



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

‘Open4’ to Support Resilience of Small Businesses and Nonprofits Across WNY

BUFFALO, NY; May 25, 2020—A new initiative to connect small businesses and nonprofit organizations in the Buffalo and Rochester regions with support from the public, private and philanthropic sectors to improve their long-term strength and resilience was announced today.

“To thrive in the best of times, small businesses and nonprofits must survive the worst of times, so we have to support their ecosystem all the time,” said David O. Egner, President and CEO of the **Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation**.



This new initiative will be called Open4, signifying both its purpose and its objective: to be an ongoing resource that is open for small businesses and nonprofits to receive long-term support, assistance and counsel; and to help small businesses and nonprofits remain open for their customers and constituents, even during the most difficult of circumstances,” Egner explained.

“The COVID-19 pandemic brought with it unprecedented social and financial disruption, for which few small businesses and nonprofit organizations were positioned or prepared,” said René F. Jones, Chairman and CEO of **M&T Bank**. “Open4 aims to quickly restart small businesses and restore nonprofits in the Buffalo and Rochester regions—and most importantly, to reinforce these enterprises for greater long-term resilience, strength and success.”

“As our region works collaboratively to build a more resilient, better future, it is very important to further develop and strengthen the resources available to our small businesses and nonprofits, especially minority and women-owned businesses which are vital to our community, said Kim Pegula, President and CEO of **Pegula Sports & Entertainment**.”

While still in development, Open4 will support the local small business and nonprofit ecosystem with mentoring, technical assistance, organizational capacity building, business services and financial tools.

Open4 will target small businesses and nonprofit organizations, with an emphasis on women

and minority owned businesses and those enterprises in underserved and low- and moderate-income communities.

Nearly \$6 million has been initially committed to fund the Open4 initiative by a group of Buffalo companies and foundations, including the KeyBank/First Niagara Foundation, M&T Bank, The John R. Oishei Foundation, Pegula Sports & Entertainment and the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation.

Open4 will provide longer-term systemic support to small businesses and nonprofits, building on the near-term financial assistance provided by the New York Forward Loan Fund announced Friday, May 22 by Governor Andrew M. Cuomo, to which an additional \$3.5 million in funding was committed by Evans Bank, N.A., M&T Bank and the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation.

“The Open4 initiative, in combination with the New York Forward Loan Fund, will help to build and sustain a level of economic activity and opportunity that is healthy, inclusive and lasting,” said David J. Nasca, President and CEO of **Evans Bank, N.A.**

This collaborative group of funders is working with other partnering organizations to develop the specific parameters of the Open4 initiative. Small businesses, nonprofits and other support organizations will be able to learn more about the program as it is developed at a new website, www.open4wny.org.

“Open4 will be available to any small business owner and nonprofit operator who wants help and guidance. We’ll be using all of our resources and expertise, including mentors who are already in the business community, entrepreneurs and other types of community leaders,” said Gary Quenneville, Regional Sales Executive and Buffalo Market President of **KeyBank**.

“The initial group of contributors and supporters are only the impetus,” said Robert D. Gioia, President of **The John R. Oishei Foundation**. “The goal is to leverage the incredible insight of our local entrepreneurs, leaders and community partners in co-designing a new public-private-philanthropic approach to strengthen the nonprofit and small business ecosystem.”

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