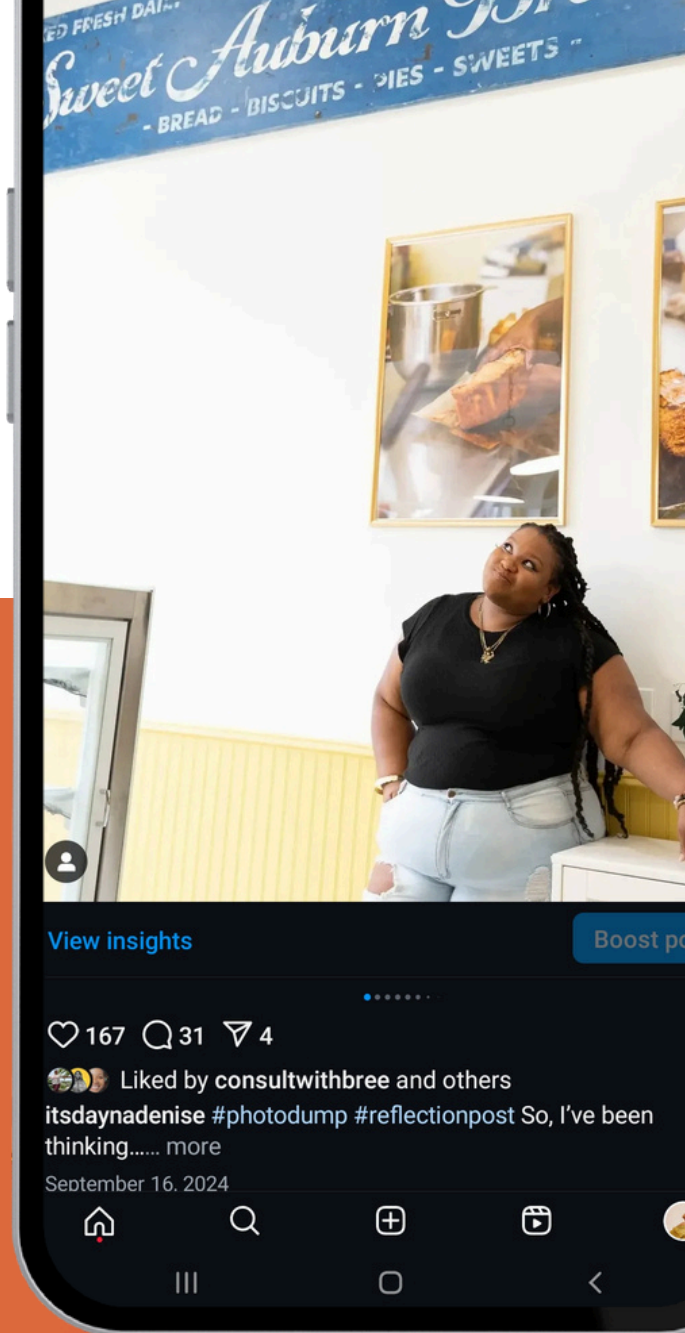


SPARK

Designing an Entrepreneur
Support Ecosystem for Atlanta's
Historic Sweet Auburn District
Case Study



Designing an Entrepreneur Support Ecosystem for Atlanta's Historic Sweet Auburn District **Case Study**

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SPARK

Project Overview

What began as a **graduate school community design project** evolved into an **award-winning economic development initiative**. As a graduate student at SCAD, I partnered with Sweet Auburn Works Inc. to help local entrepreneurs identify barriers to growth and uncover opportunities for business development.

After graduation, I was hired to **lead the organization's economic development efforts** and transform those insights into action. Over the next several years, I **designed and operationalized SPARK Innovation Lab**, an entrepreneur support ecosystem that connected small businesses with funding, technical assistance, strategic resources, and community support.

The Challenge

Sweet Auburn is one of the nation's most historically significant Black business districts. Decades of disinvestment, economic shifts, and storefront vacancies threatened both the economic vitality and cultural identity of the corridor.

As investment returned to the neighborhood, community leaders faced a critical question:

How might we support economic growth without losing the businesses, culture, and community that make Sweet Auburn unique?

At the same time, entrepreneurs faced a different challenge. While funding and recommendations were available, there was **no structured system** to move entrepreneurs **from problem identification to implementation**.

Role: Program Manager

Timeline: Jan 2022 - Dec 2023

Stakeholders: Entrepreneurs, Legacy Businesses, Community Leaders, Sweet Auburn Works Board, Visitors & Customers

Partners: Sweet Auburn Works Inc., Main Street America, Bank of America, SCAD SERVE

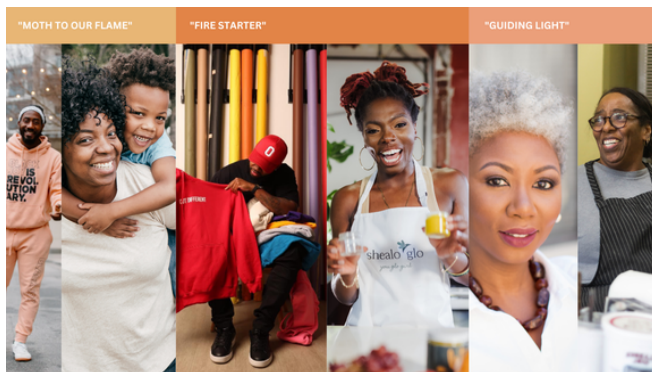
Understanding the Ecosystem

Before designing SPARK Innovation Lab, I needed to understand **how the program fit within Sweet Auburn's broader revitalization strategy.**

Sweet Auburn Works followed Main Street America's four-point approach to revitalization: organization, promotion, design, and economic vitality. **SPARK served as the organization's economic development initiative.**

Through workshops, stakeholder interviews, and business assessments, I synthesized findings into a framework that informed the design of the entrepreneur support program and identified **three primary audience groups**

- **Guiding Lights:** Legacy Businesses & Community Leaders
- **Fire Starters:** Entrepreneurs & Future Business Owners
- **Moths to Our Flame:** Visitors & Community Supporters



Main Street America provided the framework, Bank of America funded the pilot, SCAD SERVE helped identify business challenges, and Sweet Auburn Works transformed those insights into community action through SPARK Innovation Lab.



Building the Entrepreneur Journey

Through entrepreneur workshops, business assessments, stakeholder interviews, and strategic planning exercises, **we uncovered a critical gap in the existing support model.** Each entrepreneur required different forms of support, but there was **no consistent process** for assessing needs, allocating resources, connecting service providers, or tracking outcomes.

This **insight became the foundation for SPARK Innovation Lab** and ultimately shaped the entrepreneur journey I would later design.

See Appendix A for complete audience report



Key Findings

✓ Every entrepreneur had different needs.

Businesses varied in maturity, resources, operational readiness, and growth challenges.

Opportunity: Create a flexible support model that adapts to different business needs.

✓ Funding alone wasn't enough.

Many entrepreneurs requested financial support, but deeper assessment often revealed operational, marketing, or infrastructure issues.

Opportunity: Address root causes rather than symptoms.

✓ The biggest gap was implementation.

Recommendations existed. Funding existed. A pathway between the two did not.

Opportunity: Design a repeatable entrepreneur journey that connects assessment, resources, implementation, and outcomes.

How might we create a repeatable support system that:

- Adapts to different entrepreneur needs
- Connects assessments to implementation
- Allocates resources effectively
- Measures outcomes over time

Solution Direction: Design a structured entrepreneur journey that connects assessment, resources, implementation, and outcomes.



Co-creation workshop used to **uncover entrepreneur needs, service gaps, and barriers** to program participation.

Insights from these workshops informed **recruitment campaigns designed to engage emerging entrepreneurs** and grow the SPARK pipeline.



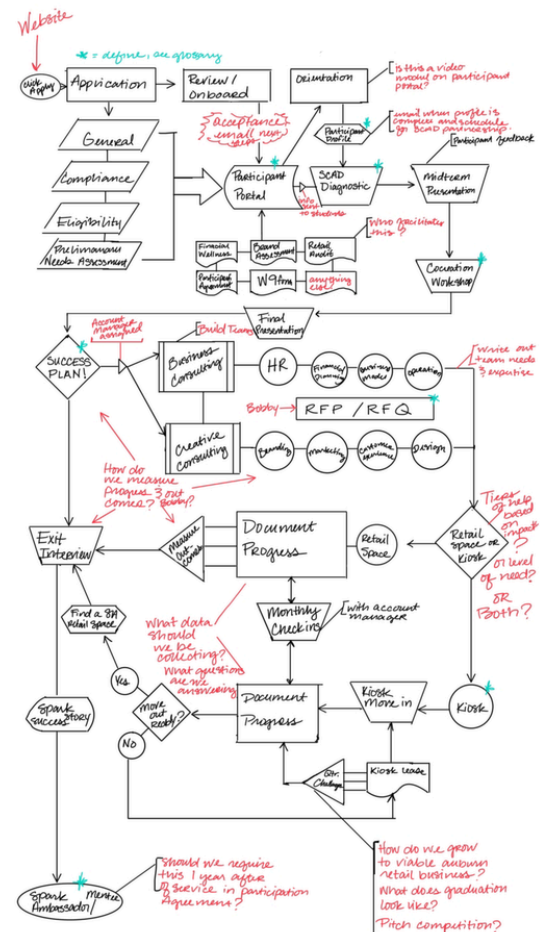
Designing the Entrepreneur Support System

I designed a **repeatable program journey** that guided participants through assessment, planning, technical assistance, implementation, and outcome measurement. The goal was to **create a flexible framework capable of supporting businesses at different growth stages** while ensuring resources were aligned to validated needs.

The **entrepreneur support model** established a shared process for entrepreneurs, consultants, and program staff. It **defined how participants entered the program, how business challenges were diagnosed, how resources were allocated, and how progress was measured** over time.

Entrepreneur Journey Milestones

- **Application & Assessment:** Evaluate business readiness, goals, and support needs.
- **Diagnosis & Discovery:** Identify root causes through workshops, assessments, and strategic planning activities.
- **Business Success Plan:** Develop recommendations, priorities, and implementation pathways.
- **Implementation & Resource Allocation:** Match entrepreneurs with funding, technical assistance, consultants, and retail opportunities.
- **Measurement & Graduation:** Track progress, document outcomes, and prepare participants for long-term sustainability.



This early service blueprint helped visualize entrepreneur touchpoints, decision points, resource allocation pathways, and success measures. It became the foundation for the operational framework used to deliver consistent support across businesses with different needs and growth stages.

See Appendix B for complete artifact



From Strategy to Execution: Shealo Glo

As an **emerging entrepreneur**, Shannon Mitchell, founder of Shealo Glo, had built a promising skincare business rooted in natural ingredients and wellness. While the products were well received, the business faced challenges common to many early-stage entrepreneurs: **translating a strong vision into a cohesive customer experience and scalable retail offering.**

The Challenge:

Following participation in the SCAD SERVE entrepreneur program, **recommendations and strategic direction had been developed, but implementation remained a challenge.** Like many entrepreneurs in the ecosystem, Shannon needed support turning ideas into tangible business outcomes.

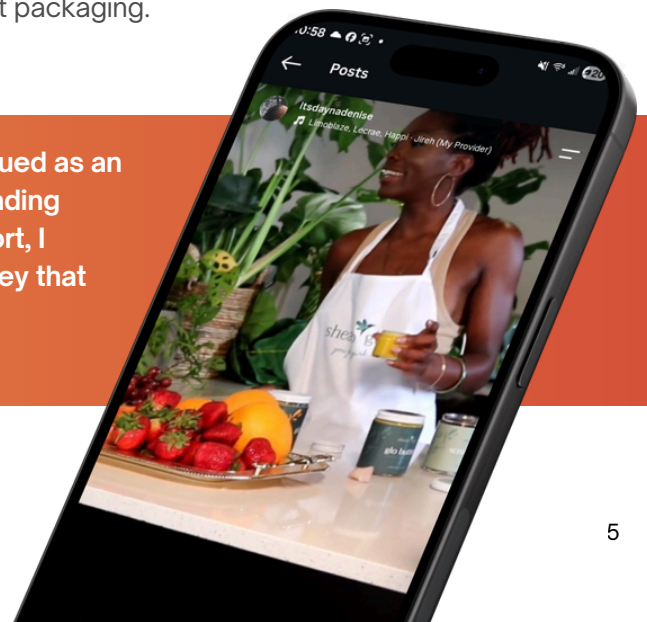
Key opportunities included:

- Strengthening product differentiation
- Improving packaging and shelf presence
- Create a more cohesive brand experience
- Increase understanding of product offerings
- Preparing the business for retail growth



Led **end-to-end implementation**, directing merchandising, photography, customer experience execution, and redesigning product packaging.
Scan to see Shealo Glo photoshoot BTS

I began this work as a SCAD SERVE graduate student and continued as an independent consultant after the engagement concluded. By leading implementation and demonstrating the value of execution support, I established an early proof of concept for the entrepreneur journey that would later become the foundation of SPARK Innovation Lab.
See Appendix C for complete artifact





From Strategy to Revitalization: Sweet Auburn Bread Co.

As **one of Sweet Auburn's longest-standing businesses**, Sweet Auburn Bread Co. represented more than a neighborhood bakery. It was a **cultural landmark** and community gathering place with decades of history. As investment returned to the neighborhood, the bakery faced a common challenge among legacy businesses: **modernizing the customer experience while preserving the identity and community trust that made it a neighborhood institution.**

The Challenge:

The physical environment **no longer reflected the quality and legacy** of the brand, operational improvements were needed, and the customer experience required revitalization. Like many legacy businesses, the challenge was not creating something new, but **thoughtfully evolving without losing the character that made it meaningful to the community.**



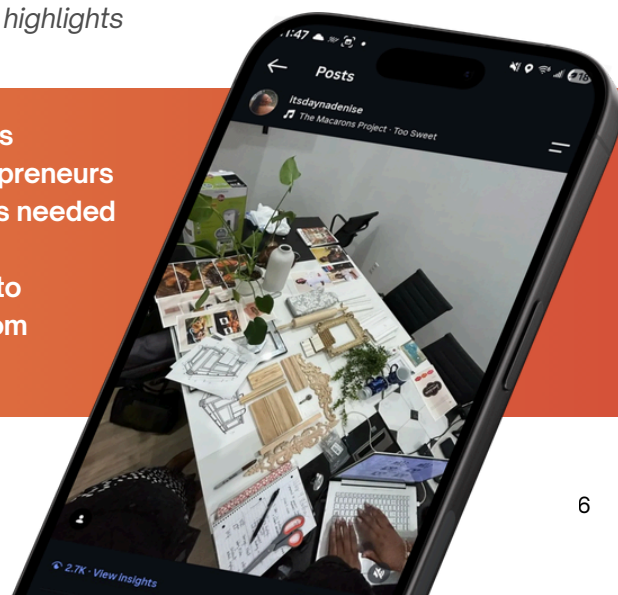
Key opportunities included:

- Modernizing the storefront experience
- Improving customer flow and functionality
- Strengthening brand presentation
- Preserving the business's historic identity
- Positioning the bakery for long-term sustainability



Led **storefront revitalization from concept to implementation**, coordinating budgets, vendors, environmental design, stakeholder engagement, and experience improvements. *Scan to view project reflection featuring process highlights*

This project validated the flexibility of the SPARK framework across different business types and growth stages. While emerging entrepreneurs often needed support bringing new ideas to life, legacy businesses needed support reimagining established ones. Together, these projects demonstrated that a structured entrepreneur journey could adapt to distinct business needs while maintaining a consistent pathway from assessment to implementation.



Program Outcomes & Impact

15+

Entrepreneurs Supported

5+

Businesses Incubated

5

Retail Storefronts Activated

\$200k+

Funding Distributed

Multiple

Community Events & Entrepreneur Showcases
Including a visit from the Mayor on Small Biz Day

What began as a pilot initiative evolved into a repeatable entrepreneur support ecosystem. By connecting assessment, planning, technical assistance, implementation, and outcome measurement, SPARK provided a structured pathway for both emerging entrepreneurs and legacy businesses.

The success of the initial cohort demonstrated the viability of the model and helped attract additional investment. Following the pilot, Truist joined the initiative as a funding partner, providing further validation of the program's approach and community impact.

Most importantly, the framework proved adaptable across different business types and growth stages. Whether supporting emerging entrepreneurs launching new ventures or legacy businesses reimagining established ones, SPARK provided a consistent process for moving from identified challenges to implemented solutions.

Recognition

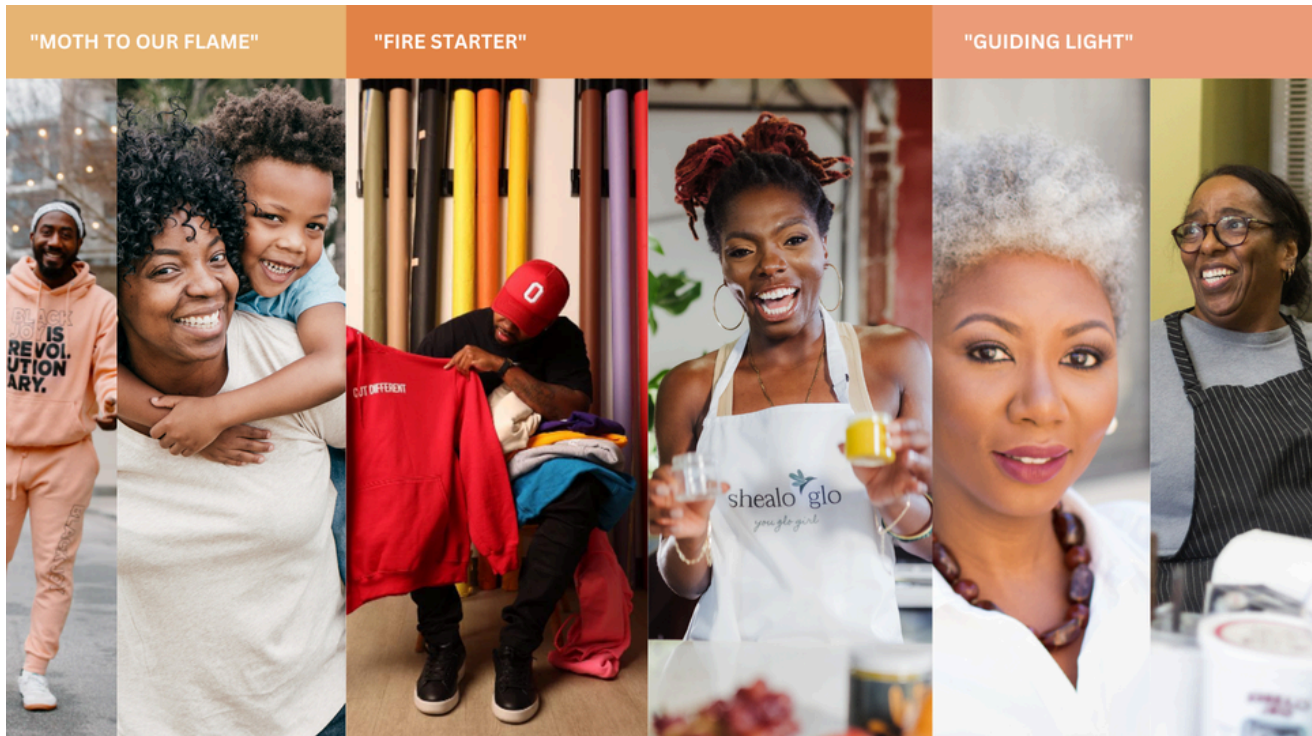
The revitalization of Sweet Auburn Bread Co. received recognition from the City of Atlanta and served as a flagship example of the SPARK model in action.



What began as a **community revitalization initiative** ultimately became a **lesson in systems design**. Whether supporting an emerging entrepreneur launching a new venture or a legacy business reimagining an established one, the challenge remained the same: **helping people move from insight to action**. SPARK proved that **when research, strategy, and implementation are connected through a thoughtful framework, meaningful change becomes repeatable**.

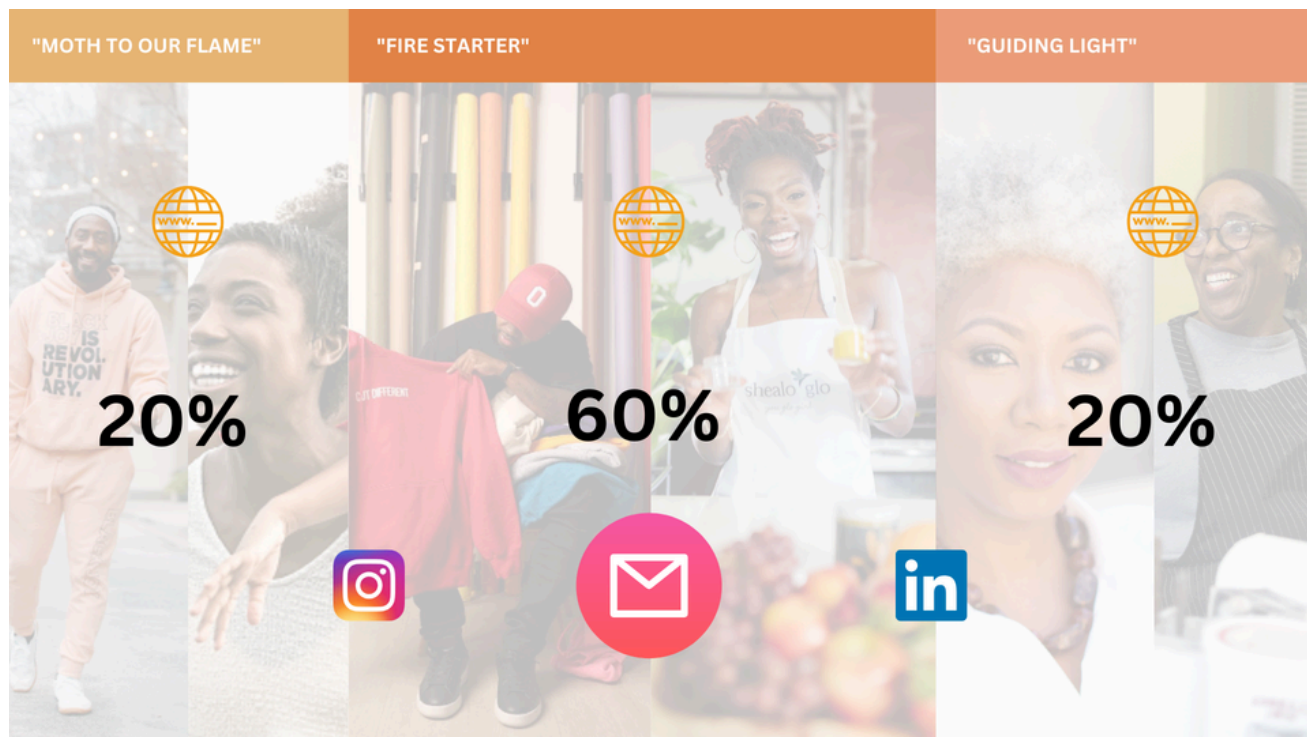
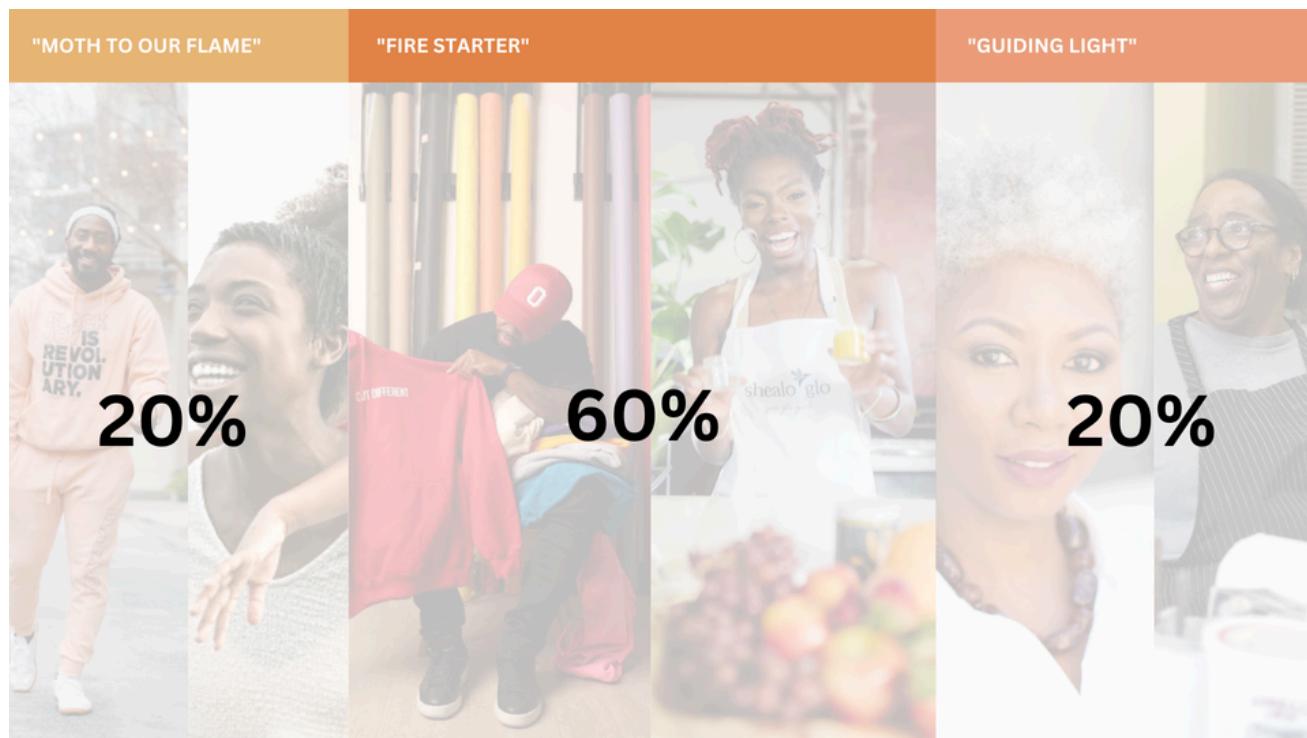
See Appendix D for the complete award submission.

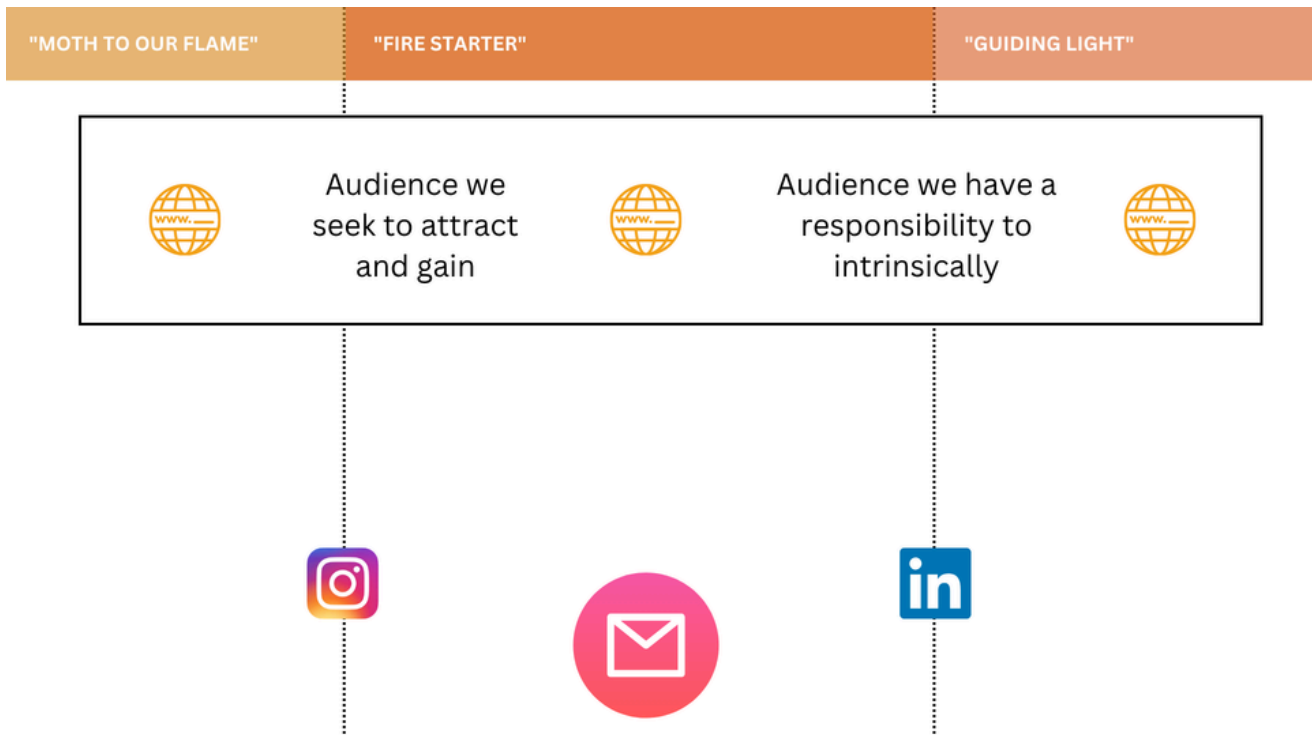
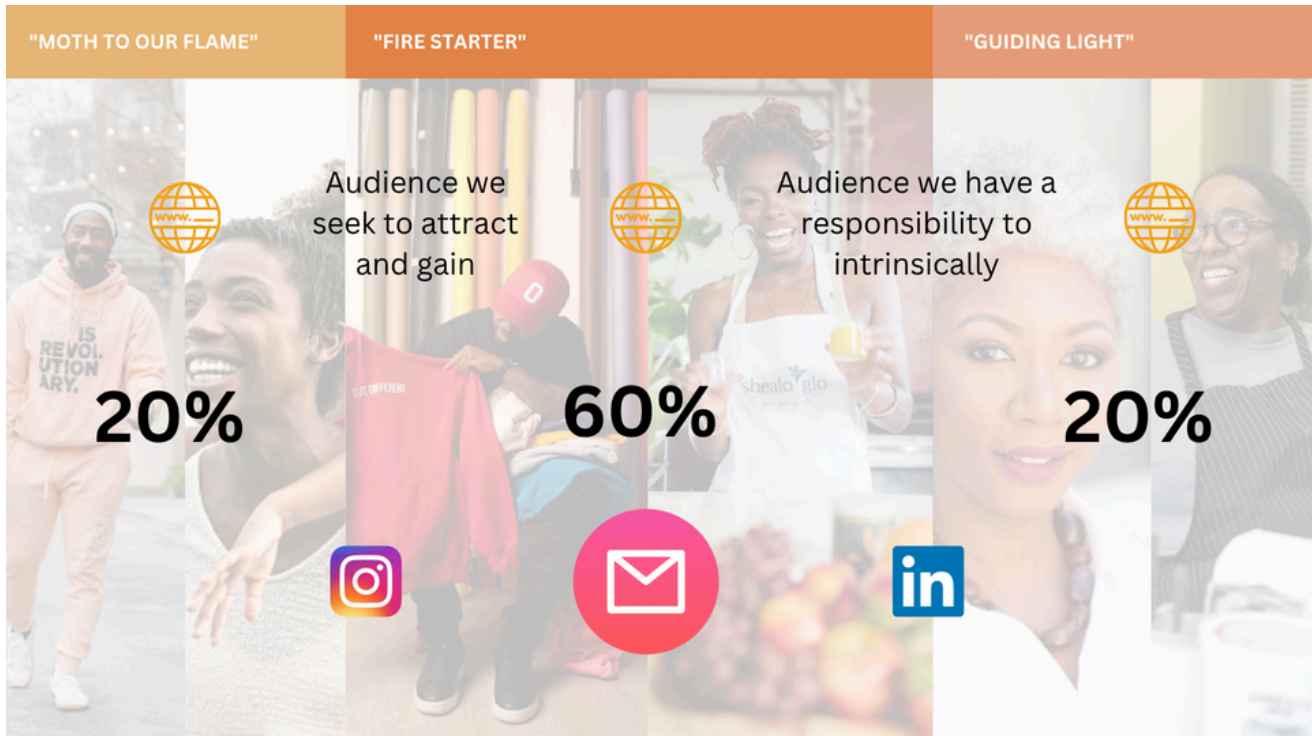
Target Audience - Communications Plan

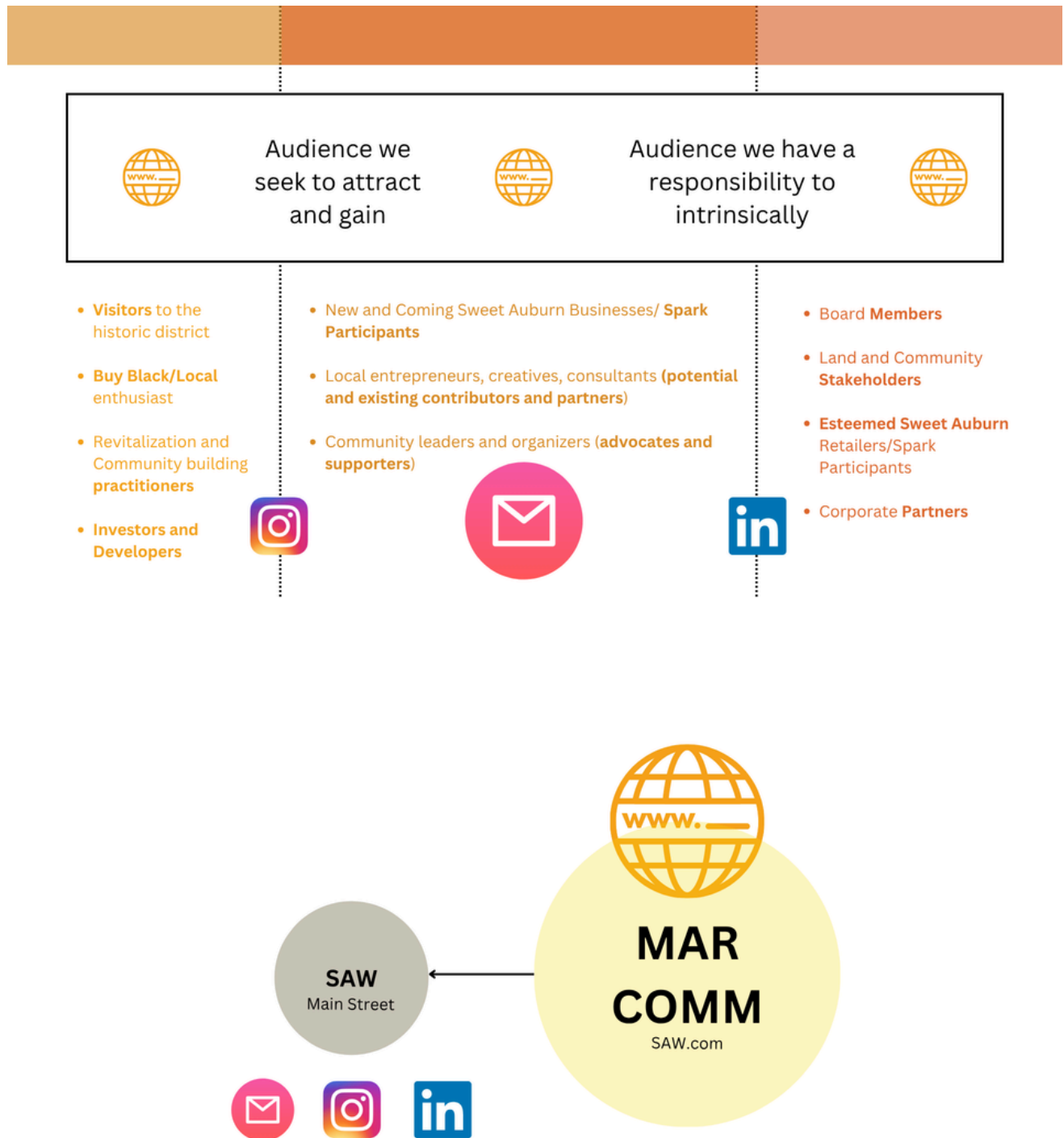


**Communicating
Key Messages**

APPENDIX A







APPENDIX A

"MOTH TO OUR FLAME"

Brand Archetype Match: **SAGE**

Mellinials and their families + Gen X



- **Visitors** to the historic district
- **Buy Black/Local** enthusiast
- Revitalization and Community building **practitioners**



"FIRE STARTER"

Brand Archetype Match: **CREATIVE**

Millennials + Gen Z



- New and Coming Sweet Auburn Businesses/ **Spark Participants**
- Local entrepreneurs, creatives, consultants (**potential contributors and partners**)
- Community leaders and organizers (**advocates and supporters**)



APPENDIX A

"GUIDING LIGHT"

Brand Archetype Match: **CAREGIVER**

Gen X + Baby Boomer

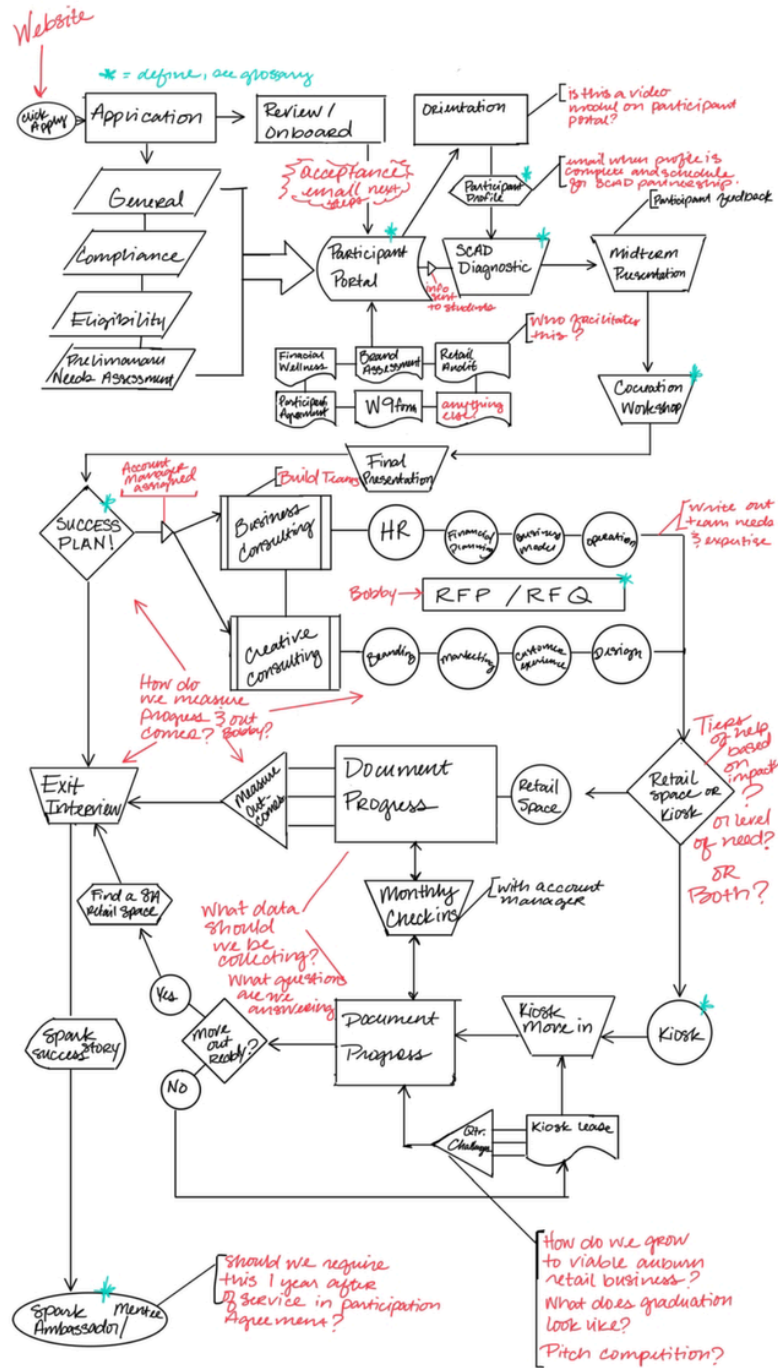


- Board Members
- Stakeholders
- Esteemed Sweet Auburn
Retailers/Spark Participants



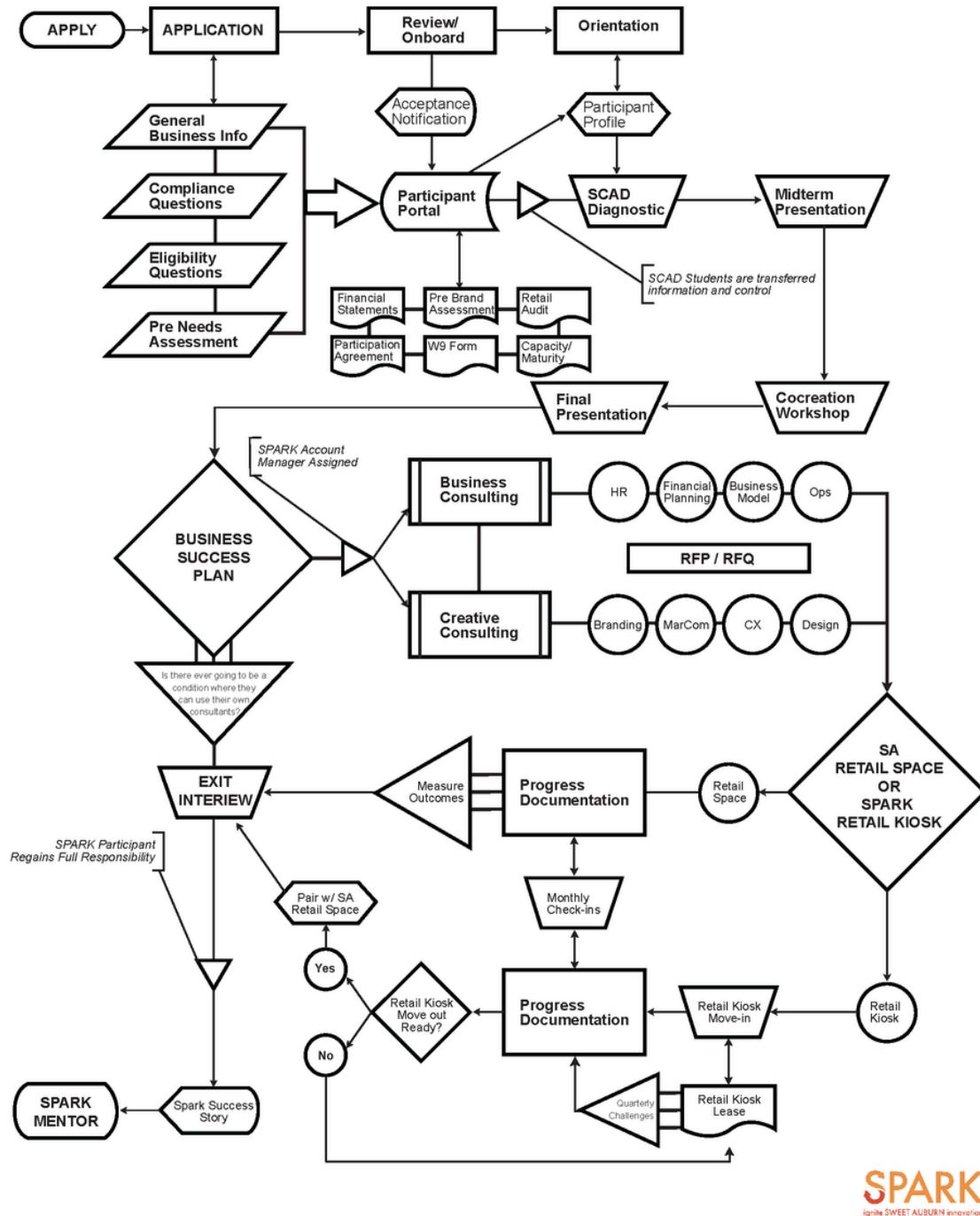
Dayna Edmonds
January 2023

PROGRAM FLOWCHART: Process Draft



Dayna Edmonds
January 2023

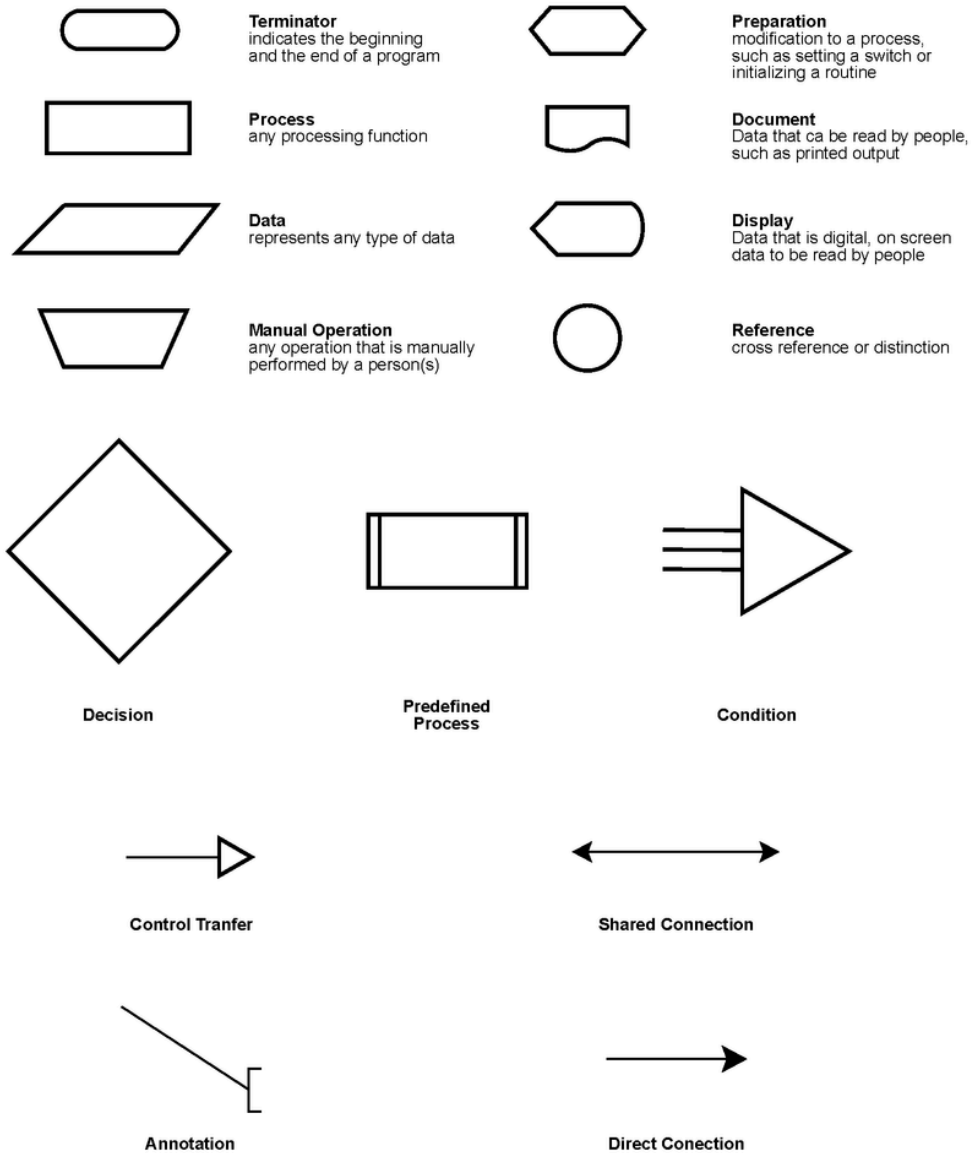
PROGRAM FLOWCHART: Final Draft for Review



SPARK
ignite SWEET AUBURN innovation

Dayna Edmonds
January 2023

PROGRAM FLOWCHART: Diagram Legend



The Ask

Create an elevated product packaging system that visually conveys the unique positioning of Shealo Glo in the competitive natural skincare market.



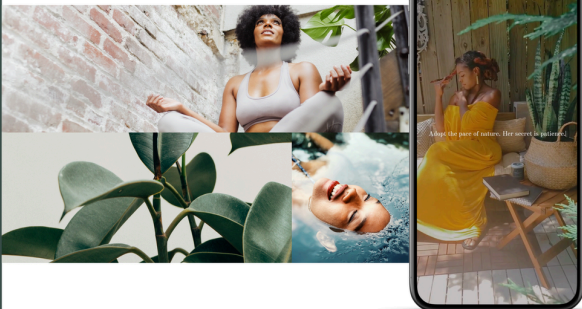
Vision

Shealo Glo, a natural shea butter company, founded in 2020 by female entrepreneur Shannon Mitchell. Her mission was to promote self-care and holistic wellness through products that heal the skin and emphasize the importance of self-care.

I harnessed the power of storytelling to develop product packaging and create compelling brand content resulting in an enhanced retail experience.



Rebranded Visual Identity



Aa

Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg
Hh Ii Jj Kk Ll Mm Nn
Oo Pp Qq Rr Ss Tt Uu
Vv Ww Xx Yy Zz

Design Development

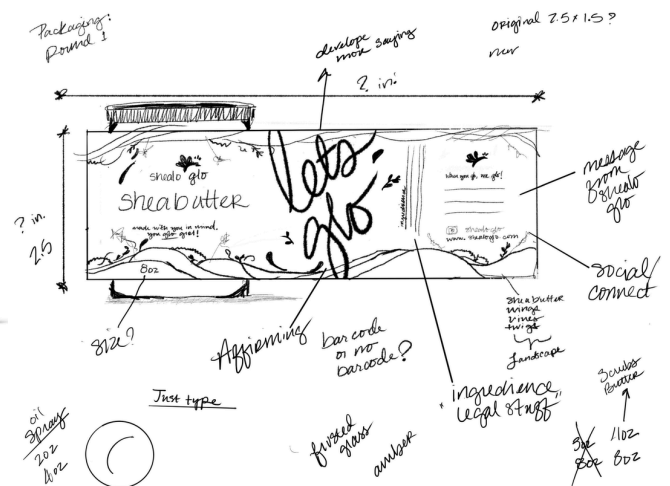
Vision

Create a community of customers "glo"ing from the inside out by using our organic, handmade products.

Shealo glo desires to be a safe-place for conversations around health and a catalyst for the self-care discussion amongst families globally for generations.

Mission

Promote daily self-care and good habits through learning to love and heal yourself.



Research + Discovery

Target Audience

Black and Brown Ethnicity
Older Generation Z and Millennial
85% Women

Generally, more mature from having to grow up fast. Value hard work, family oriented, career driven, and believes in sacrifice and compromise.

It's easy for them to get caught in the routine of life and forget to take a break.

Self care is a desire but not a priority as they tend to put everyone and everything before themselves.

Need to be reminded that it's OK not to be OK.

Brand Narrative

You are amazing! We understand carrying the weight of the world on your shoulders can lead to sacrificing your mental and physical health.

Shealo glo supports your prioritizing self-care — we empower you to put YOU first! Self-care is your next good habit!

When you glo, we glo!

Brand Archetypes

Caregiver
The client is the bird. Shealo glo, the brand, is the nest.

Innocent
Encourage others to be themselves authentically.

Sage
Rejuvenation through healing knowledge.

APPENDIX C

Iterations + Prototypes

#1

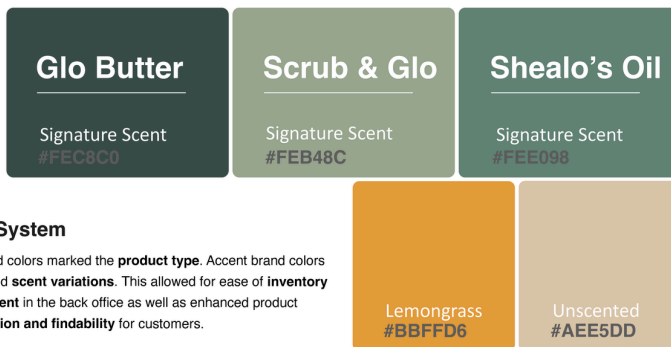


#2



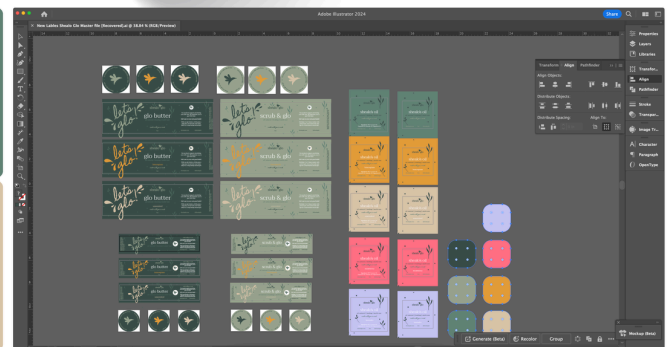
Feedback

The base white is **easily stained** by products. The current color contrast is overly pronounced, **create a smoother transition between hues**. Main brand colors should be more prominent. Packaging should **include a system to easily identify** the product type and scent variation.



Color System

Main brand colors marked the **product type**. Accent brand colors represented **scent variations**. This allowed for ease of **inventory management** in the back office as well as enhanced product **identification and findability** for customers.



Final Designs + Content Creation



Sweet Auburn Bread Co. - Before & After



Sweet Auburn Bread Co. - Before & After



Sweet Auburn Bread Co. - Award Submission

For over 25 years, Sweet Auburn Bread Co. has kept the historic Sweet Auburn district “sweet”! In Fall 2021, a SCAD Serve course at Savannah College of Art and Design made up of students from various disciplines worked to propose a refreshed design for the bakery's storefront, brand identity, and interior.

The designs were to be implemented through the Sweet Auburn Works’ program, Spark Innovation Lab, backed by Bank of America. After months of several bids above budget, a recent graduate student from SCAD joined the Sweet Auburn Works team in the summer of 2022 to mobilize ideas beyond the classroom. Through creative problem-solving, storytelling, and community fostered relationships the Sweet Auburn Bread Co. experience became even “sweeter”!

The re-emergence of this project evoked a mass of emotions and cultural connections. Reflecting on the profound significance of the “kitchen as a haven” within the Black community inspired design decisions by weaving tradition with innovation. Utilizing insights drawn from interviews with Sweet Auburn Bread Co. and collaborating closely with the brand guidelines, the design team embarked on a journey to reimagine the space and tell a story through design.

Pulling from the creativity of our ancestry, southern African Americans styled spaces culturally influenced by what was accessible to them. The intentional nodes of French ornamentation collided with joyous colors to give the warmth and safety of a family kitchen. With gentle reminders of soulfulness and resilience derived from the struggles of enslavement, the little southern Parisian bistro greets you like a folktale. The diverse team, consisting of four passionate African American women in design and construction, alongside dedicated local contractors worked diligently to bring this vision to life.

The storefront is nestled in the center of a historic landmark, The Odd Fellows Building, where various Black-owned businesses, professional offices, meeting spaces, and social clubs have contributed to Auburn Avenue’s economic and cultural vitality since 1914. Despite the many setbacks that come with renovating historic buildings, the team utilized efficient strategies to cut costs without sacrificing quality.

Throughout the years, like many legacy businesses on Auburn Avenue, Sweet Auburn Bread Co. has endured numerous challenges, including the economic crisis of 2008, the disruptions of the streetcar development, and more recently, the impact of COVID-19 in 2020. When many businesses were forced to close due to a lack of commercial retail activity, the bakery continued to persevere.

APPENDIX D

In recognition of this perseverance, hard work, and delicious sweets that bring joy to the community, Sweet Auburn Works Inc. awarded the bakery with being the pilot project to begin a long line of overdue investment in the revitalization of this “Beloved Community”.

Tatyhana Pauling | Project Admin

Kerene Souverain | Project Engineer

Karhtat Wallace | Interior Architect

Dayna Edmonds | Creative Lead | MFA SCAD

ANDRE DICKENS
MAYOR



Department of
CITY PLANNING

OFFICE OF DESIGN - HISTORIC PRESERVATION STUDIO
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www.atlantaga.gov

JAHNEE PRINCE
Commissioner

DOUG YOUNG
Director, Office of Design

TO: Dayna Edmonds
daynade@gmail.com; [REDACTED]

FROM: Matt Adams, CNU-A, Executive Director, Atlanta Urban Design Commission
Assistant Director, Office of Design, DCP

DATE: May 8, 2024

RE: **Atlanta Urban Design Commission Design Awards 2024 (46th Annual Awards of Excellence): Sweet Auburn Bread Co.**

It is my pleasure to inform you, on behalf of the Atlanta Urban Design Commission, that your nomination has been selected to receive an Award of Excellence at the Commission's Design Awards 2024 (46th annual Awards of Excellence). This year's award ceremony will be held on Friday, May 31st, in the Atrium of Atlanta City Hall located at 55 Trinity Ave. SW Atlanta, GA 30303 at 6:30 PM.

As the nominator for the award, we must ask you for assistance in preparing for the ceremony. If you are unable to assist with these tasks, we ask that you provide us with the name, email, and telephone number of a contact person for the award.

The information below covers the basic information on the awards ceremony. This information will answer many of the questions we usually receive, but if you have others, please feel free to contact Leslie Battle-Williams lbattle-williams@atlantaga.gov. We appreciate your assistance in making this year's event a memorable one.

The Ceremony: The awards portion of the evening begins promptly at 6:30 pm. The exact order of the projects receiving awards has not yet been determined. If you have any questions as to where your project is placed on the program, please contact this office **after May 24th**. Due to the 6:30 pm starting time, business attire is the norm.

Award Certificates: The award itself is a framed certificate, which is made out in the name of the project. We provide two additional unframed certificates which will be made available at the time that the award is issued. Please note that we will not be able to provide any additional certificates other than those given out at the ceremony.

Invitations: The Office of Design Staff will email out invitations to all those on our Awards of Excellence email list. You are welcome to invite others to the ceremony. In your announcement, please remember to tell potential attendees to RSVP using the following web address: <https://forms.office.com/g/xAGc074dfn> **by May 24, 2024**. In addition, we will be using social media and other outlets for announcing the event.

APPENDIX D

*45th Annual Awards of Excellence
May 8, 2024
Page 2 of 2*

Images: At the Awards Ceremony itself, images of the project will be shown as a description of the project is read. We usually use the images submitted with the nomination from which we select some to go along with the written script, which the Staff prepares. If we need additional or different images, we will contact you.

Recipients: We need to know the names and titles of those persons who will physically receive the award at the ceremony. These names and titles are announced as part of the presentation. A phonetic spelling tip for the presenter would be greatly appreciated. Please also note that the recipients are receiving the award on behalf of the project; the award is for the project itself. Any last-minute changes to the list of recipients will be made at the Commission Chair's discretion. Lastly, if there was more than one nominator for the same project / person, please try to coordinate your list of recipients. All names and titles are due by **May 17th**.

Recipients do not make any remarks but may be asked to pose for a group picture.

Email: All of the above information can be emailed to [REDACTED] with the subject line reading "Design Awards 2024 – Award Winner Information".

Publicity: In years past, various media outlets have done pieces on the Design Awards / Awards of Excellence ceremony, so we would ask that any press releases or public announcements referring to receiving an Award of Excellence take place after the ceremony. You are welcome to send general announcements about or invite people to the event.

Sincerely,



Matthew D. Adams, CNU-A
Executive Director, Urban Design Commission
Office of Design, Department of City Planning