

Independent Work, Real Opportunity: The Gig Economy and the Future of
Entrepreneurship

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Elaine Buxton, President & CEO
Confero, Inc. Cary, NC

Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Elaine Buxton, and I am President and CEO of Confero, Inc., a customer experience research company based in Cary, North Carolina. Confero was founded in 1986, and we help businesses improve customer experience, compliance, and operational performance. We do that through customer experience research and measurement, operational evaluations, and related support for multi-location businesses.

I am here today to share a practical small-business perspective: app-based platforms and digital marketplaces have made it easier for companies like mine to find specialized talent, expand capacity, and serve customers efficiently without taking on fixed overhead before demand exists.

I appreciate the U.S. Chamber of Commerce for facilitating my participation today. I also serve on the Chamber's Small Business Council, where I work alongside other business owners to ensure that the concerns of small businesses are heard in policy discussions.

Our company is a small business, but we serve clients across the country. App-based platforms and digital marketplaces have made that kind of reach much more practical for firms like mine.

Long before anyone used the phrase "gig economy," our company was already coordinating project-based activity across multiple markets. In those early years, that coordination required phone calls, paper forms, mailed reports, and a great deal of manual administration. That was particularly difficult because our projects often vary by client, location, timing, urgency, and complexity.

Today, app-based tools and digital platforms allow small businesses to manage that kind of dynamic, multi-market work far more efficiently. Over nearly four decades, Confero has remained competitive by adapting to changing technology, evolving client needs, and new ways of conducting and managing research. These tools also help level the playing field by giving smaller firms access to reach and capabilities that once were much harder to build without a much larger infrastructure.

In our business, app-based platforms support more than one kind of need. They have helped us access project-based support across multiple markets, connect with research participants when appropriate, and find specialized help in areas such as graphic design, digital marketing, research editing, advanced data analysis, and fractional finance.

For companies like Confero, this issue has real consequences. If small businesses lose access to lawful, flexible work arrangements, many of us will face higher costs, less agility, reduced geographic reach, and fewer opportunities to grow. Some projects will no longer be economical. Some clients will go unserved. In some types of research work, flexibility is not just a matter of cost or convenience. Meaningful feedback often depends on input from multiple individuals with different perspectives, experiences, and locations. That breadth of input helps us provide useful insights and sound results.

How App-Based Platforms Help My Small Business

In my experience, app-based platforms have created several concrete benefits.

- 1. Expands access to talent.** My business benefits from access to outside expertise in areas such as design, digital marketing, and fractional finance.
- 2. Helps respond faster when opportunities arise.** Real-time communication expands opportunities for freelancers and independent contractors to find and accept assignments that meet their schedules and helps me get support more quickly than traditional methods. That can matter when a project needs to start quickly or cover several markets at once.
- 3. Makes Confero competitive.** Access to flexible outside support allows my smaller company to deliver work at a level that can compete with much larger organizations. In practical terms, these tools help level the playing field by giving small businesses access to talent, speed, and scalability that once favored only larger firms.

- 4. Supports entrepreneurship more broadly.** These platforms do not just help companies like mine; they also help independent professionals and microbusinesses connect with paying opportunities. For some people, these opportunities are not just a source of income. They can also serve as an entry point to building a small business of their own.

Flexibility works best when it is paired with clarity and responsibility. People using these platforms should know what the work is, what it pays, what is required, and when payment will be made. Companies using these tools should communicate clearly, operate transparently, and protect against fraud and abuse. Responsible platforms are valuable because they create structure, trust, and efficient matching between opportunity and worker choice.

From the perspective of a small business owner, the policy question should not be whether every worker must fit into one single model. The real question is whether federal policy will preserve room for lawful, flexible work arrangements that benefit both small businesses and the independent workers and professionals who choose that model, while also providing rules that are consistent, practical, and easy for everyone to understand.

Gig platforms and independent work arrangements are important tools of entrepreneurship, innovation, and economic participation. They help small firms stay lean, responsive, and competitive. They also create real income opportunities for people who want flexibility and control over how they earn. Small businesses are often the incubators of innovation because they are close to customers and able to adapt quickly. App-based platforms and digital marketplaces help make that possible by giving smaller firms access to capabilities, expertise, and capacity that would otherwise be harder to reach.

Clear and Consistent Rules Matter

I also appreciate efforts to provide clearer guidance on employee and independent-contractor status under federal law. For small business owners, one of the biggest compliance challenges is not a lack of willingness to follow the law. It is uncertainty when standards are difficult to interpret or differ across legal frameworks.

Small businesses benefit from rules that are clear, practical, and predictable. Greater consistency helps responsible businesses comply in good faith, reduce legal uncertainty, and spend more time serving customers and creating opportunity.

How SBA Support Helped Small Businesses

I also want to recognize the important role of the U.S. Small Business Administration. During the COVID pandemic, SBA support helped many small

businesses, including Confero, navigate a period of extraordinary uncertainty. That support helped businesses preserve jobs, continue operating, and recover from sudden disruption.

The SBA's Office of Advocacy also plays an important role by bringing the perspective of small business into the federal rulemaking process and helping policymakers understand the real-world compliance burdens that regulations can create.

Finally, workable tax reporting rules matter. Many independent professionals and small businesses use digital payment tools and online platforms as part of normal business operations. Clear reporting thresholds and consistent rules help reduce confusion, improve recordkeeping, and make compliance easier for everyone involved.

For small businesses, app-based platforms and digital marketplaces are not a luxury. They are practical tools that expand access to talent, improve responsiveness, and help businesses grow without taking on fixed costs before the work is there. Preserving room for these models, while promoting clarity and responsible practices, will help more small businesses compete and succeed.

Thank you for the opportunity to share Confero's experience. I look forward to answering your questions.