U.S. Small Business Administration

Final Report

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Glossary

Term	Definition
Baseline	Measurement of outcome of interest during the intake survey (prior to program graduation).
T.H.R.I.V.E. *Emerging Leaders Reimagined*	The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA)'s T.H.R.I.V.E. *Emerging Leaders Reimagined* is a six-month intensive training program that helps CEOs and executives get unstuck and take their business to the next level.
Net Promoter Score	Score provides a measure of the question: would participant recommend the program to a fellow business owner.

Acronyms

Term	Description
COVID	Coronavirus Disease
EL	Emerging Leaders Initiative
SBA	The U.S. Small Business Administration
T.H.R.I.V.E.	Train, Hope, Rise, Innovate, Venture, Elevate
OED	Office of Entrepreneurial Development
OEE	Office of Entrepreneurial Education
FY	Fiscal Year

Executive Summary

The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) started its Entrepreneurship Education initiative in 2008. At that time, it was called the Emerging 200 Underserved initiative, reflecting the initiative's provision of assistance to 200 inner city small businesses. In fiscal year (FY) 2009, it was renamed the Emerging Leaders initiative (EL) to reflect the SBA's decision to increase the number of small businesses participating in the initiative. The executive-level training strengthens the SBA's core mission to support small companies that have achieved local success and are ready for the next level of growth.

In 2022, the SBA developed T.H.R.I.V.E. *Emerging Leaders Reimagined*, an executive-level training series intended to give ambitious small business leaders a challenging opportunity to accelerate their growth through targeted training led by motivating leaders in small business development. T.H.R.I.V.E. *Emerging Leaders Reimagined* revolutionizes the rich history of executive-level training for small businesses poised for growth. This program expands the SBA executive-level training to small businesses to include 59 locations to assist high-potential growing entrepreneurs nationwide.

Both EL and T.H.R.I.V.E. *Emerging Leaders Reimagined* promote economic development in distressed communities by facilitating business growth that provides employment opportunities, as well as goods and services to local communities. The participating leaders receive the support network, training resources, and motivation required to build and sustain businesses of size and scale within designated communities and marketplaces.

This independent study conducted by Optimal Solutions Group, LLC (Optimal) is an evaluation of all participating Emerging Leaders and T.H.R.I.V.E. *Emerging Leaders Reimagined* cohorts nationwide. The study includes an overall evaluation framework for SBA's Emerging Leaders initiative/T.H.R.I.V.E. *Emerging Leaders Reimagined*, data collection and analysis, qualitative interviews, web surveys with instructors and participants, briefings, and a final report.

From 2010 to 2021, 6,628 executives participated in and 5,588 graduated from the EL.[1] In 2022, with the introduction of the T.H.R.I.V.E. *Emerging Leaders Reimagined* program in 59 sites across the United States, 1,020 executives participated.

The evaluation was guided by the following research questions, the findings of which are presented below.

> **Research Question 1:** How successful is the initiative at recruiting the intended participants?

- Over 80% of the program participants met all eligibility requirements.
- Most participants were racial or ethnic minorities.
- Most businesses had at least one SBA business certification or socioeconomic program designation.

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[1] In 2020, the SBA did not offer the initiative due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Question 2: Is the initiative valued by participants and able to affect management behaviors?

- Program participants who responded to the survey valued the training program, and the program has a high net promoter score.
- One-third of the respondents stated the business network and educational resources were the most helpful for achieving business success after graduating from the program.
- The proportion of survey respondents using various business management practices increased from prior to participating in the program to the first follow-up year.

Research Question 3: To what extent are participants more likely to obtain contracts or financing after graduation?

- Frequency of awards of federal government contracts increased from the baseline (17.4% of businesses) to the second- and third-year follow-up surveys (19% for both years).
- The dollar value of all government levels, federal, and local government contracts increased from the baseline to the second- and third-year follow-up surveys.
- Access to nongovernmental contracts decreased from the baseline (26% of businesses) to the first-year follow-up survey (21%) and then remained stable at those levels. The dollar value of nongovernmental contracts showed mixed results.

Research Question 4: What is the pattern of business growth one, two, and three years after graduation?

- Participants reported increases in revenue every year since the baseline.
- The proportion of participants who reported opening a new business increased every year since the baseline.
- Participants reported increases in both the number of employees and profits from the baseline to second-year follow-up.

Research Question 5: Does the initiative increase awareness, use, or development of the local business ecosystem?

- There is an increase from the baseline to the first-year follow-up survey in the proportion of participants stating that their region is home to a well-developed ecosystem. The change leveled off after the first year.
- Participants used various SBA and non-SBA business network resources to achieve business goals. There is an increase in the use of networks from the baseline to the first-year follow-up survey when it leveled off.
- Use of the EL network for business was limited and relationships with the network decreased over time.

> **Research Question 6**: What is the pattern of participants' investment in the local community after graduation?

- Participants reported hiring employees from the local community every year since the baseline measurement.
- There was no change in the proportion of participants who reported donating time or money to local organizations.

In most cases, the outcome findings cover only the EL since there is no outcome data for T.H.R.I.V.E. yet.

The program has provided consistent results since its inception. The findings have not changed substantially over time or between program iterations.[2] It remains to be seen what changes in outcomes may be observed if the T.H.R.I.V.E. graduates, who aligned more with the participation requirements than in the past, produce better outcomes than the EL. However, without a comparison group (non-Emerging Leaders participants) these results cannot be attributed to the program.

Considering the results of the evaluation and the methodological limitations, Optimal offers the following suggestions for improving program implementation, a potential increase in outcome changes, and estimating the impact of the program.

Facilitate continued engagement of graduates.
Create an interactive online community of practice that provides mentors, trainers, participants, and alumni with links to business resources and networks, and offers greater opportunities for virtual interactions. Engaging graduates is also likely to improve response rates to follow-up surveys, and outcome measurement.

Increase the focus of training and technical assistance on obtaining financing.
The use of the ecosystem approach could be further promoted to encourage community engagement and partnerships of these businesses with local lenders and investors to create new opportunities for increasing participants' financial capital.

Develop quasi-experimental research designs to establish program effectiveness.
Work on a research design including new data collection to determine if the change in outcomes is attributable to the program.

Expand efforts for data collection and analyses.
This expansion will help further explore and contextualize the changes or the leveling-off effects of the program. For instance, qualitative data could determine the reasons for decreased engagement in EL and SBA networks and resources.

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[2] T.H.R.I.VE. outcomes cannot be measured until the first-year follow-up survey is completed in 2023.

Introduction

Background of Emerging Leaders Reimagined

The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) started its Entrepreneurship Education initiative in 2008. At that time, it was called the Emerging 200 Underserved initiative, reflecting the initiative's provision of assistance to 200 inner city small businesses. In FY 2009, it was renamed the Emerging Leaders initiative (EL) to reflect the SBA's decision to increase the number of small businesses participating in the initiative. The EL was an executive-level training program aimed at strengthening existing growth-oriented small businesses in America's underserved communities. The objective of the initiative was to promote economic development in distressed communities by facilitating business growth that provided employment opportunities, as well as goods and services to local communities.

T.H.R.I.V.E. *Emerging Leaders Reimagined* Program

In 2022, the SBA revamped the EL into the T.H.R.I.V.E. *Emerging Leaders Reimagined* program.[3] T.H.R.I.V.E. stands for Train. Hope. Rise. Innovate. Venture. Elevate. The new format promotes an ecosystem of business peers, government leaders, and the financial community by developing participants' relationships with business owners, advisors, experts, and other members of a business community. The program offers a comprehensive curriculum for C-level executives and other tools for networking and mentoring. Services delivered during the six-month program are:

- Mentoring
- In-person coaching for C-level executives
- Self-paced instruction with demonstrated business sustainability
- A hybrid model that includes virtual and classroom sessions
- Micro-sessions customized for small businesses' unique needs
- Experienced subject matter experts
- Removing the one- size-fits-all model in exchange for engagement, problem-solving, and peer-to-peer interaction within the cohorts

The 2022 T.H.R.I.V.E. training ran from July to December. The core curriculum includes eight online asynchronous modules with educational training videos, assessments to measure retention, and supplemental worksheets to facilitate learnings. The curriculum modules include 1) business planning and development; 2) being an effective leader; 3) business finance and raising capital; 4) HR, hiring, and company culture; 5) marketing and building brand awareness; 6) driving sales; 7) digital marketing and social media strategies; and 8) legal compliance, intellectual property, and contracts.

The program also provides access to a national network of business owners, a local business coach, and a comprehensive, individualized three-year strategic growth plan with benchmarks and performance targets to map out the support and resources necessary to reach business growth and leadership goals.

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[3] For more details, see https://www.sba.gov/sba-learning-platform/thrive-emerging-leaders-reimagined

Evaluation Design

Optimal Solutions Group, LLC (Optimal) has served as the prime contractor for the last 10 years of the program across all its format and content iterations. The conceptual and methodological approaches to the evaluation design, data analyses, and interpretation of the results follow a similar structure as previous evaluation reports for consistency.

Research Objectives and Questions

The conceptual and methodological approaches to the evaluation design, data analyses, and interpretation of the results relied on the previous iterations of the project, the literature review, and the logic model that depicted the program's theory of change (**Appendix A**).

The evaluation focuses on two components: a process evaluation and the evaluation of the outcomes associated with business leaders and their businesses. The research questions below map to these components:

Research Questions: Process and Outcomes

1. How successful is the initiative at recruiting the intended participants?
2. Is the initiative valued by participants and able to affect management behaviors?
3. To what extent are participants more likely to obtain contracts or financing after graduation?
4. What is the pattern of business growth one, two, and three years after graduation?
5. Does the initiative increase awareness, use, or development of the local business ecosystem?
6. What is the pattern of participants' investment in the local community after graduation?

Data Sources

The evaluation relied on survey data collected by the implementation contractor (2010-2021) and the evaluation contractor in 2022 for the intake (baseline) survey at enrollment, as well as follow-up surveys for three subsequent years after graduation for the 2010-2022 cohorts that participated in the EL from 2010-2019 and 2021, and T.H.R.I.VE in 2022. The data source and its timing relative to program graduation are shown in **Figure 1** below.

Figure 1: Data sources and timing relative to program graduation

Application Form
Name, address, owner demographics, number of employees, revenue

Intake Survey
Business and program participant characteristics, business practices and outcomes

Feedback Survey
Initial responses from participants on the course and delivery

Annual Follow-Up Survey (3-year timeframe)
Program value, business practices and outcomes

One month prior to enrollment → Baseline → At graduation (two months) → 1, 2, & 3 years post graduation
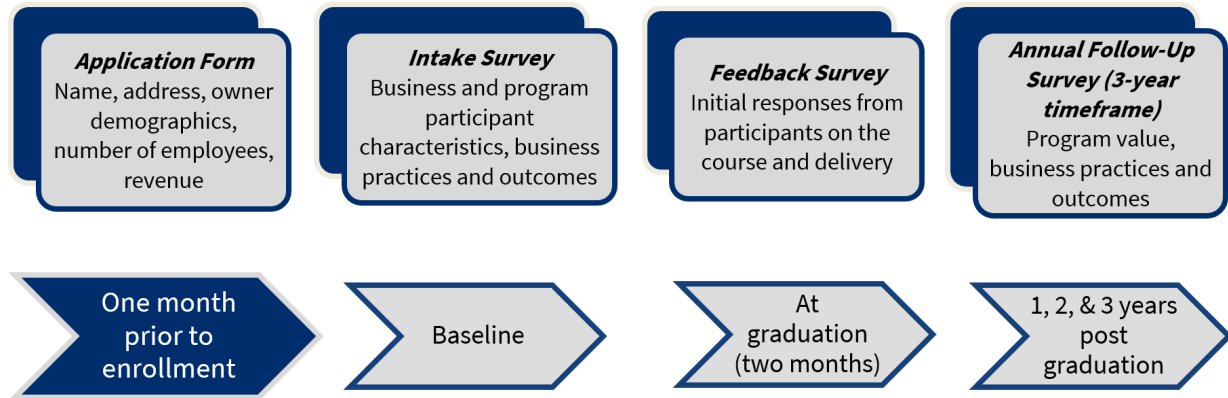
The evaluation relied on survey data collected by the implementation contractor for the baseline survey at enrollment, feedback survey at the end of the training program, and for each of the follow-up surveys for three subsequent years after graduation for the 10 EL cohorts that participated from 2010-2021. In 2022, Optimal collected the data collection for the last two cohorts (2019 and 2021) and the application and intake T.H.R.I.V.E. survey for that year. The change in data collection increased response rates and data quality.

Program Participation and Survey Response Rates

In terms of volume, the program has continued to grow since 2010, when started with less than 400 participants. There were over 1,000 participants last year.[4] Participation increased from 961 in 2021 to 1,020 in 2022, almost reaching pre-pandemic levels (**Figure 2**).

Figure 2: Survey response rates (2010-2022)

Intake survey (baseline)
7,823 participants — 90.9% Response rate

Enrolled who graduated
6,897 participants — 80.1% Response rate

Graduates: first year follow-up
3,619 participants — 57% Response rate

Graduates: second year follow-up
2,620 participants — 46.9% Response rate

Graduates: second year follow-up
1,898 participants — 34% Response rate

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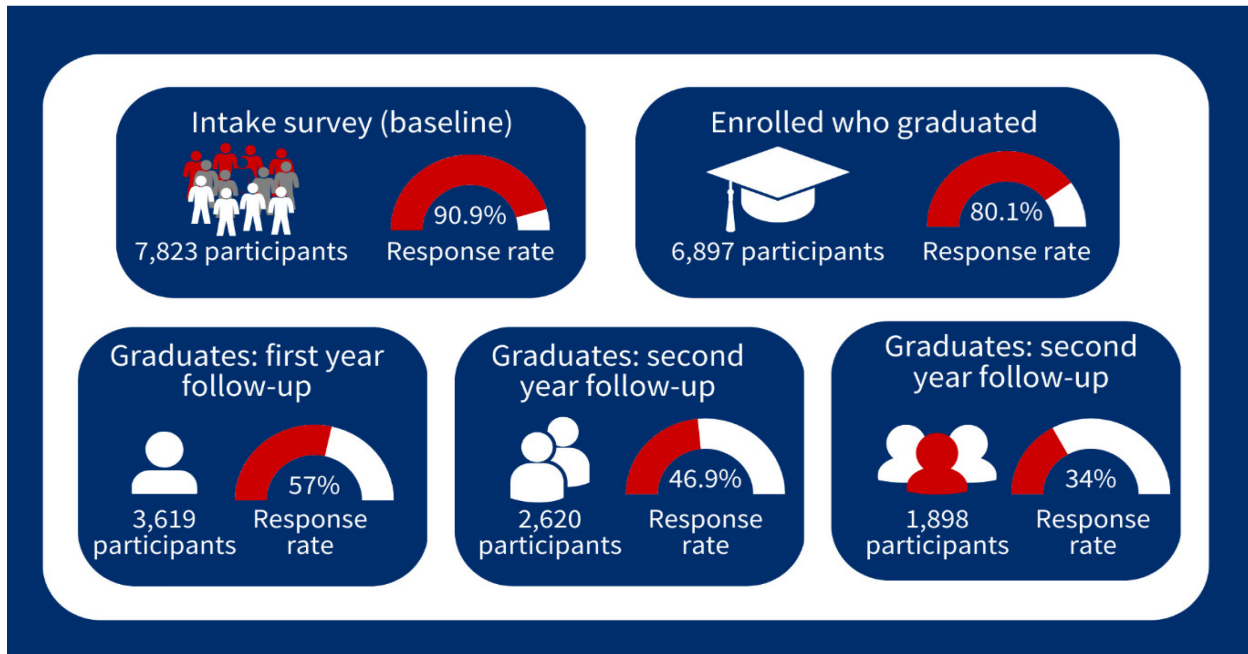
[4] In 2020, the SBA did not offer the executive-level training due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The response rate for the T.H.R.I.V.E. *Emerging Leaders Reimagined* intake survey was 77.2%, which is below the rate for the past 10 years. The implementation and evaluation contractor identified issues with data collection that will increase the response rate in the future. Two solutions to increase survey response rates and, thus, measurement of outcome changes are: a) highlight the importance of surveys for program improvements in the enrollment documents, during the classes, and at the graduation; and b) encourage more active involvement of the implementation contractor in sending reminders on survey completion.

Methodological Approach

The study conducted pooled analysis to examine the statistical significance of the changes in business management, business ecosystem, and other outcomes after graduation by combining all available survey data across cohorts. This attempts to overcome the low response rate to follow-up surveys and present information for all respondents. The study also conducted panel analysis to track the statistical significance of change in business growth outcomes for the subset of respondents who answered the intake and follow-up surveys. Although these analyses were based on small subsets of cases, they were needed to address the research questions regarding business growth.

Methodological Limitations

There are several issues to consider in terms of the methodological limitations of this evaluation, particularly in the interpretation of the findings.

- *Potential bias of the survey data* –– The surveys for cohorts 2010-2021 were collected by the implementation contractors, thus potentially biasing the collected information about performance outcomes.
- *Low response rates to follow-up surveys* –– The response rates limit the power of the analyses for the changes in outcomes over time, particularly for the value of financing and contracts.
- *Self-reported nature of the data* –– Self-reporting reduces the reliability and validity of the business growth results. There is no external validation of answers, particularly regarding the amount of revenue, profits, employees, financing, and contracts.
- *Lack of the quasi-experimental research design* –– This precludes establishing a causal link between program participation and business growth. Although the evaluation collects pre- and post-program participation data, it lacks a comparison group of businesses that are like EL participants but did not participate in the program. Since most firms that survive the first three years after formation tend to grow, the significant increase in business growth over time cannot be attributed solely to the program.

Findings

This section discusses the major findings and detailed findings for each of the research questions.

Research Question 1: How successful is the initiative at recruiting the intended participants?

Figure 3: Research Question 1 Highlights

The evaluation revealed that:
- There have been no significant changes over time on these results in the last 10 years.
- The percentage of participants meeting all eligibility requirements increased from 78.7% in 2020-2021 to 83.7% in 2022 under the T.H.R.I.V.E Reimagined program.
- There has been a decrease in racial/ethnic minority participants but an increase in female participation from 2020-2021 to 2022.
- Minority-owned and women-owned business participants also increased in 2022.
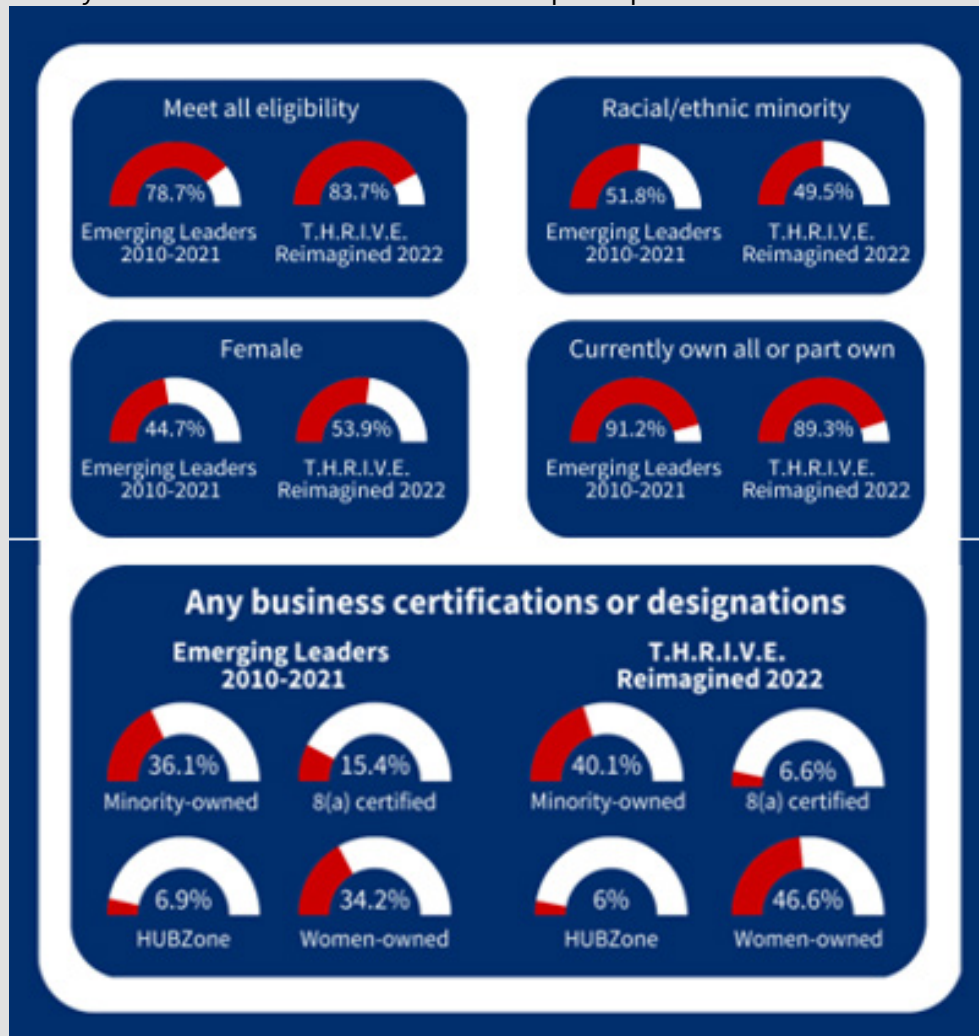
As stated on the SBA website, the T.H.R.I.V.E. *Emerging Leaders Reimagined* program is not for start-ups or people who are thinking about starting a business.[5] The training series are open to small business owners and executives that meet certain qualifications:[6]

- Have annual revenues of at least $250,000.
- Have been in business for at least three years.
- Have at least one employee, other than self.

The implementation component of the evaluation assessed how successful the program is at recruiting the targeted participants. About 80% of the participants between 2010-2022 met the program eligibility criteria as measured at the baseline survey. **Table 1** below provides a glance at the 2010-2021 cohorts for the Emerging Leaders initiative and the first year of the T.H.R.I.V.E. *Emerging Leaders Reimagined* program.

Table 1: Participation Requirements Met by Program Participants

Participation Requirement	Emerging Leaders (2010-2021) (Percentage)	T.H.R.I.V.E. *Reimagined* (2022) (Percentage)	All Participants (2010-2022) (Percentage)
Meet all eligibility criteria**	**78.7**	**83.7**	**79.2**
Meet at least one eligibility criteria	**99.5**	**99.6**	**99.5**
In business for at least three years	96.1	94.7	96.0
Have annual revenues of at least $250,000	88.8	89.6	88.8
Have at least one employee, other than self	98.5	98.6	98.5
Number of respondents at intake	**7,013**	**787**	**7,800**

Note 1: Based on cases with available baseline survey data.
Note 2: **p<.01; ***p<.001 comparing the two iterations of the program.

The adherence to the participation requirement follows slightly higher compliance in the T.H.R.I.V.E. program than the Emerging Leaders initiative. There is a statistical difference when comparing the implementation of the eligibility requirements between the two program iterations. When considering the percentage of participants meeting all the criteria, T.H.R.I.V.E. exceeds the results over the last 10 years by five percentage points (83.7% vs 78.7%), a difference that is statistically significant. This result speaks of a closer adherence by the SBA District Offices to the T.H.R.I.V.E. *Emerging Leaders Reimagined* program participation guidelines (see **Table 2**).

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[5] See program website for more details:
https://www.sba.gov/sba-learning-platform/thrive-emerging-leaders-reimagined
[6] SBA District Offices have the final say on who is accepted into the program and can waive some criteria based on their review of the application.

Table 2: Participants from Eligible Populations by Cohort at Baseline Survey

	Cohort percent												Total
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2021	2022	
In business for at least three years	90.3	97.3	96.1	93.3	95.5	96.7	97.1	95.3	96.2	94.6	100	94.7	96.0
Annual revenues of at least $250,000	74.2	82.3	86.7	86.8	93.3	92.6	90.8	87.2	90.9	88.5	88.0	89.6	88.8
At least one employee (full-time/part-time)	92.6	100	99.4	98.4	99.5	98.7	98.8	99.2	98.2	97.4	99.2	98.6	98.5
In business at least three years **and** have annual revenues at least $250,000	71.4	82.3	85.8	82.6	89.5	91.0	89.4	85.0	89.4	85.7	88.1	86.1	86.9
In business for at least three years **and** have at least one employee	83.8	98.4	97.2	92.9	95.0	95.5	96.1	94.8	94.9	92.4	99.3	93.8	95.0
Annual revenues at least $250,000 **and** at least one employee	71.3	84.8	87.1	86.4	92.8	91.5	90.8	86.7	90.9	87.5	87.6	89.2	88.5
Meet at least one eligibility criteria	98.8	98.6	98.1	98.7	100	99.9	99.8	99.8	99.6	99.5	100	99.6	99.5
Meet all three eligibility criteria	57.5	68.1	64.7	79.8	88.1	87.0	81.7	77.5	80.9	76.3	81.0	83.7	79.2
Number of respondents	**240**	**295**	**411**	**391**	**420**	**785**	**869**	**852**	**919**	**941**	**890**	**787**	**7,800**

Note 1: Based on cases with available intake survey data.
Note 2: All eligibility criteria and their combinations were significant at p<.001 comparing cohorts.

The adherence to the eligibility requirements is even higher when looking at the application data form, the data used by the SBA District Offices to select candidates. **Table 3** shows that 95.5% of participants meet all three eligibility criteria.

Table 3: T.H.R.I.V.E. Participants from Eligible Populations, Based on Application Form Data

Eligibility Requirement	Percent
In business for at least three years	98.2
Annual revenues of at least $250,000	97.2
At least one employee (either full-time or part-time)	99.2
In business for at least three years **and** annual revenues of at least $250,000	96.0
In business for at least three years **and** at least one employee	97.5
Annual revenues of at least $250,000 **and** at least one employee	96.7
Meet at least one eligibility criteria	100.0
Meet all three eligibility criteria **	95.5
Number of respondents	**1,200**

Note: Based on all application data prior to actual program enrollment.

If the program participants have the required C-level experience and sound businesses, the program as designed by the SBA (see **Logic Model** and **Theory of Change** in **Appendix A**), which can be assessed in

the next follow-up surveys, could have larger effects on the business leaders and their businesses than has been seen before.

The tables below report the business and owner characteristics information for the 7,800 survey respondents who participated in the Emerging Leaders initiative and the T.H.R.I.V.E. program from 2010-2022. At the baseline, survey respondents reported multiple job titles. The three largest references to a job title were owner (58.3% of respondents), president (46.9% of respondents), and CEO (30.6% of respondents) (**Table B-1** in **Appendix B**). About 90% of respondents over the 2010-2022 period stated that they currently own all or part of their business (see **Table 4**). There are no differences between the two program iterations.

Table 4: Characteristics of the Participating Executives

Participant Characteristics	Emerging Leaders (2010-2021) (Percentage)	T.H.R.I.V.E. *Reimagined* (2022) (Percentage)	All Participants (2010-2022) (Percentage)
Currently own all or part of the business	91.2	89.3	90.8
Female ***	44.7	53.9	45.6
Veteran or military service	10.8	10.8	10.8
Disabled	5.5	7.5	5.8
Racial or ethnic minority	53.2	49.5	52.7
Highest level of education ***			
Some high school	0.5	0.3	0.5
High school	5.1	3.3	5.0
Some college	18.1	16.0	17.9
Associate degree	7.2	9.4	7.4
Bachelor's degree	40.1	38.3	40.0
Advanced degree	28.9	32.7	29.3

Note 1: Based on cases with available data (ownership not available (N/A) prior to 2017; job title N/A prior to 2015).
Note 2: **$p<.01$; ***$p<.001$ comparing the two iterations of the program.

Looking at the demographic and educational characteristics of the participants, close to half of participants were female (45.6%) or racial or ethnic minorities (52.7%). Most participants had college degrees (76.7%). Comparing the two program iterations, T.H.R.I.V.E. participants were significantly more likely to be female and have advanced degrees than the Emerging Leaders participants (**Table 4**). Thus, executives in the T.H.R.I.V.E. program seem better positioned to benefit from the program curriculum and network than the former Emerging Leaders participants.

There are two business characteristics where there are statistically significant changes in the composition of business participating in the T.H.R.I.V.E. program relative to the EL. Most participating businesses (58.6%) had at least one business certification or socioeconomic designation, particularly those owned by women (35.6%) or minorities (36.5%). There was a 15-percentage point increase in participating businesses with SBA certifications or designations relative to the 2010-2021 period. The changes in the composition of the businesses with SBA certifications or designations are marked by an increase of 13 percentage points for women-owned businesses and a nine-percentage point decrease of 8(a) certified businesses. There are also slight but statistically significant changes in the distribution of legal structure of the businesses. There is a ten-percentage point increase in LLCs in the T.H.R.I.V.E. *Emerging Leaders Reimagined* program relative to the EL.

Table 5 below describes these different characteristics. Regarding business characteristics, participants reported that, on average, their businesses were about 14 years old, and they had owned them for approximately nine years. There are mixed changes in the distributions between iterations of the executive-level program. Business age was slightly higher for Emerging Leaders participants, but it was not a statistically significant difference from the T.H.R.I.V.E. program participants. The number of years the participant has been the owner were the same between the two groups (**Table B-2** in **Appendix B**). All the businesses (92.9%) were in metropolitan areas. The T.H.R.I.V.E. participants' businesses were significantly less likely to be in metropolitan areas with a population of 1 million people or more than the EL participants' businesses (**Table B-3** in **Appendix B**).

Table 5: Business Characteristics at Baseline

Business Characteristics	Emerging Leaders (2010-2021) (Percentage)	T.H.R.I.V.E *Reimagined* (2022) (Percentage)	All Participants (2010-2022) (Percentage)
Legal structure of the business ***			
LLC	39.5	49.4	40.8
S-Corporation	40.7	32.5	39.6
Corporation	14.4	11.7	14.1
Other	5.4	6.4	5.5
Any business certifications or designations ***	58.4	72.1	58.6
Minority-owned business	36.1	40.1	36.5
SBA 8(a) certified business ***	15.4	6.6	14.5
SBA HUBZone certified business	6.9	6.0	6.8
Women-owned business ***	34.2	46.6	35.6
Industry (2-digit NAICS) ***			
Professional services (law, accounting, engineering)	27.1	21.6	26.5
Construction**	17.4	12.5	12.5
Manufacturing	9.9	11.2	10.1
Retail trade	6.15	8.26	6.4
Health care and social assistance	6.2	9.78	6.6
Administrative, support, security, waste management & remediation services	5.2	6.5	5.3
Wholesale Trade	3.9	2.3	3.7
Food services and accommodation **	3.9	8.1	4.3
Transportation and warehousing	2.7	3.7	2.8
Educational services	2.8	2.8	2.8
Information (publishing, video, TV, radio, etc.)	2.0	1.7	1.7
Finance and insurance	1.9	1.7	1.9
Real estate, rental, & leasing	1.9	1.9	1.9
Arts, entertainment, and recreation	1.4	1.3	1.4
Agriculture, forestry, fishing, & hunting	0.5	1.5	0.7
Utilities	0.3	0.3	0.3
Management of companies and enterprises	0.2	0.0	0.2
Mining	0.1	0.3	0.12

Business Characteristics	Emerging Leaders (2010-2021) (Percentage)	T.H.R.I.V.E *Reimagined* (2022) (Percentage)	All Participants (2010-2022) (Percentage)
Public administration	0.2	0.1	0.2
Other services (auto, general repair services, barber shops, pet care, etc.)	6.3	4.7	6.2
Number of respondents	**6,699**	**787**	**7,486**

Note 1: Based on cases with available data. The follow-up certifications were not asked prior to 2013.
Note 2: **p<.01; ***p<.001 statistical comparison among program iterations.

Table 6 illustrates an approximation in the changes in business certifications or designations at baseline and any follow-up survey. The follow-up survey did not ask if the business had gained a business certification or designation after participating in the program. Thus, the table shows the response at baseline and any potential changes during a follow-up survey. The numbers differ from the ones reported in **Table 5** above because this table shows responses for program participants that provided the relevant information at both baseline and in any follow-up survey.

Table 6: Changes in Business Certifications or Designations from Baseline

	By time period		Change intake to follow-ups			
	2013-21 Baseline	2013-21 Any follow-up	No change	New certificate at any follow-up	Certificate at Baseline and not follow-ups	Total
Any business certifications or designations	**60.7**	**69.8***	**81.9**	**13.6**	**4.5**	**100**
SBA 8(a) certified business	14.2	15.0	92.1	4.4	3.6	100
SBA HUBZone certified business	6.1	7.7	94.3	3.7	2.1	100
SBA Small Disadvantaged Business	17.0	22.2***	86.5	9.4	4.2	100
Veteran or service member-owned business	9.0	10.6	96.6	2.5	0.9	100
Minority-owned business	34.3	40.2***	86.8	9.5	3.6	100
Women-owned business	36.4	41.1***	87.2	8.7	4.1	100
Located on Native American-owned land	0.4	0.5	99.4	0.3	0.3	100
Number of respondents	**3,064**	**3,064**	**2,509**	**416**	**139**	**3,064**

Note 1: Based on 2013-21 cohorts with available data for the intake and any of three follow-ups.
Note 2: **p<.01; ***p<.001 comparing intake to follow-ups.

Research Question 2: Is the initiative valued by participants and able to affect management behaviors?

Figure 4: Research Question 2 Highlights

The evaluation revealed that:

- Program participants who responded to the survey valued the training program and the program has a high net promoter score.
- One-third of the respondents stated the business network and educational resources were the most helpful for achieving business success after program graduation.
- The proportion of survey respondents using various business management practices increased from prior to participation in the program to the first follow-up year.
- There have been no significant changes over time or between program iterations on these outcomes in the last 10 years.
- About 75% of participants said that they made strategic decisions based on written goals.
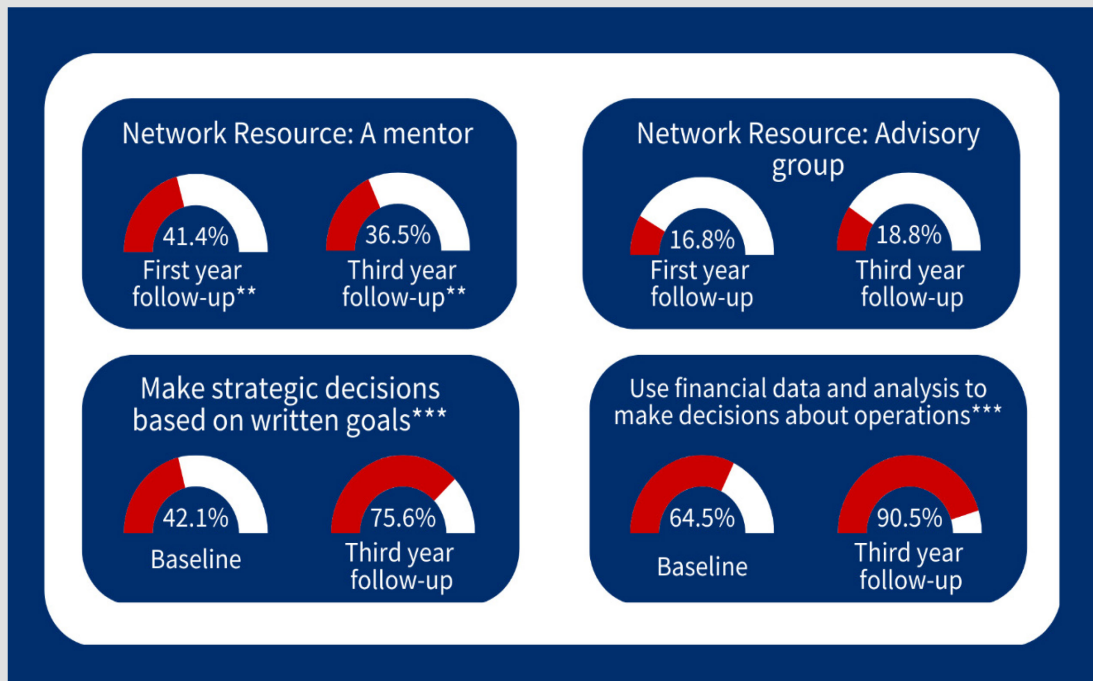
Network Resource: A mentor
41.4% First year follow-up**
36.5% Third year follow-up**

Network Resource: Advisory group
16.8% First year follow-up
18.8% Third year follow-up

Make strategic decisions based on written goals***
42.1% Baseline
75.6% Third year follow-up

Use financial data and analysis to make decisions about operations***
64.5% Baseline
90.5% Third year follow-up

Note 1. Based on cases with available data (from 2013 cohort).
Note 2: **p<.01; ***p<.001 statistical comparison among time periods.

This research question discussed the perspective of the value of the program using the responses to the annual follow-up surveys. The first-year follow-up survey for the T.H.R.I.V.E. program participants will take place in 2023. No follow-up data for T.H.R.I.V.E. graduates is reported below. We report data from the feedback survey sent after the graduation ceremony to all participants who signed a participation agreement.

Perceived Value of the Program

Approximately 97% of the respondents (3,100 respondents) stated at one of the follow-up surveys that they are likely or very likely to recommend the executive-level program to other business owners (**Figure 5**). This outcome translates into a high net promoter score (would participant recommend EL to a fellow business owner?). An added value to these business leaders is that they could not have received the same coaching, mentoring, training services, and networking opportunities available in this program elsewhere. These two responses highlight the value of the program in local communities and as discussed above, with minorities and female business owners.

Participant Quotes
"My business has tripled since January 2021 when I started implementing different processes and procedures in my business. I am still in the process of implementing all the ideas I learned from the class!"

Figure 5: Program Graduates' Views on the Value of the Program
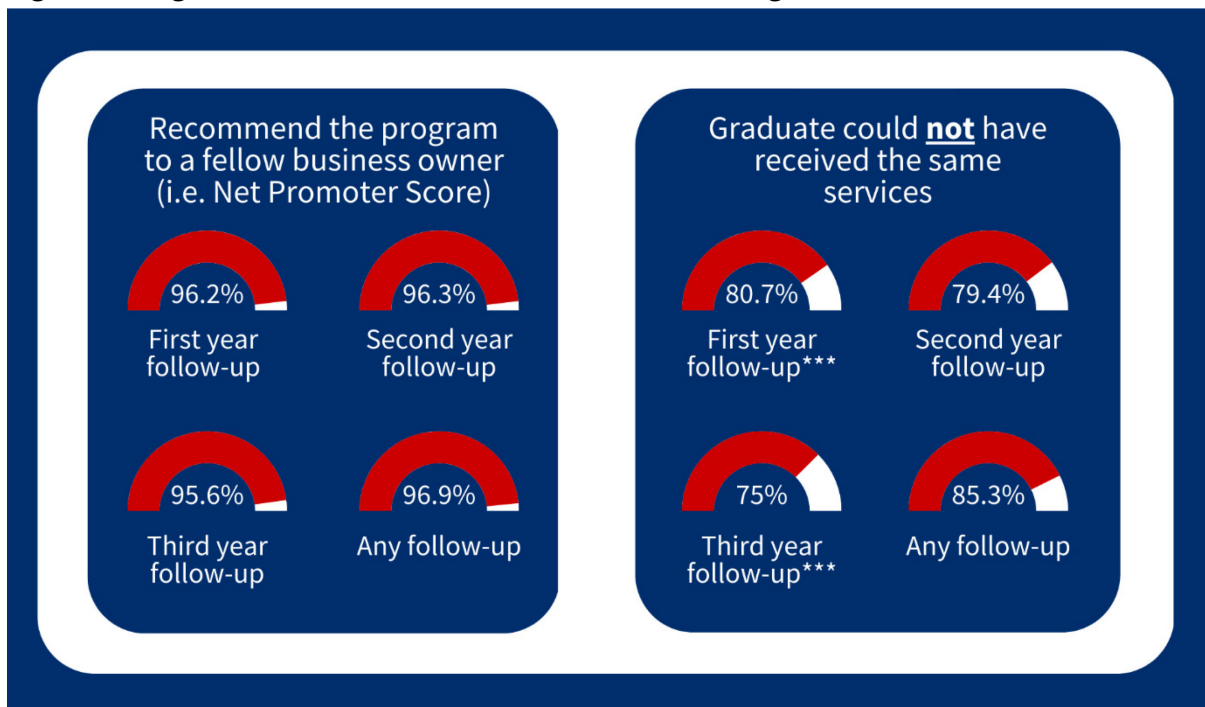
Note 1. Based on cases with available data (from 2013 cohort).
Note 2: **p<.01; ***p<.001 statistical comparison among time periods.

The responses to the open-ended questions on the follow-up survey highlighted the participants' perceived value of the program[7] and what they gained in terms of knowledge, skills, experiences, network connections, and business growth.

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[7] T.H.R.I.V.E. *Emerging Leaders Reimagined* (2022) was provided mostly in a virtual format. Preliminary analysis of the feedback survey (conducted at the time of graduation) indicates participants' preferences for in-person training.

Below are the results from the feedback survey of all program participants based on data collected after the graduation date of the training program:

- Out of the 39 that did not graduate, 36% said the reason was because they "Became too busy with new business".
- Over 62% of respondents indicated that virtual activities were less or much less effective than in-person ones.
- About 81% of respondents were satisfied/very satisfied with the overall program experience and the same percentage of respondents would recommend the program to a fellow business executive.
- Between 75% and 80% of the respondents had positive (valuable/very valuable) perceptions on the value of program components. The exception was for "Assignments and Homework" and "Feedback on assignments and homework from the instructor," where 59% found them to be valuable/very valuable.
- About 75% of the respondents had positive (valuable/very valuable) perceptions on the value of the content of the curriculum modules. "Digital Marketing and Social Media Strategies" and "Legal Compliance, Intellectual Property, and Contracts" were rated valuable/very valuable at lower percentages.
- Despite the overall positive reviews, 43% of the respondents had suggestions for changes to the content of the curriculum modules. Of the 180 respondents with suggestions, the largest proportion (43%) suggested changes to the "Digital Marketing and Social Media Strategies" module.

Figure 6 shows the open-ended responses on the perceived value of the program and suggestions for improving the training program. **Appendix C** provides additional details on the responses to the feedback survey.

Figure 6: Open-ended Survey Responses to Program Improvement
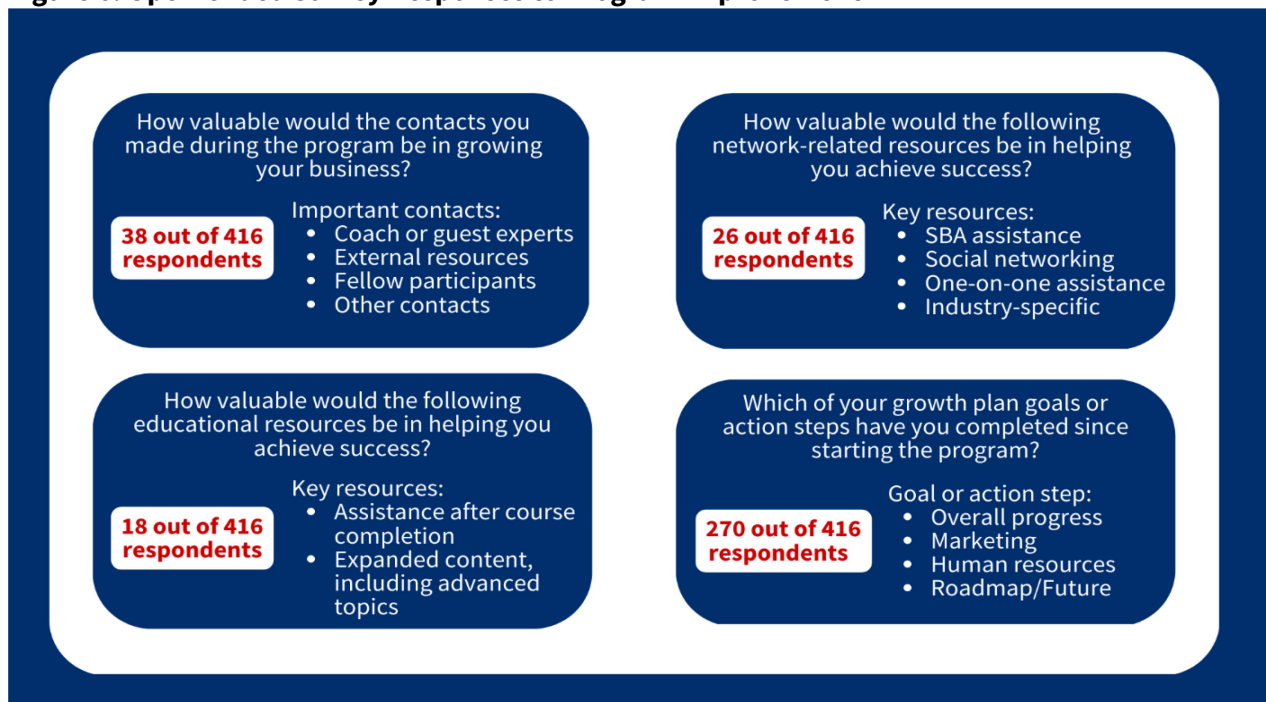
Value of Network and Educational Resources

With respect to the value of the Emerging Leaders network resources for achieving business success after graduation, more than 25% of the participants reported, at some point in time, that the Emerging Leaders network resources (mentors, subject matter experts, and advisory groups, in that order) were the most helpful for achieving business success after graduation (**Table 7**). On a similar question about the value of the Emerging Leaders educational resources for achieving business success, close to half of the participants, at some point in time, responded that the top-rated resource was the CEO mentoring meetings (**Table B-4** in **Appendix B**). Across all resources, the value of the Emerging Leaders network and educational resources for program graduates decreases after the first-year follow-up survey.

> **Participant Quotes**
>
> "I feel extremely blessed to have completed this program before the Pandemic otherwise I am not sure our business would have survived. Thank you for caring for small business."
>
> "The program offered a high-level overview and not really a deep dive into the some of the challenges that CEO's face daily."

Table 7: Program Network Resources Rated as the Most Helpful to Achieve Business Success after Graduation

Network resources	1st year follow-up (Percentage)	2nd year follow-up (Percentage)	3rd year follow-up (Percentage)	Any follow-up (Percentage)
A mentor	41.4**	37.5	36.5**	50.6
Advice from subject matter experts	20.5	18.5	19.1	28.7
An advisory group	16.8	17.2	18.8	25.7
National alumni meetings with training opportunities	11.3	10.0	10.5	16.4
Local alumni meetings with training opportunities	10.7	9.9	9.5	16.5
Connections to other alumni	6.7	6.3	5.6	10.1
Number of respondents	2,052	1,638	1,282	2,934

Note 1: Based on cases with available data.
Note 2: Participants selecting the rating of 1 (the most helpful resource) on a seven-point scale.
Note 3: **$p<.01$; ***$p<.001$ statistical comparison among time periods.

Change in Business Management Procedures

As part of the EL curriculum, participants are trained on eight business management practices that correspond to the each of the curriculum modules. The results showed that graduates incorporated several business management practices always or usually by the first-year follow-up survey relative to prior to the EL training (see **Table 8**). Once the practices were incorporated earlier on, there was no further change in business management procedures over time. The business management practice with the largest increase from the baseline was making strategic decisions based on written goals.

Table 8:Program Change in the Participant Use of Business Management Procedures (2010-2021)

Business Management Procedures Used (always or usually)	Baseline (Percentage)	1st year follow-up (Percentage)	2nd year follow-up (Percentage)	3rd year follow-up (Percentage)	Any follow-up (Percentage)
Make strategic decisions based on written goals ***	42.1	79.4	74.8	75.6	84.8
Use financial data and analysis to make decisions about operations ***	64.5	88.9	89.7	90.5	92.9
Consider the profiles of most profitable customers when creating new business strategies ***	53.9	80.3	79.7	79.0	87.3
Use well-thought-out strategies when marketing and selling ***	55.8	84.4	83.8	83.3	90.1
Use well-thought-out procedures when assessing human resource needs ***	53.7	82.1	82.0	83.2	89.1
Use well-thought-out procedures when evaluating employee performance ***	55.9	80.4	81.3	82.5	87.1

Note 1: Based on cases with available data.
Note 2: **p<.01; ***p<.001 statistical comparison from the baseline to the follow-up years.

As a sign of the health of the business post-graduation, there were significant and consistent increases in each of the survey follow-ups on the proportion of participants who reported offering health insurance benefits to their employees and providing formal professional development programs to employees (**Table B-5** in **Appendix B**).

Research Question 3: To what extent are participants more likely to obtain contracts or financing after graduation?

Figure 7: Research Question 3 Highlights

The evaluation revealed that:

- Frequency of awards of federal government contracts increased from the baseline (17.4% of businesses) to the second- and third-year follow-up surveys (19% for both years).
- The dollar value of all government levels, federal, and local government contracts increased from the baseline to the second-and third-year follow-up surveys.
- Access to nongovernmental contracts decreased from the baseline (26% of businesses) to the first-year follow-up survey (21%) and then remained stable at those levels. The dollar value of nongovernmental contracts showed mixed results.
- Without a comparison group (non-Emerging Leaders participants) these results cannot be attributed to the program.
- There was a slight increase in both federal government contracts and any other government contract awards.

Any government contract awards

28.6% Baseline
29.2% First year follow-up
30.8% Second year follow-up
28.4% Third year follow-up

Federal government contract awards

17.2% Baseline
18.6% First year follow-up
19.9% Second year follow-up**
19.5% Third year follow-up**
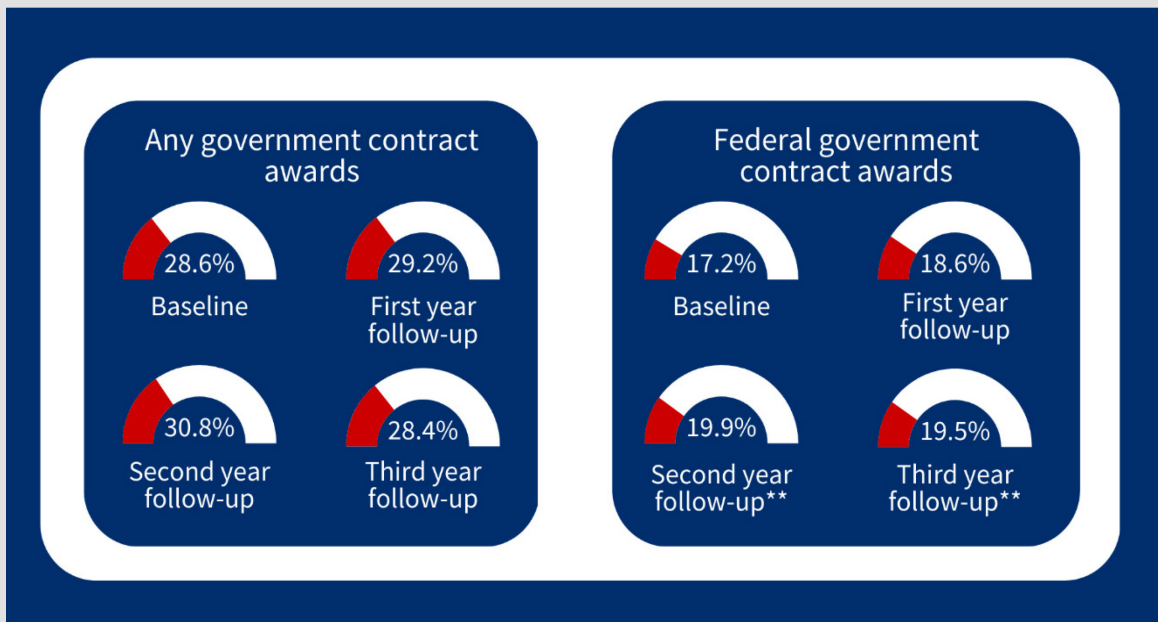
Note. *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001 statistical comparison from the baseline to the follow-up surveys.

The analysis for this research question focused on the sources of revenue for the emerging leaders' businesses. There have been no significant changes over time on these outcomes in the last 10 years. Graduates were asked if their business was awarded one or more various types of new prime contracts or subcontracts in each of the three years after graduation (**Table 9**).

Table 9: Change in the Frequency and Value of new Government contracts (2010-2021)

Type of Government Contracts	Baseline	1st year follow-up	2nd year follow-up	3rd year follow-up
Any government contract awards (Percentage)	28.6	29.2	30.8	28.4
Median value	$356,199	$426,000	$527,652***	$758,717***
Number of respondents	1,184	860	638	421
Received government contracts as (Percentage):				
Prime contractor	82.1	83.7	83.3	84.8
Subcontractor	51.6	52.1	54.6	54.4
Both prime contractor and subcontractor	33.7	35.7	37.9	39.1
Number of respondents	948	538	370	256
Tribal government contracts (Percentage)	2.2	3.0	3.1	2.1
Median	$54,267	$72,508	$84,148	$283,007
Number of respondents	90	87	63	28
Local government contracts (Percentage)	14.27	14.74	15.58	14.39
Median	$134,101	$133,444	$165,128	$191,402
Number of respondents	581	422	317	214
State government contracts (Percentage)	10.75	11.73	11.23	9.92
Median	$116,308	$142,682	$143,700	$198,699**
Number of respondents	428	332	224	138
Federal government contract awards (Percentage)	17.2	18.6	19.9**	19.5**
Median	$399,718	$346,692	$505,572**	$556,868**
Number of respondents	710	541	408	287

Note 1: Based on cases with available data (nongovernment contracts available beginning in cohort 2013) until Sept 2022.
Note 2: Results do not include data on T.H.R.I.V.E. participants.
Note 3: *$p<.05$; **$p<.01$; ***$p<.001$ statistical comparison from the baseline to the follow-up surveys.
Note 4: Dollar values were adjusted for inflation using Price Deflators for Gross Domestic Product (in 2021 dollars).

The responses showed no change over time in access (received contracts) to the new government contracts or changes in the type of contract arrangement. However, access to federal government contracts slightly increased from the intake (18.7) to year two and three follow-ups (21.5 and 22.4, respectively).

The average (mean and median) dollar value of new government and for federal government contracts or subcontracts significantly increased from the baseline to the second- and third-year follow-up surveys. As mentioned earlier, without a comparison group, these changes cannot be attributed to the Emerging Leaders program.

There was a decline in the number of new *nongovernment* contracts or subcontracts from the baseline

that stayed at the lower level through the third-year follow-up survey (see **Table B-6** in **Appendix B**). The dollar value of nongovernmental contracts showed an increase in the mean value and a decrease in the median value from the intake to the third-year follow-up. The evidence on the changes in value was inconclusive.

Participant Quotes
"Ongoing mentoring and quarterly meetings more financial help and ongoing needed more help with contract assist and certifications." – There appear to be words missing from this quote, and/or parts of the quote are repeated.
"More insight on how to leverage the SBA after the program is over. Did not develop any contacts within the SBA."

Research Question 4: What is the pattern of business growth one, two, and three years after graduation?

Figure 8: Research Question 4 Highlights

The evaluation revealed that:

- Participants reported increases in revenue every year since the baseline.
- The proportion of participants who reported opening a new business increased every year since the baseline.
- Participants reported increases in both the number of employees and profits from the baseline to the second-year follow-up.
- Without a comparison group (non-Emerging Leaders participants) these results cannot be attributed to the program.
- Figure 8 shows there was a considerable increase in mean gross annual revenue in the businesses.
- There was a significant increase in the mean number of full-time employees.

Gross annual revenue (Mean)		Full-time equivalent employees (Mean)	
$1,419,061	$1,717,617	13.8	15.7
Baseline	First year follow-up***	Baseline	First year follow-up***
$1,937,522	$2,213.650	17.9	18.6
Second year follow-up***	Third year follow-up***	Second year follow-up***	Third year follow-up
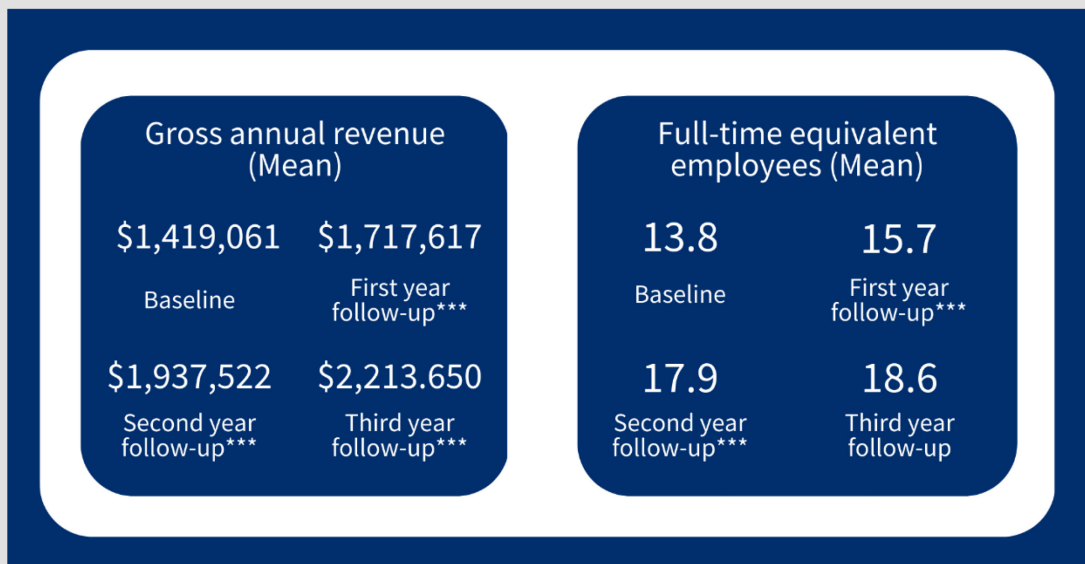
Note. **p<.01, ***p<.001 comparing each time period to the previous period.

This section discusses three topics: revenue growth, employment growth, and business formation and expansion. Regarding revenue growth, the average and median revenue consistently increased from the baseline to all three follow-up years (**Table 10**). The proportion of participants reporting net profits remained the same as in the baseline (about 78). However, the value of these profits increased from the baseline to the second-year follow-up (see **Table B-7** in **Appendix B**). The number of full-time equivalent (FTE) employees in the EL' businesses slightly increased from the baseline (13.8) to second-year follow-up (17.9).

Table 10: Revenue and Employment Growth by Time Period, Panel Analyses (2010-2019)

	Baseline	1st year follow-up	2nd year follow-up	3rd year follow-up
Gross annual revenue				
Mean	$1,419,061	$1,717,617***	$1,937,522***	$2,213,650***
Median	$789,861	$933,164***	$1,027,492***	$1,159,609***
Full-time equivalent employees				
Mean	13.8	15.7***	17.9***	18.6
Median	8	9***	10***	10

Note 1: Revenue is based on cases (n=1,115) with available data for the baseline *and* the three-year follow-ups periods until September 2022.

Note 2: Employment is based on cases (n=1,165) with available data for baseline and three-year follow-ups periods until September 2022.

Note 3: Results do not include data on T.H.R.I.V.E. participants.

Note 4: Revenues and profit values were adjusted for inflation using Price Deflators for Gross Domestic Product (in 2021 dollars).

Note 5: **$p<.01$; ***$p<.001$ comparing each time period to the previous period.

Participant Quotes

"I was very honored to be chosen to be a part of this program. My business has tripled since January 2021 when I started implementing different processes and procedures in my business. I am still in the process of implementing all the ideas I learned from the class!"

"Great program. We have added employees and revenue since then. Finances and the future of the business look much better. We even added 401k this year! Thank you for the class."

Another important component addressed in research question 4 is business formation and expansion. Business expansion indicators were stable across each of the follow-up surveys for opening a new business location (21.3%), relocating to a different location (21.0%), and acquiring an existing business (8.8%) (see **Table 11**). The proportion of participants who reported opening a new business that did not exist before program participation increased across each of the follow-up surveys. Similarly, and in the opposite direction, the proportion of participants who reported that their businesses have been sold or closed increased from the first-year to the third-year follow-up survey.

Table 11: Business Formation and Expansion in the Community after Graduation (2010-2021)

	1st year follow-up (Percentage)	2nd year follow-up (Percentage)	3rd year follow-up (Percentage)	Any follow-up (Percentage)
Business has been sold or closed	0.6***	1.3	2.0***	2.2
Opened a new business location	16.4	18.1	17.1	21.3
Relocated to a different business location	15.3	15.3	16.7	21.0
Started franchising	0.9	0.6	1.1	1.0
Opened a new business	11.4**	15.4**	17.5**	18.1
Became owner of another existing business	6.8	6.4	5.5	8.8
Advised a friend or colleague on starting a business	72.1	73.3	71.9	75.2
Number of respondents	**1,710**	**1,246**	**940**	**2,543**

Note 1: Based on cases with available data until September 2022.
Note 2: Results do not include data on T.H.R.I.V.E. participants.

Table 12 shows the Percent of Emerging Leaders Creating or Retaining Jobs and Obtaining Revenue Growth, both important metrics for the EL and T.H.R.I.V.E. program.

Table 12. Business Growth Outcomes by Time Period (2010-2021)

	Intake to 1st year follow-up (Percentage)	1st year to 2nd year follow-up (Percentage)	2nd year to 3rd Year follow-up (Percentage)	Any follow-up (Percentage)
With increase in annual revenue	68.1	67.6	66.4	82.6
Number of respondents	**3,154**	**2,011**	**1,311**	**3,776**
With created or retained jobs	66.6**	63.9	61.8**	81.9
With retained jobs	14.7	14.2	15.1	11.2
With created jobs	51.9**	49.7	46.7**	70.6
Number of respondents	**3,303**	**2,072**	**1,351**	**3,952**

Note 1: based on cases with available data.
Note 2: jobs were based on FTE employment.
Note 3: **p<.01; ***p<.001 comparing two time periods.

Research Question 5: Does the initiative increase awareness, use, or development of the local business ecosystem?

Figure 9: Research Question 5 Highlights

The evaluation revealed that:

- There was an increase from the intake to the first-year follow-up survey in the proportion of participants stating that their region is home to a well-developed ecosystem. The change leveled off after the first year.
- Participants used various SBA and non-SBA business network resources to achieve business goals. There was an increase in the use of networks from the baseline to the first-year follow-up survey, when it leveled off.
- Use of the Emerging Leaders network for business was limited and relationships with the network decreased over time.
- Between 27.5% - 35.9% participants rely on the SBA Website and SBDC as their resource partners.
- Over 50% of participants were in touch with their instructor or fellow participants even three years after graduation.
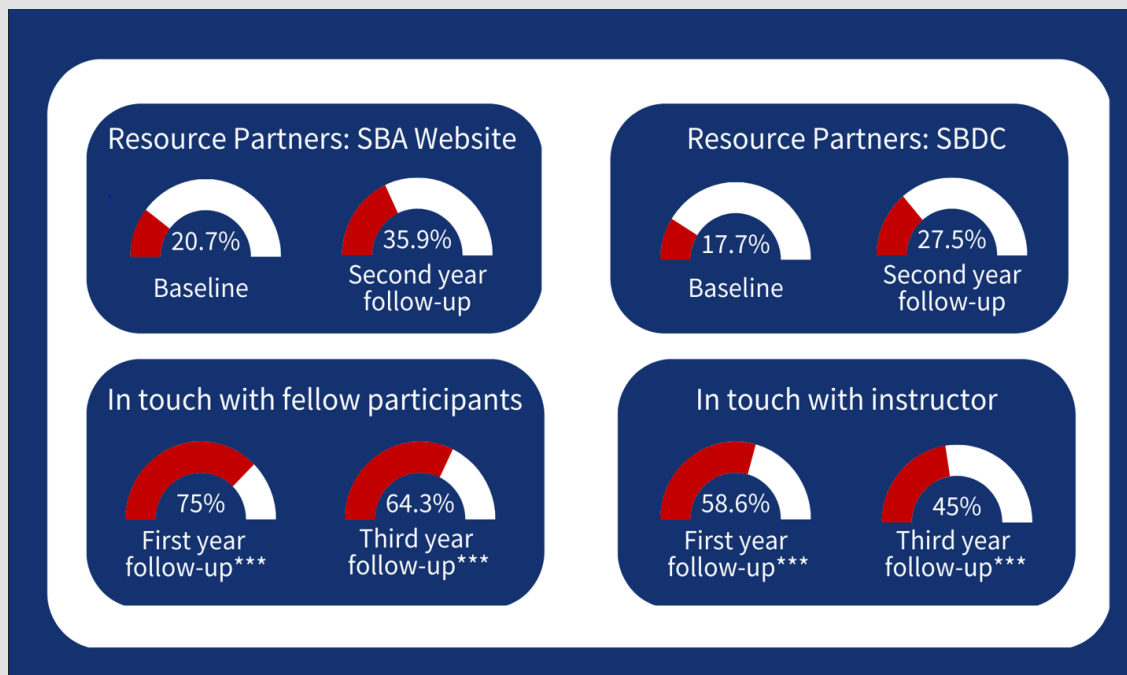
The ecosystem includes networks, organizations, and infrastructures; and resources, such as businesses, professional associations, universities, large corporations, government agencies, nonprofit organizations, support services, financial resources, the pool of skilled workforce, and other community resources and actors. The concept of the ecosystem highlights the importance of a variety of networks, resources, infrastructures, and institutions that interplay with individual, organizational and community factors to drive entrepreneurship and business growth as well as promote the

economic development of the communities. The evaluation collected information on the emerging leaders' perceptions of, contribution to, and engagement in the business ecosystems. The proportion of participants agreeing that the region is home to a well-developed ecosystem increased from the baseline (55.3) to the first-year follow-up survey (69.9). There were no changes after the first-year follow-up survey (**Exhibit B-8** in **Appendix B**). The study did not assess the actual growth and development of the participants' business ecosystems. The SBA has revised its data collection instruments and future Emerging Leaders and T.H.R.I.V.E. *Emerging Leaders Reimagined* evaluations will measure these topics.

Participant Quotes
"I still use what I learned in the program. It gave me a good set of tools, especially navigating the challenges that COVID presented. It would be good to maintain a network with the program. This has been missing and really only happens if I seek it out, but I've lost touch with many of the participants." "It would be great to have a yearly reunion with our instructor and classmates at a round table were we can openly discuss pros & cons of our local economy and strategic planning for the following year."

The proportion of survey respondents who reported using various SBA business resources to achieve business goals significantly increased from the baseline to the first-year follow-up survey for all types of resources (see **Table 13**). The changes were a one-time change with no increases over time.

Table 13: Proportion of Program Participants Using Ecosystem Resources to Achieve Business Goals and Needs (2010-2021)

Resources to achieve business goals and needs	Baseline (Percentage)	1st year follow-up (Percentage)	2nd year follow-up (Percentage)	3rd year follow-up (Percentage)	Any follow-up (Percentage)
SBA and SBA Resource Partners					
SBA website ***	20.7	36.4	35.9	35.0	47.8
SBA District Office ***	19.5	37.2	33.1	30.6	45.0
SBA Small Business Development Center ***	17.7	30.8	27.5	23.8	36.2
SCORE ***	11.8	18.0	15.0	12.6	21.2
SBA Women's Business Center ***	5.3	9.4	8.7	8.4	11.9
Federal Assistance Resource Partners					
Procurement Technical Assistance Center ***	12.7	19.4	17.7	15.0	23.1
Veterans Business Outreach Center	1.7	2.7	2.2	1.7	3.3
U.S. Export Assistance Center	0.9	2.0	1.3	1.2	2.6
Local Assistance Resource Partners					
Friends and colleagues ***	58.0	64.5	63.3	60.7	73.4
Business or industry association	31.3	30.1	29.7	30.6	39.3
Other resources	25.6	19.4	18.8	21.9	27.2
Chamber of Commerce	21.8	24.6	26.2	25.9	31.1

Resources to achieve business goals and needs	Baseline (Percentage)	1st year follow-up (Percentage)	2nd year follow-up (Percentage)	3rd year follow-up (Percentage)	Any follow-up (Percentage)
Lender services ***	12.3	16.0	16.8	16.5	24.1
State and local government economic development offices **	11.1	14.1	14.6	14.7	20.6
Number of respondents	2,886	1,945	1,395	958	2,316

Note 1: Based on cases with available data (beginning in 2016 cohort) until September 2022.
Note 2: Results do not include data on T.H.R.I.V.E. participants.
Note 3: **p<.01; ***p<.001 statistical comparison from the baseline to the follow-up surveys, follow-up years were not significantly different from each other.

The evaluation explored the participants' relationship with, and use of the program business networks, resources, and opportunities after graduation. Over 50% of participants reported being in touch one year after graduation with fellow participants, instructors, and the SBA contact (see **Table 14**).

Table 14: Proportion of Participants Being in Touch and Doing Business With the Program's Network Connections after Graduation (2010-2021)

	1st year follow-up (Percentage)	2nd year follow-up (Percentage)	3rd year follow-up (Percentage)	Any follow-up (Percentage)
Was in touch with:				
Fellow participants	75.0***	72.2	64.3***	81.7
Instructor	58.6***	50.4***	45.0***	62.2
SBA contact	56.3**	51.0	48.9**	62.2
Guest experts	39.9**	31.6**	26.0**	44.3
Number of respondents	2,421	1,838	1,379	3,154
Did business with:				
Fellow participants	30.5	29.9	29.0	37.9
Instructor	5.0	5.9	5.7	8.1
SBA contact	6.1	7.0	6.5	10.1
Guest experts	11.5	11.0	9.4	15.4
Number of respondents	2,421	1,838	1,379	3,154

Note 1: Based on cases with available data until September 2022.
Note 2: Results do not include data on T.H.R.I.V.E. participants.
Note 3: **p<.01; ***p<.001 statistical comparison for the follow-up years.

These business relationships became less prevalent as reported during the second- and third-year follow-up surveys. A third of the graduates were in business with other program participants. Other connections from the program were not used extensively to develop businesses.

A qualitative inquiry is needed to explore the reasons for the decreased engagement in the program networks over time. The above results might suggest the need for facilitating participants' engagement following graduation.

Research Question 6: What is the pattern of participants' investment in the local community after graduation?

Figure 10: Research Question 6 Highlights

The evaluation revealed that:

- Participants reported hiring employees from the local community every year since the baseline measurement.
- There was no change in the proportion of participants who reported donating time or money to local organizations.
- By the third year, 81.3% of businesses had donated time or money to local organizations.
- 86.5% of businesses had also hired full-time employees living in the same area as the business by the third year.
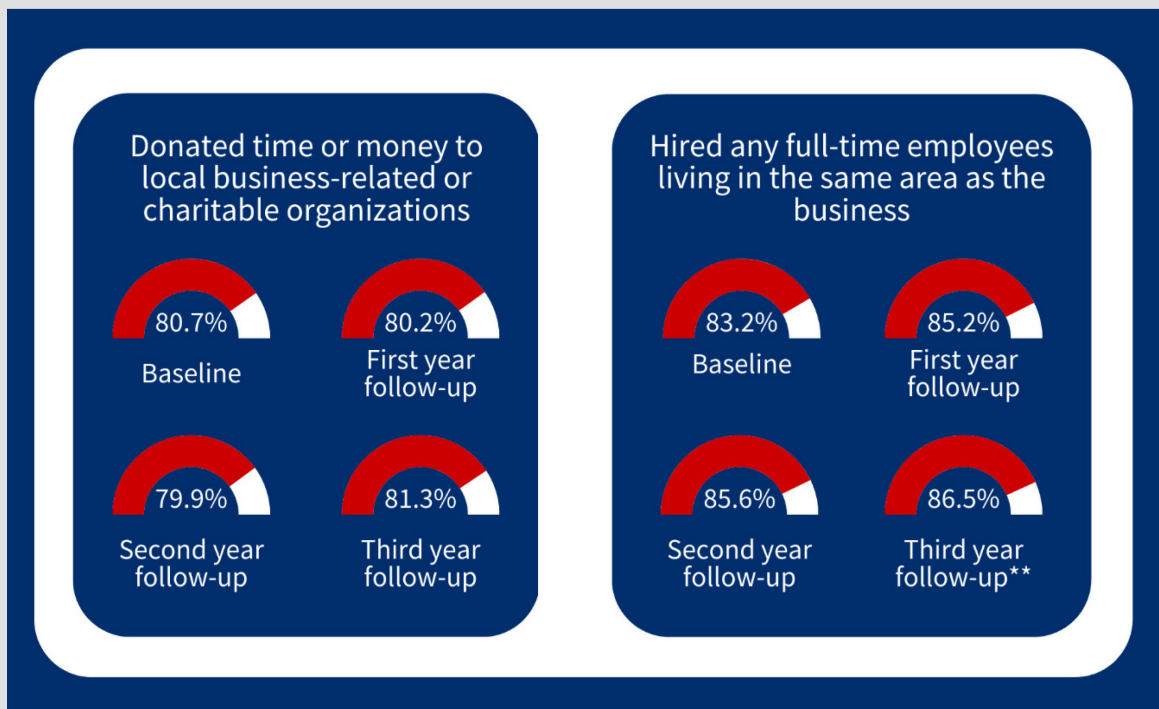
Note. **p<.01; ***p<.001 comparing the baseline to follow-up periods.

There are two indicators of the contribution of the program graduates to the local community. This investment should contribute to the economic well-being of the participants' communities. The first indicator measures the graduates' investments in local charitable and business organizations, and the second indicator reports whether participants are hiring employees from the community.

A large proportion of the participants (about 80%) reported donating to local businesses or charitable organizations prior to program participation. There was no change regarding the contribution to the community across all survey follow-ups (see **Table 15**). The proportion of participants' businesses hiring any local employees increased from the baseline to the third-year follow-up. However, the (average) percentage of employers who hired local employees did not change.

Table 15: Proportion of Participants Investing in the Local Community (2010-2021)

	Baseline	1st year follow-up	2nd year follow-up	3rd year follow-up	Any follow-up
Donated time or money to local business-related or charitable organizations (Percentage)	80.7	80.2	79.9	81.3	86.1
Number of respondents	5,747	3,421	2,484	1,786	4,053
Hired any full-time employees living in the same area as the business (Percentage)	83.2	85.2	85.6	86.5**	90.9
Percentage of hired full-time employees living in the same area as the business					
Mean	58.8	59.7	58.2	58.7	59.9
Median	66.7	68.7	66.0	66. 7	65.7
Number of respondents	3,532	2,734	1,988	1,447	3,264

Note 1: Based on cases with available data (local employment available from 2015 cohort) until September 2022.

Note 2: Results do not include data on T.H.R.I.V.E. participants.

Note 3: **p<.01; ***p<.001 comparing the intake to follow-up periods.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The evaluation results showed that participants reported program increases in the use of business management practices, access to federal government contracts, engagement in business networks, perceptions of the business ecosystem growth, contributions to the local community, and business revenue, profits, and number of employees. However, there was no change in access to business financing sources or other sources of contracts. It is important to note that in instances when there was a gain in outcomes, these gains leveled off or decreased during the second- or third-year follow-up surveys. Without a comparison group, the changes cannot be attributed to the program, and without a qualitative inquiry the reasons for the decrease in the outcomes cannot be determined.

The SBA should interpret the above results with caution due to methodological limitations, including 1) the lack of the program performance benchmarks and the comparison groups that prevent establishing a causal link between program participation and business growth; 2) low response rates to follow-up surveys that limit the power of the analyses; and 3) self-reported data that reduces reliability and validity of the business growth results. Considering the results of the evaluation and the methodological limitations, Optimal offers the following suggestions for improving program implementation, a potential increase in outcome changes, and estimating the impact of the program.

Facilitate continued engagement of graduates.
Create an interactive online community of practice that provides mentors, trainers, participants, and alumni with links to business resources and networks, and offers greater opportunities for virtual interactions. Engaging graduates is also likely to improve response rates to follow-up surveys, and outcome measurement.

Increase the focus of training and technical assistance on obtaining financing.
The use of the ecosystem approach could be further promoted to encourage community engagement and partnerships of these businesses with local lenders and investors to create new opportunities for increasing participants' financial capital.

Develop quasi-experimental research designs to establish program effectiveness.
Work on a research design including new data collection materials to determine if the change in outcomes is attributable to the program.

Expand efforts for data collection and analyses.
This expansion would further explore and contextualize the changes or the leveling-off effects of the program. For instance, qualitative data could determine the reasons for decreased engagement in EL and SBA networks and resources.
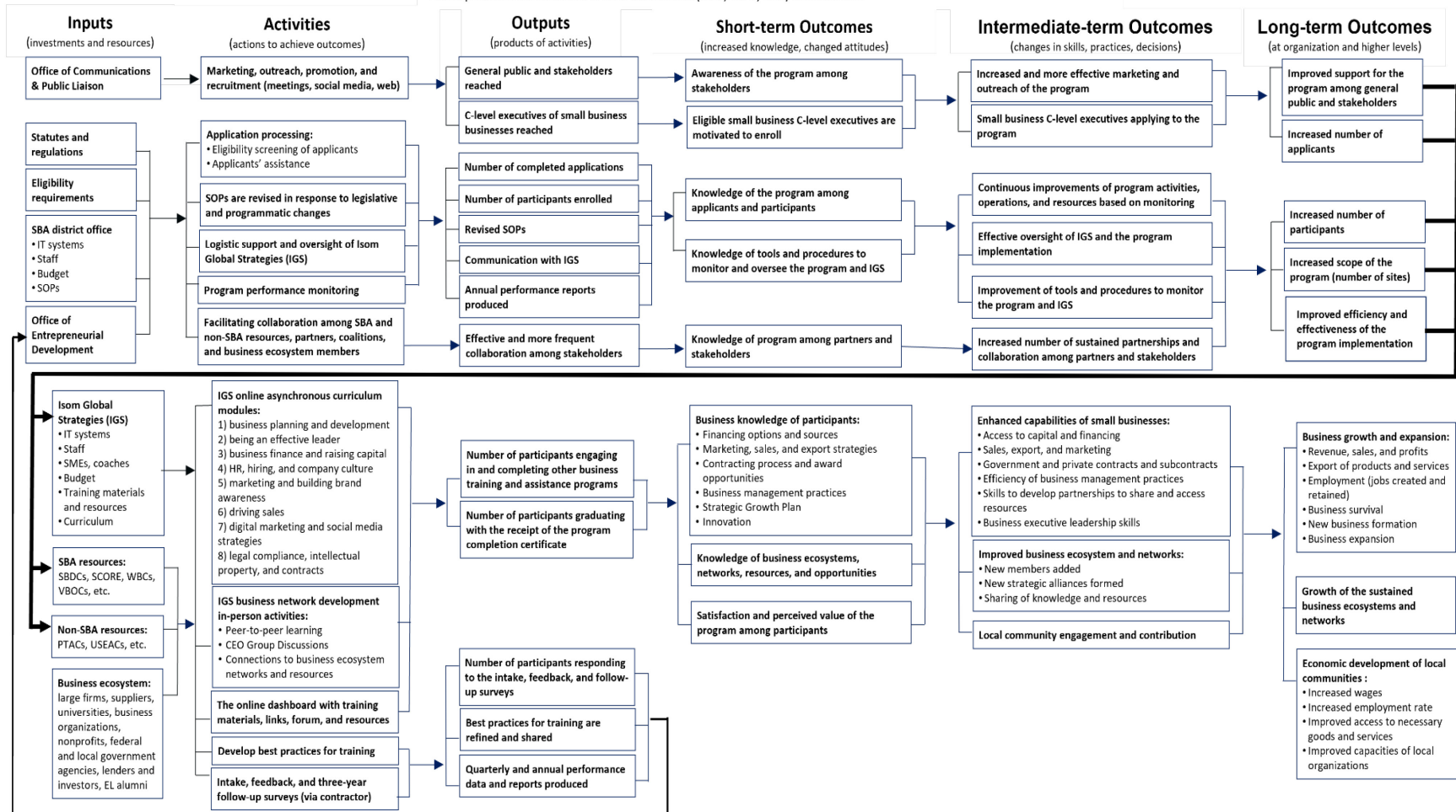
T.H.R.I.V.E. *Emerging Leaders Reimagined* Logic Model

Mission: accelerate the growth of high-potential small businesses across the United States.
Participants: small business C-level executives (CEO, COO, etc.) and leaders.

Inputs (investments and resources)	Activities (actions to achieve outcomes)	Outputs (products of activities)	Short-term Outcomes (increased knowledge, changed attitudes)	Intermediate-term Outcomes (changes in skills, practices, decisions)	Long-term Outcomes (at organization and higher levels)
Office of Communications & Public Liaison	Marketing, outreach, promotion, and recruitment (meetings, social media, web)	General public and stakeholders reached; C-level executives of small business businesses reached	Awareness of the program among stakeholders; Eligible small business C-level executives are motivated to enroll	Increased and more effective marketing and outreach of the program; Small business C-level executives applying to the program	Improved support for the program among general public and stakeholders; Increased number of applicants
Statutes and regulations; Eligibility requirements; SBA district office • IT systems • Staff • Budget • SOPs; Office of Entrepreneurial Development	Application processing: • Eligibility screening of applicants • Applicants' assistance; SOPs are revised in response to legislative and programmatic changes; Logistic support and oversight of Isom Global Strategies (IGS); Program performance monitoring; Facilitating collaboration among SBA and non-SBA resources, partners, coalitions, and business ecosystem members	Number of completed applications; Number of participants enrolled; Revised SOPs; Communication with IGS; Annual performance reports produced; Effective and more frequent collaboration among stakeholders	Knowledge of the program among applicants and participants; Knowledge of tools and procedures to monitor and oversee the program and IGS; Knowledge of program among partners and stakeholders	Continuous improvements of program activities, operations, and resources based on monitoring; Effective oversight of IGS and the program implementation; Improvement of tools and procedures to monitor the program and IGS; Increased number of sustained partnerships and collaboration among partners and stakeholders	Increased number of participants; Increased scope of the program (number of sites); Improved efficiency and effectiveness of the program implementation
Isom Global Strategies (IGS) • IT systems • Staff • SMEs, coaches • Budget • Training materials and resources • Curriculum; SBA resources: SBDCs, SCORE, WBCs, VBOCs, etc.; Non-SBA resources: PTACs, USEACs, etc.; Business ecosystem: large firms, suppliers, universities, business organizations, nonprofits, federal and local government agencies, lenders and investors, EL alumni	IGS online asynchronous curriculum modules: 1) business planning and development 2) being an effective leader 3) business finance and raising capital 4) HR, hiring, and company culture 5) marketing and building brand awareness 6) driving sales 7) digital marketing and social media strategies 8) legal compliance, intellectual property, and contracts; IGS business network development in-person activities: • Peer-to-peer learning • CEO Group Discussions • Connections to business ecosystem networks and resources; The online dashboard with training materials, links, forum, and resources; Develop best practices for training; Intake, feedback, and three-year follow-up surveys (via contractor)	Number of participants engaging in and completing other business training and assistance programs; Number of participants graduating with the receipt of the program completion certificate; Number of participants responding to the intake, feedback, and follow-up surveys; Best practices for training are refined and shared; Quarterly and annual performance data and reports produced	Business knowledge of participants: • Financing options and sources • Marketing, sales, and export strategies • Contracting process and award opportunities • Business management practices • Strategic Growth Plan • Innovation; Knowledge of business ecosystems, networks, resources, and opportunities; Satisfaction and perceived value of the program among participants	Enhanced capabilities of small businesses: • Access to capital and financing • Sales, export, and marketing • Government and private contracts and subcontracts • Efficiency of business management practices • Skills to develop partnerships to share and access resources • Business executive leadership skills; Improved business ecosystem and networks: • New members added • New strategic alliances formed • Sharing of knowledge and resources; Local community engagement and contribution	Business growth and expansion: • Revenue, sales, and profits • Export of products and services • Employment (jobs created and retained) • Business survival • New business formation • Business expansion; Growth of the sustained business ecosystems and networks; Economic development of local communities: • Increased wages • Increased employment rate • Improved access to necessary goods and services • Improved capacities of local organizations

ABBREVIATIONS: U.S. Export Assistance Centers (USEACs); Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs); Women's Business Centers (WBCs); Procurement Technical Assistance Centers (PTACs); Veterans Business Outreach Centers (VBOCs); Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

Appendix B: Additional Results Tables

Table B-1: Participant Job Titles and Business Ownership (2010-2022)

Participation Requirement	Emerging Leaders (2010-2021) (Percentage)	T.H.R.I.V.E. Reimagined (2022) (Percentage)	All Participants (2010-2022) (Percentage)
Job title:			
Owner ***	55.7	75.5	58.3
President ***	49.9	26.8	46.9
CEO **	31.2	26.3	30.6
CFO	5.1	5.5	5.2
COO	6.5	6.5	6.5
Vice President	6.0	5.3	6.0
Other (director, founder, manager) ***	10.8	34.2	13.9
Number of respondents	5,229	787	6,016
Currently own all or part of the business	91.2	89.3	90.8

Table B-2: Business Characteristics at Intake by Program (2010-2022)

Participation Requirement	Emerging Leaders (2010-2021)	T.H.R.I.V.E. Reimagined (2022)	All Participants (2010-2022)
Business age			
Mean	13.8	13.0	13.7
Standard Deviation	14.1	12.1	13.9
25th percentile	5.0	5.5	5.0
Median	10.0	8.7	9.2
75th percentile	17.0	16.0	17.0
Number of respondents	6,954	786	7,740
Years participant has been the owner			
Mean	9.2	9.2	9.2
Standard Deviation	6.9	7.0	6.9
25th percentile	4.0	4.6	4.0
Median	7.0	7.0	7.0
75th percentile	13.0	12.6	12.7
Number of respondents	6,432	699	7,131

Note 1: Based on cases with available data.
Note 2: **p<.01; ***p<.001 comparing programs.

Table B-3: Business Location at Intake by Program (2010-2022)

Participation Requirement	Emerging Leaders (2010-2021) (Percentage)	T.H.R.I.V.E. Reimagined (2022) (Percentage)	All Participants (2010-222) (Percentage)
Metro areas of 1 million population or more **	62.8	53.8	61.8
Metro areas of 250,000 to 1 million population	24.4	28.5	24.9
Metro areas of fewer than 250,000 population	6.0	7.6	6.2
Non-metro areas of 20,000 population or more	3.1	5.4	3.4
Non-metro areas of 2,500 to 19,999 population	2.9	4.2	3.0
Completely rural or less than 2,500 population	0.7	0.5	0.7
Number of respondents	6,033	785	6,818

Table B-4: Educational resources rated as the most helpful to achieve business success after graduation (2010-2021)

	1st year follow-up (percentage)	2nd year follow-up (percentage)	3rd year follow-up (percentage)	Any follow-up (percentage)
Guidelines to continue CEO mentoring meetings	33.6	33.5	31.9	44.5
Live webinars on relevant growth plan topics	16.6	16.5	15.4	24.7
Library of recorded webinars	14.3	13.2	14.6	20.8
Library of additional resources	9.9	7.8	8.9	14.7
Access to an online learning platform	17.2	16.2	15.4	25.0
Research on a small business's role in economic development	14.8	13.5	15.7	22.8
Number of respondents	2,175	1,685	1,361	2,969

Note 1: Based on cases with available data.
Note 2: The rating of 1 on the 7-point scale.

Table B-5: Change in the Participant Use of Human Resources business management procedures (2010-2021)

	Baseline	1st year follow-up	2nd year follow-up	3rd year follow-up	Total follow-ups
Offered health insurance to employees ***	51.9	56.0	60.0	63.0	61.1
Number of respondents	4,155	3,399	2,449	1,739	4,011
Offered benefits to employees (pension, vacation, sick leave, holidays) **	74.7	76.9	81.6	86.5	81.0
Number of respondents	4,050	3,276	2,366	1,655	3,969
Provided formal professional development programs to employees (excludes on-the-job orientation for new employees) ***	34.7	48.2	50.6	51.7	58.6
Number of respondents	3,798	2,011	1,702	1,364	2,825

Note 1: Based on cases with available data.
Note 2: **p<.01; ***p<.001 comparing the intake to follow-up periods.

Table B-6: Change in the frequency and value of new nongovernment contracts received (Cohorts 2010-2021)

	Baseline	1st year follow-up	2nd year follow-up	3rd year follow-up
Received nongovernment contracts ***	26.0	21.1	18.4	19.0
Mean ***	$765,107	$672,403	$888,637	$1,328,425
Standard Deviation	$1,723,554	$1,311,435	$1,931,546	$4,047,272
Median	$282,993	$207,981	$238,479	$275,170
Number of respondents	948	538	370	256

Note 1: Based on cases with available data (nongovernment contracts available beginning in cohort 2013).
Note 2: *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001 comparing the intake to follow-up periods.
Note 3: Dollar values were adjusted for inflation using Price Deflators for Gross Domestic Product (in 2021 dollars).

Table B-7: Profit Growth by Time Period, Panel Analyses (Cohorts 2010-2019)

	Baseline	1 Year follow-up	2 Year follow-up	3 Year follow-up
Percentage reporting net profitability	76.0	78.8	78.7	77.9
Number of respondents	920	920	920	920
Profit value (those with profits) **				
Mean	$172,696	$223,518	$304,310	$359,899
Median	$84,280	$106,503	$142,305	$143,533
Number of respondents	398	398	398	398

Note 1: Based on cases with available data for baseline and three-year follow-ups periods until September 2022.
Note 2: Revenues and profit values were adjusted for inflation using Price Deflators for Gross Domestic Product (in 2021 dollars).
Note 3: **p<.01; ***p<.001 comparing each time period to the previous period.

Table B-8: Change in the Rating of the Business Ecosystem (Cohorts 2010-2021)

	Baseline	1st year follow-up	2nd year follow-up	3rd year follow-up	Any follow-ups
My region is home to a well-developed business ecosystem ***	55.3	69.9	68.2	65.8	74.9
Number of respondents	2,896	1,529	1,054	981	2,153

Note 1: Based on cases with available data (beginning in 2016 cohort).
Note 2: **p<.01; ***p<.001 comparing the intake to follow-up periods.
Note 3: Follow-up periods were not significantly different from each other.

Appendix C: T.H.R.I.V.E. Feedback Survey

High Level Points

- Of the 416 feedback survey respondents, 88% were T.H.R.I.V.E. Graduates.
- About 42% of the respondents had either done business or worked with any connections made from participation in the program (primarily with fellow participants).
- About 75% of respondents stated that they perceived as valuable or very valuable various network-related resources to help achieve success, except for "National alumni meetings with training opportunities" (62%).
- About 75% of respondents perceived various educational resources to help achieve success as valuable or very valuable.
- Some of the overarching open-ended responses to the feedback questions were time commitment, unskilled SME/Coach, and a preference for in-person events.

Table C-1. Program perception and feedback

	Count	Percent
Overall, how virtual activities compared with in-person activities		
Virtual activities were:		
Much less effective than in-person	103	26.1
Less effective than in-person	140	35.5
About as effective as in-person	95	24.1
More effective than in-person	30	7.6
Much more effective than in-person	26	6.6
Number of respondents	394	100.0
Satisfaction with the overall program experience		
Very dissatisfied	21	5.2
Dissatisfied	30	7.5
Neither dissatisfied nor satisfied	25	6.2
Satisfied	150	37.3
Very satisfied	176	43.8
Number of respondents	402	100.0
How likely to recommend the program to a fellow business executive		
Very unlikely	21	5.2
Somewhat unlikely	23	5.7
Neither unlikely nor likely	33	8.2
Likely	101	25.0
Very likely	226	55.9
Number of respondents	404	100.0

Note: Based on cases with available data.

Table C-2. The perceived value of program components

	Count	Percent
The SBA Program Manager in supporting and/or connecting with additional resources		
Not valuable	22	5.4
Slightly valuable	28	6.9
Moderately valuable	41	10.1
Valuable	99	24.3
Very valuable	218	53.4
Number of respondents	408	100.0
CEO Group Discussions		
Not valuable	11	2.8
Slightly valuable	24	6.0
Moderately valuable	31	7.8
Valuable	90	22.5
Very valuable	244	61.0
Number of respondents	400	100.0
Connecting with fellow business executives during the class		
Not valuable	11	2.7
Slightly valuable	13	3.2
Moderately valuable	28	6.9
Valuable	89	22.0
Very valuable	263	65.1
Number of respondents	404	100.0
Assignments and Homework		
Not valuable	32	8.1
Slightly valuable	40	10.1
Moderately valuable	92	23.2
Valuable	119	30.1
Very valuable	113	28.5
Number of respondents	396	100.0
Feedback on assignments and homework from the instructor		
Not valuable	39	12.2
Slightly valuable	36	11.2
Moderately valuable	56	17.5
Valuable	94	29.3
Very valuable	96	29.9
Number of respondents	321	100.0
Strategic Growth Action Plan – creating, advising, and presenting		
Not valuable	19	4.7
Slightly valuable	23	5.7
Moderately valuable	61	15.2
Valuable	125	31.1
Very valuable	174	43.3
Number of respondents	402	100.0

Note: Based on cases with available data.

Table C-3. Reasons for not graduating from the T.H.R.I.V.E. program.

	Count	Percent
Participated in any training provided by the T.H.R.I.V.E. program	414	99.5
Completed and graduated from the T.H.R.I.V.E. program		
No	39	9.4

	Count	Percent
Yes	366	88.0
Don't know	11	2.6
Number of respondents	416	100.0
Reasons for not completing or graduating		
Became too busy with new business	14	35.9
Had to travel too much for business	7	18.0
Had a business crisis	11	28.2
Had a personal or family emergency	9	23.1
Closed or sold the business	1	2.6
Did not find value in the program	8	20.5
Did not find the program was a good match	5	12.8
Did not like virtual activities conducted by the program	8	20.5
Other (travel distance, basic content, too much time commitment required)	12	30.8
Number of respondents	39	100.0

Comments on course content changes are summarized below by theme.

Business Planning (65 comments): Comments indicated that there was no information regarding operations management, different business sizes impact business planning and development, and there are other types of industries that need to be taken into consideration.

Being an Effective Leader (44 comments): Comments included suggestions for adding different leadership styles, more content on stages of team development and project management, and use of actual case studies of effective leaders. Several comments indicated that suggestions of resources, books, or business coaches would be helpful for those who would like to learn more.

Business Finance and Raising Capital (69 comments): Comments asked for more small business real-world scenarios, practical examples, resources and assistance to apply for funding, and activities to gauge knowledge and get assistance with finances.

HR, Hiring, and Company Culture (55 comments): Comments indicated that more emphasis needed to be placed on documentation, applying HR best practices, examples of employee/workforce scenarios to troubleshoot, and making the content more applicable to businesses with less than 25 employees.

Marketing and Building Brand Awareness (62 comments): Comments focused on consolidating the content into one module (not having social media on its own) or that "the three marketing modules need to be thought of as a critical developmental process. I found them to be disjointed from one another and without flow that could have been more effective." Comments also suggested using hands-on activities, additional ideas for brand awareness, having the Strategic Growth Plan available at the beginning of the module, and discussing traditional marketing strategies.

Driving Sales (60 comments): Comments suggested adding resources on how to find leads, providing realistic examples, action items on the individual steps to building sales, and examples of how businesses handled their sales strategies and growth.

Digital Marketing and Social Media Strategies (77 comments): Comments involved participant dissatisfaction with the focus only on Facebook and Instagram as these cannot be used by all businesses and leave out other opportunities.

Legal Compliance, Intellectual Property, and Contracts (59 comments): Comments were that the information was too basic and repetitive. Suggested content additions included using case studies to demonstrate the value of using a lawyer for your *business*.

Comments on how the curriculum or experience could be improved for business executives are summarized below by theme.

Module Structure (125): Comments were largely related to the inability to move through the modules at their own pace or skip through content that was not applicable or not relevant to their business, the ability to go back to previous sections within a module without having to start over, and having the reflection questions available at the beginning of the module to be able to reflect accordingly to the content and their businesses.

Content (82): These comments included adding a workbook or handout, needing business size differentiation, and needing differentiation between product companies and service companies.

Time (53): Comments included the time commitment being more than what was expected, scheduling meetings at the last minute or during business hours, travel issues to attend the in-person meetings, and comments regarding how time, scheduling, and traveling impacted program retention rates.

Communication (24): Comments on communication involved the overabundance of emails, lack of a clear schedule or roadmap for the program (which led to communication issues), and the need for more clear communication.

SME/Coach (23): Comments were often regarding their lack of knowledge regarding other industries, only discussing their own business, not being able to talk generally about business, or a lack of availability for assistance.