

TGX ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT PROJECT



Final Summary Report
Submitted: Thursday, June 18, 2026

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UsCC Capacity Building Project Final Report: TGX Economic Empowerment Project

- **UsCC Subcommittee:** LGBTQIA2-S
- **Targeted Age Group:** Adults 26-64
- **Fiscal Year:** 2025-2026
- **Project Title:** TGX Economic Empowerment Project
- **Agency Name:** Best Life, LLC (d/b/a Crystal Lily Creative)
- **Name and Contact Information of Person Submitting Report:**
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 - Phone: (323) 354-7709

Original Project Proposal

Project Description

The TGX Economic Empowerment Project supported 8 to 10 members of the LGBTQIA2-S Community who identify as transgender, nonbinary, or gender expansive (TGX). Selected participants went through a 12-week trauma-informed personal and professional brand development coaching program to establish or refine their brand to position themselves for new business and opportunities. The goal was to increase economic empowerment amongst a community that experiences higher rates of workplace and housing discrimination and lower access to mental healthcare and other resources that support and improve overall well-being.

Participants clarified their brand through shared language, personal and community connection, core values, relationship building, self-examination, embodiment, and foundational messaging development. Participants received a personal/professional brand photoshoot to reflect the embodiment of who they are and what they do, a DIY website development workshop to create an online marketing presence to reach their target market. Participants also received a workshop on business legal and tax filing information. Participants were made aware of LACDMH and connected to resources throughout the project.

Interested participants submitted an application describing their existing or prospective business by the specified submission date to be considered. Participants were chosen by a selection committee made up of LGBTQIA2-2 community leaders.

Purpose/Objective

TGX individuals are more likely to experience economic disempowerment due to workplace discrimination and social biases that directly impact their income. Economic disempowerment leads to higher rates of anxiety, depression, and housing instability due to lack of access to resources to support mental health and housing. Increased economic empowerment can reduce these outcomes, by building confidence and creating income opportunities.

People who experience higher levels of discrimination are more likely to start their own businesses and need more access to resources to do so. TGX individuals benefited from the opportunity to develop or redefine their brand while connecting to their authentic leadership style, mission, vision, values, and purpose; creating opportunities to build aligned relationships that will amplify and support their business and economic endeavors. Participants also received trauma-informed support on incorporating mindfulness and nervous system regulation practices to help cultivate sustainable business and leadership growth and decision-making.

Highlighting the benefits of economic empowerment through shared values creates more opportunities for human-centered connection and relating, which aids in reducing anxiety and depression. This project created increased awareness of LACDMH through cross promotional branding throughout the project and the subsequent brand launches of participants.

Outreach and Engagement

This project engaged the LGBTQIA2-S TGX community through outreach for participation as well as brand launches upon project completion. The provided brand assets and leadership coaching helped participants build their presence in their respective markets, allowing them to confidently connect and engage with aligned and affirming customers/clients and collaborative partners.

Education

This project helped develop awareness and understanding about the challenges TGX individuals face while educating on the importance of economic empowerment so that people can access the care and resources they need.

Stigma Reduction

Studies show that stigmatization resulting from social hierarchies and misinformation leads to greater marginalization for vulnerable populations. This includes stigma towards how people present outside of the binary, as well as stigma towards people experiencing mental health challenges and access to financial resources. Connecting TGX individuals with opportunities for increased economic empowerment and showcasing the talents, products and services they can offer through shared human values creates opportunities for affirming and aligned

connections, visibility, understanding, and support for a community that is often under resourced, disregarded, and unjustly demonized.

Justification

This project was designed to support LGBTQIA2-S individuals of all races/ethnicities, aged 26-64 who want to start or realign their business. Recruitment emphasized transgender and non-binary, people of color, and people living with disabilities. Vendor worked with subcontractors and partners to ensure that they are culturally affirming, accessible, and facilitated in relevant languages.

Data

1. The 2024 Shine The Light Survey by Be The Transformational Change Fund reported:
 - a. 54% of transgender respondents report worrying about discrimination or harmful workplace behavior
 - i. (<https://www.bethetransformationalchange.org/shine-the-light>)
2. The National Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce suggests transgender business owners account for 2% of LGBTQ+ owned businesses in the United States.
3. Transgender workers disproportionately experience economic disparities exacerbated by social stigma for being transgender; thus more likely to become business owners to avoid workplace discrimination.
 - a. *Entrepreneurial fear of failure: Transgender versus cis-gender entrepreneurs* (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2352673422000300>)
 - i. (Dispenza, Watson, Chung and Brack, 2012; Lombardi et al., 2002)
 - ii. (Harrison et al., 2012; Hoang and Oosterhoff, 2016; Oosterhoff and Hoang, 2018)
4. Social norms favor masculinity over femininity, resulting in transgender women experiencing employment discrimination and subsequent economic stressors compared to transgender men.
 - a. *Transgender Stigma and Health: A Critical Review of Stigma Determinants, Mechanisms, and Interventions* (<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4689648/>)
5. Transgender workers experience poorer economic outcomes, including higher rates of unemployment (16-19%) and poverty (8-16%) compared to the overall unemployment and poverty rates.
 - a. *Understanding Diverse Economic Outcomes in the Transgender Community* (<https://www.workrisenetwork.org/working-knowledge/understanding-diverse-economic-outcomes-transgender-community>)
 - b. *Transgender Workers At Greater Risk for Unemployment and Poverty* (<https://www.lgbtmap.org/news/a-broken-bargain-for-transgender-workers-release>)

Project Outcomes Summary

The [TGX Economic Empowerment Project](#) is a three month trauma-informed leadership and brand development accelerator program for transgender, nonbinary, and gender expansive (TGX) business owners in Los Angeles County. The project was sponsored by the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health at no cost to participants.

The project provided nine business owners with access to resources and services that help support their leadership and brand development so they can create their own economic empowerment to help create access to more of the resources and services they need, ultimately improving mental health outcomes.

The selected participants included business owners from a range of backgrounds and industries, including digital marketing, research, coaching, health and wellness, pet care, contracting, fashion and events.

The project was created by Crystal Whiteaker, Founder and CEO of Best Life, LLC, DBA Crystal Lily Creative. The project was made possible by funding from the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health. Educational workshops on navigating mental health and the challenges TGX business owners face, leadership development, branding, marketing, and web design, as well as legal, business, bookkeeping and tax education. The workshops were facilitated by culturally sensitive and affirming leaders who are business owners themselves. The participants also received photo and video sessions providing them with custom visuals for their websites and marketing.

The program finished with a launch event at [The Wu:uM](#) in Los Angeles where the business owners showcased their brands and expanded their visibility.

Economic empowerment is driven by community support; and community is vital for individual and collective growth. This project reinforced that we all have something meaningful to contribute and learn from one another. Facilitator and participant feedback reflects that the Project had a profound positive impact for participants.

(*See Appendix K for the TGX Economic Empowerment Project Video Summary)

Outreach and Recruitment

This project engaged the LGBTQIA2-S TGX community through outreach for participation as well as brand launches upon project completion. The provided brand assets and leadership coaching was designed to help participants build their presence in their respective markets, allowing them to confidently connect and engage with aligned and affirming customers/clients and collaborative partners.

Selection Committee

To ensure fair, unbiased, and culturally sensitive recruitment, TGX Advisors were included in the selection process.

Rex Wilde (they/them) - TGX Inclusion Expert and Advisor

Sydney Rogers (she/her) - TGX Advisor

Selection Committee Review Process

Committee members were provided with applicant information and a two week review window. Following the review window, committee members met with the project lead to share feedback and select participants.

Applicants were evaluated based on completion of their applications, parameters of the project requirements, availability and fit for the program.

Leadership Team Development and Recruitment

The leadership team included several trusted business owners and community leaders from a range of backgrounds including consulting, creative, marketing, accounting, legal and advisory services. Each team member developed and facilitated sessions to share their knowledge and experience with participants.

Call for Applicants

In order to expand our reach to connect with potential applicants we reached out to several LGBTQ+ leaders and organizations to help share the project. The call for applicants was shared via multiple outlets:

1. LADMH LGBTQIA2-S+ UsCC email distribution
2. Community partners
 - a. Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce (LAGLCC)
 - b. Open Space Therapy Collective
 - c. Program facilitator newsletters and social media channels
3. Direct email outreach to colleagues, friends, and community partners
4. Social media (Three separate posts were shared: announcement, reminder, and meet the team)
 - a. Instagram
 - b. LinkedIn
 - c. HeyFamm*

Total Combined Social Media Engagement

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	<u>Instagram</u>	<u>LinkedIn</u>	<u>Hey Famm*</u>
Impressions/views	6,460	1,935	n/a
Reach	3,507	1,077	n/a
Likes/Reactions	114	66	8
Shares/Reposts	118	19	n/a
Saves	12	4	n/a
Comments	8	13	1

*Hey Famm (<https://www.heyfamm.com/>) is a new social network for LGBTQ+ professionals.

(*See Appendix I for marketing materials.)

Application

Applications were open from January 5, 2026 to January 18, 2026. Applicants were directed to complete the application via the application site, now hosted at:

<http://crystallily.co/tgx-economic-empowerment-project-application>

Applicants were asked to answer the following questions, with required questions indicated by an asterisk*

1. First Name*
2. Last Name*
3. Pronouns*
4. Phone Number
5. Zip Code*
6. Age*
7. Race or Ethnicity*
8. Gender*
9. How do you identify (sexual orientation)*
10. Do you identify as neurodivergent?*
11. Are there any other identities you would like to share or information you would like to expand upon?
12. Company*
13. Industry
14. Website*
15. Social media links*
16. How is your business registered?*
17. How long have you been in business?*

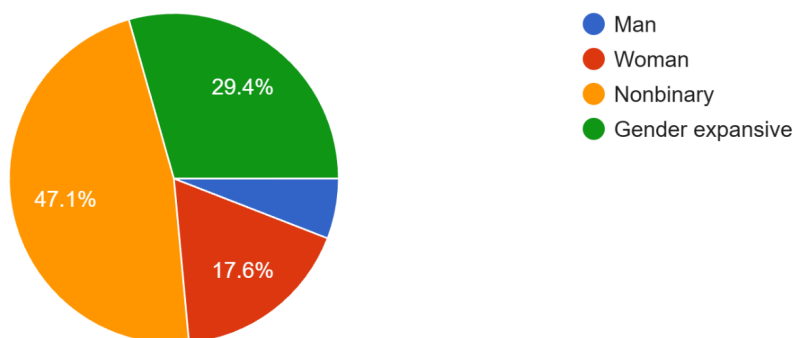
18. Annual revenue*
19. How did you learn about this opportunity?*
20. Please share a little about yourself. Who are you and what should we know about you?*
21. Please share about your business. What do you do? Why did you start it? Who are your clients/customers?*
22. Why do you want to go through this program?*
23. Have you had leadership or brand development coaching before?*
24. Have you ever gone through leadership development coaching before? How was your experience?*
25. What is your experience with brand development coaching?*
26. Please list 2 to three goals you hope to accomplish in your business in the next year.
27. How do you feel navigating owning a business as a TGX person? Please share about any strengths and challenges related to your identity(ies).
28. Do you have access to mental health services question mark
29. How do you currently care for your mental health and well-being as a business owner?*
30. Breaks closed, captioning and transcripts will be available for every coaching session. Please share any access needs you have below.*
31. This program is going to require you to do deep personal and professional work. If selected to participate, are you willing and able to commit to the weekly schedule below.*
32. If you answered no to the question above, please explain.
33. Do you have access to a computer and reliable internet connection?*
34. Do you have any questions?
35. Is there anything else you would like us to know?

Applicant Demographics

Gender Identity

Gender

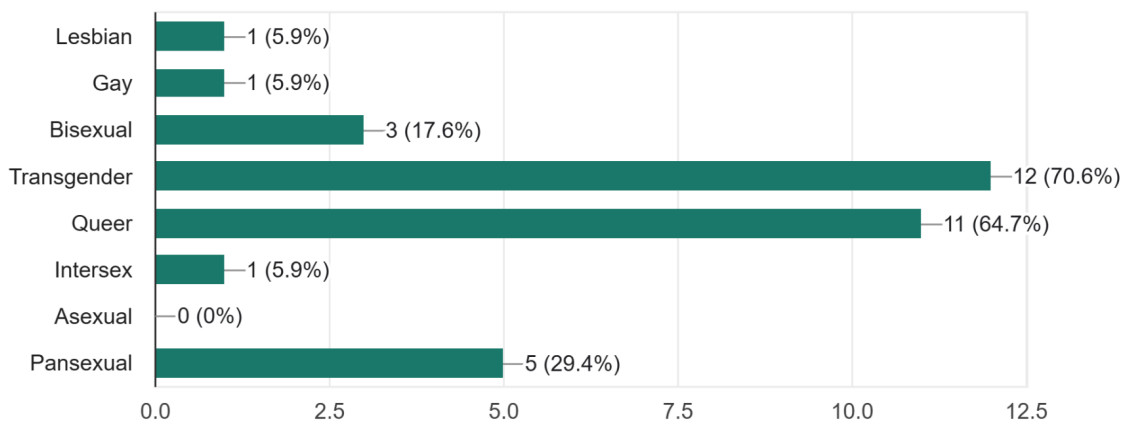
17 responses



Sexual Orientation

How do you identify? (Check all that apply)

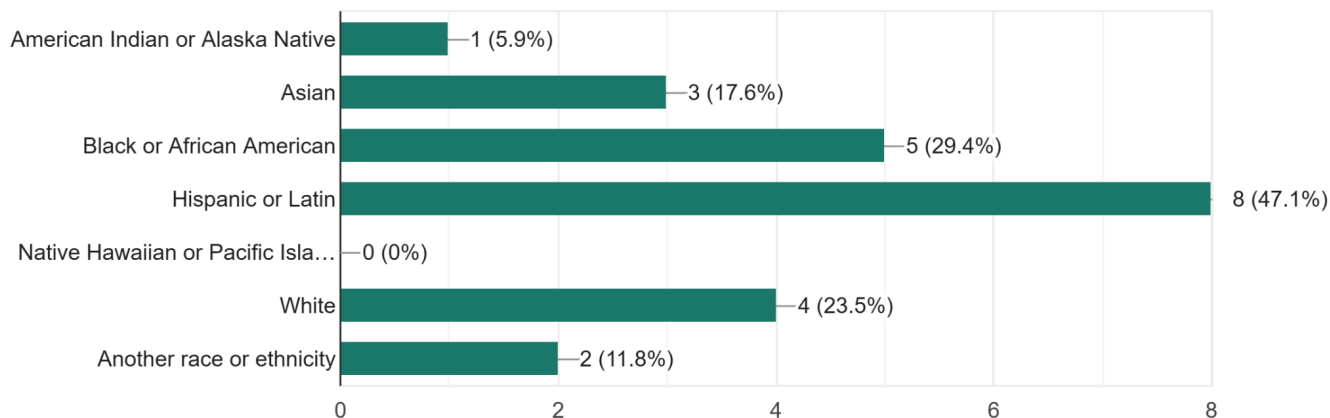
17 responses



Race and Ethnicity

Race or ethnicity (check all that apply)

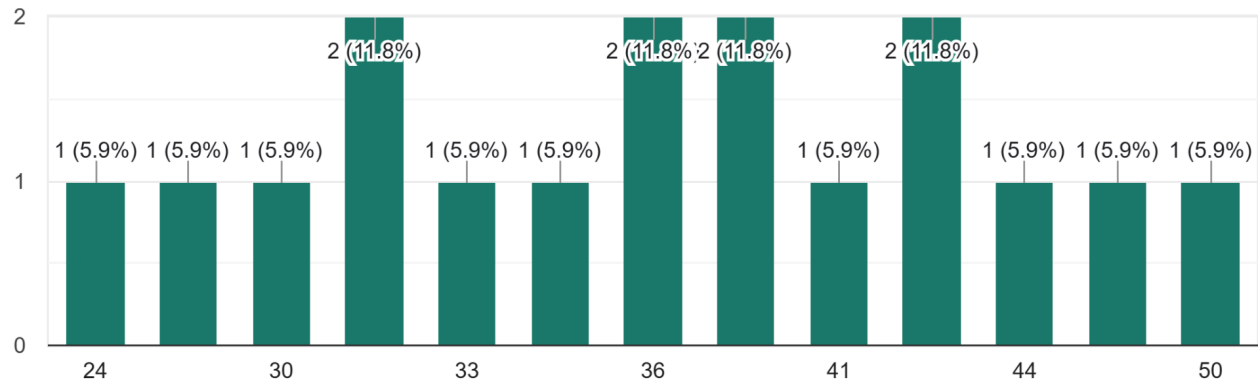
17 responses



Age

Age

17 responses



Applicant Selection and Notification

Evaluation and Selection Process

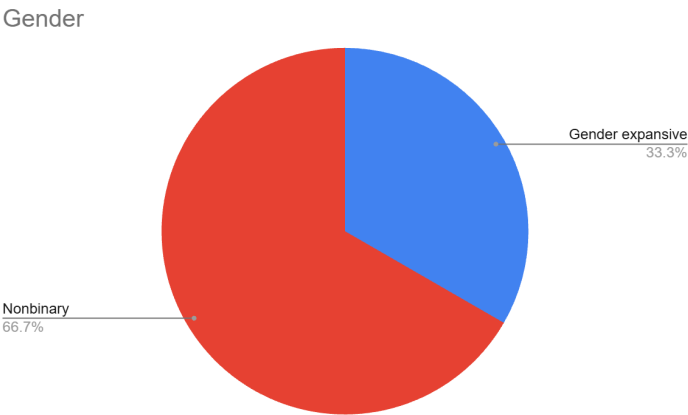
Seventeen applications were submitted. Two fell outside of the minimum requirements criteria leaving fifteen applications for review. Applicants were evaluated on the following criteria and applicants with the highest need were prioritized.

1. Completion of application
2. Clarity of business concept
3. Need for leadership, brand, and business development support
4. Annual revenue and access to resources
5. Experience with leadership and brand development support

Ten applicants were selected and notified via email and text messages. One participant attended the first call and was absent for the remaining sessions with no response to email or text messages.

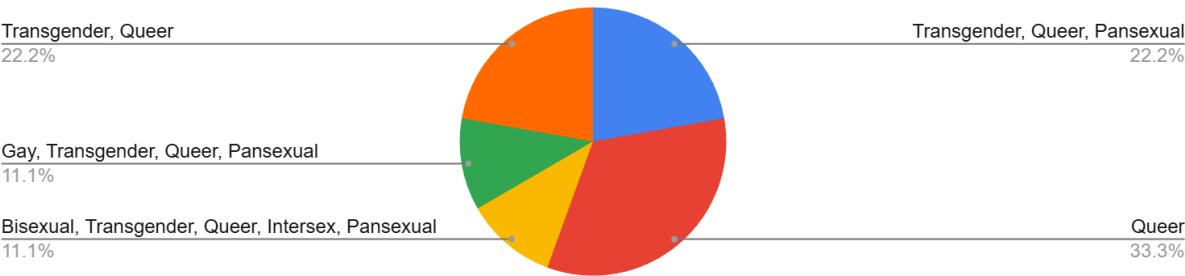
Selected Applicant Demographics

Gender Identity



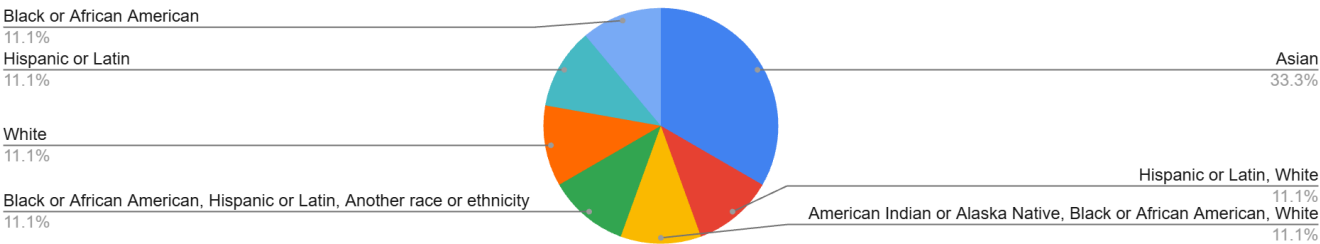
Sexual Orientation

How do you identify? (Check all that apply)

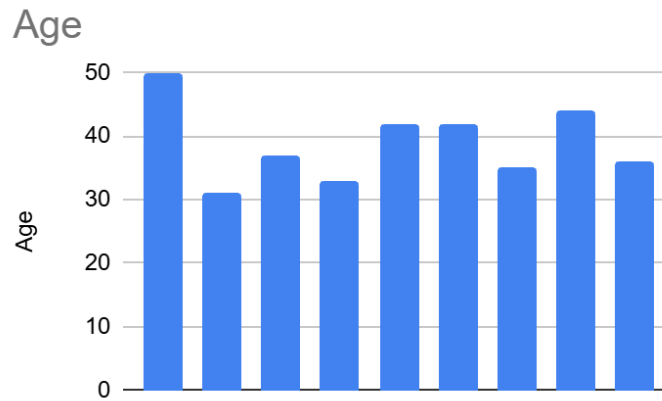


Race and Ethnicity

Race or ethnicity (check all that apply)



Age



Demographic Takeaways

All participants self-identified as nonbinary (66.7%) or gender expansive (33.3%).

Participants self-identified across a range of sexual orientations, races, and ethnicities, creating a diverse group with overlapping lived experiences and new perspectives from non-overlapping lived experiences.

All participants were between the ages of 30 and 50, with the majority of the group being in their 30's, a few in their 40's, and one participant aged 50.

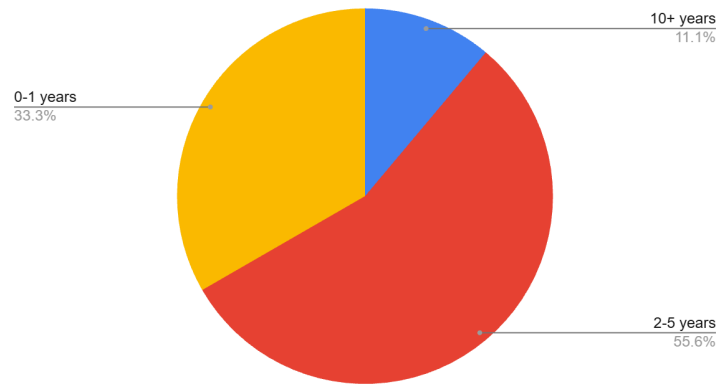
Participant Key Application Information and Pre-Engagement Survey

Key application information was collected from participants to understand their experience with leadership and brand development coaching, and availability to attend group coaching sessions.

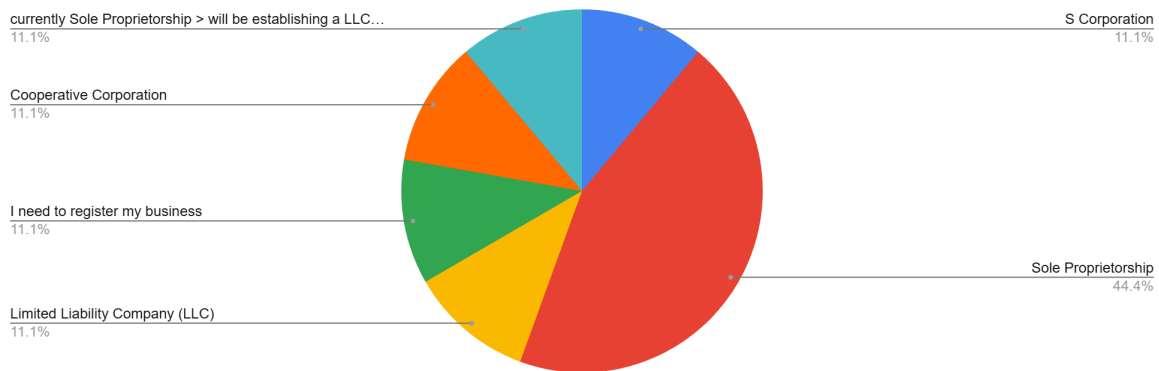
A pre-engagement survey (needs assessment) was provided for participants to complete to ensure leadership understood any accessibility needs, dietary requirements, availability to attend virtual group coaching sessions, in-person photo and video sessions, and the final brand launch celebration.

*Key survey information is below and additional information can be found in Appendix B.

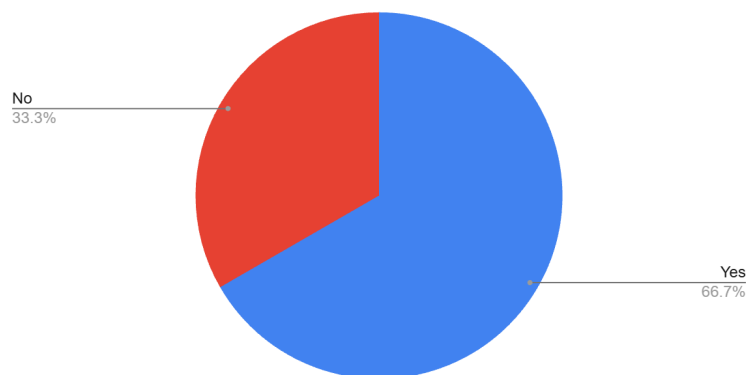
How long have you been in business?



Count of How is your business registered?

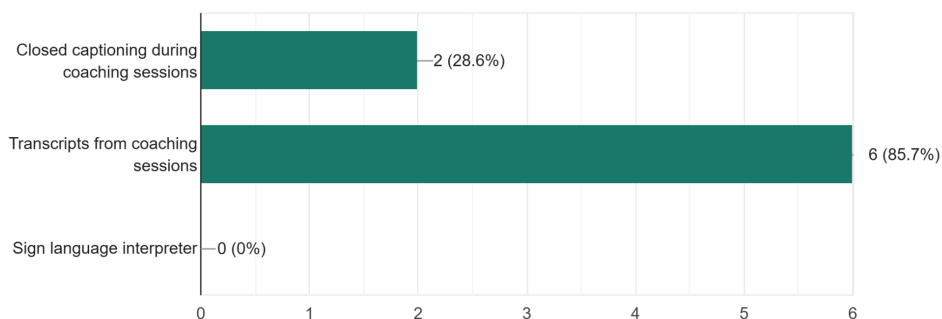


Have you had leadership or brand development coaching before?



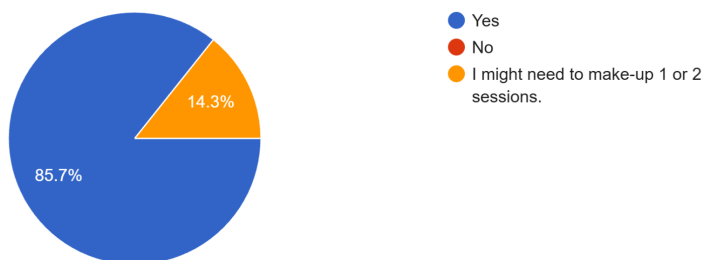
If you need any of the following, please check all that apply.

7 responses



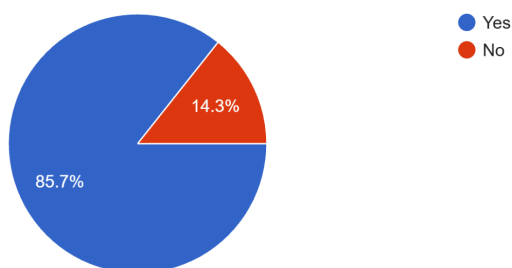
Are you available and able to commit to the weekly schedule below? Wednesdays 6:00 - 8:00 PM February 11, 2026 - May 13, 2026 (Note: Expect 1-2 hours of homework each week.)

7 responses



Do you have access to transportation to attend a photoshoot and in-person brand launch?

7 responses



Participant Leadership and Brand Development Programming

Welcome Meeting

To establish a sense of familiarity before group coaching sessions began, a welcome meeting was held for all participants and available facilitators to connect, introduce themselves, and share what they hoped to get out of the program.

Resources Provided

Participants received a link to a Google Drive Participant Resource folder that included:

1. Mental Health Resource List*
2. Business Resource List*
 - a. All facilitator contact information
3. Land Acknowledgment*
4. Participation Agreements*
5. Program Calendar*
6. Program Curriculum*
7. Aligned Values workbook
8. Session Materials
 - a. All session recording links
 - b. Session slides
 - c. Session transcripts
9. Participant contact information

(*See appendix C through H.)

Leadership and Brand Development Coaching and Learning Sessions

The program consisted of twelve (12) leadership and brand development coaching and learning sessions in the curriculum below. Each session began with a land acknowledgment, space agreements, grounding, and an energy check-in. Participants received recap emails after each session with reminders for assignments and what to expect for the next session.

Session 1: Exploring Mindfulness, Identity, and Values*

Facilitator: Crystal Whiteaker

Session 2: Understanding Mental Health and the Nervous System

Facilitator: Kat Ralph, LCSW

Session 3: Everyday Empowerment for TGX Business Owners

Facilitator: Rex Wilde (Addressing Challenges Faced by Transgender and Nonbinary TGX Business Owners)

Session 4: Business, Bookkeeping, and Tax Compliance

Facilitator: Randy Gomez

Session 5: Using Core Values to Build Your Brand*

Facilitator: Crystal Whiteaker

Session 6: Brand Messaging, Marketing, and Relationship Building*

Facilitator: Crystal Whiteaker

Guests: Tamiah Bantum (Supporting with photo/video on-camera prep) and Sydney Harris (NGLCC Certification information)

Session 7: Design Your Brand and Build Your Website to Market Your Business

Facilitator: Paige Ray

Session 8: Systems and Processes for Marketing and Client Experience

Facilitator: Tristan Katz

Session 9: Navigating Bias, Conflict, and Discomfort*

Facilitator: Crystal Whiteaker

Guest: Rex Wilde

Session 10: Protecting Your Brand and Building Your Business: A Trademark and Legal Essentials Workshop for LGBTQ+ Entrepreneurs

Facilitator: Moorisha Bey-Taylor

Session 11: Business in Practice: Implementation and Integration Session

Facilitator: Crystal Whiteaker

Session 12: Networking and Pitching

Facilitator: Crystal Whiteaker

Guests: Rex Wilde, Cat Perez, Tristan Katz

(*Supporting resource: [Aligned Values: A Guided Workbook for Inclusive Leaders](https://www.crystallily.co/shop/p/aligned-values-workbook)
<https://www.crystallily.co/shop/p/aligned-values-workbook>)

Brand Photography and Video Shoots

Brand photography and video sessions were scheduled for Friday, April 10, 2026 and Saturday, April 11, 2026. Photo sessions took place during the week when participants were on break from group coaching sessions so that they wouldn't be overwhelmed with a Wednesday session, and then an end of week photo and video session.

Participants were made aware that photo and video sessions were scheduled for the second week of April and we began preparing them for their photo sessions during week five. Participants were provided with considerations for photo and video, including wardrobe tips, creating inspiration boards, and suggestions for elevator pitches for brand videos.

Inspiration and Planning

Each participant received an individual photo and video planning meeting as well as a brand photo brief that included location information, point of contact details, inspiration images, a shot list, props to bring, brand goals, and overall mood for their sessions.

The brand photo briefs* were informed by the Pinterest boards created by Participants in collaboration with the Photographer.

(*See Appendix J for example brand photo briefs.)

Production and Editing

Photo and video sessions were scheduled over two days: April 10-11, 2026. Participants were provided with a link to a spreadsheet to choose a time that worked for their schedule. During each photo and video session, participants were directed for posing, interaction between cameras and additional models, and dialogue for video.

Photography and video was edited to align with the brand photography briefs that were created prior to the photo and video sessions.

Image and Media Delivery

Photo galleries and video files were delivered to participants in two formats:

1. Brand photo galleries were shared via Shootproof links from the photographer's brand studio
2. Brand videos were shared via Google Drive links from the videographer's Google Drive
3. Brand photo and video links of participants who signed the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health media waiver were shared with LACDMH
 - a. Participants who signed the media waiver:
 - i. Roman Rangel, Roman Rangel Coaching
 - ii. Aunjel A'resa Fullington, Rest Well Club

- iii. Charli Gross, The Love of Dogs Pet Care
- iv. Nik Kacy, Nik Kacy Footwear
- v. Grace Tang, Grace Tang MPH Consulting
- vi. Izzy Bravo, XFM Electric Cooperative
- b. Two participants opted out of the media waiver
- c. One participant opted out of photography and video sessions

(*See Appendix J for links to participant photo galleries and videos.)

TGX Connect Celebration Event

A final launch event to showcase and amplify the business owners and their brands was held at [The Wu:uM \(https://www.thewuum.com/\)](https://www.thewuum.com/) in Los Angeles. Photos from the event can be found [here](http://crystallily.co/tgx-connect-event-photos). (<http://crystallily.co/tgx-connect-event-photos>)

Final launch event: TGX Connect

1. Event host selection
2. Panning meeting
3. Venue selection
4. Scheduling
5. Panelist selection
6. Marketing
7. Catering
8. Event day
9. Photo and video editing

Marketing and Visibility

Participants were coached to prepare for their brand launch event, including website and social media assets, talking points, and calls to action.

1. Participants were provided the opportunity to share about their businesses with LGBTQIA2-S affirming communities.
2. Participant brand photos and videos were shared during the in-person launch event while presenting their brands to the local community.

(*See Appendix I for the event graphic.)

Budget and Financial Overview

The TGX Economic Empowerment Project was made possible through a total funding allocation of \$95,500. This budget was designed to prioritize participant support, provide expert coaching, advisors, and program facilitators. Funding was also allocated towards professional brand photography and video; as well as creating an accessible post program celebration event. Below is an overview of how the budget was allocated, along with insights into cost efficiencies, challenges, and adjustments made throughout the project.

Expense Category	Amount	Description
Participant Stipends	\$4,500	Direct financial compensation to participants
Curriculum Development and Group Coaching Sessions	\$39,832	Curriculum development, scheduling, leadership/facilitator recruitment and fees, etc.
Marketing and Promotion	\$6,500	Marketing, social media promotion, graphic design, and event promotion
Photography and Video	\$21,186	Studio rental, creative direction, photo and video session planning, photographer and videographer, food and beverage, etc.
Event Costs	\$5,107	Venue rental, event planning, event personnel, photographer and videographer, food and beverage, etc.
Personnel and Administrative Costs	\$18,375	Program direction, project management, additional participant support, advisor fees, and operational expenses.

Budget Adjustments

Budget adjustments were made to accommodate costs for:

- Marketing and promotion
- Photography and video
- Slightly higher than expected event costs

Unexpected Expenses

The project remained financially efficient, however unanticipated costs arose that required budget adjustments:

- Increased Personnel Costs: More staff time including higher project management, administrative expenses, and advisor fees
- Additional Program Facilitators: More program facilitators were needed than initially anticipated
- Coaching Session Accessibility: Session transcripts provided by Zoom were hard to read so additional transcripts were created using a third party

Despite these challenges, leadership and partners worked together to operate the project budget effectively.

TGX Economic Empowerment Project Outcomes

Post Survey Analysis and Individual Participant Meeting Wrap-up Summary

The project outcomes included participants finishing with:

- More clarity in their brand foundation, core values, and messaging strategy.
- Increased clarity and confidence in decision making guided by core values.
- Increased confidence of participants in embodying their authentic leadership style and sharing their business with the public.
- Increased opportunities for economic empowerment among participants.
- Increased connections with other TGX leaders and business owners.
- Increased awareness, connection, and understanding of TGX entrepreneurs and their experiences among non-TGX individuals.
- Increased awareness to LACDMH services.
- Scholarships provided for LAGLCC membership for one year.
- Expanded knowledge about running a small business.

Participant Feedback

- Increased confidence in marketing their business
- Feeling a more solid voice in their business
- The photography and video were incredibly valuable, as many participants shared that they wouldn't have invested in that for themselves, despite it being helpful for marketing their business
- Connections with other TGX leaders and business owners has been great for community building

- Having community and knowing they're not alone has helped uplift their perspective and made them feel less alone.
- Participants reflected that days when they felt challenged, showing up to group sessions always left them feeling better.
- The program helped with long-term thinking for future planning

“The TGX Empowerment Project has been a life changing experience for me as a small business owner. Crystal is a tremendous leader and curated an invaluable group of mentors to present and work alongside us. Before this program, I had a lot of fear around visibility and participation in systems that oftentimes exploit queer & trans folx. Throughout the process I felt supported and resourced to make the first steps towards defining what my business is and how to go about creating a business structure to sustain me for the future. The other mentees in my cohort were a tremendous source of support and inspiration. I loved seeing such a wide range of businesses and levels of experience. As I continue to digest the information and move along in my career path, I look forward to passing on what I have learned to other queer & trans business owners, to demystify the process and offer information so other people can make informed choices for their own careers.” –Participant

Recommendations and Lessons Learned

- More clarity around who the program was for; e.g.: new business owners (2-5 years), experienced business owners (6-10 years), etc.
- More time for deep dives, rather than overviews on bigger topics
- More time for participant interaction amongst each other
- More video/camera on during interaction for virtual settings so participants and facilitators aren't looking at blacked out screens
- More time for photo and video sessions to reduce overwhelm
- Consider ways to incentivize completing all surveys so that more participants complete them
- While masks were available at in-person activities, additional precautions for health and COVID safety should be made

Leadership Reflections

“Working with Crystal on the TGX Empowerment Project was genuinely such a positive experience. From the very beginning, it was clear how much care, intention, and effort went into every part of this program. Crystal was incredibly organized, thoughtful, communicative, and intentional throughout the entire process, which made collaborating feel seamless and really grounded. One of the most impactful parts for me was getting to see the entrepreneurs at the panel — hearing their stories, watching their videos and seeing the businesses they've built was extremely special. It was very clear to me, watching the participants interact, that they had formed real connections with each other, gained confidence in their brand and business, and I know that Crystals' hard work facilitated this connection and confidence. I was genuinely impressed but not surprised by the entirety of this project and all of the intentionality and thought that Crystal put into it, and I'm extremely grateful I got to be a part of it.” –Kat Ralph, LCSW, Total Eclipse Therapy.

“Working with Crystal on this project was truly a delight. From the beginning, she approached the work with intention, care, and a clear commitment to creating something that would be genuinely useful to the TGX community. What stood out most to me was her focus on providing a space where entrepreneurs could access practical tools, real-world knowledge, and honest conversations about what it takes to build and sustain a business. Too often, community members are offered inspiration without infrastructure. This project helped bridge that gap by creating opportunities for participants to learn from one another, exchange resources, and explore pathways toward greater economic self-determination. As someone who works closely with Trans and gender-diverse community members, I see a significant need for programs like this that combine skill-building, connection, and economic empowerment in ways that support both individual growth and community well-being.

Crystal brought a thoughtful balance of structure and flexibility throughout the process. She was intentional about bringing together the right people and creating an environment where participants felt respected, supported, and empowered. What impressed me most was her recognition that meaningful community investment requires a team of people with different expertise and lived experiences. Rather than positioning herself as the sole authority, she cultivated advisors, facilitators, and community leaders who could contribute knowledge from multiple perspectives, making the program stronger and more responsive to participants' needs. To me, that is the mark of a true leader. She understands that being an ally is not about rescuing people or directing their path, but about creating the conditions for people to discover their own strengths and take ownership of their future. Programs like this demonstrate the value of community-centered investments and highlight why continued support for this type of work is so important. This is how we strengthen communities, cultivate leadership, and build lasting legacy.” –Sydney Rogers, MSW

Next Steps

Economic empowerment is driven by community support; and community is vital for individual and collective growth. This project reinforced that we all have something meaningful to contribute and learn from one another.

The feedback reflects that the Project had a profound positive impact for participants. As future projects are developed, considerations for the following should be made:

- More administrative and leadership support for day-to-day operations and logistical planning
- More time for direct participant connections amongst each other
- More time for photo and video sessions
- Additional precautions for health and COVID safety should be made

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