



BLACK VOICES FOR BLACK JUSTICE FUND

FREEDOM TO DREAM

How the Black Voices for Black Justice Fund
Empowers Black Leaders and Honors their Experiences

This report shares the story of BVBj's first three years, highlighting the significant work of its awardees in their fight for racial justice as well as the impact of the organization's approach on awardees' ongoing efforts. In doing so, it provides a glimpse into the inspirational stories of a small sample of Black leaders working on the ground every day to create an anti-racist America, while also providing a lens for the philanthropic community to view the positive outcomes emerging when the power in philanthropic giving is shifted to those who have the experiences most proximate to the change they seek to make.

Yoal Ghebremeskel

As Yoal Ghebremeskel, **Executive Director and Founder of Street Fraternity**, talks about his experiences as a Black Voices for Black Justice (BVBJ) Awardee, he has one eye on the clock, ever aware the start of the organization's operating hours is fast approaching.

When young men ages 14-25 in the East Colfax neighborhoods of Denver and Aurora begin to walk through the door, Ghebremeskel's attention will turn fully to serving them.

Reflecting on the importance of the BVBJ award to both the organization and his personal journey, Ghebremeskel is quick to acknowledge that his work is about building relationships and trust with individuals – the young men who voluntarily choose to spend time at Street Fraternity and look to him and his small staff for support and brotherhood, not only during but often outside of the hours when Street Fraternity's doors are unlocked. Contrasting BVBJ's fully unrestricted funds and no burden approach with other grants that require ongoing monitoring and reporting, Ghebremeskel says simply, "Of course we do the paperwork that we need to do...but if something more important comes up for an individual we serve, **the person is way more important.**"

BVBJ's trust-based approach to philanthropy allows leaders like Ghebremeskel to focus their time and energy on the work they are dedicated to doing while honoring the lived experiences of leaders like Ghebremeskel to determine how to best serve the communities they seek to impact.

Maryland Governor Wes Moore, a founding co-chair of the Black Voices for Black Justice Fund, explains, "The Black Voices for Black Justice Fund recognizes and supports the incredible work that's being done by everyday heroes at the grassroots level. In order for our communities to exceed the level of greatness we all aspire to, these voices must be elevated, supported and heard."



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GOVERNOR WES MOORE

What is the Black Voices for Black Justice Fund?

The Black Voices for Black Justice Fund launched in September 2020 to support Black leaders and Black-led organizations on the front lines of shaping the urgent movement to build a fair, equitable, and anti-racist America.

The Fund amplifies and elevates ongoing efforts to address the national crisis surrounding racism, white supremacy, police brutality, and racial inequality. BVBJ seeks to accelerate the leadership trajectory of the next generation of Black leaders and support Black-led efforts to build meaningful economic and political power for their communities.

Given the unique and essential role that Black leaders have played and must continue to play if our nation is to realize its most aspirational ideals, this Black-led Fund supports grassroots advocates and organizers – including new voices that emerged after the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and too many others – in ways that can transform racist systems and institutions to better reflect the best of humanity.

The Fund is led by five co-chairs, representing a diverse and national leadership voice from within our country's efforts to fight systemic racism. It is a joint effort between 18 foundations and donors who have donated an initial \$3 million – nearly one-third of the way to their goal of raising \$10 million for the fund. Administered by The Moriah Fund, a founding partner, BVBJ ensures that **99% of donor contributions go directly to awardees.**

Launched
SEPT. 2020

Awarded

\$3M

Partners

18



99% OF DONOR CONTRIBUTIONS
GO DIRECTLY TO AWARDEES



BVBJ's Trust-Based Approach to Giving

BVBJ's model of trust-based philanthropy is based on the idea that encouraging awardees to use their grants in whatever way they believe, based on their lived experience with racism, will **make the greatest impact in advancing racial justice.**

According to the Trust-Based Philanthropy Project, a trust-based approach “flips the script on traditional philanthropy” by acknowledging the way philanthropy has been built upon and continues to contribute to systemic inequalities, including both how wealth has been accumulated and the power dynamics at play in its distribution; working to redistribute power to those closest to the work; supporting and championing the ideas of those working to drive change rather than dictating how change should occur; embracing learning; and leading “with trust, respect, and humility.”^[1]

A 2020 report by Bridgespan and Echoing Green focused on racial equity in philanthropy underscored this point, noting that leaders of color “often bring strategies that intimately understand the racialized experiences of communities of color and the issues these communities face.” Yet, data on the funds given and available to Black-led organizations shows disparities continue to exist in the way foundations distribute funds. Not only are overall revenues of Black-led organizations significantly smaller than those led by white leaders, even when taking into account the experience of their leaders and issues they seek to address, but research also shows the unrestricted net assets of Black-led organizations are 76 percent smaller than their white-led counterparts.^[2] Put simply, BVBJ seeks to reverse this trend.

BVBJ's model embodies a trust-based approach in several ways. It provides **unrestricted funding**, giving awardees the flexibility to determine how best to spend the dollars given their deep and close knowledge of the context in which they work, and explicitly honoring their lived experiences with racism. It identifies awardees through a **nomination process** that shifts the responsibility of

finding and vetting individuals and their organizations to BVBJ. This removes the standard, often time-consuming requirements related to seeking funding from the shoulders of prospective awardees, leaving them with more time to focus on the work at hand. And it significantly **reduces reporting requirements and a performative accountability lens** from relationships with awardees, seeking instead to learn from awardees, keep abreast of and amplify their accomplishments, and ensure ongoing communication and engagement provides added value to awardees. Importantly, BVBJ's view of accountability acknowledges and honors that the work of social justice often cannot be described or measured in the way philanthropy usually thinks of outcomes.

Each awardee is provided with a grant – either

\$20,000 or \$50,000

– to use at this pivotal moment to expand their voice and grow their solutions for building an anti-racist America.

BVBJ seeks to ensure that leaders who have helped fuel the racial justice movement will have additional resources needed to expand their work. Each awardee is provided with a grant – either \$20,000 or \$50,000 – to use at this pivotal moment to expand their voice and grow their solutions for building an anti-racist America. BVBJ plans to offer awardees individual support, such as communications and media assistance, and will bring awardees together periodically to build relationships with other leaders, reflect and share progress and lessons learned.

The BVBJ Community of Awardees

The Fund has received more than 5,000 nominations and, as of August 2023, it has made 116 awards, totaling \$3 million, to Black leaders, organizers and activists in 20+ states. Awardees represent a diverse group of individuals with leadership across areas including **criminal justice reform, democracy and voting rights, education and youth leadership, environmental justice, gender equity / LGBTQ rights, health equity, housing justice, and the arts.** Profiles of current awardees can be found [here](#).

NOMINATIONS

5,000

TO BLACK LEADERS,
ORGANIZERS AND ACTIVISTS

\$3M

AWARDS

116

STATES

20+

Impact of the BVBJ Approach on Awardees and Their Work

Awardees described the significant impact receiving a BVBJ award has had on their personal activist and leadership journeys as well as on their ongoing work and accomplishments. Moreover, they lauded BVBJ's "frictionless giving" approach, describing feeling trusted, respected, and that their experiences were honored in both a symbolic sense and practically as indicated by the degree of control they were given over how to employ the funds. Untethered from the traditional constraints placed on philanthropic grantees, awardees have the space and freedom to think about new, unusual, and even unprecedented ways they could use their funds, resulting in innovative methods of engaging communities, impacting the narrative, developing programs, serving individuals, and changing policy – all in the service of racial justice.

100%
100%
100%

OF AWARDEES INDICATED BVBJ SHOULD BE USED AS A MODEL FOR OTHER GRANT PROGRAMS.

Specifically, BVBJ's trust-based approach was clearly felt by awardees and perceived as a strong contributor to the outsized impact of the award, particularly given its modest size.

100% of awardees reported that they felt in complete control of the decision-making power related to how they chose to use their BVBJ award, and the flexibility associated with being given unrestricted funds allowed them to spend the award in a more impactful way than other grant dollars they have received.

Similarly, 100% of awardees reported feeling their lived experience with racism was valued by BVBJ, and they were trusted to know best how to have the impact they desired. Nearly all (98%) noted the process associated with receiving funding from BVBJ placed significantly less burden on them than other grants or awards they have received. One awardee summed up the impact of the approach by saying, "The BVBJ award helped stretch my belief in my own leadership ability in the social justice space by simply trusting me to lead without barriers or bureaucracy."

Awardees attributed the award with multiplying the impact of their work to advance anti-racism in several ways.



“

This award allowed me to really think and practice outside of the box as a leader. As a generally creative person, this award allowed me to really THINK BIG, and that has improved my personal and professional efforts.”

Impact of the BVBj Approach on Awardees and Their Work

Giving awardees the freedom to think outside of the box. They described BVBj as allowing them, and even pushing them, to think bigger and more creatively than they had in the past.

Citing BVBj as giving them the “freedom to dream,” allowing them to “step into a new lane,” and providing the ability to “think ambitiously and boldly in our racial justice advocacy,” awardees noted these broadened perspectives came both from the overall guiding beliefs and ethos of the award as well as the functional reality of receiving an award with very limited restrictions or requirements. (BVBj simply requires that awards be used in ways that advance racial justice and are aligned with IRS 501c3 giving requirements.) Beyond thinking bigger, awardees also described feeling able to think more openly and authentically about the work and how it impacts the communities they serve, largely as a function of no longer having to fit their ideas into a predetermined box.

Validating their work and making them feel seen, supported, and empowered

Awardees consistently described feeling honored to have been nominated and selected to receive a BVBj award. Being acknowledged by BVBj not only affirmed the value of their work, but left them feeling empowered and supported in their pursuit of change. Again, awardees described how the great trust and autonomy that came with the BVBj award transformed it from being simply an honor to a practical way of empowering them as they work to implement their vision. As one awardee said, “[The BVBj award] afforded me autonomy and flexibility in my decision making, which was empowering as a Black leader.” Another noted the validation she felt for her own work and the work of others fighting similarly to advance anti-racism, saying, “It’s increased my faith that Black leadership and Black organizations will receive the support they need to shine and succeed.”

Increasing their confidence and resilience

Beyond validating their work, a related common theme heard from awardees was the boost in confidence they received from being recognized for their efforts, which often translated into greater feelings of being “courageous, bold, and unapologetic” in their ideas. This also led to strengthened resilience, allowing them “to keep going and push harder,” often in the face of significant roadblocks and challenges inherent to the nature of their anti-racism work. One awardee said, “You can’t underestimate the boost of confidence that [this award] gives a leader working on a set of intractable problems,” while another explained through a more specific example, “Organizations that are committed to providing the rising generation with honest history have come under fire, and this award supports my resilience and courage as a leader.”

“

**IT LIT A FIRE UNDER ME, BECAUSE
IT HELPED ME SEE WE'RE... MAKING
A DIFFERENCE AND PEOPLE ARE
PAYING ATTENTION TO IT.”**



Energizing and providing awardees with a renewed sense of purpose

For many recipients, the BVBJ award sparked a resurgence in energy around what is often very challenging work. Awardees noted the great strain – emotional, mental, and even physical – placed on those working daily to bring about change in deeply personal and complicated issues such as racial justice. One awardee remarked, “So often what we do is a thankless task.” Many awardees reported the BVBJ award gave them just enough funding to pause and focus on their personal health, ultimately re-energizing them for the work ahead. An awardee explained: **“I was able to stop moving 100 mph and take a second to catch my breath.** Something as simple as taking some time off and knowing I had all the needed people on the team to ensure no balls were dropped was huge. I got to step back, reflect, recharge, and come back ready to do more.”

Recognizing and raising awareness of their work, thereby generating additional funding.

Awardees were clear that their work could not be accomplished without additional funding. BVBJ’s award, though modest in its financial size, brought with it recognition that translated to many awardees securing additional dollars to support their work. In some cases, they secured matching grants from other funders (including from BVBJ funders introduced to them through BVBJ itself), or by leveraging their BVBJ award in other funding proposals. For example, awardee Vangela Wade leveraged her \$50,000 BVBJ award to raise an additional \$200,000, both from her organization’s Board as well as from an additional funder. In other cases, BVBJ provided seed funding to start a new body of work, allowing awardees to begin to produce programming and materials, or pilot the experiences they hoped to expand. Given many funders want to see a proof of concept or evidence of tangible results before investing, BVBJ funds allowed many awardees to create the momentum needed in order to then be positioned to successfully seek additional funding.

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Spotlighting BVBJ Awardees

BVBJ's awards have been given to a diverse set of inspirational leaders, spanning a wide range of activities that are building a more equitable and anti-racist America.

Core to the Fund's design, awardees are able to choose how to use their BVBJ funding, drawing on their individual experiences and ongoing work. While many chose to invest in the organizations they lead, funding innovative new work or expansions of existing work, others chose to invest in communities and even individuals. This section highlights seven awardees. More detailed information about their work, as well as profiles of all current awardees, can be found [here](#).





Dr. Jeanine Abrams McLean

Dr. Jeanine Abrams McLean is the President at **Fair Count**, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization working to build long-term power in communities that have been historically undercounted in the decennial census, underrepresented at the polls, and whose communities are often torn apart in redistricting.[4] As a biologist and former population researcher at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Abrams McLean switched careers in part based on the belief that she could have a greater impact on the fight for racial justice, while positively impacting people's ability to thrive, through her work at Fair Count. Yet, she continued to "keep one foot in science," eager to one day identify a way to bring her love of science and knowledge of its importance to thriving communities to her advocacy work.

BVBJ helped make this dream a reality by providing the dollars (along with matching funds from Fair Count) to seed a new initiative, **Science for Social Equity**. The first-of-its-kind program works by pairing community organizers with scientific researchers to work together on science-related issues impacting marginalized communities, with the goal of creating community-driven

solutions that will help educate and mobilize communities to address these issues.[5] As Abrams McLean explains, **"The point of Science for Social Equity was to move away from the idea of a scientist, or anyone, coming into communities and telling them what to do to solve their problems, but instead talk to communities to come up with solutions together."** The first cohort included five research-community pairs, addressing issues such as climate change, pandemic recovery, and mental health.

Since the initial project work concluded, follow on funding is supporting continued efforts in two of the original five partnerships. Abrams McLean hopes to raise additional dollars to expand the program to include more cohorts, utilizing learnings from the initial experience to make future efforts even more successful. Importantly, she credits BVBJ with sparking the creation of an important new initiative that would not have happened without the flexibility provided by BVBJ.



IT TOOK THE PRESSURE OFF OF ME AS A NONPROFIT EXECUTIVE, AND GAVE ME THE FLEXIBILITY AND FREEDOM TO TRY SOMETHING DIFFERENT, SOMETHING NEW."

Vangela Wade



Vangela Wade, President and CEO of the Mississippi Center for Justice, draws on her early experiences growing up in Mississippi as she considers her career as a lawyer and racial justice advocate. “The challenges we have here in Mississippi are different from most other places impacted by injustice. Here, race and racism impact every aspect of life – every decision, every policy, every response that occurs. At some point if you drill down, it will come back to race or racism.”

MCJ’s mission is to dismantle the policies that keep Mississippi at the bottom of nearly every indicator of human well-being and deny African-American and lower-income Mississippians the opportunity to advance themselves. As a home-grown public interest law firm, MCJ advances racial and economic justice through an approach that combines legal services with policy advocacy, community education, and media outreach.[3]

Among its many focus areas, public education was an area of advocacy that had gone dormant in MCJ’s portfolio. Upon receiving the BVB award during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Wade knew immediately that the funds would be best used to spark an examination of the impact of the pandemic on students and schools. Wade

first leveraged the BVB award to raise additional dollars for this work, initially challenging her Board of Directors to match the funds 1:1, and then securing an additional \$150,000 in funding from another donor. With these dollars in hand, MCJ initiated and completed a COVID-19 Impact Study to examine 12 rural, high-poverty school districts.

As a result of the study, MCJ was able to identify education disparity gaps and make specific recommendations to lessen or close the gaps. MCJ’s re-energized focus on education has continued beyond the pandemic, with dedicated staff engaging in advocacy and policy efforts intended to address the longstanding inequities in Mississippi’s public education system. As Wade notes, “The BVB award provided a launch pad for further education work focused on ensuring equity and access for all students in Mississippi, regardless of their zip code.” In describing the impact of her work overall, and of the specific efforts made possible by the BVB award, Wade reflects not only on tangible progress seen through studies completed or policies changed, but on the human impact: **“When you see that advocacy work personally impacts people, that’s the progress. That’s what you need to keep going, to take the next swing at the next issue.”**

Sharhonda Bossier



As co-founder and CEO of **Education Leaders of Color (EdLoC)**, **Sharhonda Bossier** works daily to realize the organization's vision: that young people of color are thriving, building generational wealth, and facing fewer systemic barriers to capitalize on opportunities.[6] EdLoC's range of strategies include grantmaking initiatives, such as the **Boulder Fund**, a program that provides significant funding to leaders of color to support innovative solutions to reducing systemic barriers for children of color.

Bossier's personal journey around combating racial injustice has evolved significantly over the past 15 years, starting with a deep focus on impacting students and families within the public education system, and eventually leading to the creation of EdLoC and a focus on shifting institutions and systems to be more anti-racist. Yet, even with EdLoC's current focus on shifting systems, Bossier saw the BVB award as an opportunity to invest in small ways in individual Black leaders who were facing obstacles in reaching their own professional goals.

"It was a way for me to think about how people who are first generation college goers, or who are not from families who have wealth, encounter all of these other invisible hurdles on the path to acquiring academic and life achievements. Through my seat at EdLoC and in other roles, I had insight and visibility into the challenges these leaders faced. These were folks spending all of their time working on issues I care about who don't

have access to institutional philanthropic support. That's how I used my award – in support of Black leaders who, despite the social capital they may have acquired, were finding themselves stretched thin financially as they were pursuing their professional and higher education goals. I saw myself as providing triage support."

Having made more than 20 small gifts to date, Bossier continues to look for individuals in need of her small investments as she spends her BVB award. She said her BVB award felt like



A HUG FROM THE UNIVERSE

and credits it with raising her own confidence as a leader and fundraiser, noting it came early in her tenure as CEO and represents one of the first investments made in her leadership at that point in her career. The award also helped her see the value of smaller grants for both individuals and organizations, noting the team at EdLoC has been influenced by the ideas, collaboration, and validation that can be sparked by smaller investments as they implement their own microgrants program. She recognizes that traditional philanthropic pathways would not have allowed her to invest in individuals as she chose to do with her BVB award, citing the challenges in measuring and attributing the impact of those dollars on outcomes funders typically prioritize, stating that's what makes BVB so unique and beneficial to the field.



Jay'Aina “Jay Jay” Patton

At age 18, **Jay'Aina “Jay Jay” Patton** is the youngest BVBJ recipient to date, receiving her award when she was just 15. Yet, the impact of her work is far reaching and continues to grow. Patton found her calling after she and her family learned how challenging it can be for incarcerated parents to stay connected to their children. Just three years old when her father went to prison, Patton and her family experienced firsthand the difficulties in maintaining a close relationship and frequent communication with her father. Out of this experience, coupled with her father's newfound knowledge of coding he gained in prison, grew **Photo Patch**, a website created by Patton and her father that allows children to share letters and photos with their incarcerated parents for free.

Learning from her father, Patton started coding at age 10. In her role at Photo Patch she created a mobile app version to meet the needs of youth, who generally prefer to use their cellphone to communicate. To date, Photo Patch has connected over 75,000 youth to their incarcerated parents and sent over one million photos to parents in prison. Since its launch, the app has been downloaded

more than 10,000 times, proving to be invaluable during lockdown restrictions due to COVID-19.

Since then, Patton continues to expand her work to diversify the technology field. She worked with her father to create coding classes for Black youth at **Unlock Academy**, and used her BVBJ award to launch 10K Tech Queens, her effort to help 10,000 women and girls of color launch a career in STEM. Patton was filmed by HP for its Generation Impact series, which features young inventors using technology to make the world a better place. She was also named a **Voice of Change** by *Seventeen* magazine and she and her father appeared on **The Ellen Show**, where they shared their story, spread Patton's mission for **10K Tech Queens**, and received an additional \$20,000 from Ellen and the rapper Ludacris. Patton credits the BVBJ award with allowing her to move forward and launch her new initiative. “The award has had a great impact on me. I've been able to use this award to further my voice and reach out to Black and Brown girls and women who need the tools to make noise in tech.”



WE HAVE TO ASK OURSELVES HOW WE REDEFINE SUCCESS. YES, WE NEED TO BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE FOR HOW WE SPEND PHILANTHROPIC MONEY, BUT HOW CAN WE THINK DIFFERENTLY ABOUT WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE IN LIGHT OF THESE THORNY ISSUES THAT WILL LIKELY TAKE LIFETIMES TO UNDO?”

Chantal Hinds



As a policy entrepreneur at Next100, Chantal Hinds works at the intersection of education and the foster care system. Beginning with her work in New York City as a senior staff attorney at Advocates for Children of New York, her career has focused on ensuring children in the foster care system have the educational support they need to succeed. Early work led to realizations about the ways in which the current education and foster systems fail to meet the needs of children, and how the burden of these failings falls heavily on Black children in New York state who make up a majority of those impacted by the foster system. Now, through her work at Next100, Hinds has expanded to state-level advocacy, investigating how state education and child welfare offices can better support local school districts and, ultimately, the educational needs of the children they serve.

Hinds chose to use her BVBJ award to ensure the voices of those who have firsthand experience with the foster system inform her policy work. She conducted interviews and focus groups of 75 current and former foster youth, parents, and adoptive and/or foster parents to gather their views on how New York state can improve its education system to better support young people in the foster system. Her findings will be published in a report in the second half of 2023 accompanied by a video showcasing stories as told by participants created in partnership with **Zaki Smith**, another BVBJ Awardee and Next100 alumnus. Hinds' BVBJ award funds were used primarily to compensate those who chose to tell their stories for their time. "Many times we look to those with lived experience and say 'tell us the worst thing that's ever happened to

you,' then we take that information and use it without compensating them for their time and expertise. It was important to me to not only use the funds to do the work, but also to give back to the people who can use it and deserve it."

When describing the impact of being a BVBJ awardee, Hinds notes how the flexibility and few-strings-attached nature of the award was critical in helping her think more expansively and creatively about what policy work could look like. One result was her decision to include a video component when telling the stories of those in the foster system. By moving beyond the traditional idea that policy should just be words on the page, she believes her work will be more impactful in pushing the policy conversation forward. This would not have happened were it not for the complete ownership BVBJ's approach provided her in determining how to best meet her goals.

She further reflects on BVBJ's approach and how it is founded on inherent trust in the experts on the ground, a very different starting place than traditional philanthropy. She explains how this unique view is even more important for those working to advance social justice. **"Honoring those Black voices who have been in the community advocating for change is where philanthropy needs to go in general.** It's the idea of trusting in local communities that they can identify what they need, and the best ways for supporting them, even if they don't always have specific metrics attached. Where success doesn't always look like a measurable return on investment."

Shemeka Frazier Sorrells

Shemeka Frazier Sorrells co-founded **A Better Glynn** in 2020, in part catalyzed by the murder of Ahmaud Arbery in her community of Brunswick (Glynn County), Georgia. “That trauma brought us together. Discussing his life and how it ended, we weren’t surprised it happened here. We talked about the reason and conditions for how it could happen here in this city and county, how a narrative could be accepted that his life deserved to be taken and the ways in which justice was delayed. Asking, what’s behind this? Fear? Mistrust? Apathy?” A Better Glynn was born out of the desire to inform the answers to those questions, and in so doing to educate community members to better understand equity, provide access and tools for individuals to advocate for themselves and their neighbors, and activate their leadership to make positive change and participate in our democracy.

Even though the BVBJ award was given to Sorrells as an individual, she considers it to be an award for the entire organization, citing how it propelled the team into action. “It was one of the first sources of funding we’d gotten. **It propelled us into this place of thinking we can do this, and there are people that support us even if we don’t feel like we’re being supported in our own community. And in terms of me as a leader, it gave me the opportunity to dream, and helped me to open up about the possibilities of what we can do on behalf of our community when we do not have to fit our strategy in a box.**”

A core goal of the organization is to help shape future leaders. To accomplish this, they developed the **Justice Journey**, a three-part, hands-on, immersive trip for high school students to various cities in the South intended to

help students learn about their own history and ignite a passion for social justice. Part of the BVBJ grant was used to develop and implement the first part of the Justice Journey, enabling a group of 16 students to participate in the trip in Summer 2022. One participating student noted, “For me to be able to learn and travel through these different cities, and learn about the history of our people – what they had to overcome, learning and seeing how other people live – it was a great experience.” With the successful demonstration of the first leg of the Journey, A Better Glynn was then able to raise the additional funds needed to support the second part of the initiative, allowing 21 students to take the Justice Journey in Summer 2023. The BVBJ award is also being used to launch a community engagement strategy to ensure equity and diverse voices are included in the implementation of key initiatives across the city.

When asked about the progress A Better Glynn has made in meeting its goals, Sorrells describes one marker of success as the extent to which many more diverse voices from the community are engaging in important discussions. “In this work of social justice and anti-racism, there’s a lot in the way in which the work gets done that can’t be described in the typical way we think of outcomes.” The flexibility provided through the BVBJ award to target the kind of change those closest to the work feel is important, was a key part of the power of the award. “It’s the adaptive things that change, for example having more people actively engage in conversations that typically create divisiveness. These shifts are hard to articulate and quantify in the way that some other grants require.”





Yoal Ghebremeskel

As Executive Director and Founder of **Street Fraternity**, **Yoal Ghebremeskel** works to provide a place of brotherhood, safety, and personal growth for urban young men, offering a different path to youth living in a community rife with violence and lacking opportunity. Over the decade that Street Fraternity has been in operation, they have consistently kept the doors open to offer a “walk in, drop in” space and time, serving hundreds of young men at the Street Fraternity location and serving thousands of community members through food distribution and meal delivery programs.

Having emigrated to the United States at age 12, Ghebremeskel began volunteering as a college student for a refugee resettlement agency and coaching youth soccer, staying on a path of serving the youth in his community throughout his career. Ghebremeskel chose to use his BVBJ grant to support the travel of staff members to their home communities – both domestic and international – to share the Street Fraternity’s story and highlight the importance of providing a similar experience for other young men in those communities. “If we really think about the young men committing these acts, such as gun violence, forget the politics and race. Why are these

young men not being provided the space and time they need?” By sharing Street Fraternity’s story, he hopes to inspire others to create similar spaces, serving to feed his dream and multiply an impact that feels hindered by lack of capacity to meet all the on-the-ground needs of the youth he is directly serving.

In reflecting on his BVBJ award, Ghebremeskel acknowledges that the travel and work to share and inspire others about Street Fraternity’s mission and impact would not have happened without BVBJ’s dollars. Noting that it took a long time for local foundations to give Street Fraternity general operating funding, “I don’t want other community leaders that are doing similar work to go through what we went through because of lack of resources. **When you’re dealing with life or death situations, you need this trust and flexibility.**”



**BVBJ WAS JUST ‘HERE, GO AND DO.’ WE NEED MORE OF THIS
TYPE OF FUNDING, FOR US AND FOR OTHERS LIKE US.”**

BVBJ as a Model for Future Philanthropy



These stories highlight just a fraction of BVBJ awardees' ongoing work to create a fair, equitable, and anti-racist America

While the awards are limited in size, they have driven an outsized impact for both the Black leaders receiving them and the organizations, communities, and individuals who have benefitted from their innovative uses. BVBJ's trust-based approach has energized, empowered, and increased the confidence of awardees. It has engendered a more creative set of solutions, imagined by those leaders most proximate to the social injustice they seek to change, and helped generate additional funds to add to these causes.

Even without traditional requirements around seeking funding, reporting, and accountability, BVBJ has nevertheless supported individuals in the midst of significant personal and professional journeys to battle racial injustice, who have used this freedom to invest their awards in meaningful and impactful ways. Much can still be done to bring greater equity to the philanthropic sector and inject trust, respect, and humility into giving. We hope BVBJ's story and the inspirational work of its awardees can provoke thought, reflection, conversation, and even serve as a model for the philanthropic community about how to enact a more equitable approach to future grantmaking.

About the Black Voices for Black Justice Fund

The Fund is led by five co-chairs, all national leaders in the effort to end systemic racism:



TENICKA BOYD

Former National Organizing Director and Deputy Political Director of the ACLU



JEAN DESRAVINES

CEO of New Leaders



SHAVAR D. JEFFRIES

CEO of the KIPP Foundation



THE HONORABLE WES MOORE

Governor of Maryland, bestselling author, social entrepreneur



KERRY WASHINGTON

Activist and actress

About the Black Voices for Black Justice Fund



The Moriah Fund, a founding partner, is presently administering BVBJ as an in-kind contribution. This enables over **99% of partner contributions to go directly to awardees.** (Two partners cover all of the operational expenses so that 100% of the contribution from the other 16 partners goes solely to awardees.) The Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law was the initial fiscal sponsor for BVBJ until it received its own IRS designation in 2022.

Previous co-chairs include:



Stacey Abrams, a former Minority Leader of the Georgia House of Representatives and founder of two of Georgia's largest voting rights organizations, Fair Count and New Georgia Project, was recently chosen as Howard University's first chair for race and Black politics.



Kristen Clarke was tapped by President Biden and Vice President Harris to serve as Assistant Attorney General of the United States, leading the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice.



John B. King, Jr., former U.S. Secretary of Education for President Obama and CEO of Education Trust, is now Chancellor at SUNY.

The Moriah Fund

The Joe and Clara Tsai Foundation

The Walton Family Foundation

Spencer Foundation

Rodel Foundation

Red Crane Foundation

Kresge Foundation

Kenan Charitable Trust

Greater Washington Community Foundation

Galaxy Gives

Delaware Community Foundation

Susan and Matt Daimler

CityBridge Foundation

Chan Zuckerberg Initiative

Bridge Alliance

Jim and Nancy Bildner Charitable Trust

Anonymous Foundation

Anonymous Donor

The Black Voices for Black Justice Fund is a joint effort between 18 foundations and donors who have contributed an initial \$3 million. The partners hope to raise \$10 million for the fund and recently secured 501(c)3 status from the Internal Revenue Service so it can become a stand-alone nonprofit organization.

Appendix

Co-Chairs

Tenicka Boyd, former National Organizing Director and Deputy Political Director with ACLU, New York

Jean Desravines, New Leaders, New York

Shavar Jeffries, KIPP Foundation, New Jersey

The Honorable Wes Moore, Governor of Maryland, Maryland

Kerry Washington, Actress and Political Activist, New York and California

Co-Chairs Emeriti

The Honorable Stacey Abrams, former Minority Leader of the Georgia House of Representatives, Georgia

Kristen Clarke, Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights at U.S. Department of Justice, Washington DC

Dr. John B. King, Jr., Chancellor at State University of New York, New York

Black Voices for Black Justice Awardees

Criminal Justice Reform

Brittany Barnett, Buried Alive Project, Texas

Montrell Carmouche, Operation Restoration, Louisiana

Tiffany Crutcher, Terence Crutcher Foundation, Oklahoma

Brittany Packnett Cunningham, Campaign Zero, Washington DC

Wakumi Douglas, S.O.U.L. Sisters Leadership Collective, Florida

Christopher Rashad Green, Free*Dome Unlimited, Virginia

Oluchi Omeoga, Black Visions Collective, Minnesota

Andrew Saunders, New Blue, New York

Michael “Zaki” Smith, Next100, New York

Syrita Steib, Operation Restoration, Louisiana

Ebony Underwood, WE GOT US NOW, New York

Kei Williams, New York

Monalisa Weber, Probation Station, Florida

Democracy & Voting Rights

Tamieka Atkins, ProGeorgia, Georgia

Dr. Janet Dewart Bell, LEAD InterGenerational Solutions, New York

Roni Bennett, South Florida People of Color, Florida

Juston Cooper, Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition, Colorado

Ryan Haygood, New Jersey Institute for Social Justice, New Jersey

Desmond Meade, Florida Rights Restoration Coalition (FRRC), Florida

Shannon Robinson, Positive Women’s Network, Colorado

Shameka Frazier Sorrells, A Better Glynn, Georgia

Nique Williams, Common Defense, North Carolina

APPENDIX

Education & Youth Leadership

Dr. Tony Alleyne, Delaware College Scholars, Delaware
Wisdom Amouzou, Empower Community High, Colorado
Afua Atta-Mensah, Community Voices Heard, New York
Rev. Dr. William Barber II, Repairers of the Breach, North Carolina
Mike Battle, Restoring Inner City Hope (RICH), Maryland
Kevin Beckford, Pretrial Justice Institute, Washington DC
Maia Blankenship, Wildflower Montessori, Washington DC
Sharhonda Bossier, Education Leaders of Color, California
Michelle Browder, Mothers of Gynecology, Alabama
Janeen Bryant, Center for Racial Equity in Education, North Carolina
Giselle Burgess, TROOP 6000, New York
Gabriella Carrethers, Youth Action Launchpad, Colorado
Paul Clifton, The Confluence Center, Colorado
Leah Angel Daniel, Fostering Greatness, New York
Trish Millines Dziko, Technology Access Foundation, Washington
Sharif El-Mekki, Center for Black Educator Development, Pennsylvania
Shamoyia Gardiner, Strong Schools Maryland, Maryland
Olivia Gardner & Ruth Woldemichael, Colorado
Dr. Whitney Gaskins, The Gaskins Foundation, Ohio
Yoal Kidane Ghebremeskel, Street Fraternity, Colorado
Kaya Henderson, Reconstruction, New York
Norris Henderson, Voters Organized To Educate (VOTE), Louisiana
Chantal Hinds, Next100, New York
Rafiq Kalam Id-Din II, Ember Charter for Mindful Education, Innovation, and Transformation, New York
Dr. William Jackson, Village of Wisdom, North Carolina
James Jeter, Civic Allyship Institute, Connecticut
Ebony Johnson, The Resource Room, Florida
Miranda Walker Jones, The Little Bit Foundation, Missouri
Leslie-Bernard Joseph, Coney Island Prep, New York
Nicole Lynn Lewis, Generation Hope, Washington DC
Dr. Janiece Mackey, Young Aspiring Americans for Social and Political Activism, Colorado
Jacquelyn Martell, DFER NY, New York
Joyce McMillan, Just Making A Change for Families, New York
Mary Moran, Our Voice Nuestra Voz, Louisiana
Dr. Micia Mosely, Black Teacher Project, California
Jay'Aina "Jay Jay" Patton, Photo Patch and Unlock Academy, Florida
Courtney Robertson, I Believe In Me Girls, Maryland
Elizabeth Clay Roy, Generation Citizen, New York
Dr. Kelli Seaton, Center for Black Educator Development, Pennsylvania
Diwee Sewell, The Get Ready for Obstacles in the World (GROW) Program, Maryland
Keishamata Strong, Passion Outreach Center, Illinois
Knicole Taylor, Empowering Minds of Maryland's Youth, Maryland
Marlyn Tillman, Gwinnett STOPP, Georgia
Cassandra Overton Welchlin, Mississippi Black Women's Roundtable, Mississippi
Maliyah Womack, Girl Plus Environment, Georgia

APPENDIX

Environmental Justice

Christopher Bradshaw, Dreaming Out Loud, Washington DC

Mari Copeny, Michigan

Fatuma Emmad, Front Line Farming, Colorado

Dr. Ayana Elizabeth Johnson, Urban Ocean Lab, New York

Dr. Tiara Moore, Black In Marine Science, Washington

Heather McTeer Toney, Environmental Defense Fund, Mississippi

Gender Equity

Makisha Boothe, Sistahbiz Global Network, Colorado

Aly Conyers, South Carolina

A'Dorian Murray-Thomas, SHE Wins, New Jersey

Nadine Smith, Equality Florida, Florida

General/Other

Charlea Bing, Black N Tampa, Florida

Franchelle Hart Parker, Open Buffalo, New York

Rev. Dr. Timothy Tyler, Shorter Community African Methodist Episcopal Church, Colorado

Vangela Wade, Mississippi Center for Justice, Mississippi

Pastor Dr. Howard-John Wesley, Alfred Street Baptist Church, Virginia

Health Equity

Joel Bervell, Washington

Dr. Uché Blackstock, Advancing Health Equity, New York

Taylor Marshall, Not Just A Smile, North Carolina

Dr. Jeanine Abrams McLean, Fair Count, Georgia

Housing Justice

Bernell K. Grier, IMPACCT Brooklyn, New York

Lisa Rice, National Fair Housing Alliance, Washington DC

Chaniqua Simpson, North Carolina State Women's Center, North Carolina

Cameron Whitten, Brown Hope, Oregon

The Arts

Natasha Alford, The Griot, New York

Haley Elizabeth Anderson, New York

Melissa Denizard, New York

Kahina Haynes, Dance Institute of Washington, Washington DC

Tonya Lynch, Black Light Project, North Carolina

Cory Minakh Montalvo, Youth Empowerment Broadcasting Organization, Colorado

Diane Robinson, Yard Girl Productions, Florida

Johnaé Strong, Strong Visions Productions, Illinois

BVBJ made six awards to organizations in the first round of giving as well as an emergency award in support of the Asian-American community in Atlanta after they experienced racially-motivated violence.

The organizational awardees are:

- BLOC
- Colorado Criminal Justice Coalition
- Dream Defenders
- Live Free
- Mass Liberation AZ
- Michigan Liberation
- Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Atlanta

[1] [Trust-Based Philanthropy \(trustbasedphilanthropy.org\)](https://trustbasedphilanthropy.org)

[2] [Racial Equity and Philanthropy: Disparities in Funding for Leaders](#)

[3] [Home | Mississippi Center for Justice \(mscenterforjustice.org\)](https://mscenterforjustice.org)

[4] [Jeanine Abrams McLean, PhD](#)

[5] Fair Count (2021). [Science for Social Equity Report](#).

[6] [Our Strategy — Education Leaders of Color \(edloc.org\)](#)

[7] [Support for Black Portlanders | Black Resilience Fund | Black Lives Matter](#)