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U.S. Small Business
Administration

Empowering Asian Immigrant- Owned Small Businesses Post Covid-19: A Survey

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IN COLLABORATION WITH



INTRODUCTION & LITERATURE REVIEW

GENERAL BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

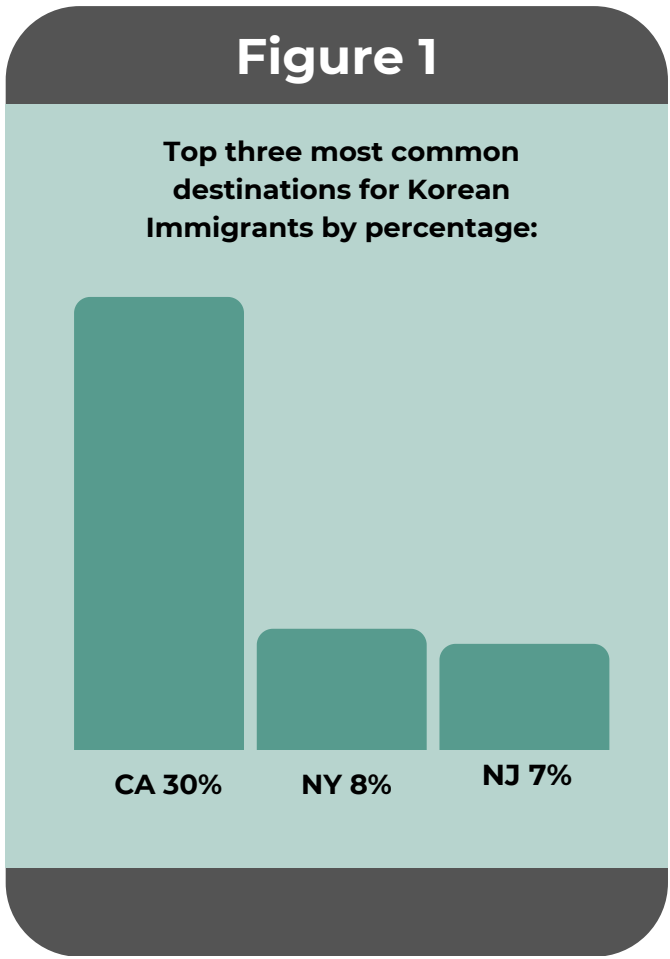
History of U.S. Immigration

The United States is a common destination for immigration, with 14.1 million Asian immigrants living in the U.S.A. in 2019 (Hanna & Batalova, 2021). Approximately 7.4% of these Asian immigrants identified as Korean, with a Korean-born population of 1.039 million (Batalova & Esterline, 2022). Today, thirty percent of Korean immigrants to the U.S. choose to migrate to California, with Los Angeles and Orange County being the most popular regions in which to settle (Batalova & Esterline, 2022).

In terms of education levels among Asian immigrants, the 2000 census shows that Asian immigrants are much more likely to have graduated college compared to the national average. However, not all Asian immigrants have received high levels of education; 15% have graduated high school and 18% have had education less than high school (Fairlie et al., 2010). In 2019, 56% of Korean immigrants aged 25 or older had a bachelor's degree or higher (Batalova & Esterline, 2022), but their education is often less valued than education from the United States, which will be covered in the following section. Additionally, nearly half (49%) of Korean immigrants who are 5 and older claimed to have limited English proficiency (Batalova & Esterline, 2022). However, Asian immigrants are still more likely to have higher education degrees than U.S. citizens as a whole (Fairlie et al., 2010), shedding light on larger structural disparities in higher education access in the U.S.

Asian Immigrant-Owned Businesses

Korean individuals have self-employment rates over double the national average (Batalova & Esterline, 2022), often due to barriers to access to resources. For example, due to a familiarity bias, employers would prefer to see native credentials, meaning that an education in the U.S.--or a resumé with previous employment experiences in the U.S.--will usually be preferred to foreign counterparts (Sanders & Vee, 1996). With a harder time seeking work opportunities outside of self-employment, it may be easier for a Korean immigrant to turn to self-employment to overcome this bias. This is especially true if the only jobs that are readily accessible due to prejudice are blue-collar work, which would be more incentivizing to become self-employed as an educated Korean immigrant (Fernandez & Kwang, 1998). Many Asians face a glass ceiling due to language barriers and are stereotyped as





“subordinate” team players, as opposed to leaders (Chu et al., 2010). Employers may view human capital from immigrants as less valuable than domestic human capital.

While external factors may deter Koreans away from traditional employment, internal cultural factors may also draw them into self-employment. Often, an immigrant family is willing to pool together labor and capital to run a business (Sanders & Vee, 1996), which not only makes the venture less financially straining but also provides a level of encouragement or support not usually found in typical United States businesses. These forms of encouragement can include approval of the ventures pursued, or or assistance with extraneous errands for example. Furthermore, an immigrant’s business will naturally be more approachable for people of the same nationality regardless of whether the goods or services relate to their culture (Fernandez & Kwang, 1998). In an area such as Los Angeles or Orange County, which contains a large Korean population, it may be enticing for prospecting Korean immigrants to start a business where the local Korean population would feel more comfortable buying goods or services. However, self-employment does not completely protect Koreans from discrimination or biases, as it is common for white suppliers to provide inferior delivery speed or quality, product prices, and item selection to Korean business owners (Chu et al., 2010).

Current Trends: The Aftermath of the Covid-19 Pandemic

As Asian Immigrants first opened their businesses in the U.S., they faced microaggressions and racial profiling from prejudiced consumers or citizens. However, as Asian culture spread throughout the U.S., Asian business owners took advantage of this popularity surge. They utilized their culture as a means of profit while simultaneously displaying their culture. With the introduction and rise of

COVID-19, many Americans had an innate distrust of members of the Asian community regardless of immigration status, ethnicity, or country of origin, stemming from internalized biases such as xenophobia and racism (Huang et. al, n.d.). The lack of accurate information, amplified by the rise of harmful rhetoric online, began the spread of discriminatory narratives and false accusations, causing hostility towards Asian-owned businesses (Kate Rogers, n.d.)

At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, not only did Asian-owned businesses begin to lose customers, but Anti-Asian hate crimes also increased drastically. The anti-Asian hate crimes have increased by 76% in 2020 during the pandemic, and many Asian business owners have since spoken out on cases of assault, targeted theft, and vandalism of personal property. Discriminatory rhetoric in mass media, such as former President Donald Trump tweeting “...Some are being hit harder by the Chinese Virus, some not at all,” and other similar tweets in 53 different instances resulted in

Number of Reported Anti-Asian Hate Crimes in New York City by Year

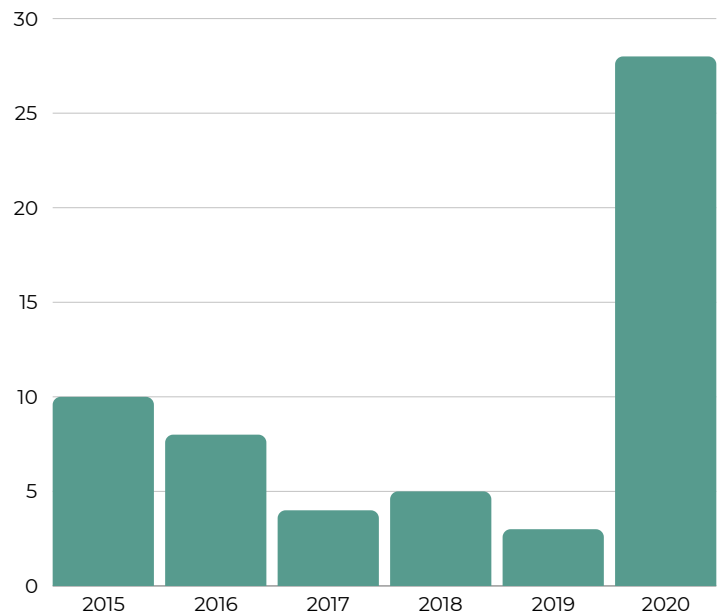


Figure 2. Corroborated with The Center for Data Innovation

avoidance and paranoia towards Asian-owned businesses, a dominant effect caused by associating COVID-19 with Asians. During this period, it was recorded that 80% of Asian-owned businesses in the U.S. suffered negative effects, and 44% could not afford to maintain the costs of employing staff. There were especially detrimental impacts on metropolitan cities. As seen in *Figure 2*, anti-Asian hate crimes spiked over 9 times in 2020 compared to 2019 in New York City.

The lack of financial cooperation from the government and discrimination from customers led to the closure of numerous Asian-owned businesses. Melany De La Cruz-Viesca, the Deputy Director of the UCLA Asian American

Studies Center, estimates that roughly 233,000 Asian American small businesses closed from February to April of 2020 at an 11% higher rate than their White counterparts. There was a decline of 20% in Asian American Small business activities. (Fairlie, n.d) .Minority-owned businesses were greatly excluded in the first process of the Paycheck Protection Program. Asian-owned businesses tend to be a non-employer system, causing lenders to be less generous with loans. Additionally, small or immigrant-owned businesses have fewer relations and connections with banks to gain financial assistance (Fairlie & Fossen, n.d).



(Descending left to right) Kaju Soft Tofu, Imbanga Rice Cake Bakery, BCD Tofu House, Hair-Free Beauty Salon, and Koba Tofu Grill. Example participants in the present study.

METHODOLOGY

THE PRESENT STUDY

Background of Program Initiative

The present study is a survey conducted as part of the Community Navigator Pilot Program, a grant-funded initiative by the Hwarang Youth Foundation and Koreatown Youth + Community Center (KYCC) to help community members overcome the challenges of accessibility to community development and resources. It is a structured framework that assists residents in navigating the landscapes of a community. This present study fosters community engagement and increases access to services with tailored support providing assistance to meet individual needs. Given the observed high proportion of Korean migrants to Los Angeles and Orange County, the present study takes data from these areas due to the relatively high population of Korean immigrants within these counties (Batalova & Esterline, 2022).

The Community Navigator Pilot Program has aimed to include assistance such as networking opportunities, access to financial guidance, and marketing research and analysis. With the support of volunteers, the initiative has aimed to provide aid through marketing and manual

maintenance work, such as distributing flyers to small businesses containing resources, and working through social media. The content of the flyers included the SBA website, which provides readers with a place to seek SBA resources. These foundations have worked heavily in Cypress and Diamond Bar California with small Asian-owned businesses to help clean businesses and their environments. In the present study, young members of the Hwarang Youth Foundation and the Korean Community Center in Orange County focused on in-person advertisements to spread resources for cleaning and advertisements.



PARTICIPANTS

Participants in this community-based research project consisted solely of Korean-owned small businesses in Orange County, California. Although selecting exclusively immigrant-owned businesses would allow for more efficient, streamlined, and helpful research, the natural difficulty in discerning whether a business is immigrant-owned meant the research process could not afford to exclude any participants. The present study defines the participants as the businesses reviewed. An exact total of 202 participants, or businesses, were included in this study.

Category of Business	Frequency
Restaurants	82
Doctors/Medical	53
Dentists	25
Markets/Misc. Stores	13
Beauty & Cosmetic	13
Clothing	13
Bakeries	10
Travel Agencies	5

Figure 3. Categories of identified Korean businesses in Orange County

STUDY DESIGN

Data Collection

Google MyMaps was used to spatially and visually store locations. Google Sheets was used to categorically store each location, its name, and contact information. The Google Workspace was used for its ease of access with multiple collaborators.

Participants were primarily found, identified, and located using the local listings page on Google and Yelp. To gather data efficiently, the present study utilized keywords in the search engine functions that were ethnically specific, exclusive to Orange County, and pertained to categories of businesses. Examples of keywords included “Korean,” “restaurants,” or “clothing,” as well as region-specific keywords like “Orange County,” “Los Angeles,” or “Irvine.”

Once the search pages were exhausted, the small remainder of businesses were found by manually scanning across streets using Google Maps.

As seen in Figure 3, the most common Korean-owned businesses in Orange County are food and health-related. Bakeries and restaurants total to 92, and doctors/medical and dentists total to 78. This becomes noteworthy in the makeup of HDGs, discussed in the following discussion section.

High-Density Groups

Some areas present high concentrations of businesses. These high-density groups (HDGs) provide unique insight into cultural, economic, and behavioral aspects discussed in the following section. The present study classifies these areas as follows:

Large HDGs: A large density sample is identified when the density score (# of Korean businesses divided by the length of the street, in miles) is 18 or higher. The number of businesses must exceed 4; otherwise, they are categorized as normal HDGs regardless of density score. A total of three (3) large HDGs were identified.

Normal HDGs: A normal HDG is identified when the density score is 11 or higher, but below 18. The number of businesses must exceed 3; otherwise, they are categorized as Small HDGs regardless of density score. A total of 5 normal HDGs were identified.

Small HDGs: A small HDG is identified when there are 3 businesses within one-third of a mile. Any number of businesses less than 3 is not considered a HDG. They are not as significant compared to larger HDGs as individuals but are too frequent to be overlooked. A total of 4 small HDGs were identified.

All measurements of distance were calculated using a straight line strictly along streets. The point at which a perpendicular line drawn from

the business meets the measured street was considered a business's position for standardization purposes. This method was adopted since using a radius for the distance measure used to calculate density, for example, includes unrelated businesses across blocks. Density scores are rounded to the nearest tenth.

Data Outcomes

High Density Groups

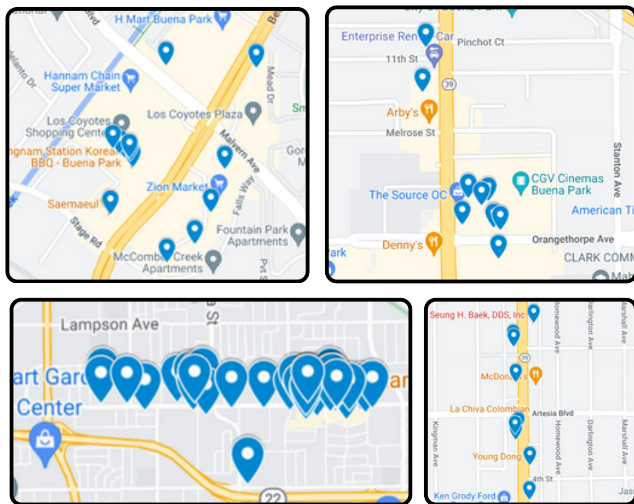
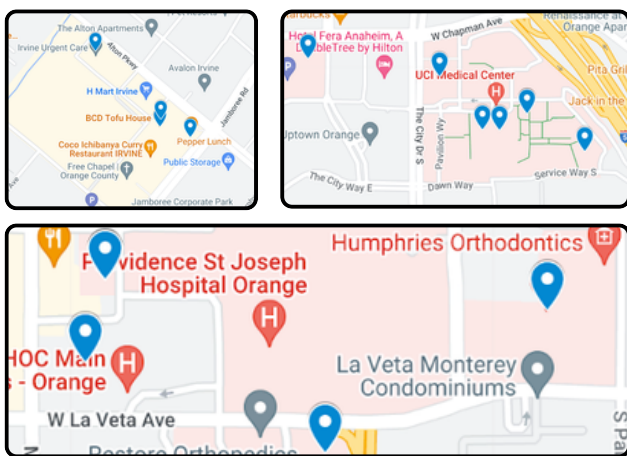


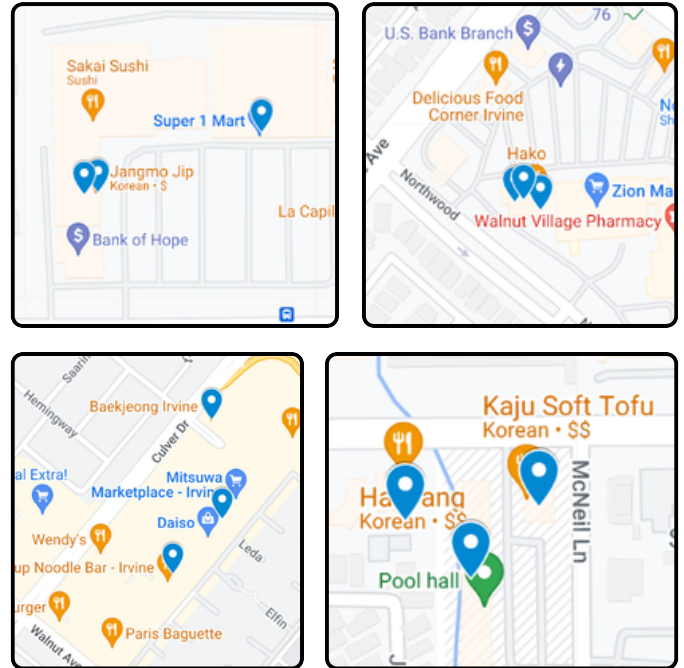
Figure 4. Respective density scores (left to right, top to bottom): 35.6, 27.2, 29.1, 28.1

Normal Density Groups



Respective density scores: 12.1, 11.1, 14.0, 16.3

Small HDGs



(No density scores are given to small HDGs)

DISCUSSION

For organized categorization, modifiers were given to the Doctors/Medical category and the Markets/Miscellaneous category. Except for seven businesses, all participants in the Doctors/Medical category are medical doctors. The exceptions consist of alternate health-related services, such as acupuncturists or pharmacies. A significant amount of orthodontists were counted to warrant its own category. The Markets/Miscellaneous category consists of Korean markets and uncategorizable businesses, such as a kitchenware store, a bookstore, and two kimchi shops.

In our research, we observed several patterns regarding the locations of these Korean-owned businesses. Our data showed a consistent clustering of these businesses. Many of these businesses tend to reside in well-supervised areas such as hospitals, parks, banks, and more. It appears that Korean businesses tend to value security as seen by their strategies of grouping



compactly and residing in well-guarded locations. Another pattern our team observed is that numerous Korean American businesses tend to group close to Korean markets. Korean supermarkets play a crucial role in the Korean American community (especially in Los Angeles), acting as a hub providing access to culturally significant goods and community interactions and offering valuable networking opportunities for local businesses. Given that these markets serve as important gathering sites within the Korean community in Los Angeles, many businesses seek to reside near them, recognizing the value of networking opportunities and access to resources provided by these markets. Korean-owned businesses tend to follow trends of locating their businesses in a well-guarded communal area leading to the large grouping of these Korean American businesses.

The prevalence of HDGs can likely be explained by Hotelling's Model of Spatial Competition, which states that competing businesses will move to the optimal location to serve as many customers as possible while not losing any to competitors--a point called Nash Equilibrium (Osborne et. al, 1987). The optimal location often leads to packed business groupings, which can present complications. Profit margins may be reduced to keep a competitive edge or businesses may need to spend more on advertising to differentiate themselves, which can lead to difficult financial decisions. For example, a business may overspend on advertising in an overly ad-saturated area, leading to an overall net loss in revenue. Businesses are also interdependent on one another, and it is not necessarily good if a business loses a competitor if they both depend on a common resource, such as a supplier or ethnic-specific patrons. This especially applies to the HDGs within Orange County, as they tend to be in the same business category. Additionally, if a competitor goes out of business, it may negatively affect how consumers view the HDG as a whole, especially if they share physical

infrastructure.

This interdependency is further highlighted by the alliances that are commonly formed within Asian HDGs. It has been shown that businesses in the 1998 Asian Financial Crisis, including Korean SMEs (small-medium enterprises), who were nearby or networked with other small businesses had an increased correlation of survival—even when collaborating with competitors (Miklian & Hoelscher, 2022). Businesses that grouped in proximity after an exogenous shock such as COVID-19 had an increased probability of surviving post-crisis, especially when pooling resources, leveraging connections, or enacting local change with like-minded businesses (Miklian & Hoelscher, 2022).

In terms of categorical makeup, the HDGs followed a variety of patterns. The large HDG with the highest sample size was the most diverse, consisting of food, cosmetic, and health-related businesses. To sustain a markedly high density of Korean businesses, Garden Grove Blvd, the street containing this HDG, is likely a culturally significant area that receives high traffic. An interdependency between businesses may be present in this HDG, as two or more businesses of the same category are commonly found contiguous. The other two large HDGs also exhibited categorical variety, but much less than the Garden Grove Blvd HDG.

By contrast, the normal HDGs were noticeably mono-categorical. Korean doctors were noted to be adjacent to each other and other non-Korean medical facilities. As an overflow of patients in large hospitals would benefit surrounding smaller practices, these doctors likely utilize the large parking lots and hospitals nearby. Small HDGs had no discernable categorical patterns.

Additionally, many Korean businesses, especially the ones found within large HDGs, are located within the same building in plazas. Knowledge of the SBA's financial resources would be

particularly beneficial to these HDGs as a whole, since even the image of a single business shutting down may poorly affect the public image of the rest of the HDG. Providing these businesses with accurate SBA info is also important to preserving culturally significant spots, such as Garden Grove Blvd. The present study identifies 48 Korean businesses within the Garden Grove Blvd HDG (see limitations). Additionally, knowledge of categorical frequency is integral in the event of a disaster. For example, during an event similar to the COVID-19 pandemic, it can be readily seen that a larger amount of Korean businesses (e.g. restaurants, travel agencies, hair salons) will be affected than essential businesses (e.g. doctors, orthodontists, pharmacies, Korean grocery stores) since the latter would still serve public health.

LIMITATIONS

We utilized digital platforms such as online websites, Yelp, and Google to gather information on small businesses. Through these channels, the Hwarang Youth Foundation identified potential Asian American immigrant-owned businesses in the Orange County/Los Angeles area. This study enabled us to gather insights into the products and services offered by these businesses.

However, the scope of the present study was limited, as we encountered challenges in obtaining additional data that could have been valuable in proposing resources for small businesses. For instance, we lacked demographic information, such as whether a business was immigrant-owned or second-generation, which made it difficult to offer targeted assistance. The information we collected was able to identify general information regarding the company such as the type of services/products offered and the business's contact information.

Our team's reliance solely on internet-based

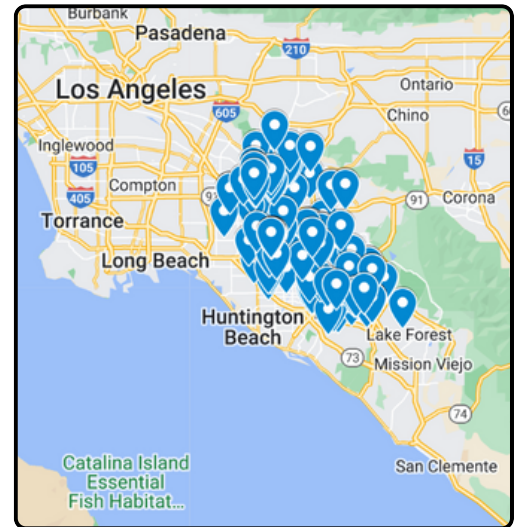


Figure 5. A display of the digital mapping

information limited the scope of our research outcomes. To enhance the effectiveness of our project in proposing resources for small businesses, it's crucial to incorporate more precise data. For instance, given the present study's online sources for data collection, we encountered challenges in obtaining demographic details such as whether a business is immigrant-owned or second-generation. This lack of demographic insight makes it difficult to tailor specific aid to individual businesses. For example, a first-generation Korean American restaurant whose owner faces language barriers may require different resources compared to a third-generation Korean American-owned beauty salon. Generalizing the necessary help to all businesses can be challenging since various business categories often have unique needs. For instance, restaurants possess specific needs distinct from other types of businesses. Unlike retail stores, which can store non-perishable items for extended periods, restaurants heavily rely on perishable inventory like fresh produce, meat, and dairy. The SBA website currently has several resources targeting the needs of specific businesses. For example, the Restaurant Revitalization Fund (RRF), created under the American Rescue Plan Act, aimed to support



restaurants and eligible businesses in maintaining their operations during the pandemic. Through this program, businesses could have received funding matching their pre-pandemic revenue capped at \$10 million per business and \$5 million per individual store. This program prioritized the restaurants with women, veterans, or socially/economically disadvantaged business owners.

Further, given this method of data collection, the present study may not have addressed Korean immigrant business owners who may face barriers to accessing technology. This refers to businesses and individuals who do not have their businesses represented in the online space. The National Skills Coalition discovered around 67% of immigrants have insufficient to no digital literacy. Asian Americans already have a low 66% digital literacy rate however the percentage drastically drops to a staggering 33% amongst immigrants as of June 9th, 2021 according to medium.com. The study may not be representative of regions outside of the areas studied. The sample size of this data was strictly business in the city of Los Angeles. Our statistical data is not a point estimate of any population parameters.

Additionally, not every Korean-owned business was likely accounted for. By manually sweeping through streets using Google Maps Street View, Korean businesses with a low digital profile were able to be found and logged. For example, some Korean businesses cannot be found in Google Maps by searching their name--only their exact address will produce a result. While manually searching for these low-profile businesses was a useful countermeasure, given the high volume of streets contained within a county, it is not a perfectly accurate solution. However, since a small proportion (approximately 2 in 41) of businesses logged had a low digital profile, the sample collected is representative of the overall Korean business population. Understanding the unique needs and socio-cultural background of each business

is essential for effectively not only supporting immigrant-owned businesses but also developing policies that are conducive to the well-being of marginalized members of the community.

While our study aimed to identify as many immigrant Asian American-owned businesses as possible, it was constrained to those with an active online presence on social media platforms. However, numerous factors such as financial constraints, limited education, and language barriers often prevent immigrant-owned businesses from establishing a viable online presence. To address this limitation, our study conducted manual searches in the streets of Orange County, specifically targeting Korean businesses that may not have been initially identified online. However, this method predominantly yielded small restaurants, as other categories of businesses already had a robust online presence.

Although doctors were included as small businesses, it is important to note that they are often in-network due to affiliation or contracts with health insurance plans or healthcare networks. Additionally, doctors are less likely to require loans, as an entry-level doctor's annual salary is approximately \$238,000 as of December 27, 2023, according to salary.com.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The SBA website <https://www.sba.gov/> provides a wide array of resources for any person to use. From business plans, marketing tutorials, etc. the SBA website's learning platform page provides lessons and videos to help all businesses grow. The SBA website also has a specific page dedicated to helping minority-owned businesses succeed. They offer counseling and training, various funding programs, contracting certifications, and business development programs specifically for minority-owned businesses to use. Their T.H.R.I.V.E. Emerging Leaders Reimagined is an intensive series dedicated to helping the growth



of high-potential small businesses in America’s underserved cities. The participants in this program create a three-year strategic growth plan with guidance and specific goals to merge as self-sustaining businesses further developing the community. The SBA Mentor-Protégé Program connects experienced companies/businesses with smaller businesses that could use the guidance of a successful company. The goal of this program is to create a mentor-protége dynamic e allowing for the immigrant-owned business to get a boost in sales. The 8(a) Business Development program supports the growth of socially and economically disadvantaged small businesses by providing them with exclusive

opportunities to compete for specific contracts. Participants in the program can engage in set-aside and sole-source contracts, receive guidance from Business Opportunity Specialists, establish joint ventures through the SBA’s Mentor-Protégé Program, and access various types of assistance including but not limited to business training, counseling, marketing support, and executive development. Certification and meeting specific criteria are prerequisites for participation in the 8(a) Business Development program. Through the use of the SBA website, immigrant-owned businesses can access various forms of resources and assistance to help maximize the potential growth of these businesses.

SBA RESOURCES

MINORITY-OWNED BUSINESSES

T.H.R.I.V.E. Emerging Leaders Reimagined

This program is a focused effort aimed at supporting the advancement of promising small businesses in underserved cities across America. Participants in this program work on crafting a strategic growth plan spanning three years, guided by mentors and with clear objectives, aiming to become self-sustaining entities and contributing to the development of their communities.

SBA Mentor-Protégé Program

This program links established companies with smaller businesses seeking guidance from successful counterparts. The aim is to foster a mentor-protége relationship, facilitating sales growth for immigrant-owned businesses. The 8(a) Business Development program specifically aids socially and economically disadvantaged small businesses.

The 8(a) Business Development

This program aids socially and economically disadvantaged small businesses in their growth journey by offering exclusive contracting opportunities within the federal marketplace, thereby reducing competition and enabling them to establish a strong presence. Businesses enrolled in the 8(a) program gain access to various benefits, including the ability to compete for set-aside and sole-source contracts, guidance from Business Opportunity Specialists for navigating federal contracting,

opportunities to form joint ventures through the SBA's Mentor-Protégé Program, and access to management and technical assistance such as business training, counseling, marketing support, and executive development.

The HUBZone program

This program is designed to restrict competition for particular contracts exclusively to businesses located in historically underutilized business zones. Its primary objective is to allocate a minimum of three percent of federal contract funds annually to companies certified under the HUBZone program.



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