



OUR COMMUNITY. OUR POWER. OUR PROSPERITY.

2023 – 2024 Listening Tour Summary

At the Black Future Co-op Fund, we often talk about family. In 2023 and 2024, we conducted a listening tour to gather with our extended family – listening to and learning from Black folks who are actively dismantling systems and serving communities in ways that center Blackness and Black people.

We offer this summary of what we heard 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.

Key Insights

Community Strengths

“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

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 and address systemic root causes. Communities are embracing Black-led solutions to enhance civic engagement, education, economic mobility, public safety, and health for Black people throughout the state.



Co-architect Twina 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.



Barriers and Strengths

“The Black community is here and we want to do the work, there just needs to be more safe spaces to collaborate.”

—Velynn Brown, Vancouver

Black Washingtonians experience systemic barriers to their well-being. We heard that the impacts of centuries of racism and racist practices continue to impede opportunity. Participants discussed ongoing philanthropic redlining. 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. 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. Organizational leaders called for increased multiyear, unrestricted funding and capacity-building support with grant writing, fundraising, financial management, communications, policy advocacy, and human resources. They stressed the importance of increasing Black leadership and mentorship across issue areas, and expressed an interest in partnership and collaboration locally and statewide, but have seen few avenues because of limited resources.

Investment 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. Communities talked about the importance of focusing on relationships first and foremost. Collective power building needs to be intergenerational, enabling trusted elders to interject their wisdom. We also heard that more youth and young adults need to be part of conversations.



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

- **Recognize that healing is essential.** People talked about the role of healing and, in particular, prioritizing mental health care and youth support, as integral to the work of racial and social justice.
- **Increase multiyear, unrestricted funding.** Organizations need flexible funding over five to 10 years to use as they see fit to advance their missions. As funders, we must reimagine our roles to work more collaboratively and creatively with nonprofits.
- **Support capacity building.** Foundations and other funders ought to expand their roles to help organizations raise money, as well as offer assistance and tools to support grant writing, financial management, communications, policy advocacy, human resources, and more.
- **Invest in Black leadership.** Black people want to see other Black people in their workplaces as peers, collaborators, mentors, and role models. It's past time we level the playing field and accelerate investment in education, training, apprenticeship, and other professional development. 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, we must fund policy advocacy to change the systems and structures that perpetuate racial disparities — moving us toward an equitable world.

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.

Next Steps

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.



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

- **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.
- **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.
- **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.
- **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 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 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.

TO VIEW FULL REPORT SCAN QR CODE

