

WE'RE ON A MISSION:  
**Putting Locals First**

2025 ANNUAL REPORT



## DEAR FRIENDS AND ALLIES,

When Lowcountry Local First re-wrote our mission statement a few years ago, we agreed: Lowcountry Local First advances economic prosperity and local ownership through innovative and inclusive initiatives that build our community's wealth and wellbeing.

I love everything about this mission, but I admit, that bit about "innovation" scared me (a little). Our Board of Directors and our community said LLF's ability to be nimble, to lean into and get out ahead of our community's needs, was essential to who we are and why we exist. But how do you promise to continue to know what the community will need in the future? How do you promise to not just serve, but to anticipate what your community will want?

2025 felt monumental because we proved our ability to deliver on that expectation. By really listening to our members, by inviting our community to lead, by being open to trying new things, we continue to innovate in a way that resonates with our members and our community.

We created new ways to engage, and so many of you did. We started up new spaces and opportunities to learn and connect, including:

- Our **MARKETING MINDSHARE**: because so many local independent business owners wear the marketing hat, even while they do everything else. This has been a popular and productive place to pick up tips and recharge creative batteries.
- A monthly **SOLOPRENEUR MEETUP**: making room for business owners who are doing it all on their own to learn, strategize, problem solve, and feel supported in their ventures.
- **INVEST LOCAL**: an initiative dedicated to unlocking unconventional capital and leveraging all the crowdfunding platforms to help emerging entrepreneurs access affordable loans.
- **BLOCK PARTY**: (we brought it back!) showcasing local vendors, makers, food entrepreneurs and even friendly local goats - all to build up excitement and enthusiasm for shopping and dining local throughout the holiday season.
- **LOCALIST CARDS**: our new effort to encourage our community to choose local and reward them for making that choice. Member businesses can get extra visibility and then offer perks or discounts to card-carrying local lovers.

No matter what tomorrow brings, you can rely on us to play this part. Our commitment to the local businesses of the Lowcountry is this - to listen to our members, to ask what you need, to do everything in our power to contribute to your success.

Thank you for walking alongside us in this work - we're so grateful for the opportunity to support the awesome local businesses of the Lowcountry.



Locally yours,

Jacquie Berger, Executive Director



Staff at the Holiday Local Social at Lamar's Sporting Club.



Lowcountry Local First advances economic prosperity and local ownership through innovative and inclusive initiatives that build our community's wealth and wellbeing. We've been working towards this mission since 2007, creating a movement that champions a thriving local economy, and fostering an unwavering sense of local pride and connection.

### WHAT WE DO:

- **AWARENESS**: Educating the general public on why it's important to choose local and influencing them to do so.
- **ADVOCACY**: Working with our elected officials, decision-makers and opinion leaders to foster a better environment for creating and sustaining local businesses.
- **AFFINITY**: Building relationships and knowledge by delivering resources, programming, networking, mentorship and more to local businesses owners from all sectors and stages.

Let's explore how these three pillars of our work showed up in 2025.

2025 AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS

## We educate the community on why it's important to choose local and influence them to do so.

We know that for every dollar spent with a locally-owned business, three-times more of that dollar stays circulating in the local economy than if it had been spent with a national chain.

Local businesses also play a critical role in community well-being, preserving the unique soul of our communities and providing good jobs. They provide product diversity, fair competition, and often lead to further environmental sustainability, which matters an awful lot for our precious coastal community.

In 2025, we spurred the local movement by...

- **HELPING LOCALS BE THEIR BEST:** We hosted the **12TH ANNUAL GOOD BUSINESS SUMMIT**, uniting our region's most socially-conscious and forward-thinking entrepreneurs and leaders to share tactics that build stronger companies and communities. More than 250 business leaders and activists came together for a full-day bilingual celebration of *business as a force for good*.
- **HELPING LOCALS CONNECT TO LOCAL FOODWAYS:** We celebrated our local food and beverage communities at the **17TH ANNUAL CHEF'S POTLUCK**, where nearly 500 guests gathered marshside at Holy City Brewing. The event featured 27 local chefs, 15 farmers, and 11 beverage partners. *Thank you* to the farmers, fishers, purveyors, brewers, distillers, and more who made this celebration possible – *and delicious!*
- **HELPING LOCALS GIVE GIFTS WITH PURPOSE:** We brought back the iconic **BUY LOCAL BLOCK PARTY**, which brought together more than 2 dozen local makers and food vendors to celebrate the 13th annual Buy Local Season presented by REV Federal Credit Union.



Dr. Lakeysha Hallmon, signing her book "No One is Self-Made" alongside Jonathan Sanchez from Blue Bicycle Books at the Good Business Summit.



Vendors and shoppers at the Buy Local Block Party in November



Chef Mark Bolchoz, owner of Cane Pazzo, at Chef's Potluck

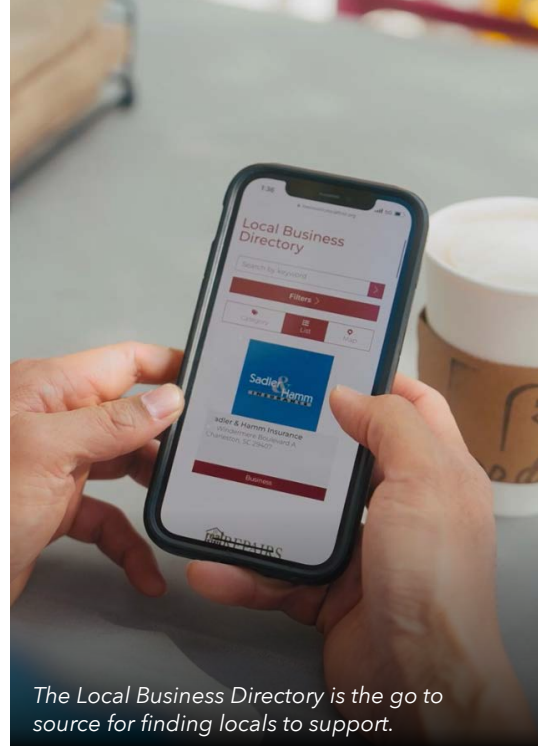
- **HELPING CITIZENS FIND & SUPPORT LOCALS:**

The online Local Business Directory was utilized more than **36,600 TIMES** throughout 2025.

- **HELPING LOCALS FIND LOCALS:**

More than **65 BUSINESSES** offered perks through the **LOCALIST CARD PROGRAM**, and more than **40 UNIQUE B2B SAVINGS OFFERS** were shared among member businesses.

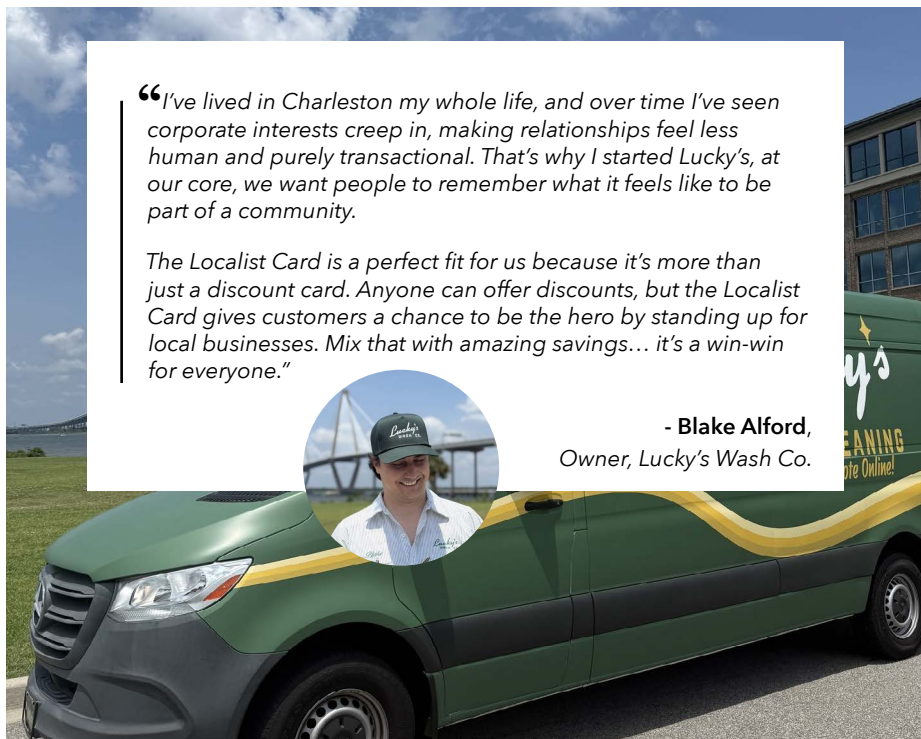
The inaugural **2026 LOCALIST CARD PROGRAM** launched with a presale in September of 2025, with 350 cards sold before the year's end! Cards connect consumers with local brands and help businesses secure repeat traffic, marketing exposure and ongoing customer engagement.



The Local Business Directory is the go to source for finding locals to support.



The inaugural 2026 Localist Card makes it's debut in September.

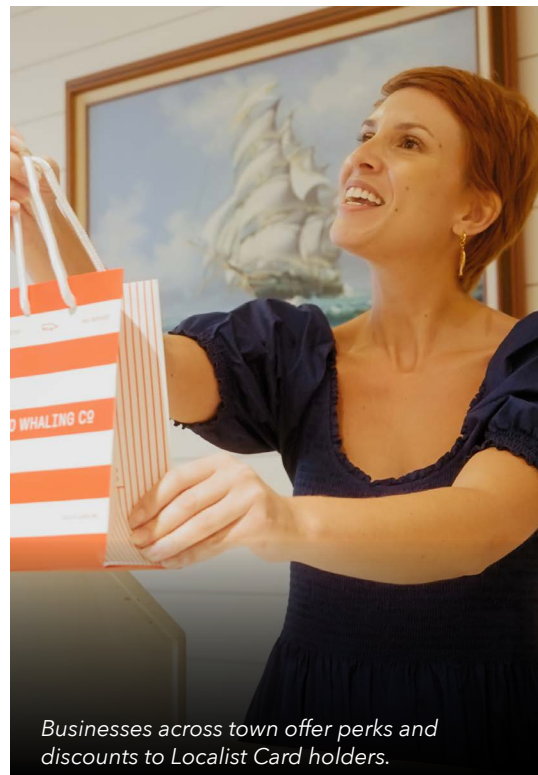


*“I’ve lived in Charleston my whole life, and over time I’ve seen corporate interests creep in, making relationships feel less human and purely transactional. That’s why I started Lucky’s, at our core, we want people to remember what it feels like to be part of a community.”*

*The Localist Card is a perfect fit for us because it’s more than just a discount card. Anyone can offer discounts, but the Localist Card gives customers a chance to be the hero by standing up for local businesses. Mix that with amazing savings... it’s a win-win for everyone.”*



- Blake Alford,  
Owner, Lucky's Wash Co.



Businesses across town offer perks and discounts to Localist Card holders.



The LLF team sells Localist Cards at various community events.

## 2025 LOCAL BUSINESS SUPPORT

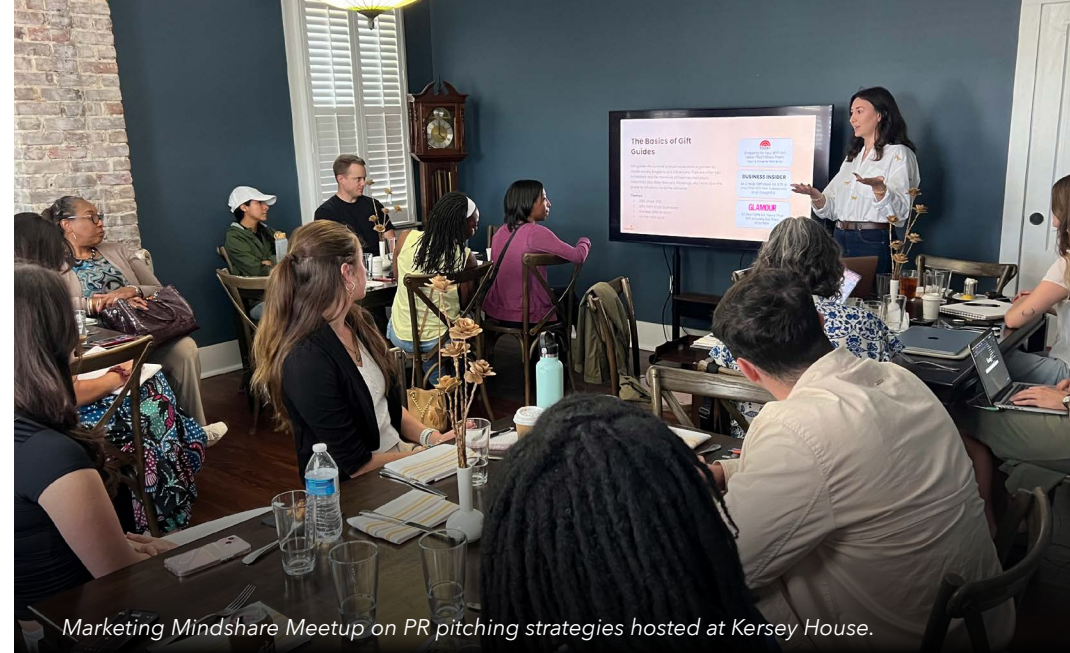
We deliver resources, expertise and a supportive network to local business owners, from local business owners.

Running a small business is hard and can often feel like a lonely journey. We're proud to be the engine behind a generous "give and take" system of shared knowledge, cultivating meaningful connections between experienced local business owners with those who are just getting started who can benefit immensely from the lessons-learned.

In 2025, we served more than **770 LOCAL-INDEPENDENT BUSINESSES**, from solopreneurs to 100+ employee hospitality groups and banks. Our member businesses span across more than **20 INDUSTRIES** and **4 COUNTIES** of the Lowcountry – from Moncks Corner to Wadmalaw, from Hollywood to Georgetown.

## TACTICAL BUSINESS SUPPORT

- **8 HANDS-ON WORKSHOPS AND WEBINARS** in English and Spanish, on topics ranging from healthcare access, crowdfunding, marketing, hiring and more.
- **57 STUDENTS GRADUATED** through the Community Business Academy between our Spring and Fall cohorts taught in English and Spanish.
- 7 Community Business Academy graduates participated in our **RETAIL RESIDENCY PROGRAM** at The Station Park Circle.
- 21 businesses utilized flexible memberships at **LOCAL WORKS**, our affordable open-sector coworking space
- Our **LOCAL EXPERTISE EXCHANGE** was utilized more than 35 times.
- Our **COMMERCIAL SPACE ADVISORY TEAM** was utilized by 8 local entrepreneurs as they sought to lease brick and mortar spaces.
- **GIVING GRACE:** 13 local businesses received Grace Memberships at no cost, keeping them plugged into our resources, network and support during times of crisis.



Marketing Mindshare Meetup on PR pitching strategies hosted at Kersey House.

“ It is the second time that I have the opportunity to be here and study in the Community Business Academy program, it is the first time that I feel that we are truly included, and I have no words of gratitude to express my feelings for Jacquie and especially Javier Jiménez, our instructor, and mentor who has supported us unconditionally in achieving our goals! I adore, love and respect this institution with all my heart. They will always have @Alta Vibra 2.0”



- **Adriana Zabala**, Owner, Alta Vibra 2.0  
Translated via May 2025 Google Review



Fall 2025 Community Business Academy Graduation

## BUILDING RELATIONSHIP CAPITAL

In 2025, we hosted...

- **16 MEMBER MEET-UPS** for business owners in retail, urban manufacturing and urban food manufacturing businesses, solopreneurs, as well as for operations and marketing professionals.
- **6 LOCAL SOCIALS** were held for our entire network to build relationships that matter.
- **6 BUENAS CONEXIONES** participants joined a new referral program which was piloted for our Spanish-speaking and bilingual entrepreneurs to drive business to one another.

## INVESTING IN LOCAL ENTREPRENEURS

In partnership with a team of dedicated advisors, Lowcountry Local First continued to explore unconventional capital as a route to supporting traditionally overlooked and underfunded entrepreneurs. Over the course of 2025, this initiative served 8 entrepreneurs and helped them to secure a combined **\$77,000 IN 0% INTEREST LOANS.**

The funding poured into a wide variety of new businesses, including:

- A Columbian coffee importer, who was able to expand inventory and purchase equipment to expand her business,
- A local jeweler who purchased a piece of machinery to help her create more custom pieces,
- A maker of face and body products, who was able to purchase supplies in greater quantities, driving down her marginal cost,
- A media professional, who invested in high quality equipment to elevate her production quality and her brand,
- An educator on the cusp of opening a childcare center on James Island who used the funding to create a safe and engaging playscape for children.

**2025 INVEST LOCAL ADVISORS:** Brady Quirk-Garvan, *Natural Investments* | Julie Hussey, *Workshop at Howard Heights* | Herbert L Drayton III, *HI Mark Capital* | Orían Rodriguez, *South Atlantic Bank* | Dr. Sonja Ogletree Satani, *Corporate Cycle Consulting, LLC* | Shawn Saulsberry, *Saulsberry Group* | Victor R. Rivera, *First Citizens Bank* | David Lopez, *The Huntington National Bank*



The team from Cooper Family Dentistry at the February Local Social hosted at Commonhouse Aleworks.



Exciting News: Tracer Coffee officially opened a brick and mortar cafe in March of 2026!

Tracer Coffee, founded by Gina Cordoba, successfully raised \$11,500 through our Invest Local Initiative to purchase inventory, upgrade her equipment, and continue expanding her business.

## 2025 ADVOCACY EFFORTS

We work with elected officials, decision-makers and opinion leaders to foster a better environment to start and grow local businesses.

In 2025, Lowcountry Local First showed up for local businesses by...

- Welcoming **4 LOCAL MUNICIPALITY** members that support and engage with our membership year-round.
- Hosting a **LISTENING SESSION ON REDUCING RED TAPE** during the permitting process with local businesses based in the Town of Mount Pleasant.
- Building up relationships with multiple major commercial developers in the region and beginning to act as a **PIPELINE FOR PROSPECTIVE LOCAL TENANTS**.
- Moving the conversation forward with new elected leadership at City of North Charleston around **FORMULA BUSINESS ORDINANCES** for key local business districts.
- Strengthening relationships with regional **ENTREPRENEURIAL RESOURCE PARTNERS** and accepting leadership roles with state and federal advocacy partners.
- Publishing **CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRES** on local business support ahead of key November 2025 local elections.
- Engaging with federal representatives around **TARIFF AND HEALTHCARE EXPENSE IMPACTS** on our member businesses.
- Engaging with state representatives around **LIQUOR LIABILITY INSURANCE REFORM**.
- Working with state legislators to amend **COMMERCIAL COVENTURER LAWS** to cut red tape around small businesses' charitable efforts.
- Spurring local business leaders to be **ADVOCATES AND STEWARDS** for their communities.

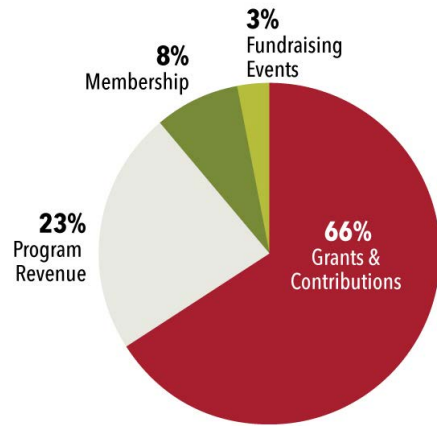


LLF staff speak on small business resilience at a US Chamber forum in December 2025.

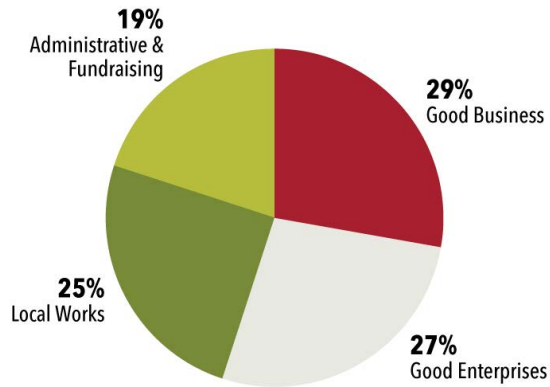
# FINANCIALS

Lowcountry Local First is committed to financial transparency and accountability in appropriately stewarding our supporters' dollars to further our mission. For more information, please contact [jacquie@lowcountrylocalfirst.org](mailto:jacquie@lowcountrylocalfirst.org).

### 2025 REVENUE \$1,157,909



### 2025 EXPENSES \$1,270,691 100% of every dollar goes to impact.



Information provided is unaudited.



Our team walking in the City of Charleston Holiday Parade to spread the Buy Local message.

# SUPPORTERS

We extend gratitude to the following 2025 donors who catapulted our work from ideas to action through their financial support.

**\$100,000+**

Charleston County Economic Development

SouthState Bank  
Steen Enterprises  
David Thompson

**\$50,000+**

Cummins  
Palmetto Goodwill  
South Carolina Department of Commerce  
U.S. Economic Development Administration

**\$2,500 TO \$4,999**  
Addlestone International Corporation  
Central Park Accounting  
GCM  
Lowcountry Valet  
Omnisend  
SMHa  
Three Rivers Design, LLC

**\$20,000+**

City of Goose Creek  
Sisters of Charity of South Carolina

**\$1,000 TO \$2,499**

Meredith Allen  
Berkeley Electric Cooperative  
Dunes Properties  
Elizabeth Edelson  
Rebecca Epstein  
Glaser + Company  
Jamee and Jim Haley  
Homegrown Hospitality Group

**\$10,000 TO \$19,999**

First Citizens Bank  
Huntington Bank  
Pathfinder Foundation  
Kathy Ploss  
REV Federal Credit Union  
Town of Mt. Pleasant  
Truist Bank

Jonathan Sanchez  
Joe Spector  
SLC Architect  
Steinberg Law Firm  
Ryan Stewart  
Ted's Butcherblock

**\$5,000 TO \$9,999**

Anonymous Donor  
Advised Fund of Coastal Community Foundation of SC  
Bank of America  
BECU  
City of Charleston  
First Capital Bank  
First Horizon Bank  
Lennon Construction  
Palmetto Goodwill  
South Carolina Department of Agriculture

**\$500-\$999**

Linda and Ronald Berger  
Charleston County Parks and Recreation  
City of North Charleston  
Francis Marion  
Gold Creations  
GOODco.  
Goodie Bag  
Vincent Graham

Harbour Corporate and Private Wealth Management Group  
Julie and Bill Hussey  
Carol Jackson  
Ed Kronsberg  
Ann and David Marconi  
Oliver Pluff & Company  
Rush Dixon Architects  
South Atlantic Bank  
The Office People  
The Station at Park Circle  
Mimi Striplin  
The Ease Co.  
Workplace Benefits

**\$250-\$499**

Ambrose Dittloff  
Stephanie and Noel Hunt  
Kate Schmieding

**IN-KIND CONTRIBUTORS (\$250+ VALUE)**

105.5 The Bridge  
39 Rue de Jean  
Berkeley Electric Cooperative  
Brooks Signs Inc.  
Candlefish  
Celadon  
Chef Jason Stanhope  
Chef Mike Lata  
Charleston City Paper  
Charleston Magazine  
Charleston Music Hall  
Coastal Coffee Roasters  
Don Luchi Wines  
Francis Marion Hotel  
Frankie Gilmore Video and Photo

Freehand Media  
Glaser and Company  
Grassroots Wine  
High Wire Distilling Co.  
Hotel Emeline  
Inspirada Creative  
Larry Monteith Photography  
Mini Blessings Bakery  
Nelson Printing  
Olinda Olives and Olive Oil  
Palmetto Goodwill  
Patrick Properties  
PLUGS Appliance Center  
Post and Courier  
Roadside Blooms  
Saltwater Cycle  
SMART Recycling  
Smithey Ironware  
The French Eclectic  
The Indigo Road Hospitality Group  
The Local Palate  
The Swamp Fox  
The Works  
Tínto Café and Provisions  
Turn90 Print Shop  
Uptown Hospitality Group  
Verde  
West Of

*Lowcountry Local First takes great care to accurately recognize all of our generous donors and supporters. If you notice an error in our recognition, please contact Kayla Sewell at [kayla@lowcountrylocalfirst.org](mailto:kayla@lowcountrylocalfirst.org) so we may promptly correct it.*



Staff receiving a generous contribution from First Horizon Bank.

# IMPACT MEMBERS

**CONVENER**

Lowcountry Coffee Roasters

**CATALYST**

Anchor Heating and Air  
Charleston City Paper  
Charleston Magazine  
Coastal Cattle Company  
El Informador Newspaper  
Floyd Lee Locums  
Grassroots Wine  
Greystar  
High Wire Distilling Co.  
The Indigo Road Hospitality Group  
Nice Commerce  
REV Federal Credit Union  
SMHa

Sonitrol Security  
South Carolina Federal Credit Union  
Steen Enterprises  
The Charleston Mattress  
The Local Palate

**CHAMPION**

Be Data Lit  
Brackish  
Caplea Coe Architects  
Celadon Home  
Charleston County Park and Recreation Commission  
Charleston Wine and Food Festival  
Citadel Roofing and Exteriors  
Cru Catering

DataSpring, Inc.  
David Thompson Studio  
Digital Ignite  
Epstein Law  
First Capital Bank  
Fiscal Flavors Consulting  
Food is Good Hospitality  
GDC Home  
Hill Construction  
HLA, Inc.  
Holy City Brewing  
Home Telecom  
Neighborly Park Circle  
Plugs Appliance Center  
RCB Development  
Southern First Bank  
The Ordinary



Vendors and shoppers at the Buy Local Block Party.

## To our community, members, and partners: *Thank you.*

None of this happens without you. Lowcountry Local First isn't just an organization; it is a collective pulse powered by your belief that local business is the bedrock of a thriving community. As we reflect on 2025, we aren't just looking back at what we've built, we're looking forward to the barriers we're about to break.

Our mission remains unwavering: ensuring that every entrepreneur in the Lowcountry has the tools to chase their dreams, provide for their families, and weave themselves into the fabric of our resilient community.

- **THE INVEST LOCAL INITIATIVE:** Access to capital shouldn't be a gatekeeper to innovation. This newly launched initiative is growing from pilot to fully-fledged program and is already bridging the gap for entrepreneurs who have historically been sidelined by traditional lending. We are opening creative, impactful pathways to the funding necessary to turn a "what if" into a grand opening.
- **THE POWER OF ADVOCACY:** We are amplifying our role as the bridge between the storefront and the statehouse. By intentionally listening to our 500+ business members, we serve as a direct conduit to elected officials. We aren't just asking for a seat at the table; we're shaping the very landscape in which you operate.
- **A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD:** The Lowcountry is changing fast. As our skyline evolves, our commitment to the "little guy" only deepens. We are more dedicated than ever to ensuring that locally-owned businesses don't just survive the development of our region, but that they lead it.

Together, we are a loud, collective force. With every member who joins and every donor who contributes, our influence grows. We are ready to fight for the systems that impact your success and ensure the Lowcountry remains uniquely, authentically ours.



# OUR TEAM

Thank you to our 2025 Board of Directors and staff for their leadership and support.

**2025 BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Ed Kronsberg, <i>Chair</i>	Chris Brown	Sirena White-Singleton
Kate Schmeiding, <i>Vice Chair</i>	Rebecca Epstein	Ryan Stewart
Nancy Leon, <i>Treasurer</i>	Jennifer Ferrebee	David Thompson
Mimi Striplin, <i>Secretary</i>	Margie Longshore	
Jeremiah Bacon	Jonathan Sanchez	

**2025 STAFF**

Jordan Amaker	Javier Jimenez Pereira	Kayla Sewell
Maud Bentley	Ryan Kortrey	Jala Stroud
Jacquie Berger	Brittany Lucas	Cameron Cuthbertson
Mara Fields	Kelsi Rothfuss	



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**LOWCOUNTRYLOCALFIRST.ORG**

### SUPPORT THE LOCAL MOVEMENT



Join as a Certified Local  
Business Member



Make a donation that  
supports our daily efforts



Partner on a seasonal public  
awareness campaign

PLACE  
POSTAGE  
HERE