

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## **SOUTH32 RELIEF FUND HELPS SANTA CRUZ SMALL BUSINESSES THROUGH COVID-19**

A \$100,000 grant program sponsored by South32 in recent months has provided urgently needed financial relief to 40 locally owned small business in Santa Cruz County. The grant process was conducted through a partnership with Local First Arizona.

Local First Arizona launched the Small Business Relief Fund in late March to provide immediate cash flow to Arizona's microenterprises through mini-grants that can be used to cover costs like employee payroll and rent. The fund is dependent on the generosity of donors, and South32 contributions were earmarked specifically for Santa Cruz County.

Applications to the South32/Local First Small Business Relief Fund were open to businesses with up to eight employees and annual revenue of less than \$500,000. Priority was given to business owners with children under 18 living at home and to families reliant on their business as the sole household income.

Businesses applied for assistance in response to outreach largely from local Hispanic Chambers of Commerce and Local First. Most applicants had limited or no access to federal and state COVID-19 funding and loans, leaving them challenged to survive the pandemic's economic fallout. The South32 grants provided urgent relief for everything from employee payroll to overdue rent and utilities payments.

Recently, 22 of the grantees chose to participate in an anonymous survey measuring the impact of the grant program. With the support of the grants, a full 90 percent of the respondents reported that they had been able to retain their workforce and continue operations during Arizona's COVID-19 lockdown. Among their comments were stories of being able to pivot to new sales channels, stave off staff reductions, and avoid having to apply for emergency loans.

For more information about the program, visit [www.localfirstaz.com/santa-cruz-county-sbrf](http://www.localfirstaz.com/santa-cruz-county-sbrf).

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