



## 2020 Community Economic Development Award

**Project Name submission: Sweet Cash Program**

### **Purpose of Project/Program:**

The Sugar Land Office of Economic Development's (SLOED) implemented the Sweet Cash program as part of its #AllInForSLTX business recovery effort to inject needed cash flow into local small businesses impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Utilizing funds restricted solely for economic development purposes from the Sugar Land 4B Corporation, the Sweet Cash program was designed to be a creative, pro-business yet philanthropic way to help stimulate the local economy and encourage shoppers to re-engage with local businesses safely as they are striving to survive during this pandemic.

With full participation, the campaign projects to contribute approximately \$200,000 back into the local economy and has already recorded over \$58,000 in total economic impact to Sugar Land.

### **How the Program Works:**

The primary objective was to design a simple and seamless program: **BUY, GET, GIVE!** For every gift card a shopper **BUYS** (\$40 minimum) from any Sugar Land business, they will **GET** a gift card from a participating business and Sweet Cash will **GIVE** a gift card to a frontline worker. Essentially the program works in three easy steps: After shoppers submit proof of purchase of the original gift card, the City will provide two gift cards at approximately 50% of the originally purchased gift card from a Sweet Cash participating business: one as a thank you to the shopper and one to philanthropically "pay it forward" to a frontline worker.

### **How it worked for Participating Business:**

As a strategic community effort, SLOED wanted to make sure all business benefitted from the program and designed business eligibility requirements that would allow certain business to receive an immediate benefit from the program, while others could participate by promoting the reward shoppers would receive from Sweet Cash if they were to purchase a gift card from their business.

To start, SLOED wanted to make sure they were injecting cash flow into businesses immediately by acquiring gift cards to fulfill the **GET** and **GIVE** portion of the campaign. Businesses had to apply for consideration on a first come, first serve basis, applications were reviewed, and if selected the SLOED purchased \$20 gift cards/certificates up to \$5,000 (dependent on the number of eligible applications received). These participating businesses were selected by meeting the following requirements.

- Businesses had to be in Sugar Land and had paid/submitted local tax to the City at least once in 2019.
- Businesses had to have 50 or fewer full-time equivalent employees in Sugar Land.
- Business had to demonstrate the revenue loss suffered due to COVID-19.
- Qualifying businesses types included: Hotel, Retail, Food & Beverage and Service-Oriented businesses.
- And the willingness to enter into a performance agreement.

In the first round of Sweet Cash, 39 businesses sold \$2,500 worth of gift cards each to SLOED to fulfill the **GET** and **GIVE** portion of the campaign and providing immediate cash flow to their business.

Then, SLOED encouraged other Sugar Land business to participate in the Sweet Cash program by telling their customers to BUY a \$40 or more gift card from their businesses, submit a copy of their purchase, GET a gift card from a Sweet Cash participating business for up to 50% of the original gift card value and GIVE an additional gift card from Sweet Cash to a frontline worker. This strategy immediately assisted businesses that were most vulnerable and allowed for all businesses in Sugar Land to benefit from the program.

### **Marketing Strategy & Tactics:**

The marketing strategy and tactics for achieving the primary objective to help stimulate the local economy in Sugar Land consisted of the following items to raise program awareness and encourage shopper participation.

**Press Release Distribution Plan:** The SLOED developed a press release distribution plan targeting local media to help create awareness regarding the implementation and progress of the program by developing human interest features of how the program benefitted local businesses to how the program is paying it forward to frontline workers.

*Results: Helped the SLOED gain coverage on KHOU, a CBS local affiliate, and KTRK, an ABC local affiliate. Since the coverage aired on KHOU and KTRK a total of 328 users were driven to the campaign page and submissions grew by almost 40%.*

**Social Media:** Developed a social media strategy by scheduling up to three social media weekly posts pushing out the program, created Instagram stories featuring how the program works, and a program explainer video. Additionally, SLOED leveraged the tourism division's Visit Sugar Land social media platforms to share content via their Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, and Twitter channels to gain more publicity.

*Results: Social Media Campaign ads reached a total of 166,944 people and top social media referrer was Facebook and Instagram.*

**Sweet Saturdays Activation:** To further amplify the Sweet Cash program, SLOED launched a month-long Sweet Summer Saturday series of virtual activations that encouraged Sugar Land residents and local business to support the program and be #AllInForSLTX. The virtual activations consisted of featuring a local DIY painting studio, a local boutique shop, two bakeries, and two shopping retail centers in the city via all social media channels.

*Results: The virtual activations reached a total of 21,000 people.*

**Influencer Partnership:** The SLOED partnered up with three local influencers that combined have 60,000 followers. Their efforts consisted of explaining how the program works from start to finish for a total of three weeks and featured three different businesses of their choice in Sugar Land.

*Results: The influencer partnership generated a lot of engagement with their followers and all combined posts reached a total of over 7,000 likes.*

**Video:** A 1:12 video was created to explain what Sweet Cash was and how shoppers could participate. Additionally, the video was utilized for a social media ad buy piece and was placed on the Sweet Cash program website. It was strategically placed on the homepage for users that didn't necessarily want to read but would appreciate watching a video on how Sugar Land is helping stimulate the local economy.

*Results: SLOED ran a sponsored ad featuring the video and reached over 16,000 people.*

**Sweet Cash Badge:** A Sweet Cash window decal was created and given to all participating businesses and interested parties to keep the Sweet Cash program top of mind while in the businesses.

**Mailer Envelopes and Gift Card Sleeves:** The SLOED designed Sweet Cash customized envelopes and gift card sleeves to fit the cards the buyer and the frontline worker would be receiving. This tactic was incorporated to ensure participants saw the City's brand and to generate more buzz about the program by sharing a picture on their social media.

**Direct Mailer:** A direct mailer was created and distributed to a total of 47,884 households in Sugar Land to gain more program exposure and showcase what the city is doing to help stimulate the local economy. Additionally, the mailers were distributed to over 130 businesses to help push the sales of gift card or certificates at their establishments.

**Tool Kits:** The SLOED designed tool kits for different audiences (the City of Sugar Land City Council, all Sugar Land businesses, participating businesses, and social media influencers) to assist them in sharing the program messaging.

**Flyer:** A flyer was created and distributed along with the tool kits that were created to share visual information about the program.

**Destination Venue Marquee Signage:** Multiple creatives were designed for Sugar Land's top leisure destinations video boards at Constellation Field, Smart Financial Centre, and Sugar Land Town Square to entice potential viewers to learn more about Sweet Cash.

**Ad Buys:** The SLOED purchased ad buys with Houston 365, Fort Bend Star, and Fort Community Impact all three local publications. Houston 365 and Fort Bend Community Impact both combined helped drive a total of 70 users to the campaign page.

#### **Program Results:**

The Sweet Cash program immediately injected \$97,500 into the local economy and has stimulated an additional \$30,000 with shopper's participation in Sweet Cash, for a total impact of \$127,500 to date. Over 300 shopper submissions have been made to the program. Additionally, the first round of the Sweet Cash program has generated a total of \$20,900 in gift cards to Front Line Workers including the city's three major hospitals, local grocery store, and local public safety organizations.

#### **Summary:**

Overall, the Sweet Cash program as part of the #ALLINSLTX campaign serves as a uniting theme to demonstrate the determination and resiliency of the Sugar Land Office of Economic Development. The program has generated unmeasurable engagement, solidarity and sense of unification amongst the Sugar Land business community, as is evident by the participation in the program by large corporations, local homeowners' associations, and small community groups by purchasing gift cards to support small businesses. The Sweet Cash program is a strategic economic development program that injected cash flow to the local business community, garnered positive media coverage and has contributed to the economic recovery from an unforeseeable global pandemic.