

EMPLOYMENT

Minority entrepreneurs key to job growth in Florida

BY MARCIA HEROUX POUNDS
Sun Sentinel

Olga Lucia Garzon wanted to start a business offering handcrafted goods from her home country of Colombia, but she needed a website. A group that supports Hispanic businesses gave her a grant, and now she operates her online business, fashionolg.com, from Fort Lauderdale.

The grant "made a big difference," said Garzon, who hopes to open a store as well.

Garzon received a helping hand from the Hispanic

Business Initiative Fund (HBIF), one of several minority business organizations statewide that recently formed a new partnership with Enterprise Florida, the state's public-private entity charged with bringing business and jobs to the state.

The new Minority & Small Business, Entrepreneurship and Capital division was unveiled last week to better support and grow black, Hispanic and women-owned businesses in the state.

Lending its support to grassroots organizations

serving minority entrepreneurs, Enterprise Florida's ultimate goal for the effort is to generate jobs in Florida by helping minority firms be successful.

Six minority groups recently signed a "memorandum of understanding" stating a "willingness to work together and partner in activities that support minority business," said Louis Laubscher, senior vice president of administration at Enterprise Florida, who is overseeing the new division.

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ALLISON DIAZ/FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

THE NEXT LEVEL: Beatrice Louissaint, president and CEO of the Southern Florida Minority Supplier Development Council, talks about growing opportunities.

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Partnerships aim to foster growth among minority-owned businesses

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In addition to the HBIF, the Florida Advisory Council on Small and Minority Business Development, the Florida Association of Minority Business Enterprise Officials, the Florida Consortium of Black Business, The Raise Florida Network and the Southern Florida Minority Supplier Development Council have joined

the partnership.

Augusto Sabaria, HBIF president of the Hispanic Business Initiative Fund of Florida, said his group has been working with Enterprise Florida all along, but the partnership formalizes the collaboration.

"It's a greater effort by the state to bring everyone together and make sure we're all working together," he said. "When you sign an

agreement, it sends a clear message."

The partnership will give the minority groups greater access to Enterprise Florida's resources, data analysis, and client base, Sabaria said.

The minority business initiative is an outgrowth of Enterprise Florida's merger with the Black Business Investment Fund, part of the state legislature's effort in 2011 to put all economic de-

velopment efforts under one umbrella.

Beatrice Louissaint, president of the Southern Florida Minority Supplier Development Council, said Enterprise Florida is sponsoring six minority-led firms' enrollment in the GrowFL Economic Gardening Program, which works with companies that have grown beyond the start-up stage and need help to get to the

next level.

Two are in Broward and Palm Beach counties, respectively: GDKN Staffing, a software consulting and staffing firm in Pembroke Pines, and Advocates in Manpower Management, a multimedia production and distribution company in Boca Raton.

Enterprise Florida also is working with the Department of Economic Opportu-

nity to deploy \$15 million to \$20 million in federal funds allocated to jumpstart lending to small businesses. Loans are made through banks or companies such as BAC Funding Corp. in South Florida, which provides financing to established, black-owned businesses.

Over the last 12 months, "so far about one-third of all the loans we've done are to minorities," Laubscher said.