



**AFRICAN-AMERICAN
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**

Pennsylvania ♦ New Jersey ♦ Delaware



Catalyzing Economic Equity for **Black-owned Businesses at 76 Place**

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INTRODUCTION

The African-American Chamber of Commerce (AACC) of PA, NJ, and DE secured a planning grant from the Philadelphia 76ers to enhance their strategic partnership, fostering meaningful engagement and supporting the growth of Black-owned businesses at the new 76 Place arena. The Philadelphia 76ers have set an ambitious economic inclusion goal, aiming for 40 percent of food and beverage concessions at 76 Place to be Black-owned. Furthermore, the 76ers' overarching strategy aims to create diverse opportunities for Black-owned businesses, ranging from small to large enterprises, to participate in various arena operations, including catering, premium dining, retail, merchandising, and ancillary functional areas (e.g., logistics).

BOX 1. Key Takeaways

- ✓ The AACC's research findings indicate strong interest among Philadelphia's Black business owners in 76 Place's revenue-generating opportunities. However, the data suggest a need for targeted interventions to optimize their participation and ensure sustained viability within the arena's economic ecosystem.
- ✓ The emphasis on substantive economic participation at 76 Place is intended to catalyze genuine financial growth and long-term resilience for Black-owned enterprises, potentially transforming Philadelphia's economic landscape.
- ✓ As the proposed recommendations and priority actions are implemented and refined at 76 Place, this economic opportunity initiative can become a replicable model for other cities and industries seeking to address racial and economic inequity on a broader scale.

PERSPECTIVES OF PHILADELPHIA BLACK BUSINESS OWNERS ON OPPORTUNITIES AT 76 PLACE

The AACC's planning research study, *Commerce in Color: Building a Thriving Black-owned Business Ecosystem at 76 Place*, conducted from March to August 2024, used a mixed-methods approach. The research integrated semi-structured stakeholder interviews, facilitated focus group discussions, and a quantitative survey. In addition, site visits were conducted at various sporting venues across the country (e.g., Climate Pledge Arena, Barclays Center, Prudential Center, Golden 1 Center) to observe small businesses operating within arenas and to meet with food operators and leadership personnel working with local Black-owned enterprises.

The AACC commissioned the Adtigo Group LLC to design and execute the research, as well as to formalize recommendations informed by the findings and internal group reflections within the AACC. The planning research engaged over 70 Philadelphia-based Black business owners, predominantly from the food service industry, who expressed interest in opportunities at 76 Place. Black business owners in the study had operated for an average of seven years, with most in the growth or maturity stages of business development.

Key stakeholders in the study offered a range of insights, from local entrepreneurs to those with experience in large-scale venue operations. The findings highlighted key themes, revealing potential challenges but also uncovering new opportunities for Black-owned businesses.

Operational readiness, particularly in scaling, workforce expansion, and logistics management, emerged as significant factors for the viability and sustainability of small businesses.

The data identified a clear need and opportunity for coaching to assist small businesses in navigating the contracting process more effectively, particularly in understanding vetting procedures and meeting insurance requirements. It also emphasized that businesses must determine the most suitable business model early—whether through vendor agreements, licensing, or subcontracting—to maximize their opportunities.

Consistent with existing documented entrepreneurial challenges, Black business owners identified access to diverse capital and funding options, and enhanced financial acumen, as essential elements for business development (Urban Institute, 2024). The findings further emphasized the integral role of financial preparedness in enabling businesses to innovate and adapt their processes for large-scale opportunities.

Strategic alliances, partnerships, and resource pooling have been identified as essential for small businesses seeking substantial growth and access to high-value projects. For example, a beverage company might collaborate with a concessionaire to distribute its products at arena food stands, or small suppliers could form purchasing cooperatives to negotiate more favorable wholesale rates.

Philadelphia Black business owners indicated a strong commitment to community uplift, consistent with research showing that Black-owned enterprises often channel resources back into their local communities, fostering economic stability and growth (Chubb, 2023). The findings underscored Black business owners' enthusiasm about the new possibilities at 76 Place, balanced with a pragmatic understanding of the complexities involved in preparing their businesses to leverage opportunities in the new arena.

Box 2. Research Objective

The primary objective of the research was to proactively engage Black business owners at the nascent stages of the arena planning, ensuring their perspectives and needs were integral to conceptualizing and developing the venue's commercial strategy. Our research assessed the strategic readiness of Black-owned businesses and identified potential systemic barriers, necessary support systems, and market opportunities for securing concessionaire, vendor, and supplier contracts within the new arena's commercial ecosystem.

Black business owners perceive the new arena as a potent catalyst for enhancing visibility, accelerating revenue growth, and expanding market penetration. This perspective highlights the arena's potential to foster economic empowerment and drive commercial growth within Philadelphia's Black business community.

Despite facing substantial operational and financial challenges, many Philadelphia Black business owners who participated in our research demonstrated a readiness to scale and expand their operations, particularly those with prior experience exploring partnerships with large corporations and other sporting arenas. The findings from our research lay the groundwork for developing targeted interventions and resources aimed at supporting Black-owned businesses in capitalizing on the opportunities at 76 Place.

AACC RESEARCH: KEY INSIGHTS

- ✔ Black business owners expressed a strong commitment to proactively seeking the necessary resources and support to seize new opportunities at 76 Place. This includes their willingness to pursue capital, acquire technology, adopt new systems, and address the skill gaps required to successfully bring their businesses into a large-scale sporting arena.
- ✔ Small businesses seeking partnerships with large sporting venues encounter a distinct challenge: there is no comprehensive guide outlining the essential knowledge and steps for success in this specialized environment. The absence of such a resource highlights the complexity and distinct nature of these business opportunities.
- ✔ The process for partnering with a sporting arena's food operator frequently lacks standardized transparency. Negotiating contract terms is often driven by personal relationships rather than clear, equitable guidelines. This practice can undermine fairness and mutual benefit for all partners involved.
- ✔ Current sporting arena and food operator inclusion initiatives aimed at small business enterprises often lack clearly defined metrics for measuring success.
- ✔ **Inclusion initiatives alone do not guarantee equity or equitable outcomes for Black-owned enterprises** (Brookings Institution, 2022).

A FOCUS ON RACIAL AND ECONOMIC EQUITY

Addressing the systemic challenges Black-owned businesses face is paramount in advancing racial and economic equity in Philadelphia, PA. Black-owned small businesses play a pivotal role in economic mobility, and understanding the challenges and opportunities they face can inform the best ways to support their growth. Moreover, identifying and implementing pathways to more equitable opportunities can significantly expand and diversify Philadelphia's landscape of Black-owned businesses (McKinsey & Company, 2023).

Based on data released in 2023, the representation of Black-owned businesses in Philadelphia's economic landscape is disproportionately low, constituting only 5.4 percent of the city's businesses despite Black residents comprising approximately 40 percent of the population. This stark disparity is further emphasized when compared to other racial groups: White-owned businesses account for 76 percent of the city's enterprises while representing only 34 percent of the population, and Asian-owned businesses comprise 10.8 percent of businesses with an 8 percent population representation (Nowak Metro Finance Lab, n.d.). The data underscore a significant underrepresentation of Black entrepreneurship within Philadelphia's business ecosystem relative to the city's demographic composition, highlighting systemic barriers to Black business ownership, access to growth-enabling opportunities, and full economic participation in the local economy.

BOX 3. Economic Gaps: The Low Presence of Black-owned Businesses in Philadelphia

According to a report by the Center City District and Central Philadelphia Development Corporation, Philadelphia ranks lowest in the number of Black-owned enterprises relative to its Black population when compared to other cities. In contrast, cities like Atlanta, Detroit, and Memphis exhibit significantly higher percentages of Black-owned businesses. This disparity indicates that Philadelphia could experience similar economic gains if these gaps were addressed (Center City District & Central Philadelphia Development Corporation, 2020).

Increasing the number of Black-owned businesses capable of scaling their operations and expanding market reach can significantly reduce the racial wealth gap, a persistent socioeconomic challenge across the United States (Joint Economic Committee, 2022). The median wealth of white families is nearly ten times that of Black families. This disparity is partly due to historical and systemic barriers that have limited economic opportunities for Black individuals (Aladangady & Forde, 2021).

Moreover, Black-owned businesses tend to employ a significantly higher percentage of Black workers compared to non-Black-owned businesses. This trend is consistent across various industries and business sizes (U.S. Congress Joint Economic Committee, 2022). Further studies also indicate that a limited presence of Black-owned employer enterprises constrains economic expansion, restricts investment prospects, and hampers inclusive growth within diverse metropolitan areas and regions (Pew Research Center, 2024). This undersupply highlights the critical need for strategic initiatives to nurture Black entrepreneurship and promote comprehensive economic equity and long-term sustainability in Philadelphia, PA.

The AACC advocates for advancing racial and economic equity for Black-owned businesses as a pragmatic approach to addressing systemic exclusion and pervasive economic disparities. Contrary to divisive narratives, the pursuit of equity is not a zero-sum proposition that benefits one group at the expense of others (National Bureau of Economic Research, 1973-present). Instead, strategies focusing on historically marginalized communities can enhance opportunities and outcomes across the socioeconomic spectrum.

Intentionality is critical for implementing a strategic framework that addresses historical disparities and fosters inclusive growth for Black-owned businesses.

It is more imperative than ever to establish and pursue transformative goals to support the growth of Black-owned businesses. The AACC is committed to collaborating with the Philadelphia 76ers to realize their goal of expanding growth and empowerment opportunities for Black-owned enterprises at the team's future arena. This ongoing partnership strives to mitigate the persistent racial wealth disparity in the region through sustained collaborative efforts.

FIGURE 1. **Economic Opportunity Framework for Black-owned Businesses at 76 Place**

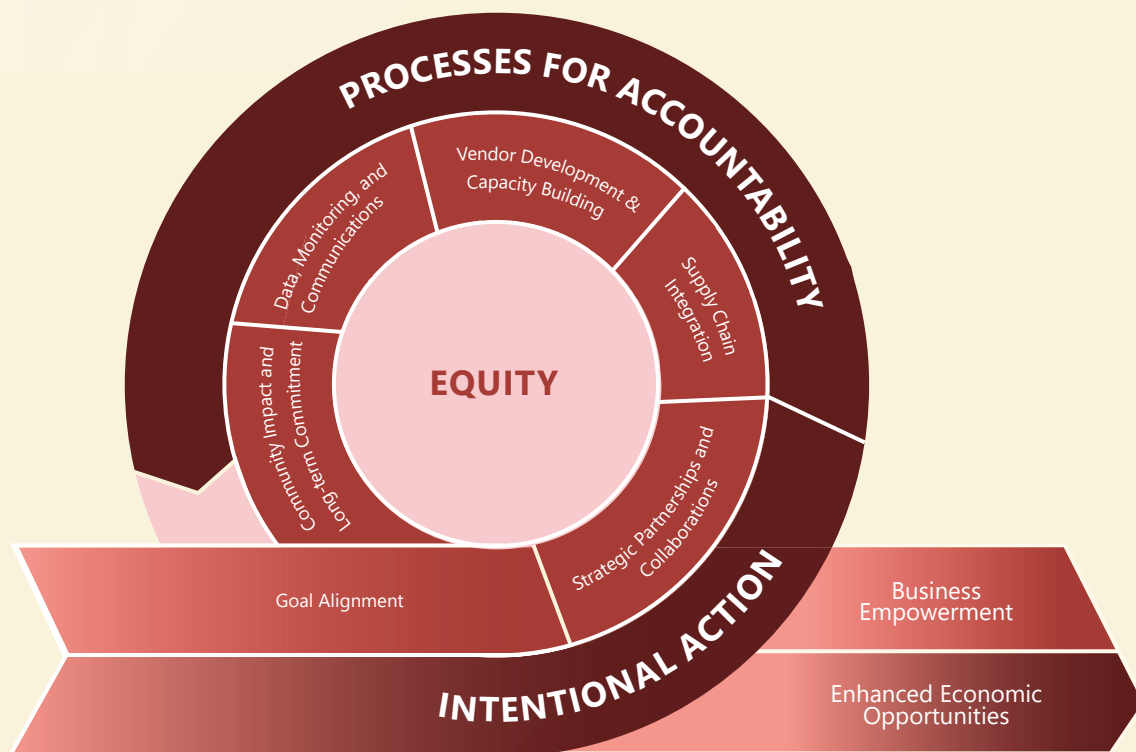


Figure 1 illustrates a framework designed to advance economic equity and inclusion, focusing on creating opportunities for Black-owned businesses at 76 Place. It outlines a comprehensive approach to generating and sustaining business growth, while addressing long-standing economic disparities. The goal is to ensure that Black-owned businesses not only benefit in the short-term but also build long-term capacity for success.

The framework includes several key components that work together: forming strategic partnerships, integrating Black-owned businesses into supply chains, helping vendors grow their businesses, using data to track progress, and assessing the broader impact on the community. These elements are combined to create a system that both generates new business opportunities and strengthens the long-term success of Black-owned businesses.

TEN RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MAXIMIZING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR BLACK ENTERPRISES AT 76 PLACE

The AACC's recommendations and strategies are designed to optimize 76 Place's potential for generating substantial and enduring economic growth among Black-owned enterprises in Philadelphia, PA. These proposed measures form an integrated model, synergistically addressing the disparities faced by Black-owned businesses while fostering profound and sustainable shifts in the local economic landscape.

Goal Alignment

Recommendation 1:

Clarify and reinforce the goal to ensure that 40 percent of the food and beverage businesses at 76 Place are designated as Black-owned. This initiative aims to create meaningful opportunities for Black entrepreneurs and establish their presence in a crucial segment of arena operations. By concentrating on food and beverage services, we anticipate driving significant economic benefits that will contribute to lasting change within both the local economy and the broader community.

Furthermore, the strategy should prioritize the development of a sustainable program that balances risk mitigation with execution flexibility. This adaptability will enable the initiative to respond effectively to changing market conditions while maintaining a strong commitment to economic equity. Implementing this recommendation represents a vital step toward ensuring equitable access to economic opportunities, delivering measurable benefits to the community, and reinforcing the 76ers' dedication to fostering diverse enterprises.

Strategic Partnerships and Collaborations

Recommendation 2:

Partner with the AACC's subject matter experts for the 76 Place RFP development process.

Priority Actions:

- The AACC will serve as an advisor to the 76ers in addressing systemic barriers within the current procurement system. Their guidance will help ensure alignment with the initiative's objectives and minimize potential misunderstandings for small businesses during the proposal, vendor, and supplier selection processes.
- The AACC will develop and implement a feedback mechanism for Black-owned businesses participating in the RFP process. This system will collect insights into challenges encountered, informing refinements to future RFPs while adhering to business and legal requirements.

Recommendation 3:

Create an opportunity (e.g., joint venture) for a Black-owned food business operator at 76 Place, reinforcing the 76ers' commitment to facilitating substantive economic growth.

Priority Actions:

- The AACC will collaborate with strategic stakeholders to support the recommendation to establish a partnership (i.e., a new enterprise) with expertise in managing all aspects of food and beverage services during events. This includes vendor contracts, logistics, concessions, menu planning, quality control, staff management, fan experience, and related operational functions.
 - Pursue a strategic partnership with a leading minority-owned food and facilities management company, as well as local minority business enterprises (MBEs), to enhance capacity and drive growth within the food service sector at 76 Place.
- Establish a Business Growth and Development Fund through the AACC's foundation, providing sustainable capital financing for member businesses. A portion of the funding will support targeted interventions and coaching for Black-owned businesses pursuing 76 Place contracts. The AACC will raise a matching amount to amplify the initiative and ensure sustainability.
 - Develop a revenue-based financing model alongside a fund for targeted grants, including microgrants, to support immediate operational needs such as technology upgrades and supply chain optimization. This strategy will help businesses overcome short-term challenges, maintain competitiveness, and reach the revenue levels necessary for reinvestment in the fund.
 - Implement a cyclical reinvestment model where beneficiary businesses return a percentage of profits after reaching set revenue thresholds. This self-sustaining fund will promote ongoing economic growth and ensures long-term financial stability for the AACC's Fund.
 - Allocate resources and design targeted AACC interventions, such as contract negotiation support, leveraging systems to scale operations, and managing workforce development, to ensure the successful participation of Black-owned businesses in 76 Place.

Supply Chain Integration

Recommendation 4:

Require the primary wholesale food distributor (e.g., Sysco) to integrate Black-owned businesses into their supply chain as diverse suppliers through contractual agreements.

Priority Actions:

- Develop a multi-tiered equity strategy that extends the impact beyond direct arena contracts, integrating Black-owned businesses into the broader food and beverage distribution ecosystem.
- Implement regular assessments and adjustments to the initiative to maximize its effectiveness in creating sustainable and long-term economic benefits for the Black community.

Vendor Development and Capacity Building

Recommendation 5:

Encourage Black-owned businesses applying to do business at 76 Place to obtain a letter of recommendation or reference from the AACC.

Priority Actions:

- Drawing from insights gained during the AACC's site visit with the Sacramento Kings' Vice President of DEI, the AACC will implement a structured business selection process incorporating preliminary capacity building and vetting, ensuring businesses advancing to the formal RFP stage have participated in or obtained requisite operational coaching.
- The AACC will develop a guide for small businesses to expand operations within large venues such as 76 Place. This resource will provide practical insights, tools, and step-by-step processes to ensure businesses meet operational, financial, and strategic requirements to secure contracts and scale successfully.
- The AACC will develop comprehensive back-office services for member businesses, addressing common growth barriers for small and medium-sized enterprises while leveraging economies of scale to reduce individual costs.
 - The AACC will assist Black-owned small businesses in obtaining their minority business enterprise (MBE) certification and, where appropriate, the Airport Concession Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (ACDBE) certification, enhancing their eligibility for arena opportunities and positioning them for expansion into diverse market segments. Note: The AACC's 2024 research indicated that 53% of Black businesses expressing interest in operating at 76 Place and responding to the survey hold an MBE certification.

Recommendation 6:

Implement a strategic initiative to facilitate Black-owned businesses' participation in large-scale opportunities (e.g., Technology Services and Audio Visual services) through targeted capacity-building interventions and structured apprenticeship programs.

Priority Actions:

- The AACC will design targeted capacity-building interventions and structured apprenticeship programs to address skill gaps, foster industry-specific expertise, and create sustainable pathways for Black-owned enterprises to participate in large-scale opportunities within the arena ecosystem.
- Collaborate with the 76ers to gain insight into their large-scale operational needs, enabling the AACC to design and implement targeted interventions that equip Black-owned businesses for effective participation in these key areas.

Data, Monitoring, and Communications

Recommendation 7:

Establish a formal data-sharing agreement between the 76ers and the African-American Chamber of Commerce of PA, NJ, and DE, granting access to key performance indicators (KPIs) to ensure transparency and accountability.

Priority Actions:

- Conduct quarterly joint review sessions between the 76ers and AACC's leadership to analyze shared KPI data, interpret trends, and develop action plans that address challenges and enhance opportunities for Black-owned businesses at 76 Place.
- The AACC will utilize the shared KPI data to inform and refine its ongoing interventions, enhancing support for Black-owned businesses operating at 76 Place.
- Design and implement a comprehensive continuous improvement system (CIS) to support the goal of engaging Black-owned businesses. This system will establish multi-channel feedback mechanisms, including regular surveys of participating Black-owned businesses, focus groups with community stakeholders, anonymous suggestion portals for 76ers' staff and partners, and quarterly review sessions with the AACC and 76ers' leadership.

Recommendation 8:

Identify and appoint a dedicated liaison as the primary point of contact for Black-owned business vendors, suppliers, and concessionaires.

Priority Actions:

- Establish regular training and capacity building sessions led by the liaison to ensure that Black-owned businesses are equipped with the knowledge and resources needed to meet the arena's procurement and operational standards.
- Leverage the dedicated liaison to ensure the smooth integration of Black-owned businesses into the arena's operational framework, providing clear and consistent guidance and support throughout the engagement process.

Recommendation 9:

Launch a multi-faceted public relations plan articulating the current strategy for engaging Black-owned businesses and highlighting their successes and impacts within 76 Place.

Priority Actions:

- Enhance transparent communication with stakeholders about current efforts and future plans for Black-owned business engagement at 76 Place.
- Identify and share data on Black-owned businesses' revenue as a percentage of total arena revenue to demonstrate their contribution to overall business performance.
- Utilize the AACC's independent storytelling efforts alongside strategic communications from other partners. Though not formally coordinated, these parallel efforts with the 76ers can amplify the initiative's messaging, building a multi-layered narrative that emphasizes the importance of stakeholder involvement and the initiative's impact.

Community Impact and Long-term Commitment

Recommendation 10:

Promote information sharing among small business stakeholders across diverse communities.

Priority Actions:

- Coordinate regular meetings with small business stakeholders, ensuring representation from mission-aligned stakeholders to review and discuss key research findings and recommendations.

- Engage with small business stakeholders to identify synergies in programs and resources that support their growth. This collaborative effort will enable the sharing of best practices and foster a cohesive support network, maximizing the effectiveness of available resources as businesses prepare for opportunities at 76 Place.

The recommendations present a strategic model to maximize opportunities for Black-owned businesses at 76 Place. By addressing barriers and leveraging partnerships, financing models, and capacity building initiatives, these recommendations lay a foundation for meaningful and sustained economic growth for small businesses. The focus on a holistic approach ensures that Black-owned enterprises are not only included but positioned for long-term success within the arena's ecosystem.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND IMPACT METRICS

Building on the outlined recommendations, an evaluation framework is essential for quantifying progress and assessing the effectiveness of the implemented initiatives. Additionally, consistent disaggregated data, thorough analysis, and transparent external communication will be vital for tracking progress and improving equity practices and outcomes for Black-owned businesses. The suggested key performance indicators include feedback indicators and long-term metrics to measure sustained impact. This approach will allow for efficient monitoring of the 76 Place initiative's support for Black-owned businesses and its contribution to broader economic equity.

TABLE 1. Key Performance Indicators and Impact Metrics

| Category | Metric |
|-----------------------|--|
| Feedback Indicators: | 1. Quarterly percentage increase in Black-owned businesses completing the AACC's capacity-building interventions (e.g., contract negotiation, costing model development, assistance in obtaining MBE certification) related to 76 Place opportunities, compared to the previous quarter. |
| | 2. Rate of adopting the AACC's shared services model for back-office operations among eligible Black-owned businesses preparing for 76 Place opportunities. |
| | 3. Percentage of 76 Place RFP submissions from vetted Black-owned businesses that have received support and resources from the AACC. |
| | 4. Success rate of Black-owned businesses winning contracts through the RFP process. |
| | 5. Percentage of total contract value awarded to Black-owned businesses. |
| Long-term Indicators: | 1. Year-over-year revenue growth of participating Black-owned businesses. |
| | 2. Percentage of Black-owned businesses introducing new products or services related to 76 Place contracts annually, with a focus on innovations that enhance operational efficiency, customer experience, or competitive positioning within the arena's ecosystem. |
| | 3. The retention rate of Black-owned businesses at 76 Place. |

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>Long-term Indicators:</p> | <p>4. Percentage of Black-owned businesses that receive seed funding and successfully reinvest profits back into the AACC's revenue-based reinvestment model annually, tracking the sustainability and growth of the fund over time.</p> |
| <p>Additional Impact Measures:</p> | <p>5. Job creation rate among Black-owned businesses participating in 76 Place contracts, focusing on positions that promote economic mobility within Philadelphia's Black communities.</p> |
| | <p>1. Black Business Ecosystem Density: Percentage increase in the number of Black-owned businesses within a 1-mile radius of 76 Place, with emphasis on those directly benefiting from the arena's opportunities. This indicator tracks the broader economic impact of the arena on the surrounding community, assessing whether it helps catalyze a thriving ecosystem of Black entrepreneurship beyond direct contracts. It provides insight into the initiative's success in fostering a self-sustaining, sustainable Black business community near the arena.</p> <p>2. Black-owned Businesses' Economic Opportunity Framework Adoption: Assess the adoption and adaptation of the 76 Place economic equity framework for Black-owned businesses in other sporting arenas. This measure evaluates how the initiative's comprehensive approach to Black-owned businesses—encompassing suppliers, vendors, concessionaires, and other business categories—influences similar facilities or projects to implement comparable equity-driven strategies. This indicator gauges the broader impact of the initiative on industry practices and its potential to catalyze systemic change in economic opportunities for Black-owned businesses beyond Philadelphia.</p> |

The selected indicators and impact measures will enable the 76ers and the AACC to systematically evaluate the effectiveness of the 76 Place initiative in promoting economic opportunities for Black-owned businesses. These metrics align with current research on economic equity and inclusive growth (Fairlie & Robb, 2023; Theodos et al., 2022). Combining early indicators, long-term metrics, and impact measures provides a nuanced understanding of immediate progress and systemic change. The Black Business Ecosystem Density measure, in particular, addresses the growing emphasis on place-based economic development strategies (Liu, 2022).

Furthermore, tracking the adoption of the Economic Opportunity Framework for Black-owned Businesses by other venues reflects the potential for broader industry transformation, a critical factor in achieving sustainable economic equity (Lester & Lowe, 2021). As the initiatives supporting 76 Place's success progress, these metrics will provide essential insights for refining strategies, enhancing organizational learning, and maximizing the broader impact on Philadelphia's Black business community and beyond.

CONCLUSION

The recommendations and strategy presented hold the potential to drive transformative change that extends beyond the new arena. By creating substantial economic opportunities for Black-owned enterprises in 76 Place's food and beverage operations, this initiative establishes a model for sustainable, community-centered economic empowerment. The focus on meaningful economic participation aims to foster genuine financial growth and long-term success for Black-owned businesses, potentially transforming Philadelphia's economic landscape. As the Economic Opportunity Framework is implemented and refined, it could become a replicable model for other cities and industries striving to confront racial and economic inequities on a larger scale.

The success of this initiative hinges on sustained collaboration, adaptability, and an unwavering commitment to equity. While the location for 76 Place is still being finalized, the proposed development transcends the construction of a sports arena; it symbolizes a broader vision for economic opportunity and equity-driven, intentional growth for Black-owned businesses. As the project progresses, it will be essential to carefully balance advancing economic opportunities for Black-owned businesses with addressing any unintended consequences in the communities surrounding the new arena.

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