

The Durham Innovation Council

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I am involved with a new group forming called The Durham Innovation Council. It's a national movement to help small businesses and people of color who want to start new businesses ,or have innovative ideals for new businesses, get support and access to services that they have had problem getting. What is different about what we are proposing to do from what other business support groups are doing is that we are a four city collaboration that shares best practices and ideals that are proven to work in poor and low income communities in the four partnering cities. We also help bring capital and mentorship to the table. The four cities are [Durham, Detroit, Cleveland and New Orleans](#).

The Durham Innovation Council is made of 24 members from small business owners, non-profits, government, universities, community colleges and the target community (men and women of color). We meet once a month as a council but and also have subcommittees to plan what we do and to do research for issues and/or ideas.

I am a little gun-shy with some members of our council because members of the community (myself included) blame some of them for some of the things that have happened to our

neighborhoods. My biggest challenge is to learn to trust these folks and their organizations again. Some have helped move a lot of my neighbors out by raising rents or not helping them maintain a residence because programs they were in just drop them. I tell myself that that was in the past, and for my community's benefit I need to let go but not forget.

We just had our first meeting with 12 people who were either small business owners or people with ideas for starting a business that needed help. So far five out of the 12 have been in contact with supportive services and three are in the process of applying for loans. It took us a month to organize and outreach to people and businesses that council members knew, to invite them to our first convening, and we feel good about the out comes for now. We would love to have you or your friends who may have ideas or advice for this new initiative share those with us in the comment section below.