



CITY OF
FORT LAUDERDALE

I AM SISTRUNK

From Pilot to Citywide Vision
Economic Recovery Corps Fellowship — Final
Report to the City Commission

June 16, 2026

The Fellowship in Brief

2.5 years. One corridor. A model for the city.



FELLOWSHIP

to ensure economic development programs measurably benefit the local community



GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE

Northwest quadrant of Fort Lauderdale — the Sistrunk corridor



DURATION

March 2024 through July 2026



DELIVERABLES

Community listening tour, asset inventory, program evaluation, policy recommendations, and the **ALIGN Framework**



The Charge

A community-centered mission to strengthen the Sistrunk Corridor and create pathways to generational wealth



WHY THIS FELLOWSHIP EXISTED



Decades of disinvestment left the Sistrunk Corridor once a thriving African American arts and entertainment district, facing some of the highest unemployment and lowest educational attainment levels.



The Fort Lauderdale CRA was approaching sunset, creating urgency to build sustainable economic systems beyond traditional redevelopment funding.



The City needed **stronger systems** for community engagement, economic development coordination, and program evaluation to support long-term revitalization efforts.



Residents and business owners needed more than isolated programs. They needed trusted guides, clearer access to resources, and opportunities to shape their future.



THE ERC FELLOW'S ASSIGNMENT



LISTEN FIRST

Conduct a community listening tour to identify strengths, barriers, priorities, and opportunities connected to economic mobility and revitalization.



BUILD COMMUNITY VOICE INTO STRATEGY

Facilitate conversations that allow residents, businesses, and stakeholders to co-identify issues and help shape economic development solutions.



STRENGTHEN THE ECOSYSTEM

Inventory community assets, programs, partnerships, and workforce opportunities while identifying gaps and overlaps across systems.



EVALUATE WHAT WORKS

Assess investments, gather quantitative and qualitative data, and design tools to measure outcomes and community impact.



HELP SHAPE POLICY & LONG-TERM DIRECTION

Develop recommendations, frameworks, and strategies to help Fort Lauderdale strengthen inclusive economic development efforts beyond the fellowship period.



What We Built

2.5 Years. One Community. A Model for the City.

★ Direct fellow involvement

2024



March 2024 —

Commissioner Beasley-Pittman District 3 Engagement

Fellow Community Listening Tour initiated ★



October–December 2024 —

I AM Sistrunk Planning Sessions ★



2025



February 2025 —

I AM Sistrunk Campaign Released ★



May 2025 —

Economic Development Week — Pitch Competition Support ★



May 2025 —

NLC Economic Mobility Grant Awarded (\$20,000) ★



July 2025 —

Sistrunk Empowerment Summit ★



August–December 2025 —

StartUp FTL Ideation & Growth Cohort ★



August–October 2025 —

Impact FTL Micro Grant Program ★



October 2025 —

Economic Development Division Formally Established



December 2025 —

CRA Extension Secured

2026



January–April 2026 —

FTL Sistrunk Community Talks series ★



April 2026 —

Roadmap Discussion with CRA ★

April 2026 —

Roadmap Delivered at Community Talk #5 ★



May 2026 —

Invest FTL Roadmap Submission for Feedback ★



May 2026 —

Accepted into IEDC Community Capital Investment Fund Accelerator ★



June 2026 —

Commission Presentation ★

What the Community Told Us

Trust is infrastructure. Accessibility is not the same as availability

Through conversations, surveys, and community events, residents and businesses shared what matters most for a stronger Sistrunk Corridor.



10,553

Individual Question Responses

- 5,638 generated through fellowship-led engagement: the Summit, Community Talks, and direct business outreach
- 4,915 from a capital access survey conducted by Dickey Consulting that the City previously did not have access to and was integrated through this fellowship



3,406

Total Data Touchpoints

Every website visit, registration, attendance, and online, and survey responses across the full initiative.



910

Direct Community Responses

People who actively provided input through surveys, comment cards, opt-ins, and live polls. In a corridor where institutional trust has been fragile, 910 respondents is a trust signal as much as a data signal.



6

Events

1 Sistrunk Empowerment Summit and 5 Community Talks Sessions bringing residents, entrepreneurs, stakeholders, and city leaders together for dialogue and action.



2

Surveys

Two surveys completed to capture community and business needs, including a capital access survey the City had no prior access to and was integrated through this fellowship.



4.5/5

Likelihood to Engage Further (Talk #5)

Residents expressed a strong willingness to remain engaged and continue shaping the future of the corridor.

WHAT WE HEARD MOST



Navigation Over Programs

Programs exist. Finding them is the problem. Community needs a clear front door, not more resources.



Access to Capital

Capital access ranked #1 barrier across every session. Businesses are ready to grow if conditions improve.



Trust Through Follow-Through

"What happens next?" was the most common question. Trust is built by showing the community its input mattered.



District 3 Visibility

Businesses and residents consistently said this corridor deserves more active promotion and investment.



Workforce Alignment

Training exists but doesn't connect to real jobs. Alignment, not expansion, is what the community needs.



Cultural Identity

Growth must preserve what Sistrunk already is. Legacy, community, and culture cannot be displaced.





CITY OF
FORT
LAUDERDALE

National League of Cities

Tomeka Lee, Municipal Practice, Program Manager

Samantha Pedrosa, Municipal Strategies & Program, Program Manager

National Perspective



Fort Lauderdale is not alone, and its response is leading the way

- Place-based trust building is a national challenge cities are actively navigating
- Cities across the country face the same tensions: investment without inclusion, engagement without follow-through
- The ALIGN framework reflects what leading cities are learning and implementing
- Fort Lauderdale had the conditions, the community, and the commitment to build something replicable

The ALIGN Framework

ALIGN: Advancing Local Impact through Growing Neighborhoods

A community-centered framework ensuring development aligns with community voice, strategic priorities, program execution, and measurable outcomes

The Four Pillars

- Community Voice — Start with the people. Listening sessions, resident & business input, co-creation of priorities.
- Strategy — Turn insight into direction. Define vision, align stakeholders, set goals, and metrics.
- Programs — Activate the work. Grants, cohorts, business support, workforce, pilot initiatives.
- Impact — Measure what matters. Track outcomes, evaluate effectiveness, and report back to the community.



The roadmap is not the finish line it is the beginning of coordinated implementation

NEAR-TERM (0-6 MONTHS)

Focus: Activation, Access, Visibility

	<p>Community Talk #5 + Findings Integration</p> <p>Owner Economic Development Division</p> <p>Partners CRA, Communications, Community Partners</p> <p>Timeline April – May 2026</p> <p>Success • Talk completed</p> <p>Metrics • Findings presented to CRA + Invest FTL</p>
	<p>Business "First Steps" Guide + Navigation</p> <p>Owner Economic Development Division + Communications</p> <p>Partners CRA, Permitting, Small Business Partners</p> <p>Timeline May – June 2026</p> <p>Success • Guide published</p> <p>Metrics • Distributed across 3+ platforms • 100+ downloads or uses</p>
	<p>Capital Access Alignment</p> <p>Owner Economic Development Division</p> <p>Partners Invest FTL, CRA</p> <p>Timeline June – December 2026</p> <p>Success • Formal partnership defined</p> <p>Metrics • At least 1 joint funding opportunity pursued</p>
	<p>Business Retention & Expansion Intake</p> <p>Owner Economic Development Division</p> <p>Partners CRA</p> <p>Timeline Ongoing (Start April 2026)</p> <p>Success • 25+ businesses connected</p> <p>Metrics • % of businesses applying for programs</p>
	<p>Community Voice → Decision-Making Integration</p> <p>Owner Economic Development Division</p> <p>Partners City Commission + City Interdepartmental Teams</p> <p>Timeline July 2026</p> <p>Success • 1 formal presentation delivered</p> <p>Metrics • Coordinating Community Concerns/Feedback with relevant City Departments</p>

MID-TERM (6-18 MONTHS)

Focus: Systems, Programs, Pipelines

	<p>Dillard Workforce Pipeline (MOU + Launch)</p> <p>Owner Economic Development Division</p> <p>Partners Dillard High School, Employers, CareerSource</p> <p>Timeline Dec 2026 – Mar 2027</p> <p>Success • MOU executed</p> <p>Metrics • 25+ students placed in pathways</p>
	<p>Community Concern:</p> <p>Housing Stability Clinics + Legal Workshops</p> <p>Owner Invest FTL</p> <p>Partners External Community Partners</p> <p>Timeline Winter 2027-28</p> <p>Success • 2-3 clinics hosted</p> <p>Metrics • 50+ residents served</p>
	<p>Entrepreneur Mentorship Program</p> <p>Owner Economic Development Division</p> <p>Partners Black Chamber, Local Business Owners</p> <p>Timeline Spring 2027</p> <p>Success • 10-15 mentor matches</p> <p>Metrics • Participant satisfaction tracking</p>
	<p>Sistrunk Business Accelerator</p> <p>Owner Economic Development Division + External Program Partner</p> <p>Partners CRA, Urban League, Black Chamber, and other Technical Assistance Providers</p> <p>Timeline Jan 2027 – Apr 2027</p> <p>Success • Program launched</p> <p>Metrics • 10-20 businesses enrolled</p>
	<p>Annual Economic Snapshot</p> <p>Owner Economic Development Division</p> <p>Partners CRA, Research Partners, Commission</p> <p>Timeline Feb 2027</p> <p>Success • Update published</p> <p>Metrics • Baseline metrics established</p>

LONG-TERM (18+ MONTHS)

Focus: Policy, infrastructure, Sustainability

	<p>Community Benefit Agreements (CBA)</p> <p>Owner Invest FTL</p> <p>Partners Commission, Economic Development Division, Developers, Community Orgs</p> <p>Timeline 2027</p> <p>Success • Policy framework introduced</p> <p>Metrics • At least 1 agreement executed</p>
	<p>Sistrunk Business Incubator</p> <p>Owner Economic Development Division, Invest FTL</p> <p>Partners Urban League, Black Business Chamber of Commerce</p> <p>Timeline 2027-2028</p> <p>Success • Site identified</p> <p>Metrics • Funding secured • Facility launched • Businesses served and supported</p>

Recommended Commission Actions

These actions advance community commitments, sustain systems change, and position Fort Lauderdale as a national leader in inclusive economic development.



ACTION 1

Authorize the implementation and phased advancement of the **2026 Sistrunk Empowerment Roadmap**

› Honors the commitment made to community participants who built this roadmap.



ACTION 2

Implement the **ALIGN Framework as a community-centered economic development approach for economically stagnant and emerging corridors**

› Ensures this model survives the fellowship transition.



ACTION 3

Direct staff to evaluate citywide application, informed by an upcoming study

› Positions Fort Lauderdale as a national model for inclusive economic development.



Thank You