

**BLOG** Published November 21, 2024 • 4 minute read

# Interview: Supporting Diverse Entrepreneurs with Rep. Sydney Kamlager-Dove



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On October 22, 2024, the Alliance for Entrepreneurial Equity hosted a roundtable in Los Angeles to explore the local entrepreneurial landscape, bringing together a group of policymakers, entrepreneurs, and small business advocates.

Afterward, we connected with California Congresswoman Sydney Kamlager-Dove to hear her thoughts on the challenges facing diverse entrepreneurs. She shared her perspective on the critical need for access to capital, her legislative priorities, and the importance of public-private partnerships in promoting business ownership. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

## **Alliance for Entrepreneurial Equity:**

Why does Los Angeles have such a vibrant startup community—what sets this city apart from others?

### **Rep. Sydney Kamlager-Dove:**

Los Angeles is a city of dreamers, innovators, and go-getters. Whether you grew up here or moved here to chase an opportunity, there is a self-starting spirit in LA that goes beyond Hollywood. Our universities, talent pool, quality of life, and access to capital through anchor industries like the entertainment sector have contributed to LA's vibrant startup community. I am committed to supporting our startups and ensuring that access to these resources is equitable so we can support diverse and underserved entrepreneurs.

## **Alliance for Entrepreneurial Equity:**

Even with great startup growth, there are still challenges—especially among minority entrepreneurs. When you talk to your constituents, what are some obstacles they mention to starting and growing a business?

### **Rep. Sydney Kamlager-Dove:**

Entrepreneurship provides hope and opportunity to communities of color, but too many entrepreneurs of color face systemic barriers, from a lack of access to capital to discriminatory lending practices. Limited access to financing is one of the most significant hurdles my constituents experience—many minority businesses face higher interest rates or struggle to secure loans altogether. I also hear from constituents looking to open their first businesses who have trouble navigating bureaucratic regulations and red tape. Without mentorship and networking opportunities to guide diverse entrepreneurs through the startup process, minority businesses are discouraged from entering the market. Even when businesses can open, their growth can be stunted by structural bias in procurement and supply chain opportunities. I am working in Washington and with stakeholders here in LA to address these challenges.

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## **Alliance for Entrepreneurial Equity:**

You have championed legislation supporting vulnerable communities including women, youth, and the formerly incarcerated. Could you share more about what motivates your support for these communities, especially with the unique challenges they face in gaining access to stable employment, education, and essential resources? Given the substantial impact that entrepreneurship can have on economic empowerment and independence, would you support legislative efforts to lower barriers and expand access to entrepreneurial opportunities for these groups?

### **Rep. Sydney Kamlager-Dove:**

I have been proud to spend my career advocating for communities and families. My first two jobs after graduating from USC were with Rebuild LA and the Los Angeles Festival, two nonprofits working to advance job creation and uplift communities across LA. Those experiences are still central to my work today. I know that minority businesses are the backbones of our communities, creating jobs, offering essential services, and driving innovation. These businesses build stronger, more resilient local economies and give back to their communities.

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## **Alliance for Entrepreneurial Equity:**

As a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, you have led efforts to foster entrepreneurship among young leaders abroad, particularly through the Young African Leaders Initiative. Could you tell us more about this bill and the ways in which the US and Africa are exchanging lessons on building resilience against challenges like predatory lending, fair contracting, and other economic growth strategies?

### **Rep. Sydney Kamlager-Dove:**

The Young African Leaders Initiative represents the United States’ commitment to empowering the next generation of African leaders as a supportive partner in Africa’s future. I am proud to further relationships between the US and African countries in Congress because these relationships are economically beneficial and because my constituents care about them. African diaspora groups in

my district are working to increase trade with their home countries, and I have been proud to support their efforts in Congress by supporting increased trade with Africa through the Port of LA, pushing for the renewal of the African Growth Opportunity Act (AGOA), and requesting full funding for Department of Commerce's International Trade Administration.

## **Alliance for Entrepreneurial Equity:**

Looking ahead, what legislative priorities or public-private partnerships would you like to see in order to promote equitable entrepreneurship and economic empowerment in America?

## **Rep. Sydney Kamlager-Dove:**

We need to focus on legislation that expands access to capital, technical assistance, and mentorship for underserved entrepreneurs, particularly in communities of color. This includes enhancing the SBA's lending programs and creating tax incentives for businesses that invest in minority-owned startups. On the public-private partnership front, we need to see more collaborations between financial institutions, tech companies, and community organizations to provide affordable capital, digital tools, and business education. By aligning government support with private sector innovation, we can ensure equitable entrepreneurship becomes a pathway to economic empowerment for all Americans.