According to Dr. Kevin Hassett, the former Chair of the Council of Economic Advisers and current senior advisor to President Trump, the Federal government has already provided $6 Trillion of stimulus into the economy. This does not include the amount provided by the Federal Reserve, which is also easily an additional Trillion. This is in fact the largest transfer of wealth of all time. Except for the money that went to unemployment, the vast amount of the “stimulus’ has gone to larger intuitions.

It is hard to imagine just how much money $7 Trillion is. But it is enough to pay reparations to every American-American person in America $150,000 for a total of $1.4 trillion. It’s enough to pay off student debt at a cost of $1.6 Trillion, make the first installment of the Green New Deal, or Single Payer healthcare, or help shore up entitlement systems such as Medicaid or Medicare and Social Security.

Many economists believe we are in the early stages of a depression. As such, we are also likely to see the most destruction of wealth in the last one hundred years. In the next year or two, we are likely to see our most vulnerable citizens loose what little wealth they have accumulated over their lifetime. The only ray of hope is this period of change will provide significant opportunities for wealth creation. The question is, will this body provide the types of policies and regulations that make it possible for all citizens to be able to take advantage of those opportunities.

The issue of language access has been important to me as the Executive Director of Greater Grove Hall Main Streets. My belief was our citizens that did not speak or had limited English speaking ability, did not have equal access to services provided by the City of Boston. The City of Boston is the largest provider of technical services to businesses in the city. What most people don’t know is that almost every City department provides services to businesses. For example, the City of Boston’s police department will provide a safety assessment for your small business if you simply request one. One of my earliest recommendations was for every city department to provide a list of services that it provided businesses, and then have the list available in various languages.

Some of the things we, as Greater Grove Hall Main Streets did to help bridge the gap language barrier in our district.

- Our Street banners were in Spanish and English – What better way to let people know they are welcome in the community than put up 114 banners that say “Welcome” in Spanish and English!

1 Peter Navarro an advisor to president Trump estimates the amount to be $10 Trillion.
• We did events specifically for Latina business owners
• We had a Spanish speaking volunteer, who would bring her laptop to the business and help them complete the paperwork, which was typically only in English, for the various city programs. Her efforts helped us overcome both a language and a technology barrier.
• When the mayor rolled out the restaurant grading system, we worked with ISD to have a Spanish speaking employee go with me, to every Spanish speaking business in my district and explained the mayor’s new program to them in person, at their place of business.
• We drafted a document with the purpose of informing English and Non-English-speaking employers of their rights as it related to employing immigrant workers. Many small business owners thought it might be too risky to hire immigrants for fear that their small business would be raided by ICE. Unfortunately, I was unable to get the Mayor’s Office for Immigrant Advancement to review and provide guidance on the document.
• I have previously testified about the language access issue at a prior City Council Hearing chaired by current City Council President Kim Janey and I have provided specific recommendations. (Please see attachments) I have also shared those recommendations with State Rep. Liz Miranda and State Senator Diana DiZoglio chair of the Small Business Committee.

In the early stages of the COVID-19 crisis, I created a special newsletter.

**Small Business Owners: What You Should Know About Coronavirus (COVID-19)** that was sent out Friday March 13th.

It had ten specific things small businesses could do and went into more detail that the CDC or Boston Public Health Commission guidance at the time. We had the presidents of Harvard Street Neighborhood Health Center and Whittier Street Health Center have their infectious disease specialist review it. They approved it and we sent it out with them as the co-authors. I sent the newsletter to several City Councilors with the request for help to have the newsletter translated into Spanish.

**I would love to get this translated into Spanish, (I have a number of Dominican and other Spanish speaking businesses) but I don't have that ability.**

____________________________________________

2 I sent it to the Boston Public Health Commission for review and they responded by saying they could not review it but provided me a link to the CDC’s page.
I didn’t get a response from any of the councilors, but I did get a response from Senator Chang-Diaz, as someone in her office replied and asked if I still needed the newsletter translated. I said yes, but by the time they got it back to me, all non-essential businesses were closed.

**Resources for Business**

Main Street Directors started getting flooded with information about different resources from the public, private and philanthropic sectors. What I soon noticed was that the resource pages at all level levels were only in English. So, if you look at the Commonwealth of Massachusetts COVID-19 Business Resources and Guidance, you will see it is only available in English. The same was true for the City of Boston’s Economic Development Update on Coronavirus (COVID-19). Other lists from ICIC to The Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce were only available in English. So, the grant applications were in English, and the list of resources were only in English. These were grant programs from companies such as Verizon’s $7.5 million to Spanx’s $5 million.

I was involved with two grant programs that had some similarities. One was the city’s Small Business Relief Fund and the other was a grant from the Boston Main Streets Foundation. They were both designed to help small businesses and they both had flyers about the program in multiple languages and the ability to apply in multiple languages. **Where we ran into a problem was that it was almost impossible to pass out flyers to store owners if their business were closed!**

Imagine if you will, there is an order from the governor and the mayor to not go out unless it is necessary, and you have flyers to distribute to businesses that are supposed to be closed. I went out and slid the flyers under the door, left them in the metal grates, etc., just in case the owner did come in.

You might ask, why I didn’t just email the flyers. That was both a language and digital divide issue. If I sent the businesses an email, I had to find a way to translate the subject line and body of the email into Spanish, so the small business owner would know to read the attached flyer or follow the links to an application.

However, when I was in the process of having the email translated, I noticed that the English version was much longer, because it provided step-by step instructions, while the Spanish version was reduced to fit on a single page, for a flyer. So, I ended up having the English version translated anyway. This time I just paid an organization to have the flyer translated because I needed a faster turnaround.

Just to make this point clear, if I received an email and the subject line was in a language that I did not read or speak, I would not read the email as I would assume it was spam. I would not open the email to see if it was in another language and then open the attachment in hopes that was in English.
The flyer issue is aggravated by the digital divide issue. Many of my small businesses don’t have a website or a business email. They have one email for both personal and business. Because it is their personal email, it is often harder to get. Some don’t use email at all and would prefer to use text. (They don’t do email marketing).

In some cases, I could not email the flyer, because I didn’t have their email. I couldn’t leave it at their place of business and expect them to get it, as they were closed. Undaunted, I was determined to get word to my businesses that there was free money for them and all they had to do was apply. One thing I did was have one of my bilingual, English/Spanish speaking businesses call, the other Spanish speaking businesses to tell them about the program.

This puts my Spanish speaking businesses at a disadvantage because grants are often awarded on a first come first served basis, and there is about a two-day delay in my getting the information translated and sent out.

Other than the flyers, everything else the City has done to help businesses has been in English. The City’s Office of Economic Development Covid website, only in English. The resource guides such as Financial Relief Handbook, only in English. The Small Business updates (facebook) from the Chief of Economic Development, only in English. The initiatives such as a listing of restaurants or stores that are open, only in English. In the case of the restaurants, I just took a half day to register them myself, with the instructions on how to view the listings and who to email if the information was incorrect.

The City will undoubtedly talk about its Small Business Relief Fund and the success it had in distributing $7.5 million in grants to 561 small businesses. The reported diversity of those receiving grants is noteworthy. However, what is also noteworthy is why a program designed to give away taxpayer money received so few applicants. According to the City of Boston’s Small Business plan, there are over 40,000 small businesses, and yet fewer than 10% or 4,000 (2,600) applied for free money, at a time when most small businesses are in financial distress.

The City didn’t appear to make any effort to get the word out doing something as simple as using its listservs for Dominican and Puerto Ricans. It seems to me if you are going to give out $7.5 million of taxpayer dollars, that you might use some of the money to run a campaign to make sure other groups had an opportunity to apply.

At some point it occurred to me that the language barrier was a more systemic problem. It was not going to be possible for me to take the initiative to translate materials into Spanish, and even if I did, I was only reaching a very small number of people who needed the information.

One of the things I did was write a letter to the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce providing specific recommendations. A section of the letter is below.

**Summary**
1. **Comprehensive Website** - Encourage Chamber Members/Non-Members, if they are going to offer resources to send the information to the Chamber to be posted on the Chamber’s website.

2. **Date the Information on the Website** – To make it easier to identify the newer information.

3. **Translation** – Translate the content on the website into languages other than English.

4. **Outreach** – Have the Chamber take responsibility for getting the information out to the various ethnic groups.

5. **Common Application** – Explore creating a common application that could be used for multiple applications.

6. **Technical Assistance** – Have the Chamber take responsibility to provide technical assistance in languages other than English. In other words, if the SBA or a similar program doesn’t do this, take the steps to make sure it happens.

Although Bob Rivers did get back to me right away with this response.

Thanks for your email, Ed – you’ve read our minds.

The Chamber is already doing some things in this regard and Jim and I are already working with other business leaders on a broader platform to support small businesses of color.

Glynn Lloyd of the Foundation for Business Equity has is also doing some things here and is working with this group as well.

More to come.

I selected the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce because most of the large corporations have a chief diversity officer and because of the Chamber’s stated commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Outreach, because the Chamber could use connection to the various ethnic groups and networks to get the word out.

After reading this response, I didn’t know what the Chamber had in mind, but it clearly was not a response to my email. It was clear I was not going to be able to get anyone else to move forward with the idea of making resource lists available in languages other than English.

In response, I did another newsletter in Spanish, this one was about all of the resources that I knew of that were still available.

With word of the second round of Federal funding in process, and articles about how small business and businesses of color were left out in the first round. I knew we had to do something.
I reached out to one of the City Councilor offices and said I wanted their help in requesting the SBA do a webinar in Spanish on applying for PPP. This would have been fairly simple as the SBA was more than willing to do it. The reason I couldn’t do it myself is I don’t have a Spanish email distribution broad enough to promote the webinar to make it worthwhile.

The City missed an opportunity to make more of the Federal dollars available to our local businesses. With the second round of Federal funding, approximately $60 billion was to be set-aside for minority and rural businesses, like those that would be found in our Main Street districts. The City could have run a campaign like the Mass Equity PPP Access Initiative did or went into the districts to spread the word like they did when they wanted to inform residents about Covid. The City’s Office of Economic Development already had contracts with many technical service providers. Those consultants could have been repurposed to help applicants with their loan applications and the mayor’s office could have negotiated with the large banks to make a certain number of slots available for applicants the same way the Mass Equity PPP Access Initiative did.

The Problem at the Federal Level with the PPP Program.

The problem was using the banks as a distribution channel. This built in structural inequality.

The Unbanked - There is a large segment of the population that is unbanked. There are more unbanked businesses than unbanked individuals because of the number of people who have car and mortgage loans, credit cards, checking and savings accounts. Banks have products for personal customers such as first-time home buying classes, secured credit cards etc. There is no such thing on the commercial side.

Customer Service – The benefit of being a large, good customer, is that your commercial banker is going to reach out to you when there are programs that you should take advantage of, such as the PPP. If you do apply, you will get the support you need to make sure your application is processed.

Prioritization – Large customers will be a higher priority than smaller customers because the objective of the bank is to maximize loan origination fees and profits. Some loans from small businesses were just too small. Some banks wouldn’t make loans under $20,000 in any situation and that much or less is all a small business needed. Loans required the same amount of paperwork, whether they are for $1,000 or $1 million.

\(^3\) While the aid said this was something the councilor could not do as a part of constituent service, I was offered an opportunity to speak at this hearing.
Outreach – In a situation such as this, where there is more demand than supply, there is no need for the bank to do outreach, and especially to small businesses that need small loan amounts. The cost of the outreach is an additional cost, which also cuts into profits.

Risk – The more you need the money, the less likely you are to get it. Shake Shack, one of the small businesses that received a $10 million-dollar loan is a great example. They had over $100 million in cash on hand. The chance they will repay the loan is a lot higher than a beauty salon that has been closed and is just trying to survive. While the beauty salon owner may need the money more than a larger business, the loan is much riskier and thus less likely to receive funding.

Language – Language was a barrier as the original loan information was only in English. Eventually it was translated into other languages.

Technical Assistance – This was a barrier, but it was often combined with a language barrier. While I was receiving notice about webinars on the PPP and EIDL loans from a range of people, CPAs, bookkeepers, banks, attorneys, payroll firms, I only heard of one workshop in Spanish. Done by JPNDC and Egleston Square Main Streets.

Misinformation – Business owners would read a list of authorized SBA lenders, go to those lenders and discover they were not taking applications from non-customers. If they went to another bank where they didn’t have a relationship, they received low p

Bank Size – Large banks versus smaller community banks. The second time, CNBC reports the five largest banks had more than 1 million applications for over $100 billion ready to go by 10:30 a.m.

Location – If you read that one salon owner has a location on Newbury St and the other has a Roxbury address you might make certain assumptions about the business. Entrepreneurs of color tend to operate in lower income areas and have lower profitability.

Even in the good times only 3% of SBA loans went to Black-owned businesses.

A Bright Spot

The Mass Equity PPP Access Initiative – Started by a coalition of business serving organizations included five banks with a commitment of 500 “slots.” This group did out reach to the small businesses of color, provided necessary technical assistance for the PPP loans and handled approximately 450 applications.
The group is working on next steps such as providing guidance to ensure that the maximum amount of the SBA PPP grant is forgiven.

**Boston Small Business Strong** – Supported by some of Boston’s largest businesses such as McKinsey, State Street, PWC, and pro bono help from many others to provide a range of services to small businesses.

**Closing Remarks**

What happens next in terms of businesses re-opening, and access to opportunity is in the hands of this body, the most diverse City Council in the City’s history, and an administration that has a number of people of color in senior positions that could influence how the city works with businesses of Color such as the Chief of Economic Development, Director of Small Business, Chief of Civic Engagement, Chief Resilience Officer, Director of Equity and Inclusion among others. It should probably not come as a surprise that a city that procures less than one percent of its goods and services from minority businesses 1% of $644 million, would not be leaders in helping small businesses owned by people of color. The future of this majority, minority city depends of what this body and administration does in helping all of its citizens capitalize on the opportunities that are before us.