



**BLACK
FUTURE
COFUND**



**OUR COMMUNITY.
OUR POWER.
OUR PROSPERITY.**

2023 - 2024 LISTENING TOUR REPORT



Foreword

“Ours is not the struggle of one judicial appointment or presidential term. Ours is the struggle of a lifetime, or maybe even many lifetimes, and each one of us in every generation must do our part.”

—U.S. Representative John Lewis

Just as we see the reality and gravity of recent events, we also see our future. We see our future rooted in the generations of power that have brought us to this point and in our present-day communities' wisdom and strength that will carry us forward.

We see our future in you. You who showed up for our listening tour to share your aspirations and ideas. You who are reading this report to learn and understand what actions you will take to invest in Black wealth, health, and well-being. And, you who are working every day to ensure all Black people are liberated, prosperous, and self-determined to fully live our lives.

Together, we are charting our destiny.

In solidarity,

Andrea Caupain Sanderson
Angela Jones, J.D.
Michelle Merriweather
T'wina Nobles



Community members come together for the Vancouver listening session.

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Introduction

The Black Future Co-op Fund is Washington state's first philanthropy created by and for Black people. We are among a handful of funds created in the last few years, as America has been reckoning with racism and racial injustice brought to the forefront by the unequal impacts of the COVID pandemic on Black people and the brutal public killings of Black people.

The antidote to philanthropic redlining

In Washington state, Black people have long been vital contributors to our communities and the growth of our economy. From the early 1900s working aboard ships and trains, in the military, and in essential services to the present day working in myriad industries from technology to education to government, Black people play fundamental roles in the fabric of society. We have undeniably innovated and driven popular culture that has local, national, and global impact.

Yet, for generations, our work has been unrecognized, ignored, and underfunded by traditional philanthropy. Only 2% of traditional philanthropic funding has gone to Black-led organizations, according to ABFE. During the COVID pandemic, Black-led organizations were called on to step up even more, without adequate resources. It became increasingly clear that if we want philanthropy to work for Black people, we need to build our own model of philanthropy.

Inspired to be the antidote to philanthropic redlining, four of us — Andrea Caupain Sanderson, Angela Jones, Michelle Merriweather, and T'wina Nobles — launched the Black Future Co-op Fund in 2020.

Through the Fund, we seek to connect Black communities for collective power, promote truthful Black narratives, increase investment in Black-led solutions that foster Black generational prosperity, and shift the philanthropic paradigm. Our vision is a Washington state, working cooperatively, where all Black people are liberated, prosperous, and self-determined to fully live our lives.

Rooting ourselves in community wisdom

Working cooperatively is central to our vision. It will take all of us to call out inequitable systems and structures, to break down barriers, and to push for community-based solutions that enable future generations to be more free than we are. And, we're committed to grounding the Fund in community wisdom.



Participants review community-identified approaches for economic mobility in the Black Well-being report.

Since we started the Fund, we've wanted to get to know and learn from Black Washingtonians throughout the state.

- We began with virtual meetings, bringing together inaugural Black funders around defining our vision, mission, and work of the Fund.
- Spokane activist and consultant Kiantha Duncan assisted the Fund in conducting initial research about Black people, organizations, businesses, faith groups, and others across Washington by facilitating focus groups and collecting data county by county.
- During our first year, we also promoted an online survey asking for Black Washingtonians' visions of a liberated future, priorities, perceived gaps, and opportunities for the Fund to play a role.
- Next, we led the Black Well-being: Moving Toward Solutions Together study, which culminated in a report and audiobook rooted in 1,000 Black voices from across Washington to support collective organizing, inform policy change, and direct resources into Black-led solutions.
- Our annual We See You grants to Black-led organizations and Black leaders around the state have expanded our understanding of community aspirations, needs, and solutions, while connecting us with each other and building our collective network.

Traveling statewide to listen and learn

Building on this community engagement, we've desired to get together in person. And, in 2023 and 2024, as safety concerns around the COVID pandemic subsided, we organized seven listening gatherings with communities across the state. We've been honored to meet with, listen to, and learn from Black folks who are actively dismantling systems and serving communities in ways that center Blackness and Black people.

We continue to be incredibly grateful and humbled by the growing community of people and partners statewide who are committed to igniting Black generational wealth, health, and well-being in Washington and beyond.

This summary report synthesizes what we heard and how this input is shaping our work going forward. **We offer it as a tool and a guide to support ongoing conversation and action to further Black liberation and prosperity; to hold ourselves accountable to community aspirations and needs; and to propel increased investment in Black-led solutions.**



Approach

At the Black Future Co-op Fund, we often talk about family. We see family throughout Washington. Whether chosen or by birth, we understand family is important, offering kindred connection and unconditional love. This listening tour was an opportunity to find and gather with our extended family.

Objectives

We set out on this listening tour guided by the following objectives.

- Build relationships with Black leaders and community members across Washington state.
- Share key themes and data from the Black Well-being report as a launching point for discussion.
- Learn what Black people and Black-led organizations are working on and the resources and support needed.
- Understand the type of organization that people want the Black Future Co-op Fund to be.

Listening Gatherings

We organized the in-person listening tour around six regions, each with a major city, and intentionally started with visiting areas outside of Seattle-King County. The listening tour included:

- **Kitsap and Olympic Peninsulas**
Sept. 8, 2023 | in Bremerton
- **Eastern Washington**
Nov. 3, 2023 | in Spokane
- **Northern Washington**
Dec. 1, 2024 | in Everett
- **Southwest Washington**
Feb. 2, 2024 | in Vancouver
- **Central Washington**
Mar. 8, 2024 | in Yakima
- **Puget Sound**
Apr. 26, 2024 | in Renton
- **Online** | May 17, 2024

Format

We heard that daytime, during traditional work hours, was best for folks. Gatherings were held on Fridays over lunchtime in order to “break bread” with people. While we refined the format as we heard feedback, we roughly followed an agenda that included:

- Welcome, libations, and introductions
- Black Future Co-op Fund and Black Well-being study overview
- Lunch break
- Town hall discussion
- Closing

Key Insights

We purposefully put co-op in our name because we know it will take our entire community working together to achieve our vision of a Washington state, where all Black people are liberated, prosperous, and self-determined to fully live our lives.

Our deep appreciation to all the folks who traveled to, showed up, and participated in the listening gatherings. We value your wisdom, your strength, your stories, and your time. We recognize the listening tour was only a sampling of Black Washingtonians. It was not perfect, though the feedback we heard mirrors what each person at the Fund knows to be true from our lived experiences. We plan to continue reaching out to as many Black people as possible, and growing our cooperative statewide.

In support of our journey together, this summary report is organized to amplify community strengths; call out barriers and challenges to Black well-being; and present investment opportunities to further Black liberation.

Photo left: Community members from the Olympic Peninsula gather at the Marvin Williams Center in Bremerton for our first listening session.

Photo right: Central Washington community members pose in front of the OIC of Washington after the Yakima listening session.

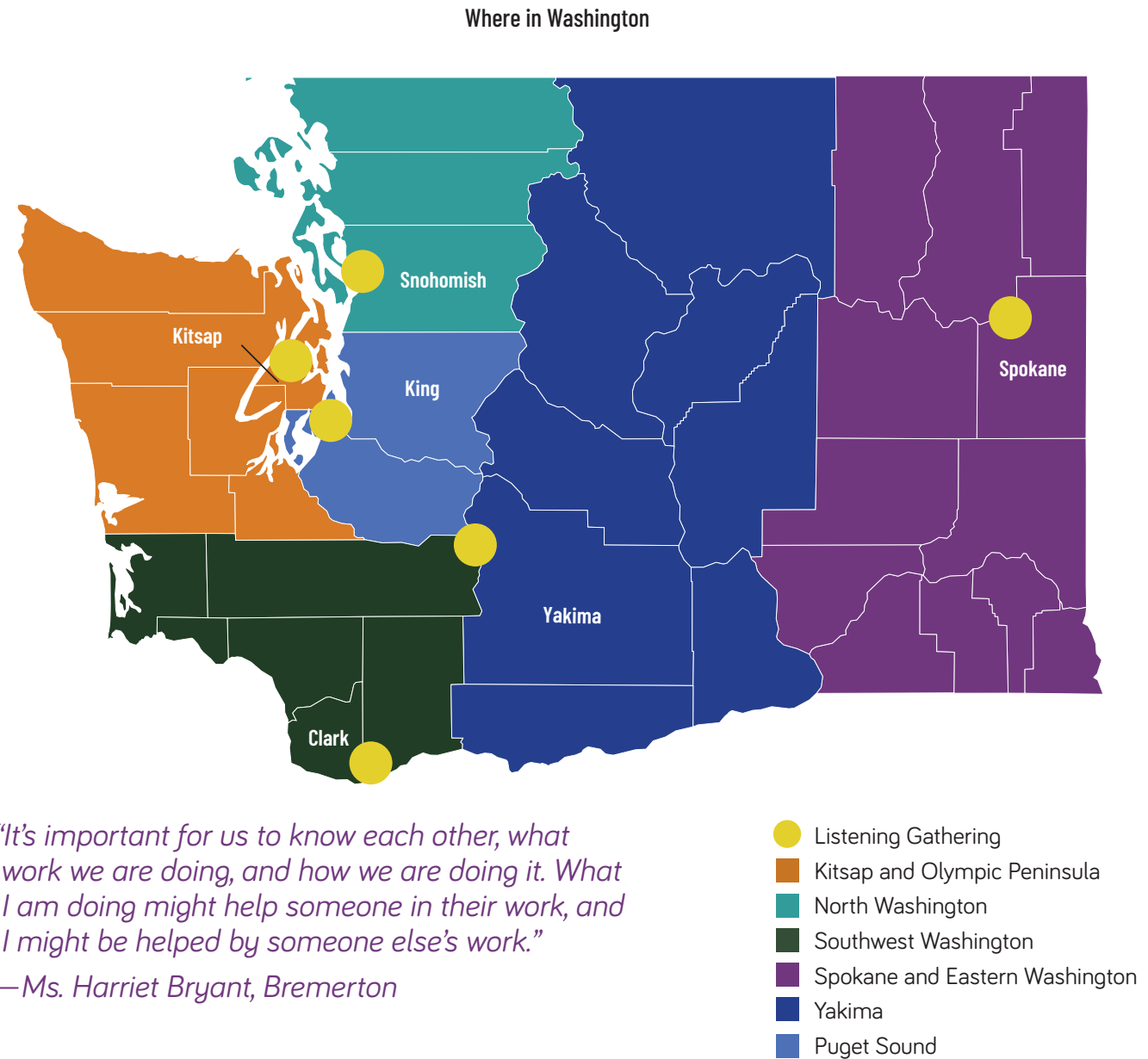
Community Strengths

Powerful Black-led work is happening across Washington state to promote Black well-being. While each region is distinct, in every place we visited, communities are connecting across intersecting issues to respond to immediate needs, as well as to address systemic root causes.

- In the Kitsap and Olympic peninsulas,** youth, education, arts and culture, health and social service, faith, and racial justice groups are designing programs specific to Black residents. Black Lives Matter of Jefferson County, Well Organized, and NAACP Kitsap are some of the groups empowering truthful storytelling; facilitating organizing among communities of color; and encouraging civic involvement. A number of health practitioners are creating care systems that holistically support people’s wellness and well-being. And, organizations like Our Gems, The Freedom Project, and YWCA are providing educational and supportive services, while actively dismantling systems that harm us.
- In North Washington,** communities are more geographically dispersed in this largely rural setting. NAACP Snohomish County is a major pathway for collective power building, as well as protecting and expanding the rights of North Washingtonians. Additionally, organizations like The Bronze Chapter are rewriting outdoor narratives and increasing access for Black people to enjoy nature.
- In Southwest Washington,** folks who participated in the listening session expressed the importance of investing in their communities’ well-being. Organizations like Odyssey World International Education Services, Red Sea Road Consulting, and Roots and Remnant LLC, are offering safe and supportive spaces, particularly for Black youth and women. The Community Foundation for Southwest Washington is funding local racial and social justice initiatives.
- In Spokane and Eastern Washington,** the Carl Maxey Center and MLK Center are providing vital cultural anchors for Black people, while the Spokane NAACP continues to organize community members around civil rights and racial justice. The community journalism of The Black Lens is uplifting Black perspectives and relevant news. Organizations like Terrain and Raze Development are cultivating Black brilliance through art and investing in young people’s development. Strong Women Achieving Greatness (SWAG), the Shades of Motherhood Network, and Forge are supporting the health and well-being of Black women. In addition, several groups are focused on apprenticeships and job skills training.
- In Yakima,** local churches, the Yakima NAACP, and the Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC) have been instrumental in carving out opportunities for Black residents. With the Yakima NAACP celebrating eight decades of impact this year, we learned about the long list of Black leaders who’ve championed equal rights in education, voting access, economic mobility, and more. We met Ms. Esther Huey, who is the driving force behind fundraising for and building a new aquatic center in southeast Yakima; Rev. Robert Trimble, a Martin Luther King Jr. disciple, who has advocated for Yakima’s own MLK Boulevard and building a beloved community; and Mr. James Parks, a retired army sergeant, environmental justice organizer, and current president of the Yakima NAACP. They are all helping usher in a new wave of Black leaders.

- In the Puget Sound,** organizations, such as Community Passageways, Young Women Empowered, Rainier Scholars, African Young Dreamers Empowerment Program, and more, are offering culturally relevant programs and mentorship for Black youth. Arts and culture organizations like CD Forum, 4Culture, and Movimiento Afrolatino Seattle are lifting up true Black narratives and storytelling about our past, present,

and future. Local, regional, and state government representatives participated in our listening tour conversation, as well as Seattle Public Schools — all showing their support for collaborative action. And, a myriad of social service and racial justice organizations are investing in Black generational wealth, health, and well-being.



“It’s important for us to know each other, what work we are doing, and how we are doing it. What I am doing might help someone in their work, and I might be helped by someone else’s work.”

—Ms. Harriet Bryant, Bremerton



Community-identified approaches are enhancing civic engagement, education, economic mobility, public safety, and health with Black Washingtonians. Building on the Black Well-being study, we surveyed listening tour participants and discussed regional and local activities around the five topic areas.

- **Civic engagement.** Across Washington, communities are leading efforts to center the arts in civics, interrogating harmful narratives, and funding communities to plan and lead.
- **Education.** Regional and organizational approaches to making education work for Black communities include redefining academic standards to recognize and cultivate Black brilliance; creating accountability and transparency practices; revisiting job descriptions and organizational structures; and funding communities to design the education systems we want.
- **Economic mobility.** To bolster economic opportunity, Black-led organizations are investing in Black entrepreneurship and businesses; increasing affordable housing and homeownership; and partnering with Black youth to create the jobs of tomorrow.
- **Health.** In endeavors to create the necessary conditions for health, both regional and organizational approaches include redefining what care means, while recognizing both family and community; addressing ableism and racism in health care; creating responsive, coordinated care models; and restructuring the way insurance works.
- **Public safety.** Community members affirmed that public safety isn't just physical, it starts with mental, emotional, and psychological safety. Regional and locally led efforts are using art and creativity in systems change work; holding systems accountable; and engaging Black brilliance, especially youth, in ideating and implementing public safety solutions.

There are even more Black Washingtonians who can be engaged in this collective work. Church and faith groups, as well as youth were often cited as missing from the listening tour conversations. In addition, farmers and more business leaders were mentioned as leading important liberatory work. In future travels and conversations, we are planning specific outreach to expand our cooperative.



Barriers and Challenges

“The community is here and we want to do the work, there just needs to be more safe, common spaces to collaborate.”
—Velynn Brown, Vancouver

Black Washingtonians experience systemic barriers to their well-being. We heard about how the impacts of centuries of racism and racist practices continue to impede opportunity.

- **Racism.** Across Washington, listening tour participants discussed challenges with racist systems and the legacy of redlining that have perpetuated disparities in education, employment, homeownership, and health care. Some raised concerns about the disproportionate incarceration of Black people and its impact on families and communities, as well as on opportunities to build generational wealth.
- **Philanthropic redlining.** Black-led organizations continue to receive fewer philanthropic dollars than their white peers. The 2020 funding boom left some organizations in the lurch, as funding was a one-time investment. To build capacity and respond to community priorities, organizations need flexible funding over longer periods of time.
- **Less resources outside of the Puget Sound.** We heard how funders often focus on Seattle's Black communities to the exclusion of other communities. Many Black nonprofit executives are leading important education, job training, mentorship, supportive services, and diversity, equity, inclusion (DEI) work in their region, but don't have the resources or capacity to meet the needs.
- **Backlash.** Post-2020 backlash to DEI efforts has cut off some potential funding sources. Donors are seeing racially specific programming as risky due to landmark losses like in the Freedom Fund case — and now Black-led organizations are being passed over again.
- **Safety.** In regions with fewer Black people, safety concerns were raised about harassment and not having secure places to gather together.

Black-led and -serving organizations want resources, capacity building, and networking support to further their work. We surveyed listening tour participants about what they needed to support civic engagement, education, economic mobility, public safety, and health, and heard common themes across these areas.

- **Multiyear, flexible funding.** Organizations called for more resources to be able to respond to community priorities. In education, people mentioned capital and sustainable funding. In health, there needs to be investment in culturally relevant care and Black-led health centers and hospitals. In other areas, participants discussed funding for programs, hard costs, and operating expenses.
- **Organizational capacity building and technical assistance.** Across issue areas, organizational leaders called for support with capacity building. They expressed a desire for tools and assistance with grant writing, fundraising, donor cultivation, capital campaigns, financial management, communications, policy advocacy, and human resources. Folks also asked for outside counsel, such as legal, bookkeeping, fundraising, grant writing, marketing, and communications.



At the Puget Sound listening session, participants explore community-identified approaches to encourage civic engagement.

- **Investment in Black leadership.** There need to be pathways, scholarships, education, and training for Black people to pursue various jobs and professions. And, Black people must be paid equitable wages. Listening tour participants want more Black candidates for local, regional, school, and state offices. They also highlighted the importance of increasing Black leadership in education, economic mobility, public safety, and health. Several suggested internships as a way to build ladders of opportunity.
- **Black mentorship.** In seeking support and guidance, people also want Black professionals or other professionals of color who see them! Black teachers, doctors, and attorneys can bring relevant lived experience and offer more culturally specific assistance.
- **Networking.** Participants expressed interest in partnership and collaboration across the region and state, but have seen few avenues to coordinate across organizations because of limited resources. There was mention of creating a community directory or database; hosting regional events to bring people together; and providing community gathering spaces where people feel safe to meet. Some also talked about creating a jobs board or network for sharing board openings to promote more Black people into these positions.
- **Mental health and healing.** Racialized trauma was a consistent theme, and wanting support for healing. People mentioned mental health support from Black and other professionals of color, along with funding for youth enrichment programs.
- **Tangible support.** Nonprofit leaders listed office and meeting space, as well as equipment like computers as ways that funders, corporations, and businesses can invest in nonprofit organizations. They also talked about funding childcare, transportation, housing, and other supports.

The folks in the room are the ones that we are funding. Our listening tour was largely attended by grantee organizations or by organizations looking to become grantees. To get a more expansive view of community aspirations and needs, we need to broaden our outreach and lean into our aspirations to serve as a collective resource hub for Black Washingtonians.

Investments and Opportunities

“Philanthropy should focus on addressing the root causes of inequality, such as racism, economic segregation, and lack of access to tables of power, rather than only funding surface-level solutions.”

—Mya Douglas, Kent

How philanthropy and funders engage with communities matters. Participants shared feedback and ideas to guide community engagement.

- **Think and act relationally.** Communities talked about the importance of focusing on relationships first and foremost. Showing up is huge. Taking a flight to Spokane, sharing a meal, paying for people’s time, providing childcare are all parts to building relationships and building trust with communities. People expressed gratitude that the Black Future Co-op Fund made time to visit folks in areas outside of Seattle-King County.
- **Foster inclusion.** Collective power building needs to be intergenerational. At our listening tour gatherings, trusted elders interjected important histories and wisdom. We also heard that more youth and young adults need to be part of the conversations. As funders, we must pay attention to societal and organizational hierarchies, and ensure everyone feels welcome. At the first gathering, we heard from participants that invitations should note when gatherings are open to more folks from an organization, as well as encourage extending invitations to a diversity of community members. We need to intentionally outreach to those missing from the conversation.
- **Support connection.** There is a growing appetite among people and organizations to learn from each other and connect across the state. Communities appreciated the opportunity to come together, and suggested funders can help advance the work by investing in bringing people together who are working on similar issues across geographies, as well as those working within the same geography across issues. Having an unaligned entity bring all parties to the table and facilitate conversation across differences can also be beneficial.



Co-architect T’wina Nobles holds up a brochure about a new aquatic center in southeast Yakima for which Ms. Ester Huey has been a long-time champion to build it.

The Black Future Co-op Fund and other funders can invest in Black well-being statewide. We consistently heard these themes across the state.

- **Recognize that healing is essential.** Healing was called for by individuals, organizations, and regional communities. It is not an extra, add-on, or after thought. People talked about the role of healing as integral to the work of racial and social justice. In particular, listening tour participants prioritized mental health care and youth support. We must plan for, support, and invest in healing models and practices that proactively produce wellness.
- **Increase multiyear, unrestricted funding.** Organizations need flexible funding over five to 10 years to use as they see fit to advance their missions. At the beginning of the COVID pandemic and racial uprisings, we saw how quickly foundations changed – suspending burdensome application and reporting processes, increasing annual payout, and moving money more quickly out the door. This needs to be the norm. As funders, we must reimagine our roles to work more collaboratively and creatively with nonprofits.
- **Support capacity building.** This was a clear priority among organizations across Washington. In addition to grantmaking, foundations and other funders ought to expand their roles to help organizations raise money. We can offer assistance and tools to support grant writing, financial management, communications, policy advocacy, human resources, and more. And, we can provide outside counsel or loan staff for legal services, bookkeeping, fundraising, grant writing, marketing, or communications. An added form of capacity building can be sharing office and meeting space with nonprofits, or donating computers or services like transportation or childcare to enable the work.



Participants listen to an overview of findings from the Black Well-being study.

- **Invest in Black leadership.** Black people want to see other Black people in their workplaces as peers, collaborators, mentors, and role models. For centuries, societal systems and policies have intentionally barred Black people from economic opportunity and mobility. It's past time we level the playing field and accelerate investment in education, training, apprenticeship, and other professional development. Hand in hand, employers must pay equitable wages, while making their workplaces welcoming and inclusive environments.
- **Fund advocacy and systems change.** To create the change we want to see, there needs to be downstream and upstream efforts. There needs to be funding for downstream services and programs that support people struggling to make ends meet, help people recover from emergencies or disasters, nurture children in their development, make up for past harms, and more. At the same time, we must fund policy advocacy to change the systems and structures that perpetuate racial disparities – moving us toward an equitable world.
- **Go where Black folks are going.** Across our state, we've heard that funding needs to address shifting demographics. Using census and other data, we can examine where Black people are moving, and consider how to put more resources into those places so their entry into predominantly non-Black spaces is easier.



“Transformation is what is needed. Angela Davis recently said, ‘Belonging means to be treasured,’ and that is what needs to happen. Our children need to feel that.”

—Sidney Morgan, Vancouver

Next Steps

In summary, we are so honored that folks shared with us. Many themes that arose were also expressed in the focus groups, statewide survey, panel discussions, and statewide gathering that shaped the Black Well-being report. Knowing this affirms we are on the right path.

The visions, challenges, ideas, and opportunities we heard will factor into how we carry out the four primary areas of impact of our strategic plan.

- **Connecting communities for Black collective power.** We understand there’s a strong desire for connecting across issues and geographies, and are excited to do much more in this space to serve as a hub and facilitate networking. Within this area is also healing. We’ve led two healing trips to Ghana, and are reflecting on how this strategy fits with our ongoing work. Also, building on feedback from this listening tour, we directed our 2024 We See You grants to support the healing and liberation of Black leaders who have long poured themselves into communities, often at the expense of their own well-being.
- **Promoting truthful Black narratives.** We learned how many communities and organizations are uplifting true narratives. And, we want to be supportive by amplifying their voices, as well as funding capacity in communications and storytelling and funding artists. We have continued to use our own channels to lift up Black leaders, along with the soulfulness, beauty, and strength of Blackness. In addition, the Black Well-being study has served as a foundation for highlighting community identified approaches that support our collective organizing, inform policy change, and direct resources into Black-led solutions.
- **Investing in Black generational prosperity.** Much of the feedback on this listening tour centered around opportunities to invest in Black prosperity, liberation, and well-being. Since we launched, we have strived to find and fund the Black leaders, nonprofit organizations, businesses, groups, and associations that are forging pathways to Black self-determination. Every year, we have distributed We See You grants to recognize and support the powerful work happening across our state. We have also invested in capacity building and technical assistance for Black businesses. We are eager to take to heart what we heard and integrate it into our programming and grantmaking in the years to come.
- **Shifting the philanthropic paradigm.** This fourth area is in everything we do. We are doing the work internally in order to become a blueprint externally. We are building relationships with other funders and partners so we collectively increase unrestricted funding flowing into Black-led organizations, businesses, and communities.

We see this work as ongoing and requiring broad engagement. If you weren’t able to participate or if you have had additional questions or ideas since the listening gatherings, we hope you will reach out to us at info@blackfuturewa.org.

We are looking forward to 2025 and future travel across the state so we can continue meeting Black Washingtonians and allies. We are inspired to act together in creating the Washington and world we want.

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