

November 2026

THE COALITION

A City of YES

Recommendations for Small Business, Workforce Development, and Affordable Housing in Washington, DC

PROPOSAL TO:

THE MAYORAL ADMINISTRATION OF
JANEESE LEWIS GEORGE

PREPARED BY:

THE COALITION

Acknowledgements

A City of Yes reflects the insight, experience, and expertise of the many people who contributed to The Coalition's work throughout 2026. We are grateful to the Coalition members, community partners, practitioners, business owners, public-sector leaders, and other stakeholders who shared their perspectives through our working groups, programs, ongoing engagement, and Community Development Week policy summits.

The Coalition also recognizes the leadership of our Board of Directors and the staff who helped convene these conversations, interpret what we heard, conduct research and analysis, and translate that work into the recommendations presented in A City of Yes.

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A City of Yes

Washington, DC is entering a consequential moment.

New leadership will inherit a city with tremendous assets and real constraints: a changing economy, significant fiscal pressure, and public systems that too often require residents, businesses, service providers, and community partners to navigate complexity on their own. The Coalition believes this moment calls for a City of Yes.

A City of Yes is not a city without rules, standards, or accountability. It is a city where the path forward is clear. Agencies work together. Timelines matter. People know where to go when something gets stuck. Public investments are measured by whether they produce meaningful outcomes. And problems are addressed early, before they become more difficult and expensive to solve.

Over the course of 2026, The Coalition brought together practitioners, businesses, employers, housing leaders, service providers, lenders, public agencies, advocates, and other stakeholders to examine three systems that are essential to the District's economic future: small business, workforce development, and affordable housing.

The recommendations in this report grew from that work. They reflect ongoing engagement through The Coalition's working groups and committees, data and policy analysis, three Community Development Week policy summits, and a final review process in which The Coalition's Board pressure-tested, sharpened, and reached consensus on the recommendations presented here.

These are The Coalition's leading recommendations for a Lewis George administration at this time. They are not intended to represent the full breadth of The Coalition's policy agenda. Additional priorities and recommendations will continue to be developed through The Coalition's members, working groups, committees, research, and community engagement.
Several of the recommendations build on priorities already articulated for a Lewis George administration. Where that is the case, The Coalition's contribution is focused on a critical next question:

How can these ideas work in practice?
That means identifying where authority should sit, how agencies should work together, what outcomes should be measured, where existing systems can be improved rather than replaced, and how practitioners can help turn broad goals into workable solutions.

Built for the Fiscal Reality Ahead

The District will also be making these decisions in an unusually constrained fiscal environment, but that reality should not lower expectations for how government works. It makes better execution more important.

These recommendations do not assume that every problem requires a new program, new technology platform, or new layer of government. Across all three areas, there are opportunities to improve coordination, reduce duplication and delay, intervene earlier, protect existing investments, and make better use of the resources already in the system.

In today's constrained fiscal environment, our recommendations focus as much on how well the District's systems work together as on how much the District spends.

Recommendations at a Glance

1 Small Business

Demonstrate administrative leadership by removing barriers that make it harder for businesses to start, open, and grow by creating a more coordinated, predictable, and accessible business environment.

2 Workforce Development

Strengthen and empower the Workforce Investment Council (WIC) to serve as the District's accountable workforce coordinating body, with the autonomy and authority needed to lead across agencies and implement the state plan.

3 Affordable Housing

Maximize the impact of the affordable housing production and stabilization system by publishing goals and milestones, with a near-term focus on failing properties and at-risk households and a long-term focus on accountability and sustainability across the housing ecosystem.



About The Coalition

The Coalition advances community economic development solutions that address the inequity of under-resourced communities in the District of Columbia.

Since 2000, The Coalition has grown into a cross-sector network of nearly 180 organizations working across affordable housing, small business, workforce development, finance, human services, community development, and related fields.

The strength of The Coalition is in the collective expertise of that network.

2000
Founded

180
Members



12
Employees

$1.5B+
Anchor Purchasing Locally

The Coalition brings together practitioners, residents, policymakers, businesses, funders, and other stakeholders to understand the challenges facing DC communities, identify practical solutions, and move those solutions forward through public policy, research, community engagement, capacity building, and high-impact initiatives.

The Coalition's work is rooted in a simple approach:

We Listen.

We bring together people closest to the work to understand what is happening, what is working, and where systems are falling short.

We Interpret.

We connect those experiences with data, research, policy, and the perspectives of stakeholders across sectors to understand the larger systems at work.

We Innovate.

We turn what we learn into practical strategies, policy recommendations, partnerships, and programs designed to make systems work better for DC residents and communities.



How These Recommendations Were Developed

The recommendations in A City of Yes reflect ongoing engagement across The Coalition's membership and partner network, informed by practitioner experience, data, policy research, working groups, and cross-sector convenings.

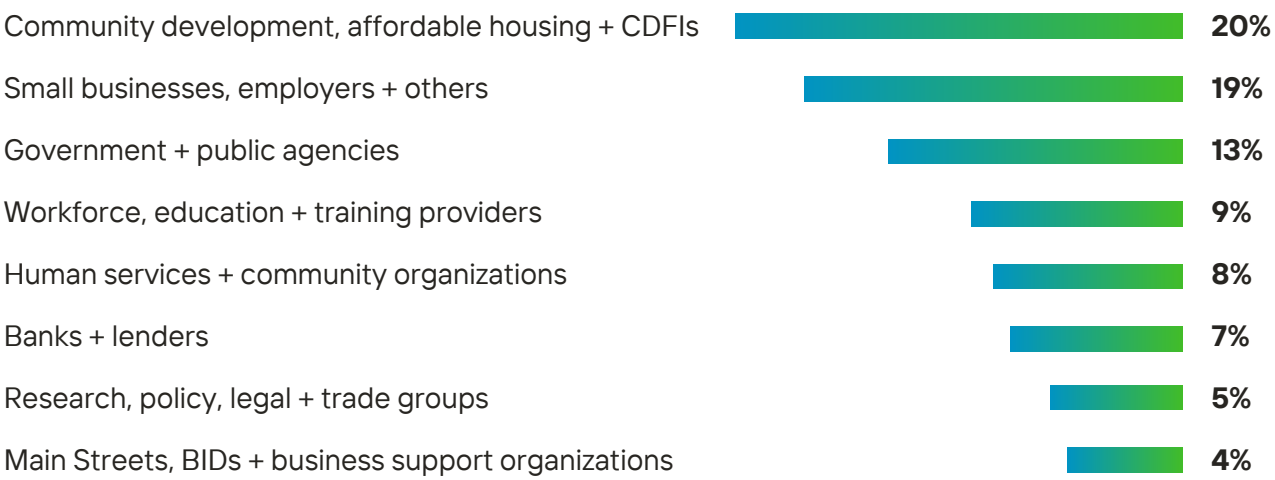
We Listened.

In 2026, The Coalition gathered input through ongoing member engagement, working groups, programs, and three policy summits focused on small business, workforce development, and affordable housing.

Those conversations brought together 251 individuals representing approximately 160 organizations and businesses across community development, affordable housing, small business, workforce development, finance, government, human services, research, philanthropy, and related sectors.

The mix of participants broadly reflects the range of organizations and institutions represented across The Coalition's membership and partner network.

Who Shaped the Conversation



Other sectors represented included anchor institutions, utilities, developers, real estate, and philanthropy. 10% of participants did not idenitfy or were self-employed.

We Interpreted.

Coalition staff connected what we heard from practitioners with available data, research, existing District programs, and policy analysis to identify recurring challenges, areas of agreement, and opportunities for systemic improvement.

Across all three policy areas, several themes emerged repeatedly: unclear accountability, fragmented systems, inconsistent measures of success, unnecessary delays, and intervention that often comes too late.

We Innovated.

The Coalition translated those findings into a focused set of recommendations designed to improve how existing systems work.

The Coalition's Board then reviewed and refined the recommendations, testing them for clarity, practicality, alignment with The Coalition's role, and their potential to strengthen coordination, accountability, and the effective use of public resources.

The recommendations that follow reflect the consensus reached through that process.



Recommendation One

SMALL BUSINESS

Demonstrate administrative leadership by removing barriers that make it harder for businesses to start, open, and grow by creating a more coordinated, predictable, and accessible business environment.



Why it Matters

The District has no shortage of programs, agencies, and resources intended to support small businesses. The challenge is often navigating them.

Business owners described a system in which launching and opening a business can require moving through multiple agencies, sequential approvals, inconsistent guidance, and long periods of waiting. For businesses already paying rent, financing buildout, or carrying other startup costs, every additional delay has a financial consequence. Once businesses are operating, another set of barriers can limit growth. Public procurement opportunities may arrive too late, be packaged at a scale smaller firms cannot realistically deliver, or leave businesses waiting too long for payment.

The Coalition is advocating for a business environment that ***works as a system***.



Recommendation One

Key Components

1A | Create one coordinated path from launch to open.

Create a coordinated launch-to-open system with a clearly identified point of accountability.

Fiscal + Implementation Lens | Streamlining

A coordinated system can reduce duplicative handoffs, improve visibility across agencies, and make it easier to identify and resolve bottlenecks.

1B | Give businesses a navigator through the process.

Extend BOSS, the Business One Stop Solution, to include Department of Buildings and Department of Health intake, with an assigned navigator for each business. Begin with restaurants and engage businesses before they sign a lease.

Fiscal + Implementation Lens | Streamlining + Potential Implementation Savings

Before creating a separate new system, determine whether existing BOSS infrastructure can be expanded to provide the needed functionality. Building on an existing platform could reduce duplicative technology and implementation costs. An assigned navigator would require sufficient staffing capacity and should primarily be viewed as an accountability and service improvement.





1C | Move approvals in parallel.

Pilot parallel approvals, including a "virtual Certificate of Occupancy," using risk-based reinspection while maintaining required safety inspections before opening.

Fiscal + Implementation Lens | Reduced Business Costs
Moving appropriate approvals simultaneously rather than sequentially can shorten the time businesses spend waiting to open and reduce rent, financing, and other carrying costs.

1D | Make public contracting a viable path to growth.

Create contracting opportunities that small businesses can realistically win and successfully deliver. Provide earlier notice of upcoming procurements, break appropriate large contracts into smaller scopes, and hold agencies accountable for timely payment.

Fiscal + Implementation Lens | Economic Impact
This recommendation is primarily about access, competition, timely payment, and creating opportunities for local businesses to grow. Any direct fiscal impact from procurement changes would require additional analysis.

Implementation

How The Coalition and its members can help move this forward.



The Coalition and its members can help translate the recommendation into a workable model.

01 **Map the launch-to-open journey**
Document how representative businesses move through relevant District agencies from pre-lease through opening, identifying required steps, handoffs, dependencies, typical delays, and opportunities for parallel processing.

02 **Bring businesses and agencies together to design the solution**
Convene small business owners, business-support organizations, and relevant agencies to validate the process and help define what a coordinated system, navigator function, and clear point of accountability should look like in practice.

03 **Identify opportunities to test the approach**

Help identify business types or cohorts, beginning with restaurants where appropriate, that could serve as a practical starting point for testing improved intake, navigation, and parallel approvals.

04 **Bring real-world evidence to** procurement reform

Gather member experiences with procurement timelines, contract sizing, payment delays, and other barriers to help identify concrete opportunities to make public contracting more accessible to small businesses.



Recommendation Two

WORKFORCE

Strengthen and empower the Workforce Investment Council to serve as the District's accountable workforce coordinating body, with the autonomy and authority needed to lead across agencies and implement the state plan.



Why it Matters

The District invests substantial resources in workforce development, but those resources do not always operate as one system.

Members described providers measuring different outcomes, platforms that do not connect well, employers entering the process too late, and participants navigating multiple programs while also managing barriers such as childcare, transportation, and access to benefits. The result is a workforce ecosystem that can be resource-rich but fragmented.

The District does not need another layer of coordination without authority. It needs a clearly empowered body that can set direction across the system, establish shared measures of success, improve existing infrastructure, connect training to actual employer demand, and ensure participants have the support they need to complete training and remain employed.



Recommendation Two

Key Components

2A | Give the WIC the authority to lead.

Empower the Workforce Investment Council with the authority and autonomy to effectively direct the District's workforce system.

Fiscal + Implementation Lens | Streamlining

Clear system-level authority can reduce fragmented decision-making and duplicative efforts across agencies and programs. Direct savings would depend on how responsibilities, staffing, and resources are ultimately organized.

2B | Measure outcomes consistently.

Refine citywide workforce goals around placing and retaining people in living-wage jobs. Establish standardized definitions of "job ready," "retention," and "wage progression" across District-funded programs. Structure grant terms to reward retention and collaboration, not simply enrollment.

Fiscal + Implementation Lens | Better Use of Existing Dollars

Common goals and measures can help the District understand which publicly funded programs are producing meaningful employment and retention outcomes and make more informed decisions about where resources should be directed.



2C | Fix and connect existing workforce systems.

Conduct a practitioner-led audit to assess opportunities to consolidate DC Networks and Talent Capital while ensuring that all workforce providers can access the system.

Fiscal + Implementation Lens | Potential Administrative + Technology Savings
Audit existing platforms before making additional technology investments. If the review identifies overlapping functions or duplicative systems, consolidation could reduce administrative costs and avoid unnecessary parallel investments.

2D | Bring employers in from the start.

Engage employers on the front end by tracking hiring commitments in priority sectors, holding targeted hiring events, and identifying employer-defined demand through an intermediary, such as the healthcare apprenticeship model.

Fiscal + Implementation Lens | Improved Return on Public Investment
Aligning publicly funded training with demonstrated employer demand can reduce investment in training that is disconnected from available jobs and improve the likelihood that workforce dollars lead to employment.

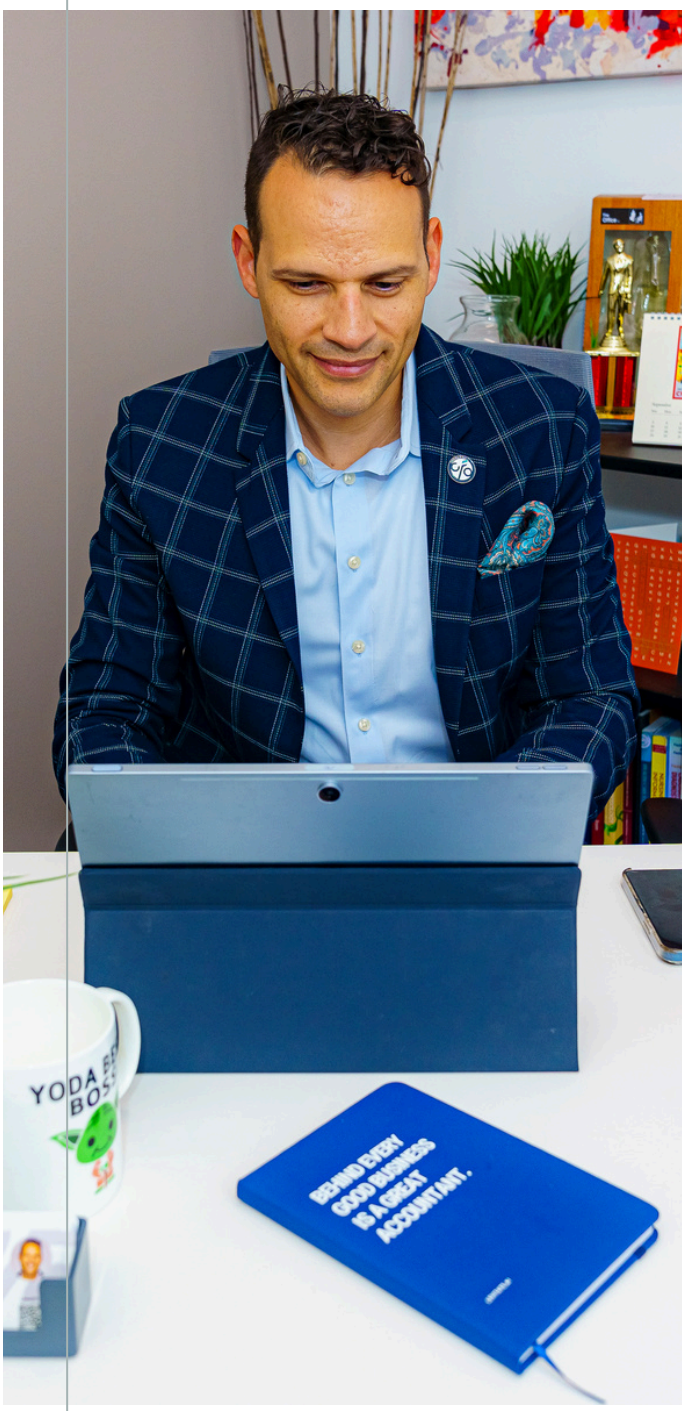
2E | Provide the supports people need to succeed.

Provide the supports people need to complete training and remain employed, including childcare, transportation subsidies, simpler benefit applications, and retention specialists.

Fiscal + Implementation Lens | Protect Existing Investment
These supports may require resources, but they can help protect the larger public investment already made in recruitment and training by improving completion and job retention.

Implementation

How The Coalition and its members can help move this forward.



The Coalition and its members can support an empowered WIC with practitioner and employer expertise.

01 **Help define what success should look like**

Convene workforce providers, employers, and other practitioners to help develop practical, shared definitions of job readiness, retention, wage progression, and other outcomes that can be applied across District-funded programs.

02 **Support a practitioner-led review of existing systems**

Bring together organizations that use DC Networks and Talent Capital to document what works, what does not, where access breaks down, and what should be connected, consolidated, or improved.

03 **Bring employers to the front end**

Use The Coalition's relationships with employers, anchor institutions, and small businesses to identify current and emerging workforce demand, strengthen hiring commitments, and help test models that connect training more directly to jobs.

04 **Document the barriers that affect retention**

Use member and provider experience to identify where childcare, transportation, benefits access, and other supports are preventing participants from completing training or remaining employed, and elevate those findings as the system is redesigned.



Recommendation Three

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Maximize the impact of the affordable housing production and stabilization system by publishing goals and milestones, with a near-term focus on failing properties and at-risk households and a long-term focus on accountability and sustainability across the housing ecosystem.



Why it Matters

The District must continue producing affordable housing while also protecting the housing in which it has already invested.

Housing practitioners described a system in which projects can encounter delays at multiple points in the development lifecycle, agencies do not always operate around one coordinated strategy, distressed properties can deteriorate before intervention occurs, and tenants often enter assistance systems only after financial problems have become significantly harder to resolve.

The District needs a housing system that can see the full picture: production, preservation, property performance, tenant stability, agency performance, and the barriers that slow progress across them.
That requires clear leadership, greater visibility, and earlier action.



Recommendation Three

Key Components

3A | Establish clear leadership for housing.

Establish and empower a Deputy Mayor for Housing to direct relevant housing agencies around a comprehensive housing strategy.

Fiscal + Implementation Lens | Streamlining

A Deputy Mayor for Housing should consolidate and strengthen coordination across the housing system rather than create an additional layer of process. The efficiency opportunity comes from clearer authority, fewer fragmented decisions, and stronger accountability across agencies.

3B | Track the full housing pipeline and agency performance.

Monitor and measure the implementation of the comprehensive housing strategy. Maintain a public pipeline tracker covering each stage in the lifecycle of all subsidized housing projects and publish a scorecard measuring the performance of each relevant agency.

Fiscal + Implementation Lens | Streamlining + Reduced Project Costs

Greater visibility into timelines and agency performance can expose delays earlier and reduce avoidable carrying costs associated with projects stalled in underwriting, closing, permitting, or other stages.



3C | Intervene before distressed properties fail.

Create an action plan to address distressed subsidized properties, including clear prioritization criteria and an early warning system. Offer building-level loss assistance that could build on the Landlord Partnership Fund model.

Fiscal + Implementation Lens | Cost Avoidance + Protection of Existing Investment
Early warning and targeted stabilization can address problems before they require more expensive rehabilitation, foreclosure intervention, or replacement of affordable units, while protecting investments the District has already made in those properties.

3D | Help tenants before crisis.

Create a first-missed-payment pathway for tenants that includes outreach and mediation with authority to settle. Right-size rental assistance programs to address one-time needs.

Fiscal + Implementation Lens | Cost Avoidance + More Targeted Assistance
Earlier intervention can match assistance more closely to actual need and address problems before arrears deepen, households are displaced, or properties experience greater financial distress.

3E | Make the housing system easier to navigate.

Make the programs included in the housing strategy more accessible to all stakeholders across the housing ecosystem.

Fiscal + Implementation Lens | Streamlining
Making existing programs easier to access can reduce unnecessary handoffs and administrative friction for residents, owners, providers, and agencies. Direct budget savings have not been quantified.

Implementation

How The Coalition and its members can help move this forward.



The Coalition and its members can help turn the housing strategy into a more transparent and actionable system.

01 **Help define the housing lifecycle and what should be measured**

Convene developers, owners, lenders, CDFIs, service providers, and other housing practitioners to map the stages of publicly supported housing development and stabilization and identify meaningful milestones for a public pipeline tracker and agency scorecards.

02 **Inform the distressed-property action plan**

Bring member experience with troubled properties, financing, asset management, and preservation to help identify practical prioritization criteria, early-warning indicators, and interventions that can occur before a property reaches crisis.

03 **Help design earlier intervention for tenants**

Convene housing providers, owners, tenant-serving organizations, and other stakeholders to identify how a first-missed-payment pathway could work, where existing rental assistance processes break down, and what is needed to reach households earlier.

04 **Bring practitioners together around unresolved implementation questions**

Use The Coalition's existing committees, working groups, and member network to further examine implementation challenges that cut across the housing system and develop practical solutions grounded in experience from the field.



Conclusion

What It Takes to Build a City of Yes

Small business, workforce development, and affordable housing are different systems, but the conversations that shaped these recommendations consistently returned to the same underlying challenges.

A City of Yes requires a different approach to how systems work.

Clear Accountability

Someone must own the outcome.
When responsibility is spread across multiple agencies, programs, or providers without clear authority, coordination becomes optional. Accountability must be visible and empowered.

Build on What Exists

Improve and connect existing systems before creating new ones.
The District already has significant infrastructure, programs, technology, and expertise. The first question should be whether those resources can work better together.

Measure What Matters

Use outcomes, timelines, and visible performance measures.
Success should not be defined simply by activity. Residents, businesses, policymakers, and practitioners should be able to see whether systems are producing the outcomes they were created to achieve.

Act Earlier

Intervene before challenges become crises.
A business should not spend months carrying rent while waiting to open. A workforce participant should not lose a job because a solvable support need went unaddressed. A tenant or affordable housing property should not have to reach crisis before help arrives. Earlier intervention can produce better outcomes and make better use of limited resources.

Keep People in the System

Technology should make systems easier to navigate, not eliminate human accountability.
Digital tools can improve coordination, visibility, and efficiency. But when a process stalls, people still need to know who can answer a question, solve a problem, or move something forward.

A City That Works

A City of Yes does not mean a city that says yes to everything.

A City of Yes knows what it is trying to accomplish, organizes its systems around those outcomes, and gives people a clear path to move forward.

The recommendations in this report offer a starting point. The Coalition and its members are ready to partner and act. Through our practitioner expertise, cross-sector relationships, and lived experience, we're eager to help turn these recommendations into solutions that work.



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THANKS

Connect with us to get started.

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