



## Services



### Jacksonville Women's Business Center Business Women of Color Initiative

In 2006, the Center for Women's Business Research (CWBR) in Washington, D.C. and Babson College launched a multi-year national study of women entrepreneurs of color. The goals of the project were to uncover the barriers and challenges women of color face in starting and growing a successful business and to utilize the data they collected to spur creation of community action plans to overcome these obstacles.

In 2008 CWBR released a list of key facts gleaned from their research. Many of the statistics were startling:

- Companies which are majority owned (51% or more) by women of color are growing at five times the rate of all privately-held businesses in the U.S. Between 1997 and 2006, the number of privately held businesses owned by women of color increased by 120% vs. all privately-held businesses which grew at a rate of only 24%.
- 1.9 million businesses were majority-owned by women of color; they employ 1.2 million workers and generate \$165 billion in sales. They represent 26% of all women-owned privately-held business in the U.S., which means more than one in five women-owned businesses is owned by a woman of color. The growth of women of color owned businesses outpaced businesses owned by men of color by 120% vs. 68%.

CWBR uncovered key issues facing women of color:

- Not being viewed as a standard for success
- Being able to attract the right talent
- Confronting unstated assumptions about her firm's ability to perform
- Successfully blending cultural and business expectations
- Giving back to her community while continuing to grow her business
- Getting the necessary connections to decision makers
- Having to choose between being a woman or a minority
- Gaining access to capital for business growth

The Jacksonville Women's Business Center (JWBC) had, in the meantime, been looking at statistics of their own. They showed 58% of the women who attend the Jump Start Orientations, for aspiring entrepreneurs, are women of color; however, the number of women of color who participate in mentoring and training programs developed for business owners declines dramatically.

A task force was formed to investigate why this is happening, and reviewed several pieces of local research data. Based on a study by Dr. Carlton Robinson, president of the First Coast African- American Chamber of Commerce, as part of his doctoral studies in diversity, business owners of color can be divided into three categories:

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- **The Survivor:** These business owners find they can make more money on their own than working for a corporation or another business. Their perception is this is a merely “a job,” not a business. They usually operate their business on gut instinct rather than a formal business plan. If they seek help, they are often told they are “doing it wrong” or do not have a viable business model. This leads them to spend their time staying “under the radar”, with a fear of authority and compliance. After seeking help once, only to be told they are going about it all wrong, they tend to leave and never seek help again.
- **The Entrepreneur:** This group of business owners are hungry for knowledge and assistance, but they don’t like to admit what they don’t know. Although they recognize the need for help, they shy away from seeking it.
- **The Hobby Business Owner:** This group doesn’t take their business very seriously. To them this is way to supplement an existing income or retirement income. Since they don’t see themselves as business owners, but merely as part-time or self-employed, they don’t seek formal training of any kind. They tend to seek advice from contacts or through informal reading.

An analysis of several years of JWBC feedback forms also suggested there is a view amongst local business women of color that the JWBC is a “white women’s organization.” Other observations included that there were very few mentors, facilitators or speakers of color associated with JWBC’s programs.

Based on the research from CWBR, Babson College and research of its own, the task force became the Jacksonville Women’s Business Center Business Women of Color Initiative. Its mission is: **to increase women of color participants, volunteers and donors** for JWBC. For its purposes, women of color is an all-inclusive term, which includes African Americans, Latinas, Asians, East Indians, Pacific Islanders and any other woman of color. The group is tasked with researching the issues, determining if key issues exist, identifying those issues and making recommendations to the Programs and Services committee and Advisory Board on how to resolve these issues and move forward.

Today, the Business Women of Color Initiative continues its research through focus groups and feedback sessions in a relaxed and non-threatening, often anonymous environment. In addition, they are partnering with a local research organization to perform more in depth research on these issues. Their future plans include a local event to share the research results, exploring the viability of specific programming aimed at women of color, and an entrepreneurial event, to be held in Jacksonville, to address the unique needs of business women of color.

For more information on this initiative or to become a client, mentor or sponsor for the Jacksonville Women’s Business Center, please contact Pat Blanchard, Director, at 904.366.6640 or via email at [pat.blanchard@myjaxchamber.com](mailto:pat.blanchard@myjaxchamber.com)