

PRESS RELEASE



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Health Foundation of South Florida Announces Investment in AI-Powered Platform Designed to Drive Millions in Institutional Spending to Local and Minority-owned Small Businesses

Ten local governments, health and educational systems commit to joining the first-in-the-nation marketplace as part of a collective strategy to invest in the South Florida economy

MIAMI, June 8, 2022 — The [Health Foundation of South Florida](#), the region's largest philanthropic organization focused on achieving health equity in historically underserved communities, today announced it is investing up to \$1.2 million to launch an AI-powered tech platform designed to help increase contracting opportunities for local and minority-owned small businesses at regional anchor institutions. The initiative is part of the Foundation's overarching goal of addressing and positively impacting the social and economic disparities that profoundly impact community health and well-being.

In addition, 10 local public and private institutions—Miami-Dade County, Broward County and the City of Miami; Florida International University, Broward College and the University of Miami; Miami Dade Public Schools and Broward County Public Schools; UHealth and Broward Health—announced commitments to join the marketplace. It represents the first time, in South Florida and across the country, that multiple institutions from multiple sectors join forces to pool contracting opportunities into one shared platform with the goal of making it easier for diverse small businesses to access them.

The 10 institutions form part of a larger group called the South Florida Anchor Alliance, a collaborative of 19 regional healthcare, education and governmental organizations founded in 2019 by the Health Foundation in partnership with Citi. The group banded together with a mission to create a more

inclusive South Florida economy through collective workforce development and procurement efforts. (Anchor institutions are organizations such as university systems, hospitals and other enduring entities that play key roles in local economies across the US.)

The Alliance's first major initiative, the marketplace is projected to launch this fall. It was created to make the process of finding opportunities and bidding on contracts to do business with such large bureaucracies—which can be cumbersome for some entrepreneurs—easier, more accessible, and inclusive. Because the anchor institutions collectively spend upwards of \$8 billion a year procuring goods and services, they have the potential to be a serious economic engine for regional small businesses. While the platform is open to any business, regardless of size, location or minority designation, its purpose is to help reduce barriers for small businesses that have been historically left out of such opportunities, primarily ones owned by underrepresented minorities.

Relying on AI technology, the platform will connect anchor institutions directly with small businesses that can provide the specific goods or services they're seeking and meet their procurement standards and requirements. It will aggregate listings of open contract opportunities, which vendors will be able to view in one easy-to-access place. It will also aggregate local vendors that have had or currently have contracts with any of the institutions, thus creating one large pool from which the participating anchors can draw when they're hiring or procuring. Once launched, other small businesses will be free to join the marketplace as well.

The initiative is the first to see a significant number of anchor institutions come together to pool contracting opportunities as well as vendor lists. It is also the first time there is one entry point for contract opportunities across numerous institutions.

"The Health Foundation of South Florida is committed to fostering a thriving local economy because we understand the profound connection between health and wealth — that without economic stability and access to opportunity a community cannot be truly healthy," said Loreen Chant, the Health Foundation's President and CEO. "The marketplace is a critical platform that will help local and minority-owned businesses—the heartbeat of the South Florida economy—not just recover from COVID's economic aftermath but grow and succeed. This is especially important since these businesses were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic."

While COVID was devastating for many businesses across the country, the impacts for enterprises owned by women, racial minorities, and immigrants were even more severe. African Americans experienced the largest losses: a 41 percent drop in the number of active business owners. Latino-owned business ownership dropped by 32 percent. Immigrant business owners suffered a 36 percent drop, while female business owners declined by 25 percent.

“Miami-Dade’s small and minority-owned businesses are the backbone of our local economy,” said Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava. “We’re ready to on-ramp these businesses to competitive procurement opportunities within our larger anchor institutions, and we remain confident that this cross-sector approach will help to uplift small businesses across the region.”

“I am proud of the collaboration between many institutions to streamline these processes and create contracting opportunities for small businesses throughout our communities,” said Broward County Mayor Michael Udine. “I look forward to seeing the positive impact the regional marketplace will have for our local businesses and workforce here in Broward County.”

The marketplace will be built using software created by Texas-based company Avisare, which was vetted and selected by Anchor Alliance members, who conducted a nationwide search for a technology partner. After a thorough review, the anchor leaders selected the Avisare system because of how well it handles the intricate marketplace requirements with one out-of-the-box solution. “Avisare is delighted to be selected as the SaaS system facilitating South Florida’s marketplace,” said its founder and CEO, Sky Kelley. “Having witnessed the unprecedented devastation for small businesses during the beginning of COVID, the timing is now to help small businesses prior to another potential recession. We are so glad South Florida sees the benefits of a regional marketplace for the local economy and look forward to accomplishing this task together.”

The Health Foundation, which acts as the Anchor Alliance’s backbone organization, recently received a \$500,000 grant from the Citi Foundation to support the Alliance’s continued work. The award was part of the Citi Foundation’s 2021 Community Progress Makers Initiative, which supported organizations across the U.S. that are working to connect communities of color to greater social and economic opportunities.

“We are honored to be the convener of this first-in-the-nation kind of collaboration between some of South Florida’s most prestigious institutions and leaders,” said Melida Akiti, the Health Foundation’s Board Chair. “We have also been deeply impressed by the commitment demonstrated by the anchor institutions who have committed to participate in the marketplace. Above all, we are confident that together we will create more economic stability across our region while underscoring the pivotal role we all play in fostering inclusivity in the communities in which we operate and call home.”

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ABOUT HEALTH FOUNDATION OF SOUTH FLORIDA

The mission of Health Foundation of South Florida is to invest in and be a catalyst for collaborations and policy and systems changes that improve the health of South Florida communities, with a focus on vulnerable, low to moderate-income populations. Established in 1993, the foundation has awarded

more than \$131 million to nonprofits that provide programs and services in Broward, Miami-Dade and Monroe Counties. For more information, visit www.hfsf.org or follow us on Twitter @HealthSFL.

ABOUT THE SOUTH FLORIDA ANCHOR ALLIANCE

The South Florida Anchor Alliance is a collaborative of regional institutions—hospitals and healthcare systems, education enterprises and municipalities—coming together to harness their collective multi-billion-dollar spending power and vast human and intellectual capital in order to create a more just and inclusive local economy. It was founded by the Health Foundation of South Florida in partnership with Citi.

ABOUT AVISARE

Avisare is a universal e-sourcing platform that leverages AI to enable public and private sector entities to make the sourcing and procurement process easier for everyone, including small & diverse businesses. Avisare's integrated suite of products (a universal registration portal, online certification, RFP matching, eBidding, and outreach compliance reporting) streamlines the sourcing process by focusing on collaboration, transparency, robust tracking and reporting. Our goal is to enhance the bidding process and make smart recommendations to both buyers and sellers that will help more small & diverse businesses better compete for contracts and get certified faster.