



Strengthening Durham's Small Business Ecosystem

April 7, 2025

County Commissioners





Roots & History of Impact

Forward Cities | Our Why

- **We believe** every entrepreneur deserves an equitable opportunity to launch, grow, and sustain a business that creates wealth for themselves, their chosen family, and their local community.
- **We understand** that building densely connected and authentically collaborative support networks is the most effective way to accomplish this.
- **We desire** to leverage our national expertise, learnings, and connections for local impact
- **We hope** our collective work will position and uplift Durham County as a model for equitable entrepreneurial ecosystems across the country, spurring sustainable local, regional, and national investment for the work and your organizations.



Community Navigator



U.S. Small Business
Administration



2022-2023 \$1M Investment Secured to Empower Durham Entrepreneurs & Support Organizations

- Forward Cities secured the only city-level grant in NC
- Was designed to help entrepreneurs within the region to equitably start, grow, and scale businesses
- Sought to address inequities in access to information and resources

Forward Cities | Leadership & Local Commitment



Fay Horwitt (left of center) pictured here with other national ecosystem building leaders from the Kauffman Foundation, National League of Cities, the U.S. Federal Reserve,, Living Cities, OHUB, and others.

- [Fay Horwitt](#), leading team since **2021**
- [National thought leader](#) on equitable entrepreneurial ecosystems
- Secured over **\$2M in national funding** for the Durham community since taking on the role
- **Raising the profile of Durham** in the national ecosystem building field through:
 - [SBA Navigator Program](#)
 - [Startup Champions Network Summit](#)
 - [Black Wall Street Forward](#)
 - [PLACE Builders](#)
 - [Ecosystem Building Leadership Network](#)

E3 Durham | Our Program Team

90% Individuals of color
70% Black, 10% Hispanic,
10% Middle-Eastern/African, 10% White



FAY HORWITT
Chief Program Officer



MAGALIE YACINTHE
Senior Director, Programs



JACINTA WALKER
Program Director



LATOYA ALSTON
PT Business Navigator



SANTIAGO RAMOS
Bilingual Business Navigator



NUTISHIA LEE
Director of Marketing



E.A. GREEN
Media Consultant



KASEM MOHSEN
Finance



STACEY WILLIAMS
Research Consultant



ASHLEY DAY
Program Coordinator



E3 Durham Today

Program Overview

- **Community-Centered Support:** E3 Durham provides wrap-around services for businesses and entrepreneurs at all stages.
- **Navigation & Alignment:** One-on-one guidance connects entrepreneurs to ecosystem partners for better support.
- **Earn & Grow:** Entrepreneurs earn credits redeemable for services and products to scale their business.



Program Tracks & Goals

Track 1

Small Business Support

1. **Learn-to-Earn** | Incentivize entrepreneurial education and connection
2. **Cohort Programs** | Leverage cohort accelerators to address gaps identified by entrepreneurs
3. **Revenue Growth** | Expand support for capital access, certifications and procurement



Track 2:

Ecosystem Development

1. **Collaboration** | Enhance trusted relationships between service providers
2. **Strategy** | Collectively design and activate a sustainable Ecosystem Strategic Plan
3. **Hub** | Activate a vibrant physical and online hub for the ecosystem

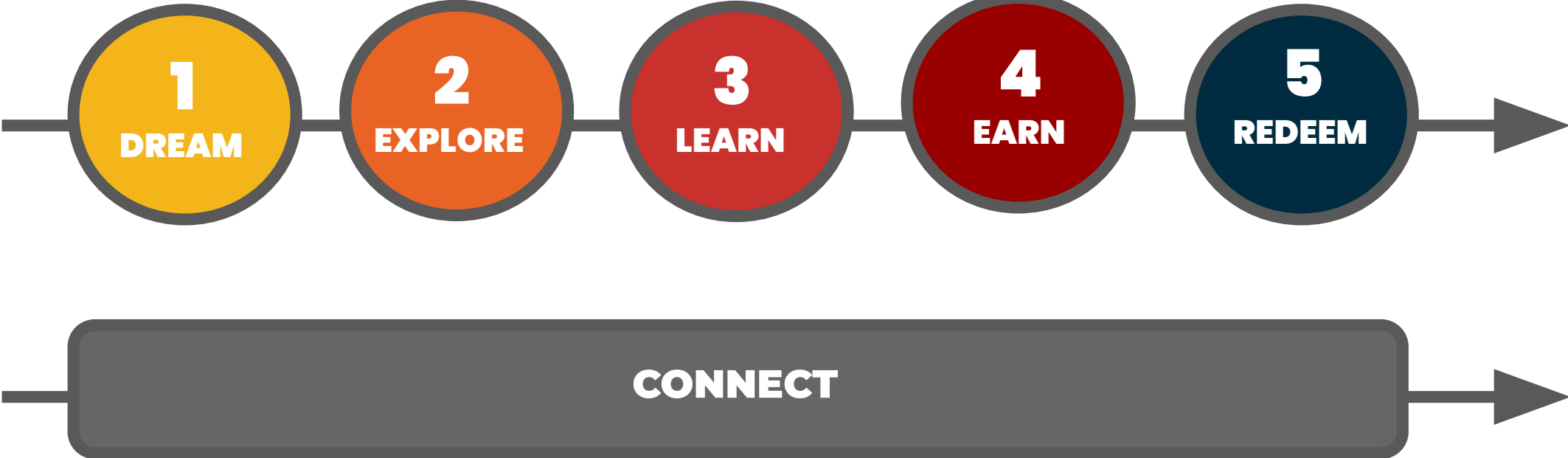


Track 1

Small Business Support

Meeting Existing & Emerging Entrepreneurs Where They Are

Learn-to-Earn



HOW IT WORKS...



1

DREAM

The entrepreneur tell us about themselves, their business/idea, and their vision for success in-person or at the new E3 Durham Center.



HOW IT WORKS...



2

EXPLORE

The entrepreneur connects with a business Navigator, explores ecosystem resources, and receives ongoing support through monthly check-ins.



HOW IT WORKS...



3

LEARN

The entrepreneur gets referred to opportunities, support, and services based on their unique needs and objectives.



HOW IT WORKS...



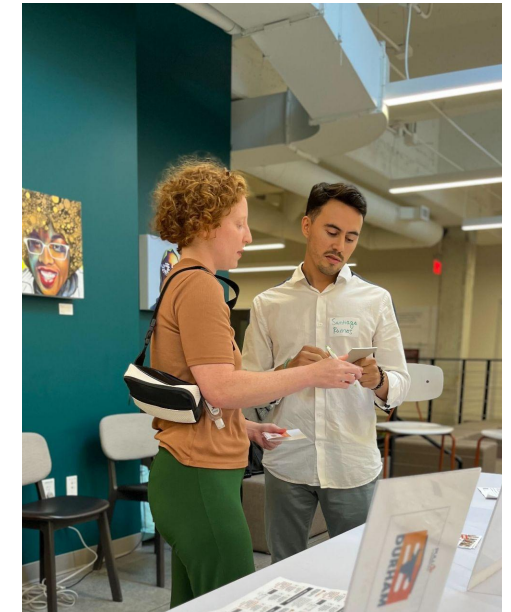
4

EARN

NEW!

The entrepreneur earns credit hours for:

- meeting with their navigator
- meeting with free business counselors
- attending monthly E3D events
- participating in cohort programs



HOW IT WORKS...



5 REDEEM

NEW!

The entrepreneur can accumulate credit hours and redeem them for needed professional service packages and products including:

- business planning
- branding/marketing
- graphic/web design
- social media plans
- accounting services
- tax services
- legal services
- software
- coworking passes

HOW IT WORKS...



CONNECT

Throughout their journey, the entrepreneur has the opportunity to connect with their peers, service providers, and valuable resources to help them grow and scale.



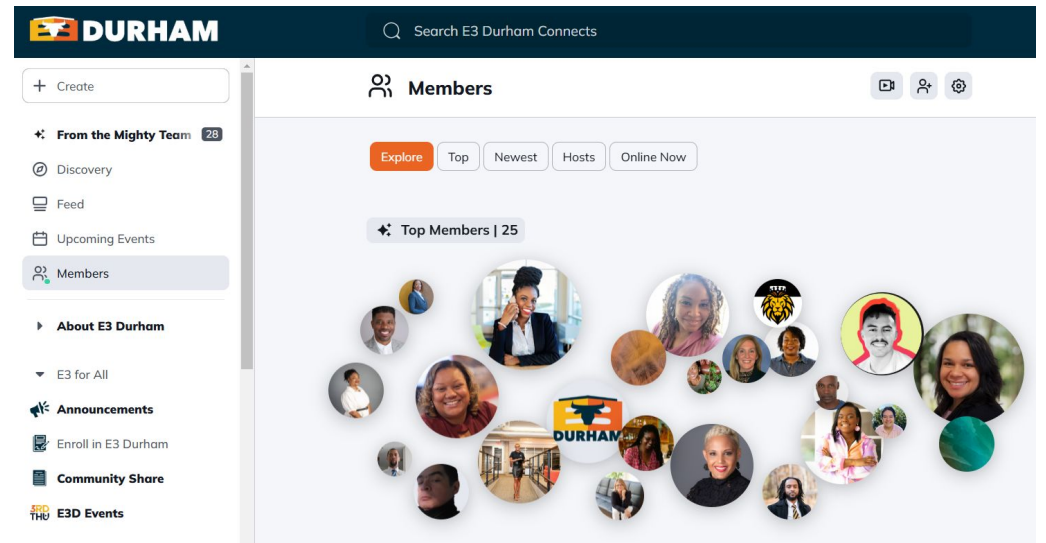
HOW IT WORKS...

CONNEC
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Throughout their journey, the entrepreneur has the opportunity to connect with their peers, service providers, and valuable resources to help them grow and scale.

E3 DURHAM
CONNECTS

S L Y N G S H O T



Cohort Programs



Funded by:

NCIDEA™



OPERATION HOPE
DURHAM

**DEVELOPING YOUR
MILLION DOLLAR IDEA -
COHORT Q&A**

Hosted by Operation HOPE
& E3 Durham

January 21, 2025 at 6PM

The poster features a dark blue background with a white and orange geometric design at the bottom left. It includes a small photo of a smiling woman in a classroom setting and logos for Operation Hope and E3 Durham.

LevTech Accelerator

A cohort program designed to train, equip, and provide limited professional service implementation for existing small businesses seeking to leverage technology to improve, grow, and/or scale their business.

Technical Assistance & Connections



LIVE STREAM

SERVICE PROVIDER MEET & GREET

Hosted by Jacinta Walker,
E3 Durham Program Director

Fridays at 12 PM



Mini-Courses (Coming Soon)

Capital Access

Business
Certification

Institutional
Procurement

Partnership

- Bi-Weekly collaboration meetings
- Program cross-promotion
- Entrepreneur referrals
- Cohort program co-development



ARPA
Partner
Organization

KNOX
ST. STUDIOS



By the Numbers

Year 1 - to Date

35%
increase in
LinkedIn
followers

12K+
e-newsletters
delivered

153
hours of
navigation &
counseling

240
active
clients

669
L2E Credits
Earned

16
cohort program
participants

415+
event attendance

18
workshop
hours



Ecosystem Development

Linking & Leveraging Insights & Resources

Entrepreneurial Ecosystems

Our Working Definition:

A network of people and entities working collectively to move knowledge and resources from the people who have them to the entrepreneurs who need it.

What It Looks Like:

An effective ecosystem works together to insure aspiring and existing entrepreneurs from all sectors efficiently find and access the resources they need at every stage of their journey.

INNOVATION THRIVES
IN DENSE NETWORKS.



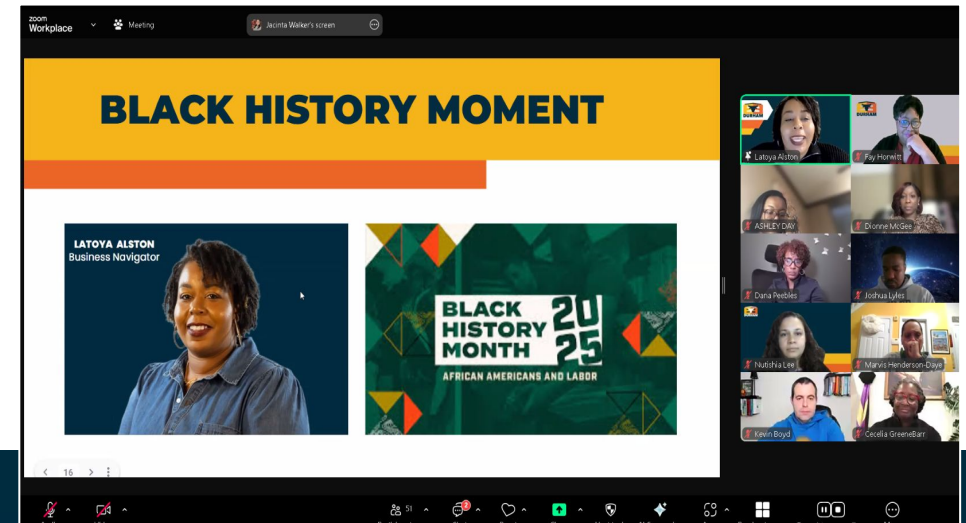
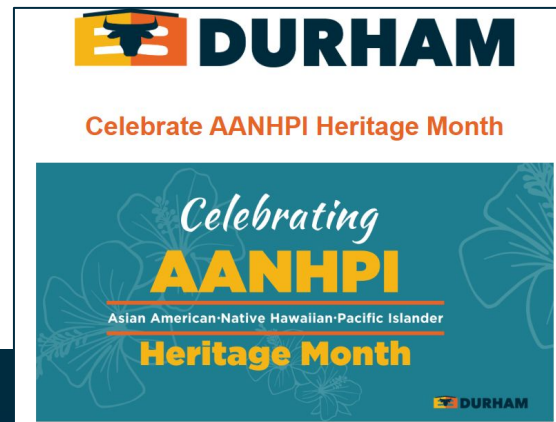
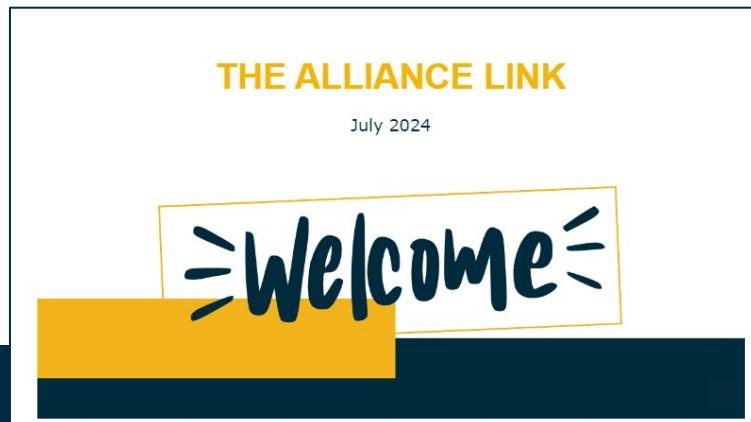
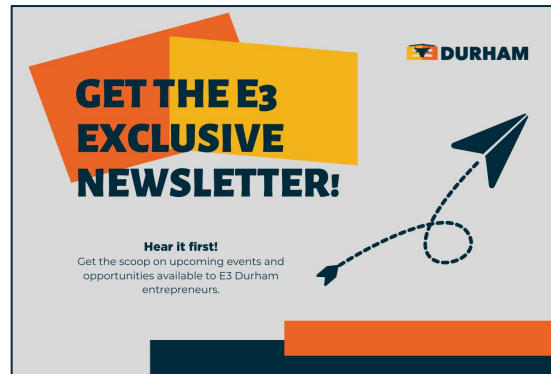
E3 Durham Center



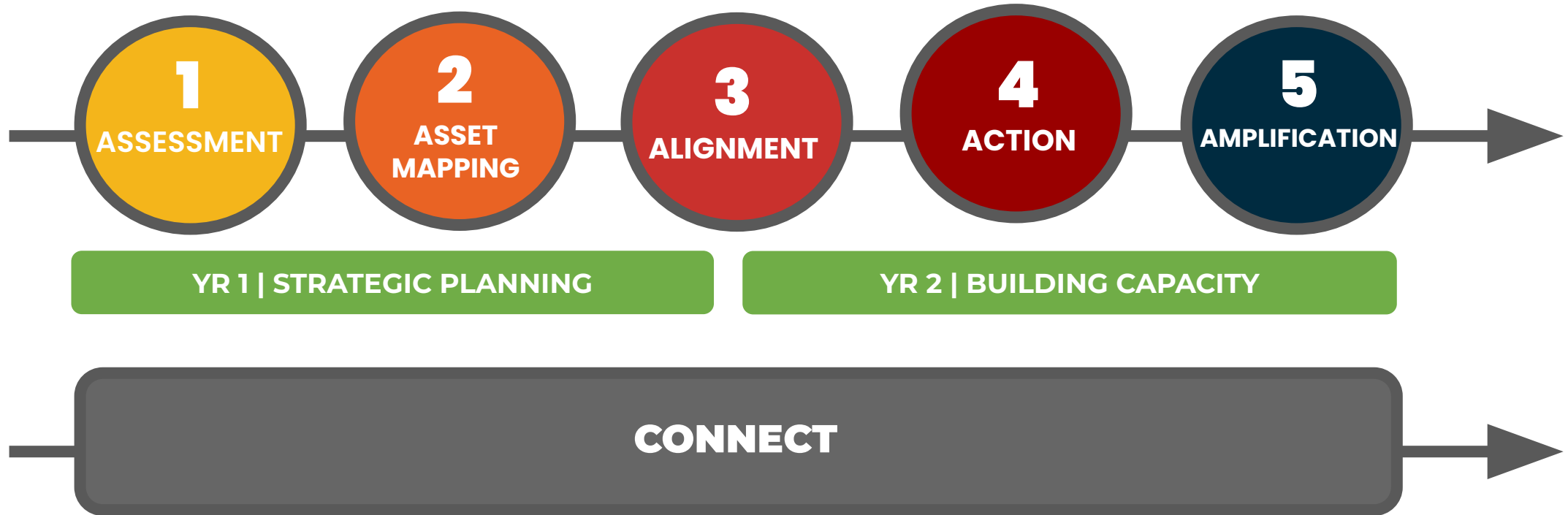
Digital Ecosystem Hub

Activating Community

- E3D Connects
- Monthly E3D Newsletter
- Monthly E3 Exclusive for clients
- Translation Services
- Business Directory
- Resource Directory
- Service Provider Mixer



ECOSYSTEM DEVELOPMENT



E3 Alliance | Coming in Year 2

- Serve as champions for the local entrepreneurial ecosystem
- Meets monthly
- Building relationships
- Mapping resources and identifying strengths/gaps
- Co-development of ecosystem strategic plan



E3 Alliance

Alignment. Awareness. Action.



360° Ecosystem Assessment Tools

- Ecosystem Metrics – Economic Inclusion Indicators
- Small Business Owner Survey
- Entrepreneurial Support Organization Survey
- E3 Scorecard & Focus Groups
-



Prioritized Challenges/Gaps

Entrepreneur Priorities

1. Centralized Resources
2. Mindset/Idea Stage
3. Hispanic Entrepreneur Support
4. Affordable Services
5. Marketing Skills

Equipper Priorities

1. Operational Capacity
2. Funder Relationships
3. Collaboration
4. Specialized Staff
5. Service Awareness

Ecosystem Priorities

1. Consistent Funding
2. Strategic Partnerships/Alignment
3. Government Alignment
4. Cluster Visibility
5. Regular Assessments/Metrics

Projects & Timeline

Phase 1 | Apr - Jul 2025

Phase 2 | Aug - Nov 2025

Phase 3 | Dec - Mar 2025

- Will develop and implement small projects to address prioritized needs/gaps.
- Projects will receive a small implementation budget and/or support from the FC team
- Small projects teams will be developed to include entrepreneurs and service providers

Examples:

Business Marketing
Workshop Series
with custom marketing kits

Product/Market
Test Cohort
with focus group feedback

Final Strategic Report

Bringing it All Together

In March 2026, a **final strategic report** will be developed to provide a blueprint for sustaining and expanding the progress made during this two-year initiative. This report will include:

- Impact, key achievements and lessons learned
- Long-term strategy for strengthening Durham's entrepreneurial ecosystem through 2030.
- Specific recommendations for policy, funding, leadership, and programming to sustain ecosystem gains.
- Budget framework to guide investment in entrepreneurship support beyond the ARPA funding period.



Final Strategic Report

Seeding the Future

This report - and the broader strategic planning period - will serve as a **foundation** for future investment, policy, and collective action, ensuring that the momentum created through E3 Durham continues to drive equitable economic opportunity well into the future.

The work starts now. Let's build the future of Durham's entrepreneurial ecosystem together!





The Vision:

Our innovative Small Business Ecosystem will position Durham as city where entrepreneurs come to thrive - becoming an aspirational small business development model for communities around the country.





Strengthening Durham's Small Business Ecosystem

Thank You!

