



## **Business Retention and Expansion Report**

**2019-2020**

sponsored by





**Decide DeKalb**

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**2019–2020**

Decide DeKalb is proud to serve our business community through the Business Retention & Expansion (BRE) Program. Existing businesses form the foundation for local employment opportunities, the local tax base, and support vitality and growth of our community. Therefore, Decide DeKalb makes BRE one of our top priorities. The BRE Program helps us identify and assess the needs and challenges of businesses in the community. With this information, it helps us create or locate resources that support DeKalb County businesses' stability, growth and expansion.

Small business is the lifeblood of any community, and DeKalb is no different. In 2019 and 2020, the majority of the businesses we engaged have less than 20 employees. Thanks to our strong BRE program and relationships built over the years, Decide DeKalb was able to focus on helping DeKalb County businesses through the challenges presented by COVID-19, and were able to build on our 2019 successes to create more touch points across DeKalb's business community.

Decide DeKalb's Joint 2019 and 2020 BRE Report is intended to assess the business climate between 2019 and 2020, and better identify the impacts of COVID-19 on DeKalb companies. This helps Decide DeKalb develop strategies to address current and future business needs. The data in this report is gathered through our BRE meetings. In addition to the usual information we collect, in 2020 we administered a special COVID-19 Business Survey, which lead to the development of our COVID-19 Business Resource Guide.

## About Decide DeKalb

Decide DeKalb is the primary economic development driving force to attract, expand and retain businesses in DeKalb County, Georgia. Established in 1974 as the Development Authority of DeKalb County, Decide DeKalb works with partners, stakeholders and the business community at-large to spur capital investments, encourage job growth and create business sustainability within our community. Decide DeKalb provides services and leverages partner relationships to continuously improve the quality of life for over 750,000 residents.

## Decide DeKalb's Business Retention & Expansion Program

Decide DeKalb's BRE Program operated with the following goals in mind:

1. Help businesses with their plans to grow, including resources on access to capital.
2. Find or create solutions to local business concerns.
3. Identify businesses at risk of leaving or downsizing.

The Business Retention and Expansion program allows us to assist in connecting existing businesses with information, resources, and programs to help their company. We do this primarily through on-site company visits (in 2020, these visits were virtual), which helps us learn more about the company's issues, concerns, plans for growth or reduction, and valuable insights into the business community. This information allows Decide DeKalb to respond quickly to the challenges that businesses face. Resources and solutions include assistance with workforce, accessing capital, navigating local government, real estate and site selection, and more.



## Doing Business in

## DeKalb County

DeKalb County is a great place to do business, based on our highly educated labor force, access to talent, interstate and public transit connectivity, and public institutions such as Emory University, Emory Healthcare, and the CDC.

### *DeKalb County Facts & Figures*

- Population: 759,297.
- Population growth: 9.7% vs US: 6.3%.
- 17,000+ Employers.
- 13 Cities.
- 64 unique languages spoken.
- 2.7 million labor draw (available workforce within 1-hour drive).
- 13 higher education institutions with nearly 28,000 enrolled students.
- 89% of residents have a High School diploma or higher.
- 10 MARTA Stations providing access to major employment centers and neighborhoods.
- 2nd busiest airport in Georgia: Peachtree-DeKalb, which is responsible for 7,300 jobs.
- Significant Employers include:  
CDC, Children's Healthcare of Atlanta (CHOA),  
Emory Hospital & University, State Farm,  
Serta Simmons Bedding, Home Chef, Home Depot,  
Gourmet Foods International, the Weather Company,  
Krystal, UPS, Dart Container Corp, Cox Automotive,  
UPS, Old Dominion Freight Line, Xtra Lease, and  
Sugar Bowl Bakery.
- 42.9 million square feet of office space.
- 53.4 million square feet of industrial space.
- 44.5 million square feet of retail space.

## Our Partners



**ATLANTA**

**CHAMBLEE**

**DORAVILLE**

**PINE LAKE**

**AVONDALE ESTATES**

**CLARKSTON**

**DUNWOODY**

**STONE MOUNTAIN**

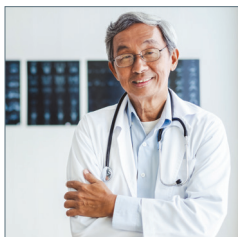
**BROOKHAVEN**

**DECATUR**

**LITHONIA**

**STONECREST**

**TUCKER**



## DeKalb County's Target Industries

- Healthcare & Life Sciences.
- Corporate Operations & Business Services.
- Advanced Manufacturing.
- Logistics & Distribution.
- Emerging industry: Film & Entertainment Production.

## BRE Results: 2019

In 2019, Decide DeKalb engaged 94 businesses. These companies are primarily small, locally-owned businesses that have been in operations for 15 years with a single location.

Industry:	
4%	Healthcare & Life Sciences.
18%	Corporate Operations & Business Services.
16%	Advanced Manufacturing.
4%	Logistics & Distribution.
1%	Emerging Film & Entertainment Production.
27%	Retail.
24%	Other.

Of the 24% "Other" category, 30% are education services and 22% are real estate.

- 94 Business Touch Points.
- 8,432 Total Employees Represented.
- 15 Average Years in Business.
- 24% Women-owned Business.
- 48 % Minority-owned Business.

Number of Employees	
251+	5%
101-250	5%
51-100	4%
11-50	18%
2-10	34%
Self-employed	9%
No response	24%

## BRE Results: 2020

In 2020, Decide DeKalb engaged 76 businesses; primarily small, minority-owned businesses that have been in operation for an average of 5 years and have a single location.

Industry:	
4%	Healthcare & Life Sciences.
22%	Corporate Operations & Business Services.
12%	Advanced Manufacturing.
5%	Logistics and Distribution.
3%	Film & Entertainment Production.
34%	Retail.
20%	Other.

Of the 20% "Other" category, 40% are nonprofits and 27% are real estate.

- 76 Business Touch Points.
- 2,000 Total Employees Represented.
- 5 Average Years in Business.
- 33% Women-owned Business.
- 67% Minority-owned Business.

Number of Employees	
251+	1%
101-250	1%
51-100	4%
11-50	22%
2-10	24%
Self-employed	0%
No response	24%



## BRE Findings:

The companies we visited are asked about their business growth, loss, and challenges. In 2019 and 2020, the effects of COVID-19 are apparent in their responses. These results will help build the foundation for Decide DeKalb's BRE efforts going forward and inform us how best to engage with county stakeholders on improving business relations and encouraging smart, robust growth. Overall, business tended to think that DeKalb is a great centralized location which makes it easy to draw business from surrounding areas, and they appreciate the diversity of workforce and residents who live here.

- In 2019, 33% reported profitable business operations, which dropped to 13% in 2020.
- In 2019, 28% of small businesses were experiencing growth, and in 2020, 43% of small businesses surveyed reported a loss in revenue.
- The two main challenges to growth our businesses faced pre-COVID and during COVID are finding funding, and attracting and retaining workforce.

## Creating a

## Better Business Environment

The BRE program also provides an opportunity for local businesses to communicate their ideas for improving the general business ecosystem in DeKalb. The following are some common business challenges that our companies shared, which Decide DeKalb has compiled below.

- The permitting and business license process can be difficult to understand, especially for entrepreneurs and microbusinesses.
- Some of the businesses we spoke to indicated that some of their workforce does not have reliable access to transportation, and expressed desire that public transportation was more accessible to their facilities.
- Businesses indicated that county infrastructure can sometimes restrict their growth.
- Some businesses wished they had more marketing opportunities.
- Small businesses expressed the need for more funding sources to be able to grow.
- Some businesses worried about any potential increase in property taxes.
- Some businesses struggled with aging facilities.

# COVID-Specific BRE Efforts

## COVID-19 Business Survey

In April of 2020, Decide DeKalb issued a COVID-19 Business Survey, which was designed to give us insight into the status of businesses in DeKalb during the pandemic. This informed the creation of the COVID-19 Business Relief Guide, which was updated with resources for companies throughout the year. The survey was distributed by email and social media channels. There were 112 total responses.

Of the 24% “other” category, 30% are education services and 22% are real-estate.

- Industries represented included:

5% Healthcare & Life Sciences.

15% Corporate Operations & Business Services.

17% Logistics and Distribution.

9% Manufacturing.

14% retail (including restaurants).

- 21% of respondents are self-employed or only have part-time staff.
- 44% of respondents have 2-10 employees.
- The largest company that responded had 600 full-time employees.

## Key findings from the survey:

- 77% of the businesses were open at the time they responded, though 59% were operating at less than half of their capacity.
- 10% of businesses responded that they were struggling to maintain staffing levels; 16% had to furlough or lay off employees.
- 84% of the businesses that responded have experienced declining sales/revenues.
- 44% said they needed assistance with maintaining operations, such as securing financing.
- At the time of the survey, 78% of companies had applied for some form of COVID financial assistance; nearly 60% of the businesses had yet to receive business relief assistance and almost 17% had not received a response from a lender.



# DeKalb County Small Business Relief Loan

The DeKalb County Small Business Relief Program was launched in August 2020 and was funded by a partnership between the Community Foundation of Greater Atlanta, United Way of Greater Atlanta, and Advance DeKalb. The program was administered by LISC.

- \$178,000 was awarded to 16 DeKalb businesses.
- Received 79 applications over 2 rounds.
- Women-owned businesses: 61%.
- Black-owned businesses: 90%.
- Received Previous COVID-19 Relief: 62%.

Through the program, 16 businesses and nonprofit organizations received a combination of loans and grants to assist their operations during the pandemic.

## DeKalb Together: COVID-19 Better Business Loan Program

DeKalb County allocated money from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act funds from the federal government to business relief. DeKalb County, Decide DeKalb and Citizens Trust Bank partnered to create the Better Business Loan Program, which included technical assistance. The loans are forgivable to businesses that complete the Better Business curriculum and meet compliance thresholds set by DeKalb County.

## BBLP Statistics

- 470 applications received.
- 228 applications approved.
- \$4,722,446.26 funds dispersed.

## Partnership Events

### **COVID-19 Reopening Your Business Townhall Meeting**

The City of Clarkston hosted a townhall meeting in partnership with Decide DeKalb, DeKalb Community Development, and Georgia Piedmont Technical College to address concerns businesses may face as they reopen. Free training, business resources, and loan information was shared to help empower and support sustainability.

### **Truist Branch Manager's Overview of Local Community Resources for Small Business**

Decide DeKalb and local organizations presented to BB&T, now Truist, Branch Managers on small business funding, small business-related relief services, or upcoming small business-related events offered in their respective areas.

### **WOW: Women Owned Wednesdays**

The Small Business Development Center hosted a month-long celebration of Women Owned Businesses in support of Women's History Month. Decide DeKalb enlisted the support of DeKalb Entertainment Commission, DeKalb Community Development, DeKalb County Planning & Sustainability, DeKalb Work Source Latino Community Fund, Invest Atlanta and Operation HOPE to host a panel discussion on DeKalb business resources every entrepreneur should know.

### **2020 LGBTQ+ Business Summit & Community Honors**

Decide DeKalb, in partnership with Golden Isles Development Authority and Invest Atlanta, co-created a session for OUT Georgia's 2020 LGBTQ+ Business Summit. The focus was on how businesses can best leverage economic development agencies.

### **Small Business DeKalb Chamber Virtual Townhall**

DeKalb Chamber of Commerce hosted a Zoom event for chamber members, business owners, and nonprofits to share the impact of coronavirus on their business. Participants were invited to market their business, share ways for local businesses to support each other, and develop strategies and tactics.

## BRE Success Stories

Despite the struggles many businesses faced in 2020, the cycle of business continued. Just as in 2019, in 2020 Decide DeKalb's economic development team acted as a liaison between companies and County, City, and other stakeholders to help businesses overcome their barriers to growth. DeKalb is committed to helping businesses navigate through challenges and plans for future growth. Below are some 2020 success stories:

### Thermo Pac

Thermo Pac is the global leader in shelf-stable food processing and has a location in the City of Tucker. Their current water supply was keeping them from expanding in their current facility. Decide DeKalb facilitated the support of DeKalb Watershed, whose engineers met with Thermo Pac and agreed that upgrading the water supply to a 4-inch main would allow enough water supply to fit their future needs, and kept the company here in DeKalb.

### Dunkin'

Dunkin' planned to renovate an existing structure in unincorporated DeKalb, doubling the size of the building and modernizing the space. Decide DeKalb was instrumental in providing permitting and development coordination with the County's Planning & Sustainability staff. This marks the second Dunkin' location in the greater Decatur area in recent years.

### Plaza Fiesta

Plaza Fiesta is an indoor Latin shopping mall located on Buford Highway, that hosts over 200 stores and (before COVID) special events throughout the year. The facility had a leak that was creating structural issues with their parking lot. Decide DeKalb was able to enlist the assistance of DeKalb Department of Watershed to figure out what the problem was and how to fix it.

### Gopuff

Founded in 2013, Gopuff is an on-demand delivery service operating in over 500 cities with 200 fulfillment centers. Because of the pandemic, the company saw demand for their services skyrocket. They expanded their service area into eastern DeKalb by opening a micro-fulfillment center in the City of Clarkston. Decide DeKalb was there to help them navigate the permitting process.



## Workforce Solutions

In 2020, Decide DeKalb created an innovative solution to workforce development: a Workforce Development Specialist hired in partnership with WorkSource DeKalb and Advance DeKalb, to provide custom workforce support to DeKalb companies and residents. This Workforce Development Specialist helped Decide DeKalb develop its first ever Workforce Strategy, which serves as a road map for building a more skilled and inclusive workforce. Since March 2020, 18 companies received direct workforce assistance, ranging from recruitment of local talent, developing custom training programs, and building connections to workforce and education partners throughout the region.

## Conclusion

Decide DeKalb continues to grow its Business Retention & Expansion program in 2021. We are excited about the efforts being made to address the challenges in DeKalb's business community, and we are grateful for the insights from the businesses who meet with us. These efforts provided valuable first-hand perspective that Decide DeKalb uses to help build a thriving business climate. County leadership and key economic development entities in DeKalb County are eager to foster increased business retention and expansion rates. The BRE program will continue to build upon its successes, as we bring value to the companies that call DeKalb home.



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