

BUILDING LOCAL ECONOMIC RESILIENCE THROUGH LOCAL BRAND INITIATIVES

THE PROBLEM

Manufacturing is an important part of a vibrant community, bringing innovation, creativity, and stability to cities. Leaders often struggle to understand the relevance of manufacturing in urban centers and regional economies because some believe manufacturing to be dirty, dangerous, loud, and mindless work. However, over the past decade, small batch manufacturing—often performed within urban areas—has evolved in large part due to changing markets, technologies, and ownership demographics. Today, we see an increasing number of manufacturing businesses, bringing with them higher paying, more accessible jobs and career pathways, helping a region’s economy become more diverse, resilient, and sustainable. Unfortunately, many of these new manufacturing businesses struggle to find supportive services and access to key business development resources – such as capital, new markets, real estate, workforce, and technical assistance—because they are disconnected from the industrial ecosystems in their regions.

Urban Manufacturing Alliance (UMA) believes the solution to help this growing sector is to build new industrial ecosystems to address issues faced by individual manufacturers and tackle shared challenges manufacturing communities face, such as overcoming false beliefs that manufacturing is dirty, dangerous, dull and dying, plus navigating zoning policies that push manufacturing jobs away from the urban workforce. These and many other issues require support from and relationships with a broad set of stakeholders, such as organizations that lead workforce programs, community development, economic development, and real estate development, as well as local government offices and agencies. The time, resources, and effort to build relationships necessary to overcome these shared and individual issues often fall outside an individual company’s expertise.

UMA has found that an impactful way to help create manufacturing ecosystems is by supporting Local Branding Initiatives (LBI). **An LBI is a pioneering approach to economic development that creates an intercon-**

ected ecosystem of manufacturers, consumers, government agencies, and community organizations, in order to lift up small scale manufacturing in communities and advance racial equity. This approach brings together stakeholders to co-create and deliver technical assistance programs tailored to small scale manufacturers to (1) increase access to resources while (2) creating new market opportunities with residents, procurement offices, and between businesses. No two cities, manufacturing ecosystems, or LBIs are the same; however, LBIs across the country show consistent impacts, including helping manufacturers: increase sales creating new jobs; create new workforce pipelines by connecting training programs with manufacturers; and increase access to capital for women and minority business owners. LBIs promote women- and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)-owned companies, emphasize the importance of both place and making, and educate consumers and leaders about the benefits of buying locally made products. During the COVID-19 pandemic, LBIs are helping local governments respond to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) requirements, create safe standards for reopening, manage grants and loan programs to help small businesses pivot and stay open, and disseminate information to businesses.

THE SOLUTION

Urban Manufacturing Alliance has identified ways that local policymakers can support the creation and growth of Local Branding Initiatives. Local elected officials can provide funding for Local Branding Initiatives, especially in the initial years when the primary work focuses on ecosystem building, depending on the scale of the local small manufacturing community. In 2020, Made in Baltimore received \$200,000 from the city’s budget. Local officials can also voice support for the LBI, giving it legitimacy and highlighting that the locality values manufacturing businesses. As well, they can establish policies that emphasize buying local. As initiatives grow, policymakers can pursue complementary tactics like promoting protecting industrially-zoned land, support

new metrics for awarding contracts, and commit to supporting regional economic strategies that utilize manufacturing to solve local problems. In return, local leaders can depend on an LBI to be a partner in building an inclusive, resilient local economy. Where there have been collaborative relationships between LBIs and local governments, the benefits to the region have been much higher and grown much faster.

EXAMPLES OF LOCAL BRANDING INITIATIVES

The following examples illustrate ways Local Branding Initiatives can start, grow, and support businesses and cities. LBIs should:

- Begin with activities focused on building community, typically by establishing a platform for makers and manufacturers to connect to workforce development organizations, capital providers, markets, and real estate providers, among others.
- These LBI platforms should create opportunities for businesses to access technical assistance and establish shared branding materials.
- Once established, LBIs should focus on a set of programs that respond to the immediate needs of the businesses they support in their region.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, LBIs played two vital roles: they disseminated information to their members, creating a trusted and dependable resource, and they organized sessions and workshops to help companies pivot and stay connected to rapidly evolving information.

Made in Baltimore (MIB) began when the Baltimore Office of Sustainability was researching industrial building vacancies and looking for ways to increase occupancy. Research showed there was not a need for new space but a need to grow businesses to occupy them. This led to new programming to create pop-up markets which brought together 80 Baltimore manufacturers. Five years into their work, MIB has organized a network of more than 200 manufacturers and built relationships across stakeholder groups. Because of this existing ecosystem, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Made In Baltimore was tasked with managing \$150,000 in grant funding, provided by the Baltimore Mayor's office, to aid urban manufacturers responding to PPE demands, pay for materials, new technology, and hire employees. Forty-six percent of the grant funding went to women-owned enterprises, and 33% to minority-owned firms. MIB also helped city agencies find suppliers for over \$400,000 in locally-made PPE, with 60% of purchase contracts going to minority owned enterprises.^{1,2,3}

San Francisco Made (SFMade) started in the midst of the 2008 Great Recession by a small group of leading manufacturers looking for ways to differentiate their brands, increase aware-

ness of the impact of buying locally made products, and create a sector-based community. SFMade forged relationships with the Mayor's office, helping to solidify manufacturing as a key economic driver in San Francisco. In 10 years of ecosystem building, the group has developed workforce hiring and training programs as well as programs for youth to gain access to manufacturing careers, and they have increased access to capital and access to industrial real estate. SFMade helped city leaders respond to the COVID-19 pandemic by organizing manufacturers to co-create best practices for navigating workforce management ups-and-downs and how to safely remain, or re-open, ensuring the safety of workers. The city then disseminated these recommendations to help set standards for the sector. SFMade expanded its pre-COVID efforts to support individual businesses by increasing free consulting services. As of mid-July, they had completed over 660 hours of consultations helping manufacturers pivot their product offerings, access loans and grants, and meet safety guidelines.⁴

Made in NYC (MiNYC) began as an initiative to help manufacturers connect with consumers because the city was shut off from the rest of the country in the aftermath of 9/11. MiNYC continues to help the city's residents and leaders understand the importance of manufacturing. From 2015 to early 2020, MiNYC offered manufacturing businesses over 40 workshops and community building events. Over its 19-year history, it has built a trusted relationship with the New York City Council. As a result, MiNYC played a significant role in New York City's PPE response committee. MiNYC became the center for PPE production, helping members in their network design, prototype, and get approval for new PPE, as well as helping buyers find suppliers. In parallel, MiNYC is helping microbusinesses (businesses with one to three employees) by running virtual gatherings where business advisors share information with up to 60 companies and offering call-in one-on-one office hours to support individual business-owners.

LANDSCAPE AND RESOURCES

Those interested in learning more about Local Branding Initiatives can connect directly with directors of LBIs across the country. Municipal leaders can find an action guide titled "Moving Towards Equitable Maker Ecosystems," as well as toolkits and supporting research, on UMA's website: www.urbanmfg.org.

Co-authored by the Urban Manufacturing Alliance



NOTES

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1. Cook, A. (2020, July 15). Personal interview [Personal interview].
2. <https://www.bizjournals.com/baltimore/news/2020/04/15/baltimore-awards-50k-to-nine-city-businesses.html>
3. Cook, A. (2020, September). Baltimore Case Studies.
4. Neider, M. (2020, July 13). Personal interview [Personal interview].