

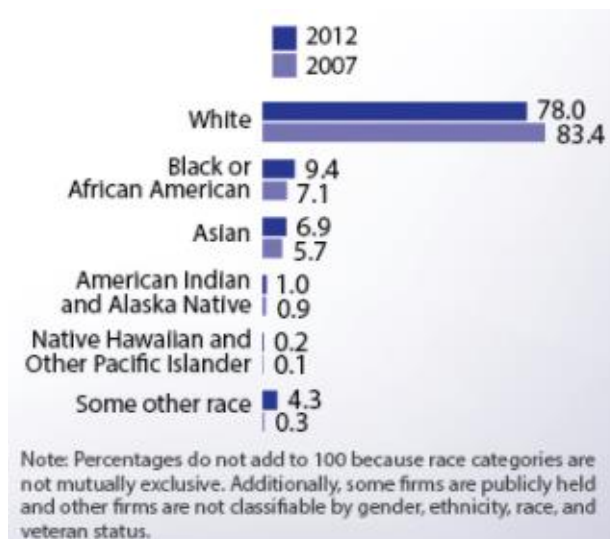


Case Study

Allen Danforth, GO-Green Painting, LLC

Background

While small businesses contribute to economic growth and development, communities of color disproportionately benefit from the advantages of small business ownership. In fact, minority business owners are underrepresented in small business ownership overall (1), with Native American owned businesses accounting for the second smallest number of firms that are minority owned (2). See figure below (3).



Small Business Ownership by Race, 2007-2012, U.S. Census Bureau

While people of color are underrepresented in U.S. markets, growth of minority owned businesses is rising, including those that are Native American owned (1,3). For Native communities, an increase in small business ownership transcends the rewards of wealth development (4) and provides an opening for a “Native American-led economy that asserts sovereignty and supports sustainable economic well-being” (4, p. 56; 5). Innovative funding streams, including Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs), have helped to fuel this success. Below, we share a success story from a Native American business owner in Green Bay, Wisconsin.

Allen's Story

After 30 years working as a painter – fraught with seasonal work and lay-offs – Allen Danforth was ready for a change. He had a potential that others could see. After painting a residential property, the homeowner – impressed with Allen's work and professionalism, asked – "Why doesn't someone like you have his own business?" Allen took the comment to heart. Later that day, Allen went to Bay Bank in Green Bay to deposit the check from the job. Here, he encountered Jeff Bowman, an acquaintance from their grade school days. The two started talking, and Allen learned that Jeff was the president and CEO of the bank. Throughout their conversation, Allen's interest in starting a business came up. Jeff suggested that he attend a seminar on business development hosted by **First American Capital Corporation (FACC), a Wisconsin CDFI serving Native American communities**. Allen had heard about the event and decided to attend at Jeff's urging.

From there, Allen recounted a series of seemingly "unbelievable" events. Jeff connected Allen with Craig Anderson, the Executive Director of FACC. Craig steered Allen to a variety of free technical assistance seminars and classes, such as an introduction to QuickBooks. In addition, Craig secured funding for Allen to receive marketing and accounting support. Allen found the classes extremely helpful, knowing that his biggest challenge would be the administrative office work required for the business. Next, Allen obtained a loan with FACC. Armed with capital and a new skill-set, Allen was ready to launch.

In 2012, Allen started Go-Green Painting LLC, which offers a variety of residential and commercial services. The learning curve was steep. From workmen's compensation, to overhead costs and joint ventures, Allen felt the struggle to keep up and make ends meet. He kept in communication with his mentors at FACC and Bay Bank who offered support and additional technical assistance opportunities. Allen repeatedly mentioned that he felt his business would have failed in the first year without the backing of Craig and Jeff. "You're on your own as a business owner, said Allen. "You really need support".

Social Impact

As his business took off, Allen hired his adult daughters to work part-time. The family grew closer as they spent more time together. He also hired other Native workers in his community. Allen continued his education, earning a minority business enterprise (MBE) certification. His additional credentials provided more and more job opportunities. These days, Allen regularly receives multiple bids for his services, even more than he has capacity to respond – a good problem to have!





With his success, Allen feels a sense of purpose and has a different outlook on life; he started feeling successful. In addition, as his own boss, Allen could take advantage of a more flexible work schedule. He can now take time off to tend to his health without fear of losing his job. In addition, Allen experienced an increased sense of confidence, noting, “People treat you differently when you are a business owner.”

Today, Go Green Painting LLC continues to thrive. Allen is still in touch with Craig Anderson at FACC and Jeff Bowman at Bay Bank. He can count on them for support as his business needs change and grow. We look forward to keeping in touch with Allen to hear about what is next for Go Green Painting LLC!

References

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- (2) Bressler, Campell, & Elliot (2014), A study of Native American small business ownership: opportunities for entrepreneurs. *Research in Business and Economics Journal*, 10:1, 1-13.
- (3) United State Census Bureau (2015), Los Angeles County a microcosm of nation’s diverse collection of business owners, <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2015/cb15-209.html>, Access date: June 7, 2017.
- (4) Colbourne (2017) An understanding of Native American entrepreneurship, *Small Enterprise Research*, 24:1, 49-61.
- (5) Anderson, Giberson, Hindle, & Kayseas (2004). Understanding success in indigenous entrepreneurship: An exploratory investigation. *Proceedings of the AGSE-Babson Regional Entrepreneurship Research Exchange*.