIAL PERFORMANCE	IMPACT
REGULATORY FRAMEWORK	MARKET CONDITIONS	ACCESS TO FINANCE	R&D AND TECHNOLOGY	ENTREPRENEURIAL CAPABILITIES	CULTURE	FIRMS	JOB CREATION
ADMINISTRATIVE BURDENS TO ENTRY	ANTITRUST LAWS	ACCESS TO DEBT FINANCING	R&D INVESTMENT	TRAINING AND EXPERIENCE OF ENTREPRENEURS	RISK ATTITUDE IN SOCIETY	EMPLOYMENT	ECONOMIC POWER
ADMINISTRATIVE BURDENS TO GROWTH	COMPETITION	BUSINESS ANGELS	UNIVERSITY/ INDUSTRY INTERFACE	BUSINESS IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION (SKILLS)	ATTITUDE TOWARDS ENTREPRENEURS	WEALTH	POVERTY REDUCTION
BANKRUPTCY REGULATIONS	ACCESS TO THE DOMESTIC MARKET	ACCESS TO VC	TECHNOLOGY COOPERATION BETWEEN FIRMS	ENTREPRENEURSHIP INFRASTRUCTURE	DESIRE FOR BUSINESS OWNERSHIP		FORMULARIZING THE INFORMAL SECTOR
SAFETY, HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATIONS	ACCESS TO FOREIGN MARKETS	ACCESS TO OTHER TYPES OF EQUITY	TECHNOLOGY DIFFUSION	IMMIGRATION	ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION (MINDSET)		
PRODUCT REGULATION	DEGREE OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT	STOCK MARKETS	BROADBAND ACCESS				
LABOR MARKET REGULATION	PUBLIC PROCUREMENT		PATENT SYSTEM STANDARDS				
COURT AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK							
SOCIAL AND HEALTH SECURITY							
INCOME TAXES; WEALTH BEQUEST TAXES							
BUSINESS AND CAPITAL TAXES							

Key		
Survey (Likert Scale)	Quant	
Interview	Qual	
Both Survey & Interview		

Source: The OECD/EROSTAT Framework for Entrepreneurship Indicators

This framework measures entrepreneurial activity across six measures (regulatory framework, creation of knowledge, marketing conditions, entrepreneurial capabilities, access to finance and entrepreneurship culture). This matched with the theoretical framing of Resource

Based Theory, provided a means to examine this topic against multiple hypotheses. The OECD measures provided a consistent structure to examine both the entrepreneurs and key stakeholders who influence their ecosystem.

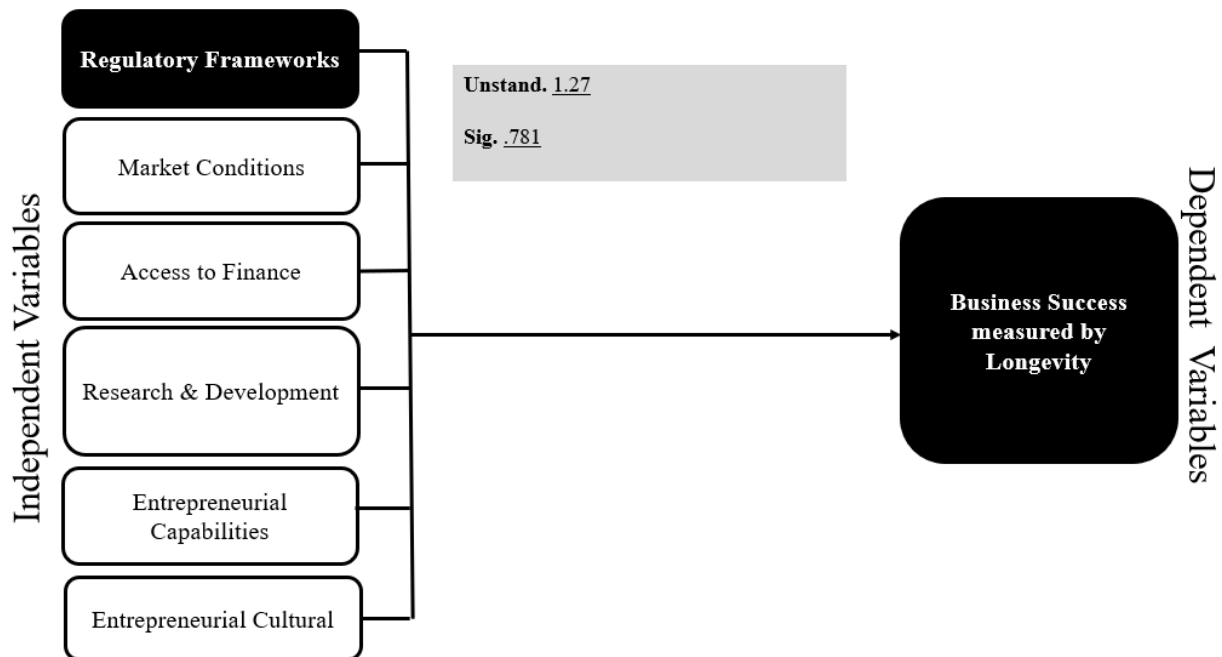
Resource Based Theory was used as my theoretical framework, as it provides an established scholarly empirical means to test the OECD categories through qualitative and quantitative research techniques. I used surveys to statistically measure how African American entrepreneurs and startups perceived their local entrepreneurial ecosystem supported their success. I identified the best representation of ecosystem leaders, policy makers, and mayors to interview in order to obtain subject matter expertise necessary to interpret the statistical results from the survey and the environmental influences that drove certain circumstances. Collectively, the findings from the mixed methods approach allowed me to test and answer my initial hypotheses and ultimately provided answers to the study's main question of how does the infrastructure and support of a local entrepreneurial ecosystem aid in the success of African American entrepreneurs?

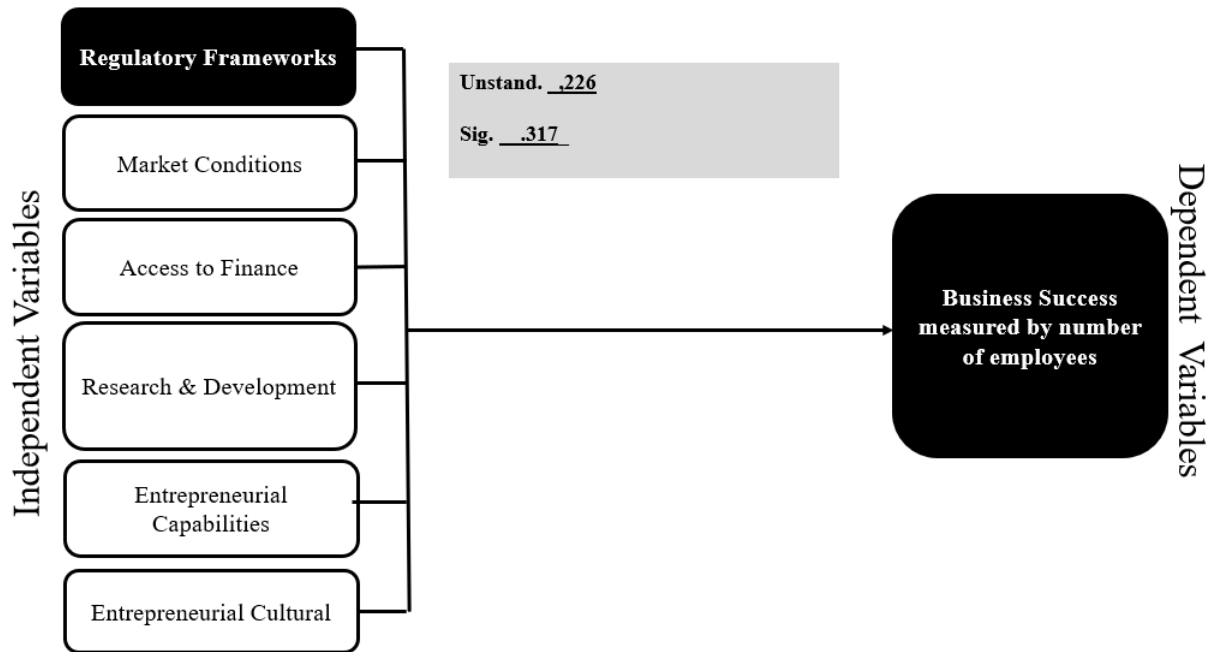
Findings and Results. My quantitative data goals were set after discussions with key interviewees in both cities. I was able to establish goals of 200 qualified respondents for Atlanta and 100 qualified respondents for Charlotte to deliver statistically sufficient and relevant results. In each city, key ecosystem stakeholders confirmed that no entity in their respective city had more than 2000 digitally regularly active and engaged members in Atlanta; and similarly, no organization had more than 1000 regularly active and digitally engaged members in Charlotte in a digital database no matter how large the entire active database is. In other words, these goals were set against 10% of the active, engaged, and available members sourced from some of these communities' most respected organizations' digital databases.

Leveraging the data collected, I was able to address some fundamental assumptions regarding the impact of local entrepreneurial ecosystems on African American small businesses and startups. The following hypotheses were addressed:

Hypotheses.

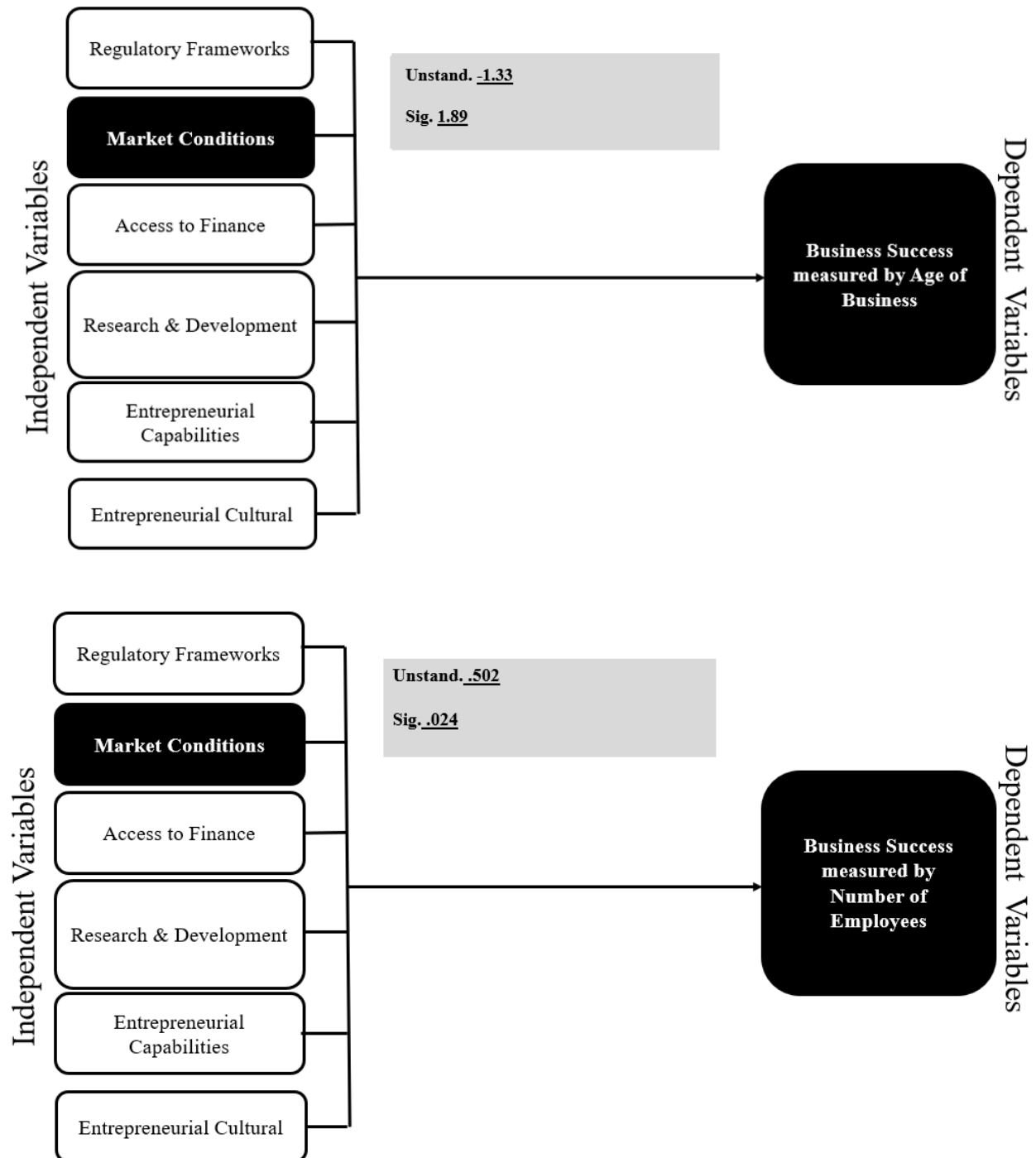
H1 – Cities that contain a challenging Regulatory Framework will have a negative effect on the success rate of African American entrepreneurs as measured in the number of sustainable businesses.





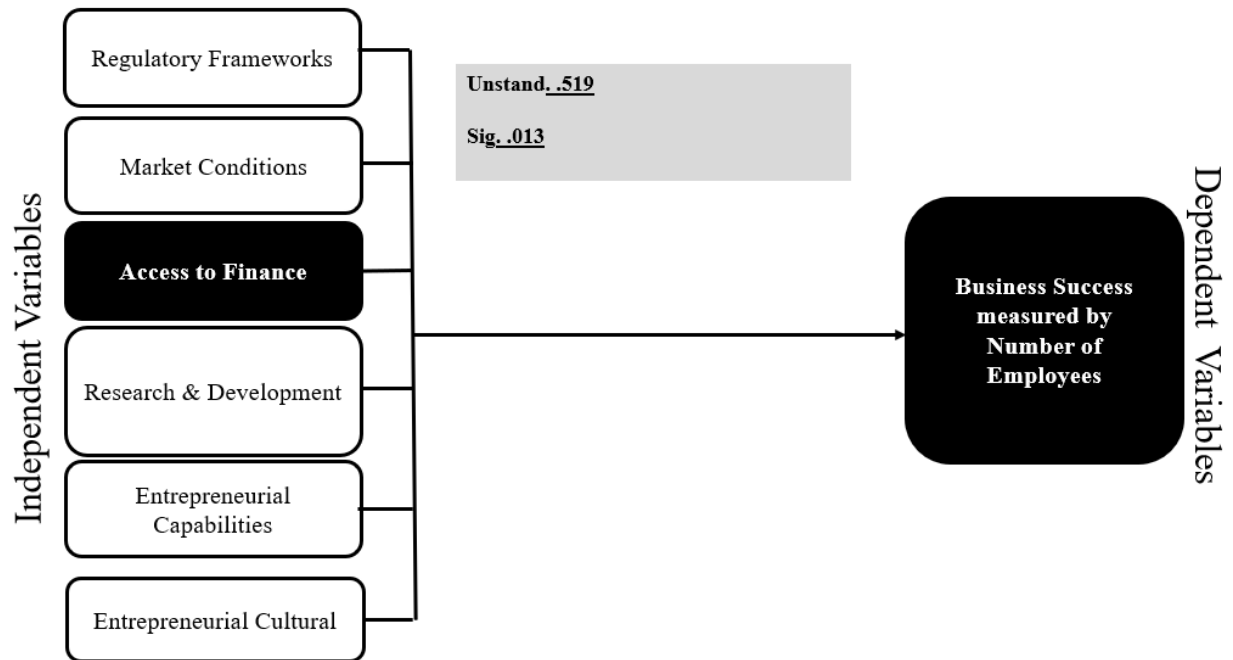
- As illustrated above, as measured against business age, number of employees, and number of industries in a given market, a regression analysis illustrates no significance for this factor as it relates to a dependency on business success.
- Regulatory frameworks are not an ecosystem barrier to African American small business success

H2 –Cities that contain challenging Market Conditions will have a negative effect on the success rate of African American entrepreneurs as measured by the number of sustainable businesses.



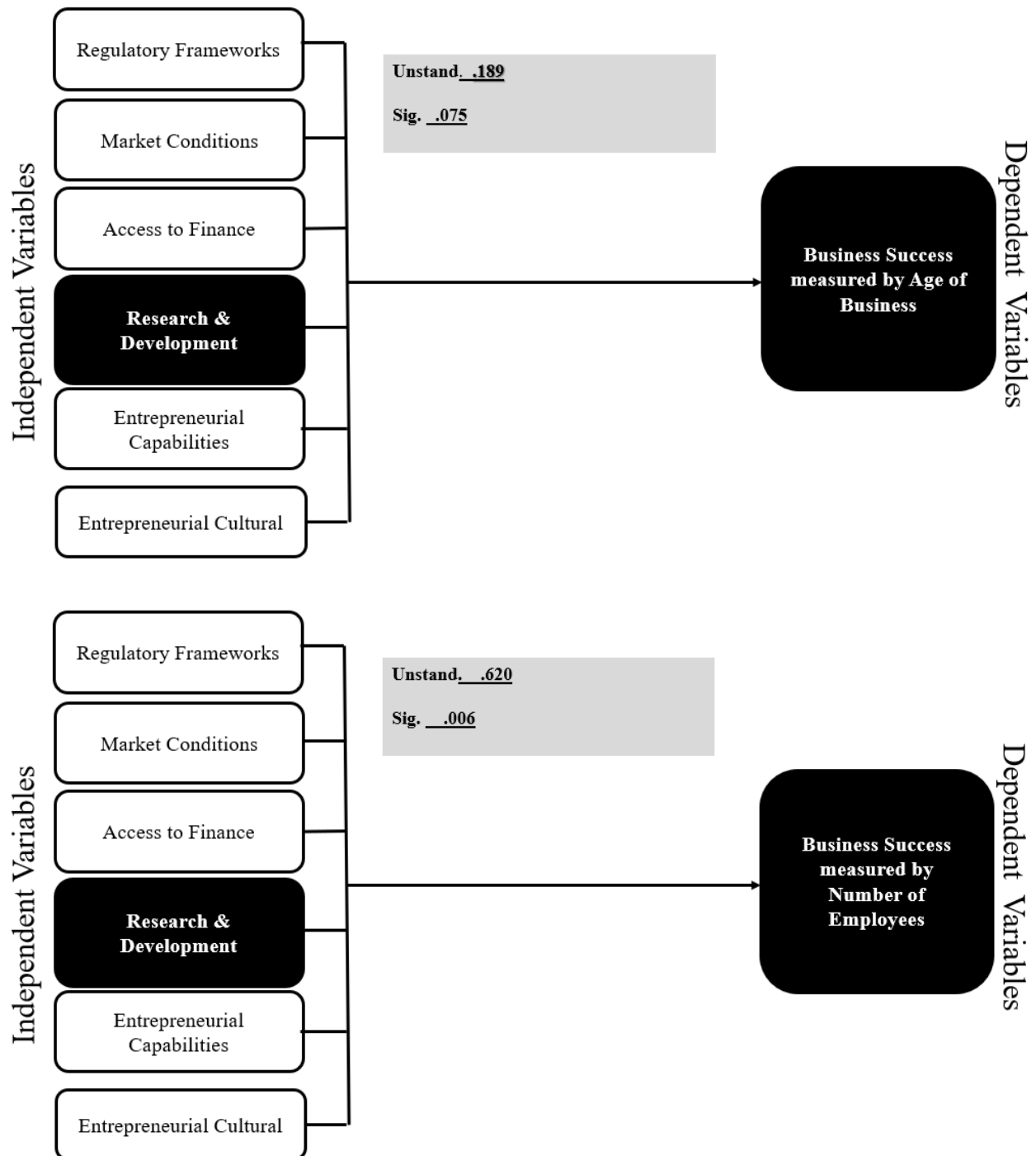
- Market conditions favorable to overall entrepreneurship showed the most significance through our linear regression model based on the data received from survey results from African American entrepreneurs in both markets

H3 – Cities that contain challenges for African American entrepreneurs to have Access to Finances will display negative results in the success rate of African American entrepreneurs as measured in the number of sustainable businesses.



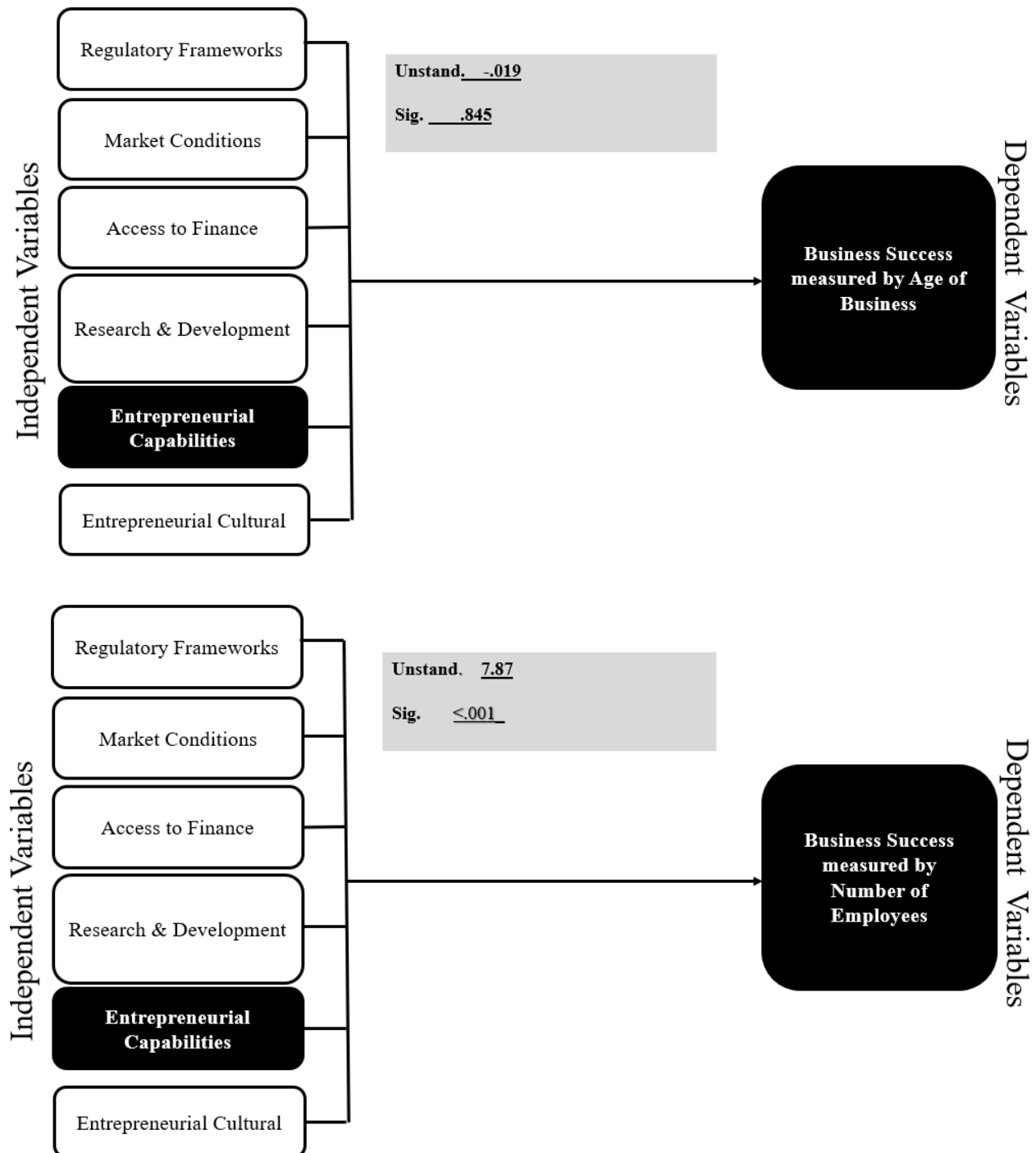
- Access to finance showed significance as African American businesses and startup success is measured by the ability to grow employment base. Clearly this is an essential element of the ecosystem to grow a business's capacity to provide more products and services.

H4 – Cities that contain challenges for entrepreneurs to participate in R&D and the technological advances of that city and or their respective industries, will display negative results in the success rate of African American entrepreneurs as measured in the number of sustainable businesses.



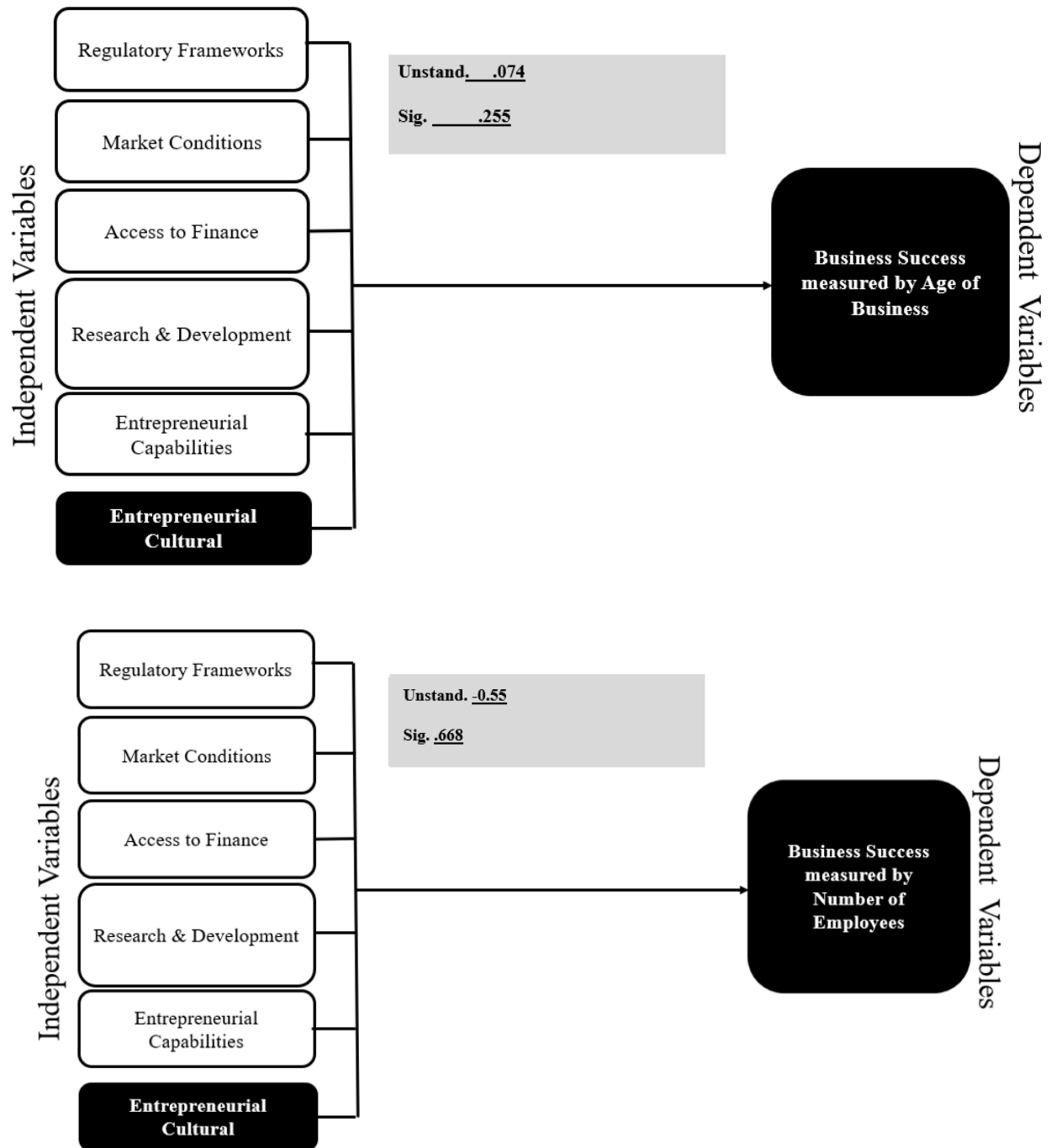
- As Research and Development represented in this study, activities that helped perpetuate entrepreneurial activity in its market or city originating from a university or college campus, I saw that those initiatives had the highest significance when I measure them against the ability to help a company expand its capacity through employment growth.
- Again, statistically proven through the aggregated results of our survey.

H5 – Cities that contain a challenge in developing and enhancing Entrepreneurial Capabilities will have a negative effect on the success rate of African American entrepreneurs as measured in the number of businesses that can be sustained.



- Entrepreneurial Capabilities within a marketplace clearly have an impact on the ability to grow capacity through the increasing of employee base.
- Aggregated results from the two cities statistically proved that through the regression analysis.

H6 – Cities that contain Cultures that are not supportive of entrepreneurship will have a negative effect on the success rate of African American entrepreneurs as measured by the number of sustainable businesses.



- Entrepreneurial culture showed no significant impact on the ability of African American small businesses to be successful.
- This is based on the aggregated results from my survey, analyzed through a multivariable linear regression model.

V.1 Contribution to Theory

While Resource Theory is a respected theoretical concept frequently used by the scholarly community, it's not without its fair share of critics (Wernerfelt, 1984; Barney, 1986; Barney, 1991; Petteraf & Barney, 2003). It was the intent of this study to strengthen its support amongst the entrepreneurial community of scholars by pairing it with the OECD/EROSTAT Framework for Entrepreneurship Indicators. These two concepts provide a formidable pairing in understanding how resources can be allocated, absorbed, and utilized to strengthen and build sustainable small business communities. Resource Theory lays the framework for establishing sustainable competitive advantage through the efficient allocation of resources. The OECD/EROSTAT Framework for Entrepreneurship Indicators provides a seamless way to monitor and measure entrepreneurial activity in any community. I used this method because there is no need to accommodate adjustment for geographical, cultural, or social norms. This framework can measure any market with similar accuracy.

V.2 Contribution to Practice

This study created an opportunity for both the African American startup and small business communities to gain the perspective of major influencers of their ecosystem on how to gain value from the local marketplace and understand potential pitfalls. One of the principal concerns amongst service providers to this community was awareness of the availability of resources and technical training. My hope is that after reading this study members of these communities turn to their local resources to inquire about assistance and aid within their local ecosystem. Likewise, I am hopeful that my survey and analysis proved beneficial to those planning resources allocated to these communities. While these communities still suffer from delayed entrepreneurial successes than other communities, I hope that this report sheds some light on their

value and that corporate and governmental stakeholders invest more to build stronger and more resilient African American small businesses and startups.

V.3 Limitations

While there were many things that coalesced well for this study, it was certainly not without limitations. Atlanta and Charlotte have historically produced a succession of African American mayors. Atlanta had the first African American mayor in the Southern part of the United States. While 4 of the 5 living African American former mayors participated in the Atlanta interviews, I was only able to interview 1 of the 3 living former African American Charlotte mayors. I think I would increase my knowledge and understanding of Charlotte's current trends had I talked with all of its African American mayors, inclusive of the current mayor. While the input received across interviewees from both cities was balanced, I think the study could have been more impactful with a larger set of nonprofit and government agency leaders dedicated to the development of African American entrepreneurial communities.

V.4 Future Research

This study provided me the opportunity to interview three legends and thirteen leaders whom, as government agency or nonprofit influencers, provided tremendous value to the startup and entrepreneurial communities. Several interesting topics were mentioned that I could envision exploring in future research, including:

- What role does CDFI's play on the development of minority and women owned small businesses and startups?
- What is the current impact of the CRA (Community Reinvestment Act), enacted by Congress in 1977, on the development of SMEs?

- The impact of minority-owned Mechanics and Farmers Bank (abbreviated as M&F Bank) on the African American entrepreneurial ecosystem.
- Resource allocation and efficiency of distribution based on the maturity level of a business or its lifecycle.
- How do we increase entrepreneurial community awareness of all available resources?

VI CONCLUSION

This study provided a unique opportunity to engage the African American small business and startup communities in two progressive cities to i) understand the impact their entrepreneurial ecosystem had on their success; and ii) interview 16 inspiring and influential resource providers and understand their impact on, and perspective of, these respective ecosystems. I collectively engaged slightly over 300 entrepreneurs and startups within these two communities. I also interviewed 16 current and former leaders and influencers of resources to this segment of the entrepreneurship community. I left those conversations inspired and encouraged to persevere in all my future endeavors. Two major takeaways from this study: first, that our society will have to find innovative ways to provide resources and funding to those that have been historically economically deprived, and otherwise disadvantaged, because the sum of their success increases the economic benefit to the collective economy. Second, intentional communication to, and increased awareness among, African American entrepreneurs and startups is essential to equitable resource distribution. Often, and across many interviews, key stakeholders discussed underutilization of resources due to African American entrepreneur and startup lack of awareness of available resources and economic opportunities. Clearly, that is something that will need to be addressed in future research in order to identify methods to reverse this pattern and increase finances available to members of this economic ecosystem.

Also, my study specifically leveraged Resource Based Theory in conjunction with the OECD/EROSTAT Framework for Entrepreneurship Indicators to identify areas of greatest need across these two cities. I used quantitative analysis to interpret and analyze interviews from a statistically sufficient sampling from both cities. I used qualitative analysis to interpret the input from entrepreneurship ecosystem interviewees who collectively have the greatest impact and

influence on the resources allocated to this community. The quantitative analysis was substantiated by the qualitative analysis allowing me to affix the appropriate assumptions to the study's initial hypothesis. Hence, the feedback from these two cities suggested that access and availability of capital is a specific entrepreneurial ecosystem concern that needs to be resolved for this community. Also, centralized mapping of the availability of these resources should be a priority to ensure maximum utilization through awareness of active and available resources. I suggest that future researchers also consider pairing theory and framework to advance similar research regarding the African American entrepreneurship community.

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APPENDICES

J. Mack Robinson College of Business

Georgia State University

Doctorate in Business Administration Program

ATLANTA MAYORS INFORMED CONSENT

[REDACTED]

How does the infrastructure and support for Atlanta's African American startup community compare to similar cities in the Southeastern portion of the United States of America?

Principal Investigator:

Wesley J. Johnston, PhD

Student Principal Investigator:

Leroy Carson, Jr.

[REDACTED]

The purpose of this research study is to examine how the infrastructure and support for Atlanta's African American startup community compares to similar cities in the southeastern portion of the United States of America. This study seeks to examine what factors exist in Atlanta's entrepreneurial ecosystem that may lead to higher rates of African American small business startup success. I will be interviewing key stakeholders and influencers that impact Miami, Florida, Charlotte, North Carolina, and Atlanta's entrepreneurship success as well as entrepreneurs in all three cities as a basis of comparison. I will also be collecting and analyzing secondary aggregate economic data from the state economic development agencies that support each city.

[REDACTED]

If you decide to participate in this study, you will have a brief recorded interview with Leroy Carson, Jr., a current doctorate in business administration student and candidate in the J. Mack Robinson College of Business at Georgia State University. The interview will take 45-60 minutes.

I don't anticipate that you will experience any risks or discomforts greater than those in a normal day of life.

Participating in this research will not benefit you directly. Overall, I hope to learn about how a city's entrepreneurial ecosystem can assist African American startup businesses to be successful as measured in sustainability up to, and beyond, their first five years. If requested, I will gladly share the general results of the investigation with you.

Participation in research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to participate in the study and subsequently change my mind, you have the right to withdraw at any time. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

I will keep my records confidential, however certain information discussed during my interview may be utilized in the future when I present this study or publish its results. Dr. Wesley Johnston and Leroy Carson, Jr. will have access to the direct recordings of the information you provide. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly (GSU Institutional Review Board, the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP)). I will use my name in context to the time relative to my specific administration as mayor of the city of Atlanta,

Georgia. The information you provide will be stored digitally through password, and firewall-protected, computers. If you participate in a telephone interview, I will record my answers. If you participate by digital video interview, my name, title, and organization will be recorded for use by the researcher. If you respond by email, I will transfer my answers to a spreadsheet before deleting the email with my responses. my name and other facts that indicate my participation may appear when I present this study or publish its results. The findings will be summarized and reported in group form. my name will be associated with the period connected to my administration as mayor of Atlanta.

[REDACTED]

The IRB at Georgia State University reviews all research that involves human participants. You can contact the IRB if you would like to speak to someone who is not involved directly with the study. You can contact the IRB for questions, concerns, problems, information, input, or questions about my rights as a research participant. Contact the IRB at 404-413-3500 or irb@gsu.edu.

[REDACTED]

Name

Signature

Date

[REDACTED]

Name

Signature

Date

J. Mack Robinson College of Business
Georgia State University
Doctorate in Business Administration Program
MAYORS OF ATLANTA INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

II. INTRODUCTION

Hello, my name is Leroy Carson, Jr and I am a doctorate in business administration student and candidate in the DBA program at the J. Mack Robinson College of Business at Georgia State University. Thank you for agreeing to speak with me.

This interview will cover several areas aimed at examining how the infrastructure and support for Atlanta's African American startup community compares to similar cities in the southeastern portion of the United States of America. The success rate of African American startups in the southeastern portion of the United States lags that of its peers in Atlanta, Georgia. This study seeks to examine what factors exist in Atlanta's entrepreneurial ecosystem that may lead to higher rates of African American small business startup success. I will be interviewing key stakeholders and influencers that impact Miami, Florida, Charlotte, North Carolina, and Atlanta, Georgia's entrepreneurship success as well as entrepreneurs in all three cities as a basis of comparison. I will also be collecting and analyzing secondary aggregate economic data from the state economic development agencies that support each city.

The overall objective of the interview is to understand my administration's role in creating the climate during my term as mayor where Atlanta's entrepreneurial ecosystem aided African American startups and small businesses to be successful as measured in sustainability of five

years or longer. I will take my feedback and build a historical context to Atlanta's support for this entrepreneurial community.

My interview strategy involves five thematic approaches:

- I. I will examine what role did **Culture** play in supporting African American startups during my administration as mayor. My focal point will be on attitudes towards entrepreneurship, overall desires to become business owners, entrepreneurship education and risk attitude in society during that time frame.
- II. I will discuss **entrepreneurial performance** during my administration as mayor of Atlanta. My focal point will be on firms developed, employment generated, and wealth created through entrepreneurship.
- III. I will discuss the **impact** of entrepreneurial activity during my administration as mayor of Atlanta. My focal point for this discussion will be on job creation, economic empowerment, poverty reduction and how and what initiatives impacted formalization of the informal entrepreneurial economic sector.
- IV. I will discuss what role did **R&D and technology** play in the support of African American startups during my administration as mayor of Atlanta. I will specifically discuss the role of universities, professional organizations, technology cooperation between firms and overall R&D investment available in the marketplace during that time frame.
- V. Lastly, I will discuss the impact of the **regulatory framework** in supporting African American startup success during my administration as mayor of Atlanta. I will cover

my perception of both the administrative burdens to entry as well as the administrative burdens to growth for African American startup entrepreneurs.

III. TOPIC:

This study seeks to understand how the infrastructure and support for Atlantis African American startup community compares to similar cities in the southeast portion of the United States of America? What lends to its perceived success? Also, what can I learn that can enable and empower similar communities to share in the same rate of success?

IV. INTERVIEW TYPE: I will conduct a semi-structured interview approach to ensure consistency of information across interviewees.

V. AFRICAN AMERICAN ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM:

The success rate of African American startups in the Southeastern portion of the United States lags that of its peers in Atlanta, Georgia. This study will deploy a mixed method approach to examining what factors exists in Atlanta's entrepreneurial ecosystem that may lend to higher rates in African American small business startup success and sustainability across the region and country.

VI. Interviewees:

- I will be conducting interviews with five of the six African American mayors of Atlanta. The pioneer, Mayor Maynard Jackson, Atlanta's, and the southern part of the United States' first African American Mayor is deceased, however proxies (who have worked for him) will be utilized to fill in for his input).

- I will conduct one-on-one interviews with the Small Business Administration Centers Directors and the Minority Business Development Centers Directors in the cities of Atlanta, Georgia, Miami, Florida and Charlotte, North Carolina (*they will have their own interview protocol*).

My questions are designed to elicit information about how the infrastructure and support for Atlanta's African American startup community compares to similar cities in the southeast portion of the United States of America and lends to their success.

VII. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

SECTION A: CULTURE

1. Please share a story you remember that best symbolizes the entrepreneurial culture during the timeframe when you were mayor of the city of Atlanta.
2. What can you tell me about the amount of risk folks were willing to take towards entrepreneurship during that timeframe?
 - a. Were folks more risk tolerant during that period?
 - b. If not, were they more risk adverse?
 - c. If so (for either), why do you think that is so?
3. How would you rate regional interest and attitude in becoming an entrepreneur? And why?
4. What types of resources were available to help educate entrepreneurs? How was their reception to them? And how were they utilized?

SECTION B: ENTREPRENEUR PERFORMANCE

1. Please tell about the pace of new African American firm creation during my administration.

2. What can you tell me about the impact that African American firms had to the employment rate in the city? And why?
3. Can you provide some examples of wealth that was created from entrepreneurs that were able to leverage the city's entrepreneurial support systems?

SECTION C: IMPACT

1. What was the impact of job creation from African American start-up enterprises to the local economy that were created during my administration?
2. What other factors do you think benefit the local economy from African American small businesses being successful?
3. What impact, if any, did the creation of African American firms have to the poverty rate in the city? Was there a reduction? If so, why?
4. How did my policies, practices or resources impact the informal sector of the entrepreneurship pool?

SECTION D: R&D And TECHNOLOGY

1. What things in Atlanta were a byproduct of my administration's ability to attract R&D Investment to African American startups in this city? How did this come about?
2. What role does the university community play in ensuring success for African American entrepreneurs and startups in Atlanta?
3. What type of technology cooperation and or collaborations lend to the success of some African American entrepreneurs and or entrepreneurial groups being successful?

SECTION E: ACCESS TO FINANCE

1. How challenging was it for African American start-ups to access capital from banks during My administration?
2. How challenging was it for African American start-ups to gain access to Angel Investors and or venture capitalist during the timeframe of My administration?
3. What other financing resources were available to African American start-ups during this timeframe?

SECTION F: REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

1. What were some of the regulatory hurdles that challenged African American start-ups during My administration?
 - a. How did these challenges impact some of these start-ups from entering the local market?
 - b. What steps did my administration take to alleviate some of these regulatory challenges for entrepreneurs?

SECTION G: WRAP UP

1. Overall, why do you think Atlanta does so well for African American entrepreneurs in comparison to other South-eastern cities?
2. Is there anything else you would like to share with me that is relevant to this study?

J. Mack Robinson College of Business

Georgia State University

Doctorate in Business Administration Program

AGENCY INFORMED CONSENT

How does the infrastructure and support for Atlanta's African American startup community compare to similar cities in the southeastern portion of the United States of America?

Principal Investigator:

Wesley J. Johnston, PhD

Student Principal Investigator:

Leroy Carson, Jr.

The purpose of this research study is to examine how the infrastructure and support for Atlanta's African American startup community compares to similar cities in the southeastern portion of the United States of America. This study seeks to examine what factors exist in Atlanta's entrepreneurial ecosystem that may lead to higher rates of African American small business startup success. I will be interviewing key stakeholders and influencers that impact Miami, Florida, Charlotte, North Carolina, and Atlanta's entrepreneurship success as well as entrepreneurs in all three cities as a basis of comparison. I will also be collecting and analyzing secondary aggregate economic data from the state economic development agencies that support each city.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will have a brief recorded interview with Leroy Carson, Jr., a current doctorate in business administration student and candidate in the J. Mack Robinson College of Business at Georgia State University. The interview will take 45-60 minutes.

I don't anticipate that you will experience any risks or discomforts other than that in a normal day of life.

Participating in this research will not benefit you directly. Overall, I hope to learn about how a city's entrepreneurial ecosystem can assist African American startup businesses to be successful as measured in sustainability up to, and beyond, their first five years. If requested, I will be glad to share the general results of the investigation with you.

Participation in research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and subsequently change my mind, you have the right to withdraw at any time. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

I will keep my records private to the extent allowed by law. Dr. Wesley Johnston and the student researcher will have access to the information you provide. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly (GSU Institutional Review Board, the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP)). I will use a study number rather than my name on study records. The information you provide will be stored digitally through password, and firewall-

protected computers. If you participate in a telephone interview, I will record my answers without using my name. If you participate by digital video interview, my name, title, and organization will not be requested or recorded. If you respond by email, I will transfer my answers to a spreadsheet before deleting the email with my responses. After my email is deleted there will be no way to identify you personally. my name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when I present this study or publish its results. The findings will be summarized and reported in group form. You will not be identified personally.



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Name

Signature

Date



Name

Signature

Date

J. Mack Robinson College of Business

Georgia State University

Doctorate in Business Administration Program

AGENCY INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

I. INTRODUCTION

Hello, my name is Leroy Carson, Jr and I am a doctorate in business administration student and candidate in the DBA program at the J. Mack Robinson College of Business at Georgia State University. Thank you for agreeing to speak with me.

This interview will cover several areas aimed at examining how the infrastructure and support for Atlanta's African American startup community compares to similar cities in the southeastern portion of the United States of America. The success rate of African American startups in the southeastern portion of the United States lags that of its peers in Atlanta, Georgia. This study seeks to examine what factors exist in Atlanta's entrepreneurial ecosystem that may lead to higher rates of African American small business startup success. I will be interviewing key stakeholders and influencers that impact Miami, Florida, Charlotte, North Carolina, and Atlanta, Georgia's entrepreneurship success as well as entrepreneurs in all three cities as a basis of comparison. I will also be collecting and analyzing secondary aggregate economic data from the state economic development agencies that support each city.

The overall objective of the interview is to understand my Agency's role in creating the ideal climate for my city's entrepreneurial ecosystem in aiding African American startups and small businesses in becoming successful as measured in sustainability over a five-year period or

longer. I will use my feedback to affirm My understanding of the results and patterns developed from the survey issued in my city.

My interview strategy involves five thematic approaches:

- a. I will examine what role did **Culture** play in supporting African American startups during my administration. My focal point will be on attitudes towards entrepreneurship, overall desires to become business owners, entrepreneurship education and risk attitude in society during that period.
- b. I will discuss **entrepreneurial performance** during my tenure as director of my agency. My focal point will be on firms developed, employment generated, and wealth created through entrepreneurship.
- c. I will discuss the **impact** of entrepreneurial activity during my tenure as director of my agency. My focal point for this discussion will be on job creation, economic empowerment, poverty reduction and how and what initiatives impacted formalization of the informal entrepreneurial economic sector.
- d. I will discuss what role did **R&D and technology** play in the support of African American startups during my time as director of my agency. I will specifically discuss the role of universities, professional organizations, technology cooperation between firms and overall R&D investment available in the marketplace during that period.
- e. Lastly, I will discuss the impact of the **regulatory framework** in supporting African American startup success during My time as director of My agency. I will

cover My perception of both the administrative burdens to entry as well as the administrative burdens to growth for African American startup entrepreneurs.

II. TOPIC:

This study seeks to understand how the infrastructure and support for Atlantis African American startup community compares to similar cities in the southeast portion of the United States of America? What lends to its perceived success? Also, what can I learn that can enable and empower similar communities to share in the same rate of success?

III. INTERVIEW TYPE: I will conduct a semi-structured interview approach to ensure consistency of information across interviewees.

IV. AFRICAN AMERICAN ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM:

The success rate of African American startups in the Southeastern portion of the United States lags that of its peers in Atlanta, Georgia. This study will deploy a mixed method approach to examining what factors exists in Atlanta's entrepreneurial ecosystem that may lend to higher rates in African American small business startup success and sustainability across the region and country.

V. Interviewees:

- I will be conducting interviews with five of the six African American mayors of Atlanta. The pioneer, Mayor Maynard Jackson, Atlanta's, and the southern part of the United States' first African American Mayor is deceased, however proxies (who have worked for him) will be utilized to fill in for his input).

- I will conduct one-on-one interviews with the Small Business Administration Centers Directors and the Minority Business Development Centers Directors in the cities of Atlanta, Georgia, Miami, Florida and Charlotte, North Carolina.

My questions are designed to elicit information about how the infrastructure and support for Atlanta's African American startup community compares to similar cities in the southeast portion of the United States of America and lends to their success.

VI. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

SECTION A: CULTURE

5. Please share a story you remember that best symbolizes the entrepreneurial culture during the timeframe you have been director of my agency in my city.
6. What can you tell me about the amount of societal risk folks are willing to take towards entrepreneurship in my area?
 - a. Are folks more risk tolerant?
 - b. If not, are they more risk adverse?
 - c. If so (for either), why do you think that is so?
7. How would you rate regional interest and attitude in becoming an entrepreneur? And why?
8. What types of resources are available to help educate entrepreneurs? How was their reception to them? And how are they utilized?

SECTION B: ENTREPRENEUR PERFORMANCE

4. Please tell about the pace of new African American firm creation during my administration.
5. What can you tell me about the impact that African American firms are having to the employment rate in my city? And why?

6. Can you provide some examples of wealth that was created from entrepreneurs that are able to leverage the city's entrepreneurial ecosystem?

SECTION C: IMPACT

5. What was the impact of job creation from African American start-up enterprises to the local economy that have been created during my administration?
6. What other factors do you think benefit the local economy from African American small businesses being successful?
7. What impact, if any, did the creation of African American firms have to the poverty rate in the city? Was there a reduction? If so, why?
8. How did my policies, practices or resources impact the informal sector of the entrepreneurship pool?

SECTION D: R&D And TECHNOLOGY

4. What things in my city are a byproduct of my agency's ability to attract R&D Investment to African American startups in this city? How did this come about?
5. What role does the university community play in ensuring success for African American entrepreneurs and startups in my city?
6. What type of technology cooperation and or collaborations lend to the success of some African American entrepreneurs and or entrepreneurial groups being successful?

SECTION E: ACCESS TO FINANCE

4. How challenging was it for African American start-ups to access capital from banks during my administration?
5. How challenging was it for African American start-ups to gain access to Angel Investors and or venture capitalist during the timeframe of my administration?

6. What other financing resources are available to African American start-ups during this timeframe?

SECTION F: REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

2. What are some of the regulatory hurdles that challenged African American start-ups during my administration?
 - a. How did these challenges impact some of these start-ups from entering the local market?
 - b. What steps did my agency take to help alleviate some of these regulatory challenges for entrepreneurs?

SECTION G: WRAP UP

3. Overall, why do you think Atlanta does so well for African American entrepreneurs in comparison to other South-eastern cities?
4. Is there anything else you would like to share with me that is relevant to this study?

J. Mack Robinson College of Business

Georgia State University

Doctorate in Business Administration Program

ENTREPRENEUR INFORMED CONSENT

How does the infrastructure and support for Atlanta's African American startup community compare to similar cities in the southeastern portion of the United States of America?

Principal Investigator:

Wesley J. Johnston, PhD

Student Principal Investigator:

Leroy Carson, Jr.

The purpose of this research study is to examine how the infrastructure and support for Atlanta's African American startup community compares to similar cities in the southeastern portion of the United States. The success rate of African American startups in the southeastern portion of the United States lags that of its peers in Atlanta, Georgia. This study seeks to examine what factors exist in Atlanta's entrepreneurial ecosystem that may lend to higher rates of African American small business startup success. I will be interviewing key stakeholders and influencers that impact Miami, Florida, Charlotte, North Carolina, and Atlanta, Georgia's entrepreneurship success as well as entrepreneurs in all three cities as a basis of comparison. I will also be collecting and analyzing secondary aggregate economic data from the state economic development agencies that support each city.

[REDACTED]

If you are willing to participate in this study, please initiate the corresponding survey. This brief online survey will only take 15-20 minutes of my time.

[REDACTED]

I don't anticipate that you will experience any risks or discomforts other than that in a normal day of life.

[REDACTED]

Participating in this research will not benefit you directly. Overall, I hope to learn about how a city's entrepreneurial ecosystem can assist African American startup businesses to be successful as measured in sustainability up to, and beyond, their first five years. If requested, I will be glad to share the general results of the investigation with you.

[REDACTED]

Participation in research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and subsequently change my mind, you have the right to withdraw at any time. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

[REDACTED]

I will keep my records private to the extent allowed by law. Dr. Wesley Johnston and the student researcher will have access to the information you provide. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly (GSU Institutional Review Board, the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP)). I will use a study number rather than my name on study records. The information you provide will be stored digitally through password, and firewall-protected computers. If you participate in a telephone interview, I will record my answers without

using my name. If you participate by digital video interview, my name, title, and organization will not be requested or recorded. If you respond by email, I will transfer my answers to a spreadsheet before deleting the email with my responses. After my email is deleted there will be no way to identify you personally. My name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when I present this study or publish its results. The findings will be summarized and reported in group form. You will not be identified personally.



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Name

Signature

Date



Name

Signature

Date

J. Mack Robinson College of Business

Georgia State University

Doctorate in Business Administration Program

ENTREPRENEUR SURVEY PROTOCOL

I. INTRODUCTION

Hello, my name is Leroy Carson, Jr and I am a doctorate in business administration student and candidate in the DBA program at the J. Mack Robinson College of Business at Georgia State University. I welcome my participation in this survey.

This survey seeks to examine how the infrastructure and support for the African American startup community compares in similar southeastern cities. This examination strives to understand what factors exists in the strongest entrepreneurial ecosystem that may lend to higher rates of African American small business startup success. I will be talking to key stakeholders and influencers that impact Miami, Florida, Charlotte, North Carolina, and Atlanta, Georgia's who can impact entrepreneurship success as well as issuing this survey in all three cities.

II. AFRICAN AMERICAN ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM:

This study will examine what factors exist in Atlanta's entrepreneurial ecosystem in comparison to Miami and Charlotte, that may lend to higher rates in African American small business startup success across the region and country. The results of this study will be made public and available to key policy makers, scholars, and support agencies to enable them to address disparities in resources.

III. SURVEY PARTICIPANTS:

Surveys will be issued to members and participants of the Small Business Administration Centers and the Minority Business Development Centers and their associated organizations in the cities of Atlanta, Miami, and Charlotte.

My questions are designed to elicit information about how the infrastructure and support for the African American startup community compares to similar cities in the southeast portion of the United States of America and lends to their success.

- IV. SURVEY QUESTIONS:** All questions will be answered on a (1-5 point) Likert scale. (1) will represent the lowest rating and (5) will represent the highest rating.

SECTION A: REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

1. How challenging are the regulatory burdens to enter the market?
2. How challenging are the regulatory burdens to growth?
3. How difficult are the product regulations in this city?
4. How challenging are the labor market regulations?

SECTION B: MARKET CONDITIONS

5. How challenging is it to gain access to the local Markets?
6. How challenging is it to gain access to the national markets from this city?
7. How challenging is it to gain access to the international markets from this city?
8. How challenging is it to get help accessing local Markets in this city?
9. How challenging is it to get help accessing international markets in this city?

SECTION C: ACCESS TO FINANCE

10. How challenging is it to find and access debt financing in this city?

11. How challenging is it to find and access Angel investors in this city?
12. How challenging is it to find an access VCs in this city?
13. How challenging is it to find an access other types of equity in this city?
14. How challenging is it to find and gain access to the stock market from this city?

SECTION D: R&D And TECHNOLOGY

15. How much does the environment lend itself to R&D investments?
16. How involved are the local universities with industry?
17. How well do the local firms cooperate in technology and innovation?

SECTION E: ENTREPRENEURIAL CAPABILITIES

18. How available is local training for entrepreneurs attempting to increase their skill set?
19. How good is My city in providing entrepreneurship education?
20. How good is the entrepreneurship infrastructure in My city?
21. How good is My city's immigration workers policies?

SECTION F: CULTURE

How entrepreneurial is My local community?