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## Beacon Council online resource hub gets 8,000 visitors

By John Charles Robbins

When business came to a sudden halt in March due to the coronavirus, the Miami-Dade Beacon Council got down to business.

Miami-Dade County's official economic development partnership, the council's immediate response to the global pandemic was to create the Covid-19 Resource Center on BeaconCouncil.com, said President and CEO Michael Finney in an email to Miami Today.

The page serves as a reservoir for South Florida-specific information and solutions across industry sectors, aggregating resources needed to address the economic hardships driven by Covid-19.

Since going live three months ago, Beacon's Covid-19 Resource Center has had almost 8,000 unique visitors, accounting for 67% of incremental page views year-over-year.

This is just one of many steps taken by the not-for-profit public-private organization whose primary focus is on job creation and economic growth.

Providing timely, valuable and helpful information became a top priority for the council, which has been helping shape the local economy since its creation in 1985.

Mr. Finney said the council is playing a major role in planning for the new road ahead, as the city and the world slowly reopen.

"The Beacon Council has played a very active role in recovery planning, working with the county and key partners including the Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau, CareerSource South Florida, local municipalities, chambers of commerce and other private and public sector partners.

"On both the county's Economic Recovery Task Force and Mayor (Carlos) Giménez's Economic



Michael Finney sees major role.

Recovery initiative, we expect to continue to drive strategic solutions for the whole of our community – from the smallest flower shop to the largest healthcare providers," wrote Mr. Finney.

Online advice and guidance are also targeted to help the small businesses.

Mr. Finney said the Beacon Council partnered with Miami-Dade County, Slalom Consulting and the Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau and numerous other partners, to quickly launch BizHelp.Miami, a one-stop online portal that streamlined the loan application process for small businesses.

The portal is available in English, Spanish and Kreyol, and features SBA-approved lenders that are working with Miami companies, delivering users directly to their bank's loan application portal or that of another approved lender for a more seamless application process.

The portal also highlights additional funding options, such as state and local bridge loans, economic injury disaster loans (EIDL), community foundation programs, and other local resources as they become available.

Mr. Finney said, "Less than two months later, we have shared

this and other resources with over 45,000 small businesses in Miami-Dade, hosted over 7,600 unique users and captured over 1,000 registrants on BizHelp.Miami.

"As we shift to re-opening and begin recovery efforts, the resources on this site continue to be augmented – we encourage you to visit BizHelp.Miami regularly and engage with the dozens of organizations that are there to offer help (most of them free of charge)."

In addition, the Beacon Council hosted a Virtual Town Hall Series that facilitated information on resources and assistance available to support businesses impacted by Covid-19.

Mr. Finney said the council surveyed local manufacturers and established a Covid Supply Chain B2B initiative, allowing it to identify local manufacturers and vendors that could produce, distribute or donate essential products or services—including masks, gloves, ventilators, and other equipment for frontline workers—and connect them to the companies and institutions that needed them.

"Beyond hosting an online portal, virtual town halls and the Covid Supply Chain effort, our team has been actively engaging with hundreds of local businesses seeking information and aid via BeaconHelp@beaconcouncil.com or questions@bizhelp.miami," wrote Mr. Finney.

He said, "We have worked closely with Commissioner (Eileen) Higgins's office as well as the Dade County Federal Credit Union and local CDFIs to design the RISE Miami Revolving Loan Fund, which we are happy to say was approved unanimously by the Board of County Commissioners on June 2. This will complement the forgivable loan program established by Miami-Dade County

(and managed by Tools for Change and Partners for Self-Employment) last month."

Mr. Finney said recovery efforts are multi-layered. The local efforts the council is helping to drive at the county level focus on three main efforts: facilitating access to capital, talent and workforce development, and marketing.

"In an effort to support our local

businesses long-term, we will be encouraging both individuals and companies to buy local. Look for goods that are Made in Miami, get fresh local produce, clothing, services and more," Mr. Finney said.

"We encourage businesses to connect with us and each other as we tap into our shared strengths in order to build the best version of Miami-Dade as we move forward."



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