

# Crisis Management: How the pandemic exacerbated existing inequities in Columbus

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COLUMBUS URBAN LEAGUE

Columbus Urban League CEO Stephanie Hightower.

The coronavirus pandemic has wreaked havoc on small businesses from across the Columbus community – but Columbus Urban League CEO Stephanie Hightower says that when it comes to the virus' impact, "We may be in the same storm, but we're not in the same boat."

Minority-owned businesses have been disproportionately impacted, Hightower said in *Columbus Business First's* latest episode of our new Crisis Management podcast.

"We all know that this pandemic particularly is disproportionately going to impact minorities and communities of color," Hightower said.

That's apparent looking at data from those who are being laid off and furloughed, to the access by business owners to needed capital to keep their businesses afloat, Hightower said.

[A May report](#) from the U.S. Department of Labor found that while the white unemployment rate was 14.2% in April, it was 18.9% for Latinos and 16.7% for African Americans.

In addition, [a report from the Center for Responsible Lending](#) estimated that more than 90% of African American-owned businesses did not receive Paycheck Protection Program loans.

Part of the reason, Hightower said, is that many don't have deep relationships with traditional financial institutions that were working on loan applications.

"When it was time to apply for those PPP dollars they didn't really have anybody to call, and weren't comfortable calling anybody," Hightower said.

That is why the Columbus Urban League recently launched a Minority Small Business Resiliency Initiative. This initiative "provides technical, financial, and strategic advice to minority and women-owned businesses," according to the Urban League.

So far, about 325 inquiries have come in for assistance, Hightower said, and about 50 companies have been approved for more than \$3.7 million in loans.

"What's really great is that we've been able to save 895 jobs ... because of our efforts," Hightower said.

You can hear the rest of our conversation with Hightower here.

[Columbus Business First · Crisis Management: Stephanie Hightower on Covid-19's impact on minority-owned businesses](#)

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*One note: We spoke to Hightower last week, before demonstrations began in Columbus over police brutality and the death of George Floyd. [Check out this story to hear more from Hightower and other African American leaders](#) on how they want the community to move forward.*



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