



THE BLACK FUND AT AUSTIN COMMUNITY FOUNDATION:

ADVANCING EQUITY AND RACIAL JUSTICE

a lived-experience data black paper

ABOUT MEASURE

MEASURE, an Austin-based nonprofit, works to support people impacted by social disparities and the accompanying narrative. MEASURE believes that, when used strategically, data provides a common language upon which community members can meet and increase their knowledge about the causes and work together to create equitable change and increase awareness. MEASURE has a mission to mobilize communities that are furthest from the opportunity to fight against systematic disparities in health, economics, criminalization, and education through the MEASURE CARE Model and our other anti-racist evaluation tools. The organization's vision is for Powerful Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities to have access to information that will support them to self-advocate toward an antiracist and equitable future.

ABOUT THE BLACK FUND AND AUSTIN COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Austin Community Foundation (ACF) uses data and community voices to identify the areas of greatest need and opportunity in the Austin area. Since 1977, ACF has remained committed to the strategic investment of philanthropic dollars in those priority areas, with an intentional focus on impact and sustainability. In alignment with their goal of achieving an equitable, just society, The Black Fund was created to harness the power of Black-led organizations and uplift solutions to benefit Black Central Texans. The Black Fund is committed to supporting organizations and community leaders seeking to improve economic, health/wellness, educational, and social progress and outcomes for Black people living in Central Texas.

The Black Fund was created for the Black community and by the Black community. For two years, The Black Fund's founders, Kendra Garrett, Jameila "Meme" Styles, Dr. Colette Pierce Burnette and the steering committee met in partnership with ACF to develop the framework by which The Black Fund would provide strategic grants to the community. The steering committee consisted of representatives from across the city with a wealth of experience in philanthropy, nonprofits, business, and activism. They were able to provide valuable insights and guidance as the Black Fund developed its mission, vision and theory of change.

The Black Fund was created in response to the stark disparities in philanthropic funding received by Black-led nonprofits. According to a study conducted by the Philanthropic

Initiative for Racial Equity, only 6% of philanthropic dollars in 2018 supported racial equity work and only 1% supported racial justice work (1). In 2020, MEASURE partnered with the Black Leaders Collective to conduct a study that found similar disparities. According to the study, 75% of surveyed leaders responded that they do not have stable funding sources that cover more than 50% of fiscal needs (2).

The lack of funding for Black-led nonprofits has real consequences for the Austin community. These organizations provide vital services and support to Black residents, but without adequate funding they are often unable to meet the needs of the community. The Black Fund was created to help address this disparity by providing grants and other forms of financial support like fiscal sponsorship to Black-led, Black-serving nonprofits in Austin.

"I think at this point, we just want to be able to have a decent chance at a quality of life, a life that others get with no barriers, with no repercussions, a normal life."

- Female Participant

BACKGROUND: HOW DO WE MAKE THE BEST USE OF THE BLACK FUND TO ENSURE THAT BLACK CENTRAL TEXANS THRIVE?

According to the Pew Research Center, more than half of Black or African-Americans (56%) reside in the southern part of the United States, and Texas is home to more Black people than any other state (3, 4). While southern states like Texas offer Black people an abundance of rich history, cultural traditions, economic opportunity, and temperate weather, it remains plagued by systemic racism, pervasive inequities, discriminatory policies, and economic disenfranchisement. Eliminating racial inequities requires the implementation of effective strategies and targeted policies. The Black Fund is a signature partnership between ACF and the Black community and a key strategy in ACF's mission to close the opportunity gap in Central Texas.

Sources

1. Cyril, M. D., Kan, L. M., Maulbeck, B. F., & Villarosa, L. (2021, October 16). Mismatched: Philanthropy's Response to the Call for Racial Justice. Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity. Retrieved November 29, 2022, from <https://racialequity.org/mismatched/>
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3. Tamir, C. (2022, January 31). Key findings about Black America. Pew Research Center. Retrieved November 9, 2022, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/03/25/key-findings-about-black-america/>
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HISTORICAL CONTEXT

An overview of key historic events related to philanthropy and the Black community has been documented in the historical timeline graphic, "History of Austin's Black-Led Nonprofits". Please use this link (<https://tinyurl.com/acfblackfundhx>) to view the timeline created in partnership with the Black Leaders Collective in a larger format. Sources in historical timeline reference citations (5-15) on the "Works Cited" page of this report.



METHODOLOGY

A total of twenty-five (25) community-dwelling Black participants were recruited from the Central Texas region to participate in one (1) to three (3) virtual focus groups. Focus group samples were formulated to reflect diversity in age and gender identity. Participants were recruited by Austin Community Foundation and MEASURE leadership. In addition, participants were contacted via listservs and Facebook groups for local organizations that provide services designed to support African-Americans living in the Central Texas community.

Participants were invited to share their experiences and provide insight into how The Black Fund should direct the grant experience for people engaging in programs across the domains of education, health and wellness, wealth- and power-building, organizing, and advocacy. Each focus group was 90 minutes in length and took place on September 12, October 4, and October 6 of 2022. Austin Community Foundation provided each participant with a \$150 electronic gift card for their time. A team of two Certified MEASURE Educators facilitated each focus group. Participants were encouraged to openly and authentically share their experiences and views within a space of safety.

METHODOLOGY CONTINUED...

Thematic analysis was used to identify, organize, and report prevalent themes from this project (16). The evaluators identified relevant excerpts from the stories as codes. The codes were then grouped to formulate overarching themes. Finally, after comprehensive discussion and refinement of each theme during weekly discussions, four (4) major themes emerged. With the aim of trustworthiness, preliminary findings were first shared with MEASURE leaders before sharing with Austin Community Foundation leadership.

Using MEASURE's Equity Focus Group Tool, Certified MEASURE educators were able to facilitate three virtual discussions wherein participants were asked the following questions:

- What is missing from your life that would make you feel like you are starting the race from the same starting line?
 - How are Black Central Texans experiencing the need for educational and health and wellness support?
 - What initiatives do you see that need support in power building, organizing, and advocacy?
 - What are the issues related to building wealth and economic inequities experienced by Black Central Texans today?
- What are your biggest barriers to receiving services?
- When receiving programming or services, when and where was the last time you felt included, like the place was for you?
- What does sustainable support look like for the Black community in Austin?
- What protections are needed to ensure that efforts and progress are not lost?

Source

16. Braun V. & Clarke V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3:2, 77-101, DOI: 10.1191/1478088706qp063oa



EQUITY FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS (DEMOGRAPHICS)

Figure 1. Participant Gender Identity

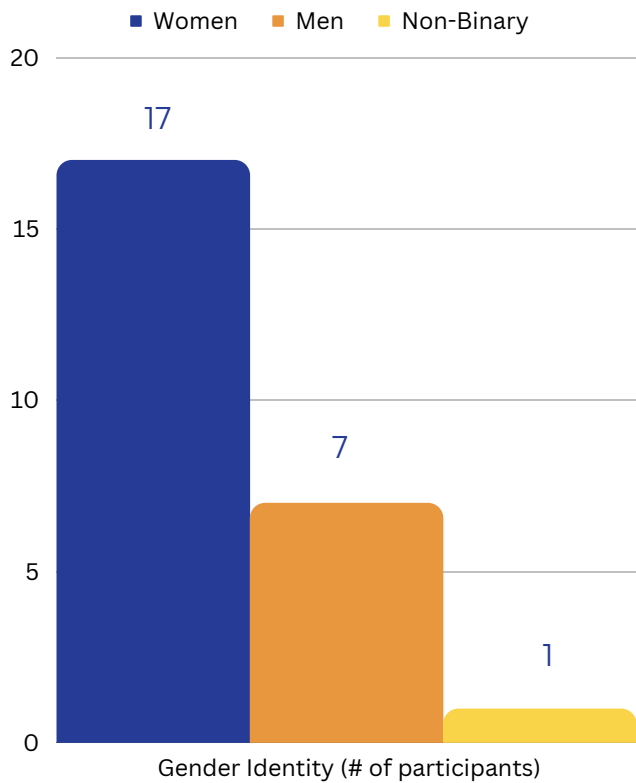
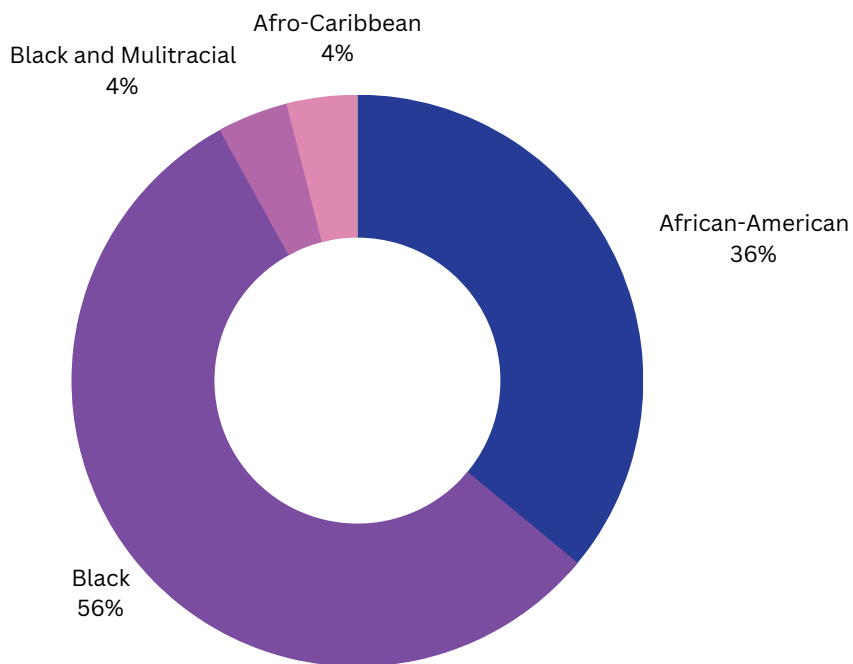


Figure 2. Participant Self-Described Race

N= 25



THEMATIC ANALYSIS (THEMES, INCLUDING EXEMPLARS)

Theme #1: Intentional relationship-building and establishing trust are missing from a majority of philanthropic partnerships.

A majority of participants expressed the belief that Black people are often stereotyped and misunderstood. In addition, they reported that oftentimes—like many institutions—philanthropic entities fail to understand or address the oppressive and racially biased systems inherent in the problems they are trying to solve. Participants felt that this results in a cycle of impaired relationship-building, mistrust, and sustained inequities. Philanthropic efforts are grounded in interpersonal and professional relationships, however, participants reported feeling excluded from certain social circles and channels and disregarded by funding entities. Participants reported that while Black people are not a monolith, they believe that they have a common desire to establish strong connections with each other and other community members who have a shared commitment to addressing core issues impacting Black Central Texans. This sense of community was purported to be rooted in Black people’s rarely acknowledged history of resiliency, advocacy, and tenacity despite centuries of systemic oppression and marginalization.

“So accountability for who? We got to count our pennies and prove that we went and bought 5 pounds of flour with it. Other people are not doing that and they have the wealth. They decide to have charity on us and we got to prove that we're worthy, you're just not going to get me to believe that it has to be that way. It does not have to be that way...part of that is having trust-based relationships. We live in a world where we don't trust because we don't know people. I would say Black people in particular, we are generous, we are benevolent, we are philanthropic by nature. We operate in a village. We are not individualistic, and we're less inclined to do the ‘get over on you’ kind of stuff.”
- Female participant

Theme #2: Systemic inequities and structural inequalities make it difficult for Black Central Texans to attain wealth

While it is well known that wealth is positively correlated with better health outcomes and educational opportunities, participants overwhelmingly agreed that the lingering legacy of slavery has been difficult for Black people to overcome, especially as it pertains to wealth-building (e.g. property ownership) and economic opportunity (17). They often expressed

Source

17. Shiels, M. S., Chernyavskiy, P., Anderson, W. F., Best, A. F., Haozous, E. A., Hartge, P., Rosenberg, P. S., Thomas, D., Freedman, N. D., & Berrington de Gonzalez, A. (2017). Trends in premature mortality in the USA by sex, race, and ethnicity from 1999 to 2014: an analysis of death certificate data. *Lancet* (London, England), 389(10073), 1043–1054. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(17\)30187-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(17)30187-3)

THEME #2 CONTINUED...

feelings of frustration and exhaustion as a result of the lack of collective progress in closing the racial wealth gap, despite an overwhelming desire to do so. Many shared personal stories of how gentrification, inequitable access to economic resources and advancement, and institutional bias and racism have limited their ability to accumulate wealth and subsequently impact lasting change in their communities. They expressed the belief that the systemic denial of generational wealth among Black Americans, has in turn limited their ability and power to create lasting wealth for their own families through property attainment and business ownership.

“The rules of the game are written by the people who have wealth and power. Even when this country started, it was the wealthy who were able to vote and run things. It wasn't the poor people...the name of the game, the rules are written not for us who have marginal finances, it was written for those who have plenty of money and power. So money and power go right together.”

- Male participant

“I think that's the fatigue of the Black community is we're starting over program to program. We're starting over generation to generation. There's no intergenerational wealth passed down because society has a way of wiping the slate clean every time we do a little too well. It's like, I'm a fifth generation Austinite. My dad grew up with my aunties in a house across from the Carver Museum. I should own a house on the East Side. I shouldn't live in Round Rock.”

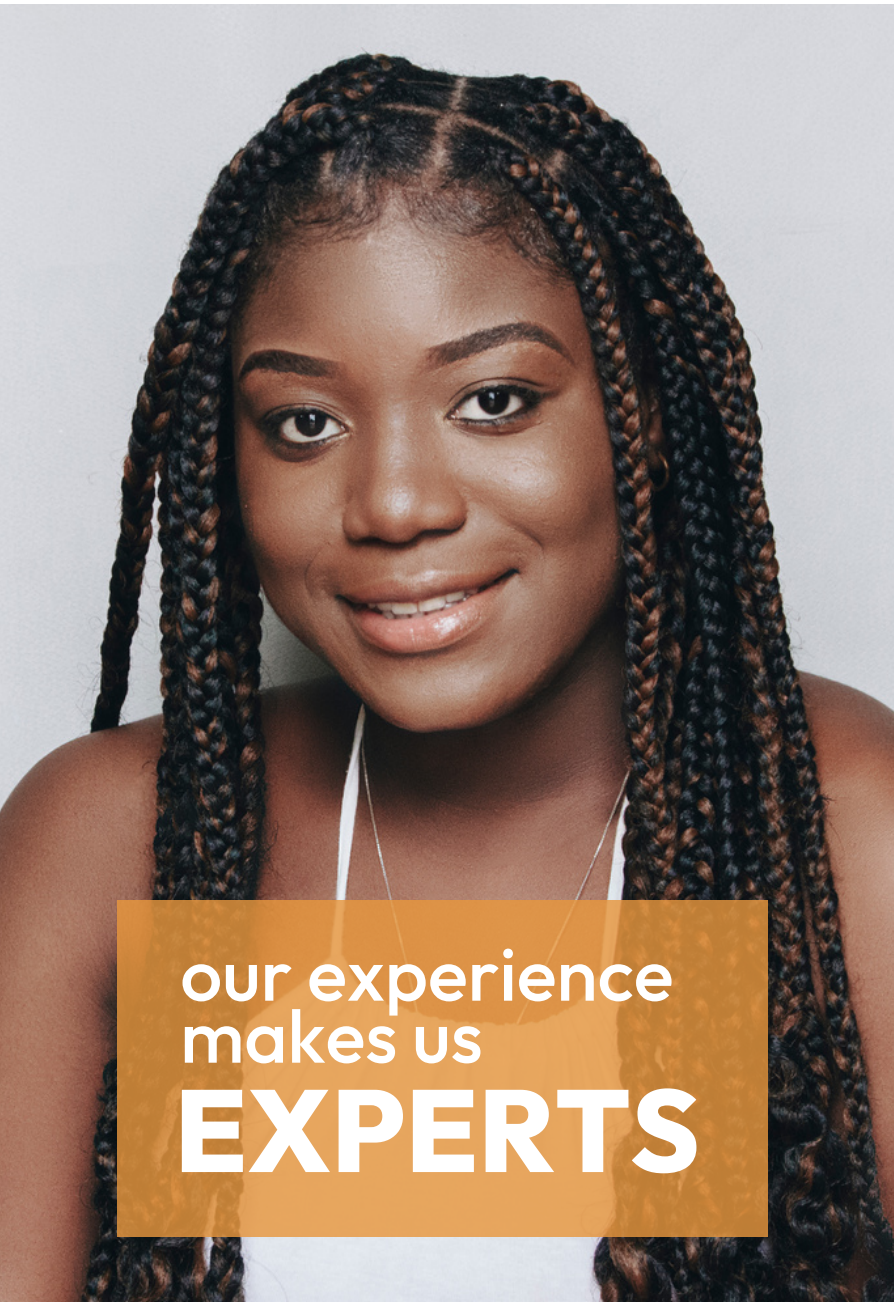
- Female participant



LIVED-EXPERIENCE DATA & STORYTELLING

“I always question why we get made to feel bad about being intentional when we want to be intentional about the spaces that we hold, the things that we are worried about, we're always made to feel bad. ‘Well, we really need to have a space for everybody. Why when everybody don't have a space for us?’”

- Female participant



our experience
makes us
EXPERTS

“One of the key barriers that I've always thought about is age and experience. Especially when it comes to a lot of youth who do want to be able to get pre-seed or seed funding for what they're doing or to be able to get money from a grant or be able to expand their business idea. Maybe when it does come to the Black Fund figuring out a way we can actually connect these individuals into resources and tools that can be accessible.”

- Non-binary participant

“I think what we're trying to do, what we should be trying to do is to fund solutions that eliminate the need for programs.”

- Female participant



Theme #3: Restrictive practices, inequitable access, “red tape,” and inexperience make it difficult for small business owners and emerging leaders to procure funding

Participants, specifically business owners, community leaders, and entrepreneurs, expressed being discouraged by many of the requirements needed to secure grant funds. They reported unfamiliarity with or limited knowledge of how to access funding opportunities, navigate regulatory processes, and adapt to expectations rooted in cultural norms. Several participants also shared what they believe to be misaligned priorities between funding entities and what their lived experiences and constituents say the Black community actually needs. It was believed that this disconnect made it difficult for entrepreneurs and business owners to secure financial support for their work.

“My thought of even having a nonprofit, it's just in my heart. I've been doing it for years, since I was a child. I've been a leader, I've been serving my community. That's why they (funders) want it to be an organization, because they don't want it to be a one-man show. Which is not right. Because right now people are stagnant, we're not sustainable because we don't have the education or the funding to get more help. I do think that individuals should be able to access the funds just as well as nonprofits. I started doing the work in 2014, but I didn't get my '501c3' until 2017 because I didn't have the funding. It's just like for a person that doesn't have a 501c3, but they're in the community doing the work, like they need support too.”

- Female participant



Theme #4: Pervasive inequities and entrenched systemic oppression make it difficult to prioritize philanthropic foci and strategy

Participants found it difficult to identify the issues with the greatest priority or need because they believed that Black people living in the Austin area need everything. They expressed appreciation for The Black Fund’s mission to strengthen access for and support Black Central Texans, but they also recognized the difficulty in being able to do that in effective and impactful ways due to the myriad of social and political structures impeding the progress of Black people. In general, they believed that funding entities had not done the best job of proactively exploring and understanding the role that racism, power, and white supremacy have in the areas of impact and disparity they are trying to address. There was consensus among participants that this was a critical first step in developing an effective philanthropic agenda.

“The answer is not ‘what do we need’ - we need everything... There’s not one specific area - we have been denied access to everything on a small scale, large scale, however you want to view it, access has been denied. There are so many aspects of systemic oppression that are interwoven - you can’t touch on one stone without affecting the others.”

- Female participant

“What I do know is that systems that were designed by white people and the way in which we have to respond to those systems is how the white person wants us to respond. That’s to fit into those categories in which they see, again, are appropriate for distributing to our community. So, yeah, I can most definitely get the coaching and support to respond in a way in which they want me to respond. Again, I’m thinking about if we’re doing something different for the Black community, then we have to do business differently than what we’ve been doing because we still are not getting where we want to get, trying to respond in the way they want us to respond. We’re still not at an equal playing field.”

- Female participant

RECOMMENDATIONS

“Not requiring a ‘501c3’ and a ‘990’ and a lot of things that a lot of Black organizations don't have the resources to be able to do, like white and larger organizations. It takes a bookkeeper, an accountant, a grant writer. Like there's so many people resources and even time resources that many Black organizations don't have...you have to cross the T's and dot the I's and stuff. It would look like taking all those things away. There's a buzzword out there right now called trust-based philanthropy, like just seeing the work that I've done and giving me the money and trusting me to do the work.”

- Female Participant

#1. CONSIDER ADOPTING A TRUST-BASED PHILANTHROPIC APPROACH

The above quote reflected the sentiment of most focus group participants. In regard to future funding strategy, participants suggested an intentional shift to trust-based philanthropy (18). With a belief that equity and justice sit at the core of trust-based philanthropy, participants called on funding entities to start with the bold step of confronting bias, racism, and white supremacy in their internal practices and policies. They wanted funders to build relationships and trust in the Black community to eliminate power dynamics, advancing equity, and capacity-building. In alignment with the tenets of trust-based philanthropy, participants encouraged funders to “shed” preconceived notions and biases about Black people. Participants wanted funding entities like The Black Fund to make a deliberate choice to believe the best about Black people and to acknowledge and highlight their ability to overcome, survive, thrive, build and create, despite systemic oppression and violence aimed at them. They suggested that funders remove barriers and rewrite the rules for how philanthropy typically works. For example, they asked that funders consider funding individuals (i.e. community workers) and community-led organizations.

Source

18. Segura, J., & Piña, M. (2022, July 22). Expanding the scope of trust-based philanthropy: How funders are helping Reshape Learning & Evaluation. Common Counsel Foundation. Retrieved November 9, 2022, from <https://www.commoncounsel.org/expanding-the-scope-of-trust-based-philanthropy-how-funders-are-helping-reshape-learning-evaluation/>

#2. MAKE WEALTH-BUILDING AND FINANCIAL LITERACY YOUR TOP PRIORITIES

Almost all participants considered wealth-building and economic stability to be the most important priorities for Black Central Texans. In addition to financial literacy, there was the prevalent belief that wealth- and power-building stood to have the most salient impact on the health, well-being, and sustained progress of Black people living in the Austin area. They wanted to see regular offerings of culturally tailored financial literacy programs for school-aged children, as well as adults. They wanted to ensure that they would be equipped with the tools needed to make prudent financial decisions and manage money effectively to build generational wealth.

“Being a senior, I think this whole idea of home ownership, owning property and wealth and being able to pass that on to create generational wealth is extremely important. As you age, if you aren't aware of the financial impact of what is expected of you in your retirement, all of your wealth or your investments are subject to be unavailable to be passed on to your children. I think that's also very important not just to get it, but to understand what legal steps you need to take in a timely manner to make sure that those assets transition to your family and your descendants.”

- Female participant

#3. ALONG WITH MONEY, OFFER COMPREHENSIVE, TAILORED SUPPORT TO BLACK FUND AWARDEES

Participants suggested that The Black Fund provide support (e.g. strategic planning) beyond grant dollars. They wanted coaching on how to find grant opportunities like The Black Fund, as well as mentorship opportunities and support. They recommended that funders consider means of support that promote sustainability and growth, like sabbatical funding, office space, and strategic plan development.



“I think that with the funds that we were able to get for our organization, one of the key things was that they offered in-kind support in terms of ‘we have two team members that have done graphic design and can assist you in building out a social media strategy. We have one person who has done programming and can work with you once a week on the programs you're developing.’ What does in-kind support look like for these organizations that don't have the funds and probably don't even have the capacity to contract or hire somebody because all those expenses go into business development or operations? I think it's important to seek out how we're building more in kind support services or thinking about how we could build something to where we continue the wealth building.”

- Female Participant

#4. FOCUS ON OR INVEST IN MULTIFACETED, INNOVATIVE, AND INTERCONNECTED INITIATIVES THAT HAVE A LONG-TERM VISION WITH A SHORT-TERM IMPACT

The majority of participants wanted to see grant funds being used to build and strengthen relationships within the Black community. It was their assessment that lasting impact is driven by forming a collective vision among Black Central Texans. They were interested in initiatives that promote community, community involvement, and activism. People suggested that funders seek out programs that were novel in their ability to build capacity and entrepreneurial leaders. There was a call for youth education and support services, with an intentional focus on health and financial literacy. They wanted funders to employ mechanisms designed to eliminate redundancy and encourage strategic partnerships among grantees.

“There are many interrelated factors and a complexity of issues that are hard to address in a vacuum. Perhaps one of the hopes here would be that we find ways to create a stronger foundation by making sure that we are looking for how to elevate all of these issues in the way that they intersect.”

- Male participant

CONCLUSION

The past couple of years have been difficult for many people, and the Black community has borne the brunt of the pandemic in terms of health outcomes and economic stability. In addition, the police killings of David Joseph, George Floyd, and Breonna Taylor have brought into sharp focus the systemic racism that continues to plague our country. These events have made it clear that we have a long way to go regarding antiracist philanthropy and supporting the Black community.

What makes The Black Fund at Austin Community Foundation unique is its focus on community-led philanthropy. Rather than dictating how funders should spend the money, the Austin Community Foundation has partnered with Black community members to identify the organizations and programs that will best meet their needs. As a result, The Black Fund is a community-led philanthropy model, providing an innovative framework from which other foundations might learn.



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ABOUT OUR DATA ACTIVISTS

TIFFANY N. RICKS, PH.D., RN



Tiffany is a nurse scientist and professor with comprehensive expertise in racial/ethnic healthcare disparities, evaluation, and health promotion initiatives. She has 10+ years' experience investigating and developing research-based tools, strategies and initiatives that improve organizational systems, policies and healthcare outcomes. She is the founder of Health R.E.P., LLC. She believes that health equity is a matter of justice, so her passion for the strategic and creative use of research (R.), evaluation (E.), and policy (P.) is the basis of her commitment to leading change and advancing equity.

VANESSA BELTRAN, MPH, RDN, LD



Vanessa brings together extensive experience in community health promotion as a registered dietitian and a systems-level perspective on improving population health through policy advocacy. Her work exists at the intersection of racial justice, gender justice, and youth leadership development, equipping future generations of activists to engage with the issues that impact their social identities and context. Through her training in public health and the privilege of learning from the communities she co-labors with, Vanessa hopes to continue to hone her skills in developing interventions that address the social determinants of health across the life course, community organizing, and the adaptive leadership framework, all with the intention of affecting positive change in the upstream factors that structure opportunity for marginalized communities.