

Attachment:

Introduction Email

Re: U.S. SBA study of current and potential SBA lenders - Interview introduction

Dear <lender point of contact name>,

You are receiving this email because your organization is a CDFI and/or MDI lender that has participated in or is eligible to participate in one of the U.S. Small Business Administration's (SBA) capital programs (7(a), 7(a) Community Advantage program, Microloan program, 504 Certified Development Company loan program) or the Lender Match tool.

The SBA is interested in increasing access to capital among underserved and minority-owned small businesses by increasing the participation of mission-based lenders such as yours. This study will enhance the SBA's understanding of why some lenders participate in the SBA loan programs and the Lender Match tool but others do not. The results will provide suggestions for increasing access to the SBA's capital programs among lending entities specializing in underserved communities. Furthermore, the findings will be used to inform the delivery of targeted assistance and improve internal decision-making within the SBA.

The SBA has hired Optimal Solutions Group LLC (Optimal) to conduct this study. This email provides advanced notice of a forthcoming request for your voluntary participation in a virtual interview that will take about 30 minutes to complete. The interview is confidential, and no personally identifiable information will be requested. Your responses will be stored as de-identified information. We also highly recommend that you whitelist the "@optimalsolutionsgroup.com" domain so that Optimal's communications are not marked as Spam.

- For questions about this evaluation, please contact Dr. Shay Meinzer at the SBA at (202) 539-1429 or shay.meinzer@sba.gov.
- For questions or concerns about your participation in this interview, please contact the Study Director, Dr. Oswaldo Urdapilleta, by phone at (301) 306-1170 Ext. 708 or ourdapilleta@optimalsolutionsgroup.com.

Optimal will send you a consent form prior to conducting the interview.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Shay Meinzer, Ph. D.,
Lead Program Evaluator, Analysis and Evaluation Division
Office of Program Performance, Analysis, and Evaluation
Office of Performance, Planning, and the Chief Financial Officer
U.S. Small Business Administration

The control number for this information collection is 3245-0425 (Expires October 31, 2025).

Recruitment Email

Re: SBA’s study of current and potential SBA lenders - Recruitment

Dear <Lender point of contact name>,

Recently, the SBA sent you an introduction email regarding its study of current and potential SBA lenders’ participation in the SBA capital programs and the Lender Match tool. Optimal will conduct virtual interviews with lenders to discuss their decisions to participate (or not) in the SBA programs and the Lender Match tool. The interview will ask questions that help the SBA better understand the top attractors, facilitators, and barriers identified in a recent survey of lenders.

Your responses will be very important in helping the SBA improve access to necessary capital amongst underserved and minority-owned small businesses.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary and will take about 30 minutes to complete. The interview is confidential, and no personally identifiable information will be requested.

Please respond to this email with your preferred date and time from the table below:

[Date]:	[Time (EST)]:
Option 1	Option 1
Option 2	Option 2
Option 3	Option 3

We are including in this email a consent form to participate in this interview. Please feel free to return it or reply to this email stating your written consent to participate in this interview.

- For questions about this evaluation, please contact Dr. Shay Meinzer at the SBA at (202) 539-1429 or shay.meinzer@sba.gov.
- For questions or concerns about your participation in this interview, please contact the Study Director, Dr. Oswaldo Urdapilleta, by phone at (301) 306-1170 Ext. 708 or ourdapilleta@optimalsolutionsgroup.com.

Thank you very much for your time and cooperation!

Sincerely,

Oswaldo Urdapilleta
Project Director
Optimal Solutions Group LLC

The control number for this information collection is 3245-0425 (Expires October 31, 2025).



Evaluation of Community Development Financial Institution and Minority Depository Institution Lender Participation in SBA Capital Programs

Consent Form

The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) is interested in increasing capital access to underserved and minority-owned small businesses by adding SBA capital programs offered by lenders and through the expansion of the number of community lenders. The SBA has hired a small business research organization, Optimal Solutions Group LLC (Optimal), to conduct an evaluation of why some CDFIs and MDIs participate in the SBA programs and the Lender Match tool but others do not. Ultimately, the results will provide suggestions for increasing access to the SBA's capital programs among lending entities specializing in underserved communities. Furthermore, the findings will be used to inform the delivery of targeted assistance and improve internal decision-making within the SBA.

The interview is expected to take about 30 minutes, and your participation is completely voluntary. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to, and you can stop participating anytime.

During the interview, Optimal will request your permission to record the conversation. Please note that Optimal will never record the conversation without your explicit permission. The recording is for internal use only and will never be distributed to anyone outside of Optimal. Optimal will also take written notes. Your responses will be strictly confidential. The information you provide will not be attributed to you or your organization and will not be identified in data files or reports submitted to the SBA. Responses will be de-identified before being provided to the SBA. Any quotations may be included in the report prefaced with phrases such as "one lender noted that..."

- For questions about this evaluation, please contact Dr. Shay Meinzer at the SBA at (202) 539-1429 or shay.meinzer@sba.gov.
- For questions or concerns about your participation in this interview, please contact the Study Director, Dr. Oswaldo Urdapilleta, at (301) 306-1170 Ext. 708 or ourdapilleta@optimalsolutionsgroup.com.

Your time and cooperation are greatly appreciated.

I agree that I have read and understand all the information presented in the interview consent form. Please provide name and date.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Please return this document to ourdapilleta@optimalsolutionsgroup.com

Other options for giving consent to the interview:

- Prior to beginning the interview, state or respond in the chat or poll function: I read the consent form and freely and voluntarily agree to participate in this interview.
- Reply to emails sent regarding this interview: Yes, I read the consent form and freely and voluntarily agree to participate in this interview.

According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, an agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information (such as this survey) unless it displays a valid OMB control number. The control number for this information collection is 3245-0425 (Expires October 31, 2025). The time required to complete this survey is estimated to average 30 minutes (0.5 hours). Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to U.S. Small Business Administration, Director, Records Management Division, 409 3rd St., S.W., Washington, DC 20416 and Desk

Officer for the Small Business Administration, Office of Management and Budget, New Executive Building, Room 10202, Washington, DC 20503.

Meeting Invite

Re: SBA's study of current and potential SBA lenders

The SBA is interested in increasing access to capital for underserved and minority-owned small businesses by adding SBA capital programs offered by these lenders and expanding the number of community lenders. As discussed in the SBA introduction email, part of the evaluation involves virtual interviews with lenders, which will probe deeper into the findings from the current and potential CDFI and MDI lender participation in the SBA Capital Programs survey to understand better the context and rationales behind the lenders' responses.

Optimal Solutions Group LLC (Optimal) supports the SBA in gathering information for this study, which will enhance the SBA's understanding of why some CDFIs and MDIs participate in the SBA Capital Programs while others do not. During this interview, we will ask you about the issues identified in a survey of 1,500+ active and potential SBA lenders; such issues are:

- Factors and features that draw lenders to the SBA capital programs.
- Processes, features, or actions on the part of the SBA that make it easier, more likely, or more efficient for lenders to participate in the SBA's loan programs.
- Barriers or obstacles that make lenders' participation in the SBA capital programs more complicated, more difficult, or less likely.

The control number for this information collection is 3245-0425 (Expires October 31, 2025).

Reminder Email

Re: SBA’s study of current and potential SBA lenders’ participation - Interview reminder

Dear <Lender point of contact name>

This is a friendly reminder that Optimal Solutions Group LLC (Optimal), on behalf of the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), is requesting your participation in an interview. The purpose of this interview is to discuss why some lenders participate in the SBA capital programs but others do not. This interview is expected to take about 30 minutes. Your responses will be very important in helping the SBA improve access to necessary capital among underserved and minority-owned small businesses.

Please respond to this email with your preferred date and time from the table below:

[Date]:	[Time (EST)]:
Option 1	Option 1
Option 2	Option 2
Option 3	Option 3

We are including in this email a consent form to participate in this interview. If you have not sent the consent form, please feel free to return it or reply to this email with your written consent to participate and share your information with Optimal.

- For questions about this evaluation, please contact Dr. Shay Meinzer at the SBA at (202) 539-1429 or shay.meinzer@sba.gov.
- For questions or concerns about your participation in this interview, please contact the Study Director, Dr. Oswaldo Urdapilleta, by phone at (301) 306-1170 Ext. 708 or ourdapilleta@optimalsolutionsgroup.com.

Thank you very much for your time and cooperation!

Sincerely,

Oswaldo Urdapilleta
Project Director
Optimal Solutions Group LLC

The control number for this information collection is 3245-0425 (Expires October 31, 2025).

Reminder Phone Script

Hello <Lender POC Name>,

This is [name], a researcher with Optimal Solutions Group (Optimal). Optimal was contracted by the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) to evaluate current and potential SBA lender participation in the SBA's capital programs and the Lender Match tool. This is a friendly reminder that we request your interview participation. Your responses are important in helping the SBA improve access to capital for underserved and minority-owned small businesses.

[If talking to a live person, in addition to the introduction statement, state the following:]

The U.S. SBA sent an email invitation for this interview using the subject line "U.S. SBA study of current and potential SBA lenders participation - Interview introduction" on [DATE SBA SENT EMAIL]. If you would like to, we could schedule the interview while we have you on the phone, or we can get one of our researchers on the call to conduct the interview now if you are willing and available. Otherwise, you could follow the instructions in the SBA's email or contact us via phone at [301-306-1170 x 709] with any questions or concerns.

Thank you very much for your time and cooperation!

[If leaving a voicemail, in addition to the introduction statement, state the following:]

We kindly ask that you check your email for an invitation by the U.S. SBA to participate in this interview using the subject "U.S. SBA study of current and potential SBA lenders participation - Interview introduction" sent on [DATE SBA SENT EMAIL] and follow the email instructions accordingly. You may reach out to us via phone at [301-306-1170 x 709] with any questions or concerns.

Thank you very much for your time and cooperation!

Interview Guide

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. My name is <First Name, Last Name>, and I am a <Job Title> working for Optimal Solutions Group (Optimal) on behalf of the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA). I am joined by [Optimal team members.]

[If Optimal has not received the consent form or email with consent] Recently, Optimal sent you a Consent Form via email, which is also currently shown on our screen. Can you confirm that you have read the consent form and freely and voluntarily agree to participate in this interview?

[If Optimal has received the consent form or email with consent] Optimal has received your Consent to participate in this interview. We again appreciate making time to meet with us.

We would also like to record this interview for note-taking purposes. Optimal will use this recording internally and will not be distributed to individuals outside the research team. Do we have your permission to record? **[If not, use notes only]**

Do you have any questions for us before we begin?

[Once the respondent has no questions, please begin.]

[Interviewer confirms the name, title, organization, type of lender and SBA lender status with the interviewee.]

Introduction

We have identified several key factors, features, processes, and barriers in a survey of active and potential SBA lenders. We would like to discuss the responses from this survey with you to better understand the context, the how and why, behind the survey findings.

Although we will be asking you to provide your opinions and arguments on the responses from other lenders, we want you to feel comfortable in providing your honest responses. Please note that generalized answers are acceptable and that your responses will not be personally identified in any reports.

0. Please give us a brief overview of your organization. What is your market? How much small business lending do you do in a typical year? Who are your targeted customers for small business lending?
1. **[If the interviewee is with a current SBA lender]** In which of the SBA's capital programs do you currently participate (or have an active loan agreement), and for how long have you participated?
 - **[If not mentioned]** Are you participating in the SBA's Lender Match tool?
 - **[If participation after PPP]** Did you only facilitate PPP to borrowers? If you started your participation with an active agreement, have you offered any SBA loans yet?

Attractors

The survey of lenders reported several factors that attract potential lenders to the SBA loan programs and the Lender Match tool. Among the most frequently mentioned were **Attractor -1**, **Attractor -2**, and **Attractor -3**.

2. What do you think about these three factors being the most attractive features of the SBA capital programs?
 - Do you agree with the lenders' responses?

[If the response indicates disagreement with the listed attractors being important factors, go to Q6]

[Interviewer, please use the following questions (3-5) to capture information on each of the three factors unless the respondent has stated no comments or cannot address a specific factor.]

3. [If the response indicates agreement with the attractor being an important factor] Why is this factor so important?
4. Is this factor more pronounced for specific SBA programs? Which one(s)?
5. Do you think this attractor is relevant for other lenders like you?
 - **[If there was a mix of clientele or coverage areas]** Is this factor more relevant for certain geographies or borrower types?
6. **[If eligible for 7(a) Community Advantage]** Did the March 2022 changes to the 7(a) Community Advantage program make it more attractive to your organization?
7. Are there other features of the SBA programs are the most appealing for organizations like yours?
 - **[Current Lender & Multiple SBA programs]** What made you add another SBA program to your small business portfolio?
8. **[If current SBA lender]** Would you recommend any of the SBA programs to other organizations like yours? What would you tell them about that SBA program?

Facilitators

[Ask facilitators section for current SBA lenders only]

[Skip facilitator questions if only PPP and no loans made out yet with active agreement]

Current lenders reported three processes or actions that make it easier or more likely for lenders to participate in the SBA programs: **Facilitator -1**, **Facilitator -2**, and **Facilitator -3**.

9. Please tell us, what do you think about these three factors or features that make it easier or more likely to participate in the SBA programs?
 - Do you agree with the lenders' responses?

[If the response indicates disagreement with the listed facilitators being important factors, go to Q13]

[Interviewer, please use the following questions (10-12) to capture information on each of the three factors unless the respondent has stated no comments or cannot address a specific factor.]

10. **[If the response indicates agreement with this facilitator being an important factor]** Why is this factor so important?
11. Is this factor more pronounced for specific SBA capital programs? Which one(s)?
12. Do you think this facilitator is relevant for other lenders like you?
 - **[If there is a mix of clientele]** Is this factor more relevant for certain geographies or borrower types?
13. Are there other factors that would contribute to your ability to use / access the SBA capital programs?

Barriers

Now focusing on the **barriers to participation** in the SBA capital programs, lenders mentioned several factors that make lender participation more complicated, more difficult, or less likely. Among the most frequently mentioned were **Barrier -Top 1**, **Barrier -Top 2**, and **Barrier -Top 3**.

14. Please tell us, what do you think about these three issues being the most challenging for organizations like yours?
 - Do you agree with the lenders' responses?

[If the response indicates disagreement with the listed barriers being important factors, go to Q18]

[Interviewer, please use the following questions (15-17) to capture information on each of the three factors unless the respondent has stated no comments or cannot address a specific factor.]

15. **[If their response indicates agreement with this barrier being an important factor]** Why is this barrier so challenging?
 - Does it make participation too costly for your organization? Does it make the loans too costly / onerous for the borrower? Or something else?
16. Is this challenge more pronounced for certain SBA programs? Which one(s)?
17. We are interested in your opinion on what the SBA could *do to alleviate this barrier*, if anything?
18. If we did not mention them before, what other issues would you consider to be the greatest barrier(s) for organizations like yours to adding SBA capital programs and/or expanding the number of community lenders? And what can the SBA do to mitigate them?
19. Have you ever considered participating, or did you participate in the past, as an SBA lender in one or more of the SBA capital programs or the Lender Match tool [**if current lender:** other than the one(s) in which you are currently participating]?
 - If yes, why did you decide not to participate (or to stop participating)?
 - **[If different from the barriers discussed above]** Could the SBA have done anything different to facilitate your participation? Please explain.

Unmet Demand

20. Has your organization seen an unmet demand for small business loans in your market?
 - **[If there is not an apparent unmet demand]** Are there any contextual conditions that may be masking the unmet demand?
21. If the barriers we just discussed were mitigated in one or more of the SBA programs, would that be a catalyzer for your organization to participate in those programs?
 - How much additional SBA-supported lending could you do (number and dollar amount) in a typical year?
 - Would your participation in SBA programs address the unmet capital demand in your market?
 - If not SBA-related barriers, probe for internal organization factors preventing the organization satisfying that unmet demand (e.g., borrowers unable to meet underwriting standards, insufficient loan capital on the part of the organization, insufficiently flexible loan capital, insufficient staffing on the part of the organization).
22. **[If not a visible interest on the SBA capital programs]** Do you envision being an SBA lender at all?
 - What would get you involved in the SBA capital programs?
 - Would your calculus change if you received some subsidy to help defray the costs, and if so, how much subsidy would be necessary and for how many years?
 - If so, how would your small business portfolio change if you were to offer SBA loans?

[Interviewer, at the end of the interview, use the following script.]

23. Is there another lender you would suggest we talk to about these topics? If yes, who, and would you mind doing an introduction?

Thank you for participating in this important study. We very much appreciate your time and your answers. Do you have any questions, comments, or concerns?

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