



ASCEND
BLO

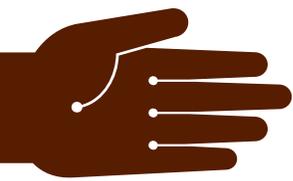
**East Bay Community Foundation
ASCEND:Black-Led Organizations**

Accelerating and Stabilizing Communities
through Equitable Nonprofit Development

**Final Evaluation Report for Year One
January 2019**

East Bay Community Foundation | ASCEND: Black-Led Organizations
Accelerating and Stabilizing Communities through
Equitable Nonprofit Development

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The ASCEND:BLO Initiative for Black-led organizations (BLOs) is a collaborative multi-year capacity building effort. It recognizes that these nonprofits serve as the backbone of Black communities and are deserving of greater investment to support leadership, best-in-class systems, and sustainable growth.

Convened by five original funder partners—The East Bay Community Foundation (EBCF), The San Francisco Foundation (SFF), The Kapor Center, Y & H Soda Foundation, and The California Endowment (TCE). ASCEND:BLO seeks to enhance the growth, sustainability, and impact of BLOs in the Bay Area by building their capacity. It disrupts “business as usual” and is free from the current funding environment that has historically, and continues to, under-resource Black-led organizations and the communities they serve.

ASCEND:BLO embraces a culturally-grounded approach to capacity building that it delivers in a three-pronged approach: an Accelerator cohort for emerging/promising organizations, a Stabilizer cohort for well-established anchor organizations, and a Network inviting all BLOs in the greater Bay Area to share and engage in peer learning opportunities.

This report draws from the Initiative’s organizing documents, interviews, surveys, and first-hand observations to describe the Year One progress of ASCEND:BLO, its successes, challenges, and recommendations for its future development. Based on this evaluation, principal recommendations can be summarized as follows:



- First and foremost, this effort must continue, as it is uniquely valuable in its focus on strengthening BLOs and providing a brave, safe space to be proudly Black.
- Maintain a center on race as it powerfully disrupts “philanthropy as usual.”
- Sustain the Funders’ Collaborative role as keepers of the vision, and pursue and engage other funders to grow and expand this important work.
- Recognize that one year may be too soon to yield significant results for the Accelerator, but continue to mine for short- and longer-term results showing strengthened individual and organizational capacity.
 - ▢ For future rounds, consider geographic expansion to outlying counties.
- Continue to invest in building the capacity of capacity builders to nurture a broader and more robust capacity building cohort as it is filling a void in the capacity-building infrastructure nationally.
 - ▢ Consider a more market- or need-driven model that places money and resources in BLOs hands to obtain direct assistance from a pool of capacity builders.
 - ▢ Retain a backbone group as a hub for coordinating capacity building.
- Continue and further develop the BLO Network as a unique and vibrant peer learning and networking space.



I. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

From Crisis to Change

When the Bay Area Black United Fund (BABUF) released *Black-Led Organizations in the Bay Area: From Crisis to Change*, its seminal 2015 report on Bay Area Black Led Organizations (BLOs), it was with an eye toward the effects of the Great Recession that had not only cost Black families nearly 54% of their wealth but threatened the sustainability of BLOs providing vital services in Black communities.¹ Having already seen some long-standing and important Black-led nonprofits close their doors, and cognizant of the consequences of losing more BLOs, the research team at Walker and Associates Consulting **sought to better understand BLOs' strengths, challenges, and what supports they need to both survive and thrive.**

They found that “Bay Area BLOs are significant assets with proud, passionate and positive leaders; strong relationships with their Boards; and longstanding connections to the communities they serve,” indicating a strong foundation upon which to build. At the same time, they also learned that in addition to needing to develop financial reserves and access to funders and major donors, many BLOs lacked strategic plans, succession plans, or marketing plans; that their boards needed support with fundraising; and that there was an unmet desire for peer networks to foster greater collaboration and connection.

“BLOs are lifelines for communities across the Bay Area.”

– *Black-Led Organizations in the Bay Area: From Crisis to Change* (2015)

¹ Constance J. Walker and Jeannine N. Walker, *Black-Led Organizations in the Bay Area: From Crisis to Change* (2015), Bay Area Black United Fund (BABUF).

The report's ultimate recommendation was **"the development of a collective enduring effort to help BLOs grow and thrive."** The ASCEND:BLO Initiative is a direct response to that call to action.

Why BLOs?

BLOs do what no other nonprofit organizations do in serving as the **backbone for Black communities across the greater Bay Area**. As one ASCEND:BLO funder partner tells us: "These [BLO] institutions come about because of community need. They went into places where nobody would go [and] they invested, created community infrastructure. Having BLOs...in the community has stabilized neighborhoods and created opportunities to address unmet needs."

But BLOs are important not just because of what they do for communities, but because of **the community they create**. Black people get so many damaging images about our collective worth, beauty and place in this world. To find a community of Black folk, in a room together standing proudly shoulder-to-shoulder with them in your truth and magnitude is a testament to the strength and perseverance that is implicit in the Black experience.

Recognizing that BLOs are doing remarkable work that's having significant impact is one thing—it's also clearer than ever before what they are up against. This is why it is so important to offer BLOs unapologetically Black spaces in which to engage, network, and build capacity.

The current moment holds both promise and pain for BLOs that are doing so much, but for whom it often doesn't feel adequate. For leaders of BLOs, Black-only spaces

// We don't get to be a mess and get the same help in spaces that are not Black spaces. **I don't have to be representing all Black people here; I can just say, 'I don't know what the heck I'm doing.'** I actually get to be the person who doesn't have to know it all, have it all together, and be a 'credit to my race.' This stuff's rough, I need help!"

allow that duality to be acknowledged without the need to code-switch to explain it to non-Black colleagues. This creates the opportunity to **breathe more deeply and to feel more heard and more held, leaving more room to be more creative, more present**—and to get the real help that we need. When Black love shows up in these spaces, we are able to appreciate each other’s and our own beauty where other people may only see deficits.

The Funders’ Collaborative

The Funders’ Collaborative serves as the governing body of the ASCEND:BLO Initiative. Convened by the **East Bay Community Foundation (EBCF)** and **Y & H Soda Foundation (Y & H Soda)**, five original funder partners—EBCF, Y & H Soda, **The San Francisco Foundation (SFF)**, **The Kapor Center**, and **The California Endowment (TCE)**—came together to explore the challenges and opportunities facing BLOs in the Bay Area. As stated earlier, this work was spurred by the findings of the BABUF-sponsored report, *Black-Led Organizations in the Bay Area: From Crisis to Change*, which included the recommendation to launch “a multi-year, collective effort...to provide access to increased resources, advice, coaching, training, and succession planning for nonprofit leaders.”²

Additional funders were recruited to support this three-pronged effort to: 1) develop emerging, innovative BLOs in Alameda, Contra Costa, San Francisco, and San Mateo Counties, 2) strengthen the work of well-established community anchor organizations in that same service area, and 3) create learning opportunities open to all BLOs in the four core Bay Area counties plus Marin County and Santa Clara County. **Today, the Funders’ Collaborative is comprised of a diverse group of representatives from community, family, and private foundations and County government.** The Funders’ Collaborative is supported in designing and delivering this Initiative by Walker and Associates Consulting.

2 “Black-led Nonprofits Threatened: Increased Demand, Insufficient Resources,” [Press Release, BABUF], March 25, 2015 via PR Newswire, accessed online on 12/10/18 at <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/black-led-nonprofits-threatened-increased-demands-insufficient-resources-300056105.html>

Funders' Collaborative Members

Alameda County Board of Supervisors Keith Carson's Office

The Akonadi Foundation

The California Endowment*

The California Wellness Foundation

The East Bay Community Foundation*

The Kapor Center*

The San Francisco Foundation*

Sobrato Family Foundation

Walter & Elise Haas Fund

Y & H Soda Foundation*

** indicates founding members*

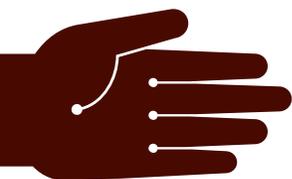
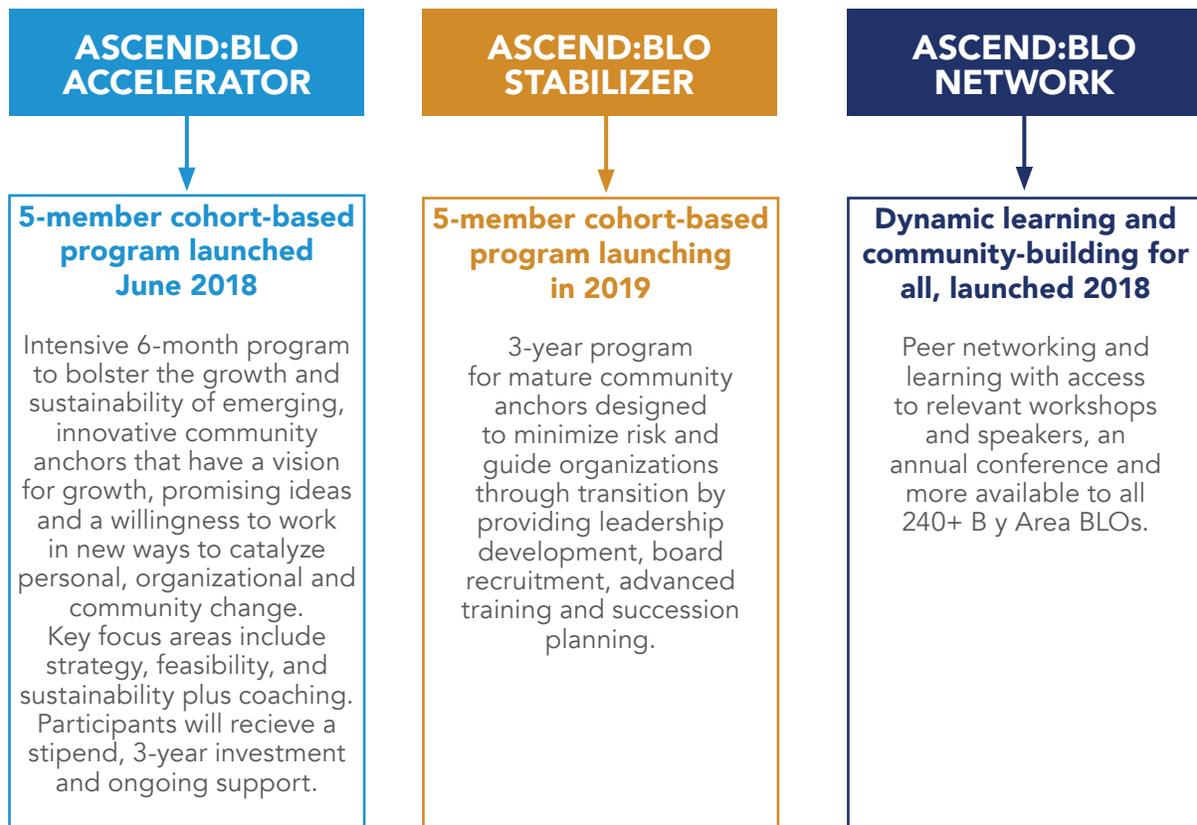
ASCEND:BLO's Three-Pronged Model: Network, Accelerator, and Stabilizer

The purpose of ASCEND:BLO, currently envisioned as a 5–7 year effort, is to:

- Enhance the growth, sustainability, impact and sense of community among Black-led anchor institutions in the Bay Area (focusing in four core counties: Alameda, Contra Costa, San Francisco, and San Mateo) in order to ensure the long-term vitality of those organizations and the communities of color they serve, and
- Apply a fresh, dynamic and replicable approach to collaborative capacity building that further develops the nonprofit sector with a lens towards race and equity.

The initiative does this through a network open to all BLOs to meet, partner, and share; an accelerator program for emerging organizations ready to transform their efforts with some additional capacity building; and a stabilizer for well-established community anchor organizations to strengthen their work (see Figure 1, next page).

Figure 1. Key Components of the ASCEND:BLO Initiative

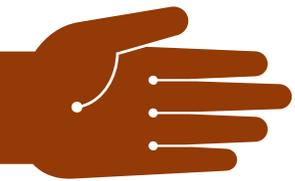


II. METHODOLOGY

This Final Evaluation Report for Year One draws from the Initiative’s organizing documents, interviews, surveys/polls, and the evaluators’ first-hand observations to describe the **progress of ASCEND:BLO to date, its successes, challenges, and recommendations for its future development.** Sources include:

- ASCEND:BLO Theory of Change (see **Appendix A**)
- Surveys/Live Polls
- Interviews
- Observations

This analysis focuses on the Funders’ Collaborative, the Accelerator, and the Network; the Stabilizer is still being developed for launch in 2019.



III. COMPONENTS OF THE INITIATIVE

The Funders' Collaborative

■ Purpose: The Focus on BLOs

One outcome of ASCEND:BLO is in **surfacing and recognizing the community of BLOs in the Bay Area**. At the Initiative's launch, it had identified a list of some 75 BLOs. Now, it lists a vibrant network of three times that: **240+ BLOs across six Bay Area Counties**. (See searchable directory online at <https://www.ebcf.org/blocommunity/>.) Together these organizations employ 9,000 people.

For the Funders' Collaborative, ASCEND:BLO represents a **Black-focused and Black-supporting effort** born of the realization that BLOs are addressing multifaceted, generational, and large-scale systemic issues facing some of the most vulnerable communities yet receive limited invitations to apply for funding, recognition, and support from the philanthropic community. The Initiative focuses on building the capacity of BLOs to access available funding, build relationships, form networks, and identify and create unique funding and development opportunities free from the current funding environment which too often produces a "chase the money" mentality. The recent struggles of BABUP itself, commissioner of the Black-Led Organizations in the Bay Area report and a 35-year old intermediary organization focused on uplifting and empowering Black communities throughout the Bay Area, serves as a sobering reminder of the **importance of this work**.

From the outset, funder partners recognized the **potential for the ASCEND:BLO effort to serve as a model** for others. In stakeholder interviews with evaluators at

// ...The strength and resilience in the community that has really done amazing things on limited resources... how do we help them strengthen long-term and think about sustainability."

the start of the Initiative, funders noted that the effort would be watched closely, but that this should not deter them from taking risks. Interviewees spoke about the **opportunity for the Initiative to prototype interventions** such as the accelerator and stabilizer to meet the needs of individual organizations at different phases of their development, and one expressed their hope that ASCEND:BLO would become **“gold standard” for supporting BLOs and other organizations with leaders of color**. Others shared their hopes that the effort would help BLOs advocate for social justice and systems change and that the Initiative itself might be embraced as a movement. Across the board, interviewees hoped to capture and disseminate lessons learned in ways that would support a **national commitment to similar efforts** and that would be valuable to other organizations.

The opportunity **to strengthen, maintain, and sustain “anchor” institutions** was a strong motivator. These organizations represent community gathering places where people connect and leadership development takes place; they are also often those that actively advocate and stand up for social and systems change. As one interviewee shared, a desired outcome of the Initiative would be for the organizations, as they emerge and evolve, **to find new ways to do this work that are “innovative and cutting edge.”**

// The recognition of race [as part of ASCEND:BLO] is not an agnostic fact. Historical and material trends have led us to this moment.”

Funders were also inspired by the way **the Initiative calls out race explicitly**, noting that this allows for the examination of factors that have led to the need for BLOs to give voice to the Black communities’ “multi-layered” (as opposed to “token” or “singular”) experiences. They noted that the focus solely on Black communities enables the exploration of organizations’

legacy, including **how implicit bias and institutional and structural racism have contributed—and continue to contribute—to attitudes about BLOs’ strengths and abilities**, and in turn, their eligibility to garner the financial support to sustain themselves and grow.

■ Operations: Observations of the Funders' Collaborative

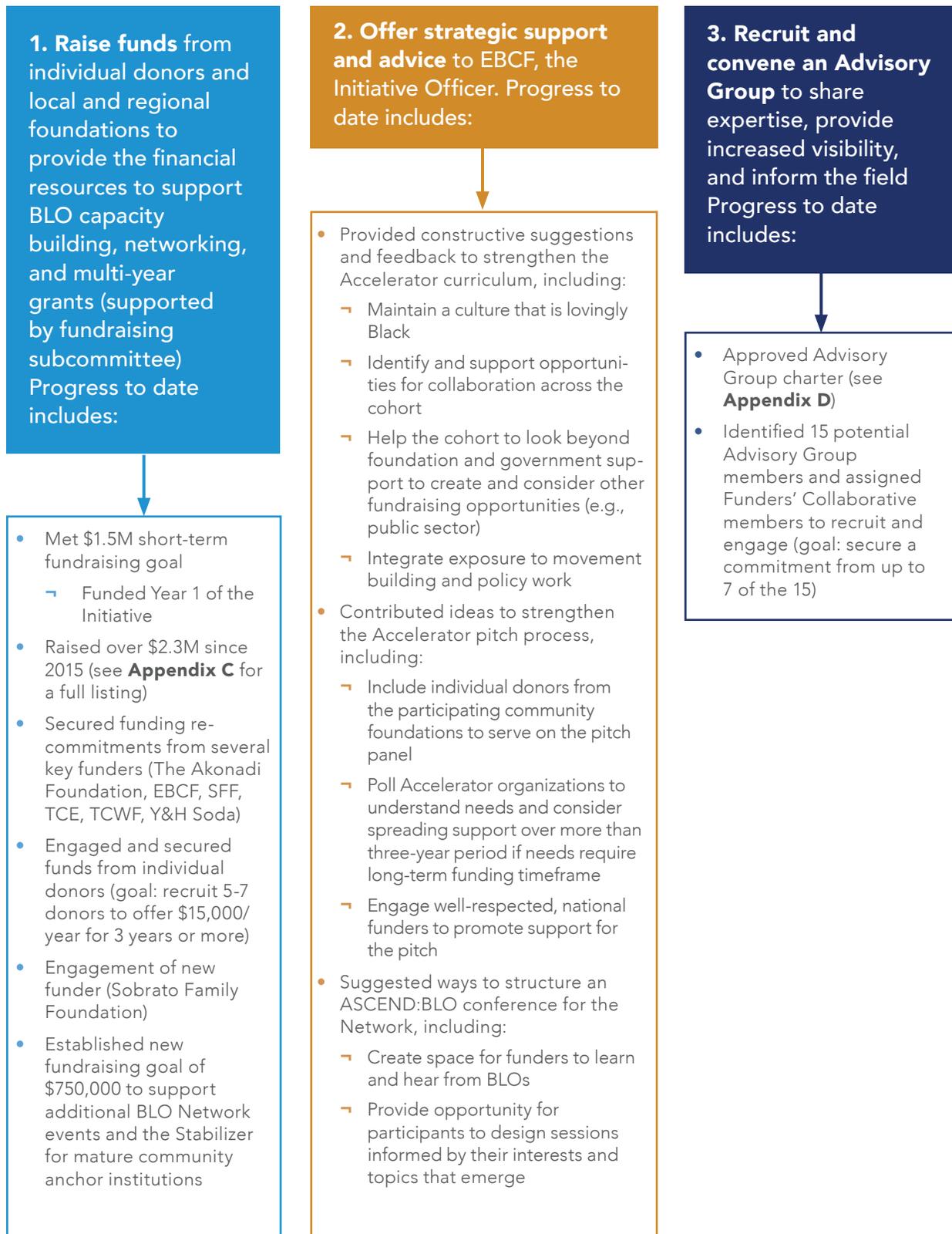
The Funders' Collaborative represents a like-minded, diverse, and engaged group **committed to modeling a new way for funders to strengthen, convene, and support Black-led anchor organizations** while moving away from traditional philanthropic approaches to designing and managing Initiatives. Meetings are efficient, guided by agendas with standing items, and informed by summaries of previous meetings provided by Walker and Associates as the consultants supporting Initiative design and management. Members are prepared to share updates on work for which they are responsible and to offer constructive feedback, as is the group's charge, to provide strategic support and direction to the Initiative. See **Appendix B** for a diagram of the governance model for ASCEND:BLO.

The tone of these meetings suggests that the group is **bonded by their shared commitment to BLOs** and the understanding that the Initiative is a unique, groundbreaking model that could spur national replication. Conversations are collegial, and members often complete each other's thoughts, with some members having worked together for many years. Ambassadors for this work, **the collaborative members use their collective knowledge, resources, and networks** to promote and advance the Initiative efforts.

Quarterly meetings of the Funders' Collaborative, along with the work of its subcommittees (e.g., cohort selection), are focused on the following three key functions. Progress made in each of these areas is also summarized on the following page (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. Funder Collaborative Progress Toward Key Goals



The enthusiasm of the Funders' Collaborative is contagious and suggests that the ASCEND:BLO Initiative has engaged and connected funders to support organizations in ways that have renewed their **commitment to and excitement about how they, as funders, can better support and structure capacity building for grantee partners** for greater, longer-lasting impact.

The Network

■ Network Makeup and Activities

The ASCEND:BLO Network is **open to all 240+ Bay Area BLOs**. The Network was launched in February 2018, bringing together organization leaders for **peer learning and networking**. A live poll at the launch event sought to gauge participants' interests, and given the choice of how they preferred to engage, 93% expressed interest in in-person networking and learning (e.g., as opposed to an online learning community). A second in-person convening was held in September 2018, which featured peer-led activities as well as "speed coaching" and "curbside consulting" opportunities. Further polling at the September event reflected³:

- **Unanimous interest in more network-wide events** (with 93% indicating interest in attending a 1-day, in-person conference in 2019)
- Most desired topics for future sessions or activities include **fund development**
- Aspirations and wants for the networking space include outdoor meetings/activities and healthy foods
- Strongest representation (72% or 21 respondents) from Alameda County
- **High interest in applying for future rounds of the Accelerator** (79% of all respondents) and/or Stabilizer (75% of all respondents)

3 See Bibliography: 9-27-18 BLO Live Poll Results – Network Gathering

The Accelerator

■ Accelerator Cohort

The purpose of the Accelerator is to enhance the work of BLOs that have **a vision for and are ready to increase their rate of growth** with additional capacity building. It consists of a 6-month intensive, bolstered by a 3-year investment and ongoing support. Applications were released in February 2018, selection occurred in May, and the cohort launched in June.

To qualify, organizations had to be a 501c3 nonprofit located in Alameda, Contra Costa, San Francisco, or San Mateo Counties, with Black leadership at the highest staff and board level; have a track record of at least five years supporting Black communities; and have at least two bold ideas for growth. Additional selection criteria included the organizational capacity to participate in an intensive program and provide real-time feedback.

There were 51 applications for the ASCEND:BLO Accelerator. Of these, five were selected for participation in the initial three-year cohort, listed below.

Accelerator Inaugural Cohort

African American Art and Culture Complex: Serving San Francisco's Western Addition and Fillmore communities, the African American Art and Culture Complex "seeks to nurture and facilitate the empowerment of the African-American community through Afro-centric artistic and cultural expression, mediums, education, and programming."

Black Organizing Project: Working in Oakland, the Black Organizing Project is a "Black member-led community organization working for racial, social, and economic justice through grassroots organizing and community-building in Oakland, California."

Community Housing Development Corporation: Serving North Richmond and the greater East Bay, the Community Housing Development Corporation "was founded in 1990 to eliminate blight, improve housing opportunities for current and future residents, and create better economic conditions."

The Hidden Genius Project: Serving Oakland, the greater East Bay, and San Francisco, the Hidden Genius Project “trains and mentors Black male youth in technology creation, entrepreneurship, and leadership skills to transform their lives and communities.”

Roots Community Health Center: Working in Oakland and the greater East Bay, the Roots Community Health Center is “dedicated to improving the status of health of East Bay residents.” Roots was founded in 2008 to “address the growing need for accessible, culturally appropriate, community-responsive, comprehensive health care in Oakland, California.”

The 46 BLOs that were not selected for the Accelerator were **all given the option of a follow-up conversation with Initiative leadership**. EBCF Capacity Building Initiative Officer, Byron Johnson, reports that this helped in **“building out those connections, allowing space to connect with me and provide real-time support—rarely done in philanthropy”** and that he heard from applicants: “I’m glad you’re taking the time, I appreciate having the conversation.”

Capacity Building Team

The Accelerator is served by a diverse group of five firms of consultants, trainers, and coaches, selected to reflect a range of specialty areas and to include a high level of **representation of Black capacity builders** (see **Appendix E** for detail).

Core Capacity Building Team

Be the Change Consulting

Blooming Willow Coaching

Jeweld Legacy

MMAPEU Consulting

Saad&Shaw

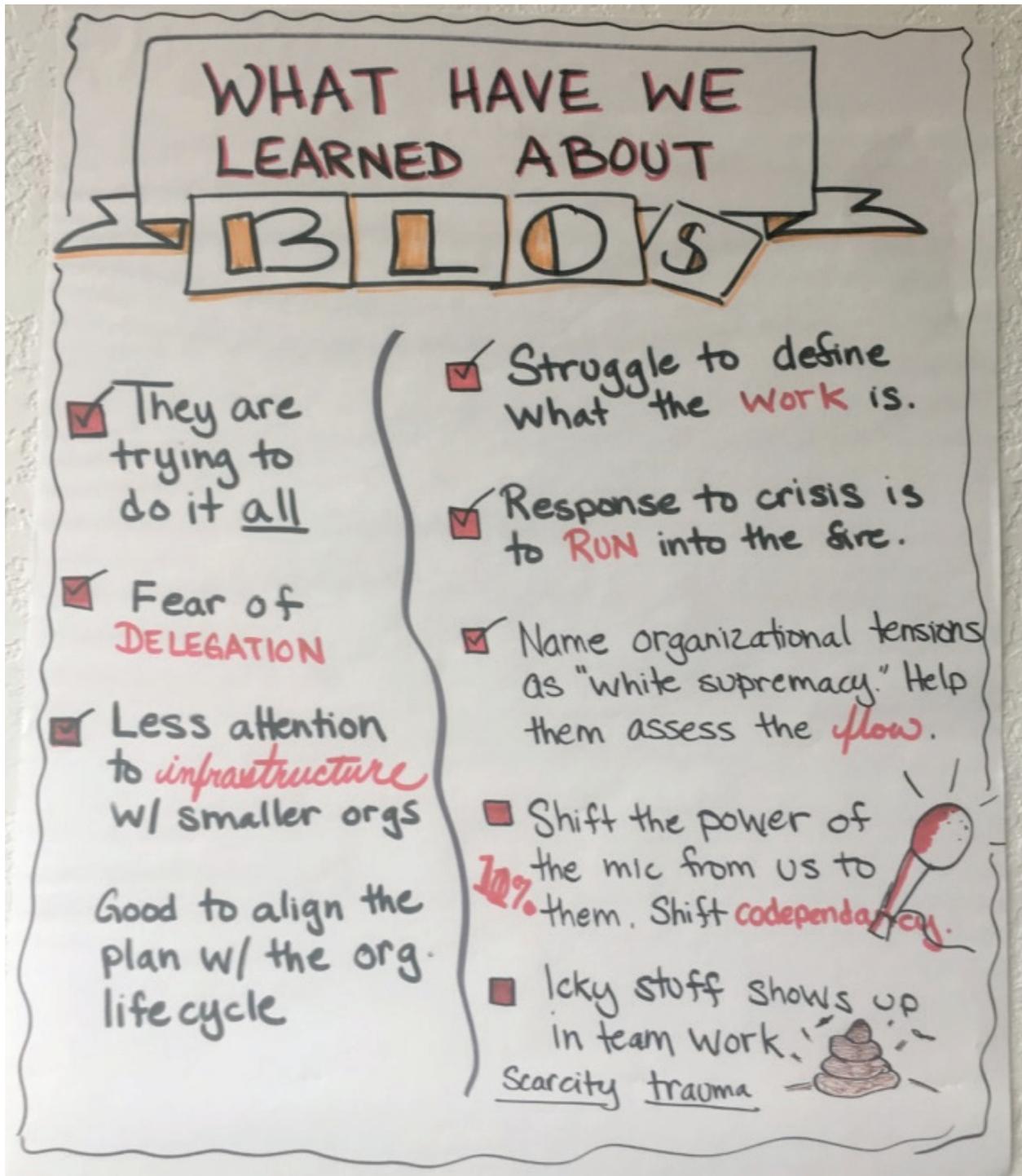
In reflecting on this component of the Initiative, Initiative Officer, Byron Johnson indicated that the capacity building team was selected before participating groups—or their specific needs—were identified, and that in retrospect, having a **clearer sense of what the groups need would have helped inform the selection** of capacity builders. Another observation is that the capacity building team presented a **wide range of approaches and ways of working**, both in how they organized the provision of services and in the depth of rigor in content delivery, which did not always align with initial expectations. Key takeaways include the importance of better understanding what capacity builders are bringing to the table, and of continuing to **develop the capacity of the capacity builders themselves**. Much of this learning also speaks to the Initiative Officer’s own role in communicating with—and how closely to manage—the capacity building team as he has served as a “broker and navigator,” helping to identify BLO needs and consultant/coach fit.

Capacity builders have also debriefed on the process to date, sharing common concerns about the **short time frame limiting their work** and not having had the opportunity for input in the design process. The launch of the initiative demanded that

Accelerator groups begin work with their capacity builders very rapidly, allowing **little time to assess needs and/or acclimate the organizations to working with a consultant or coach**. “Six months is too short for transformative results,” was a prevailing reflection. Capacity builders also acknowledged the great potential for working with the BLOs, noting “we have so much talent in the room” and that coexisting with the unique challenges faced by BLOs (captured in Figure 3, next page), “there are **tremendous positive conditions of resilience**, willingness to engage, impacts of services, and values to their communities.”

// Over the seven-year lifespan that we’ve articulated for this Initiative, I hope we all see a difference for BLOs: a pipeline to attract leadership, and that these organizations are stable and innovative and articulate unique strategies in their communities. I want to see increased levels of support for these agencies...appropriate levels of resources, equity...so their futures are more secure.”

Figure 3. Capacity Builders' "What We Have Learned About BLOs"



Additional reflections from the Capacity Building Team's debrief are captured in **Appendix F**.

■ Accelerator Sessions

From June to October 2018, Accelerator organizations participated in a **five-part curriculum** of capacity building sessions. These included a launch orientation focused on Readiness and Assessment as well as workshops on: **Ideation and Implementation, Messaging and Pitching, Fundraising/Resource Development, and Evaluation and Sustainability** (see **Appendix G**). Sessions received consistently high rankings from participants, averaging a low of 2.5 to a high of 3.6 on a four-point scale (except for the launch session, which was not rated).

// [It] struck the right balance...[the] work on coaching, resource development, building relationships, how to and the importance of collaborating, topics that promote and encourage folks working with others. I now have a peer as a thought partner, [I'm] no longer isolated. It's a powerful avenue for the success of our organization."

In interviews with executive directors of four of the five Accelerator organizations, beneficial aspects of the Initiative included its cultural competency—that it provides **safe and caring space** “to talk about issues that the mainstream is not facing” and **discuss how to address issues of “institutional racism and inequality.”** And where “being Black is not divorced from why we do this work... don’t have to be different from who you are.” One interviewee shared: “This is the **first experience with capacity building that has landed on my views** and impacts how I navigate the world.”

Observing the sessions, the value of “giving organizational leaders a time to talk, strategize, and gel” was clear. As well, facilitation including movement and visual exercises was effective in delivering content and keeping participants engaged.

Short-term Outcomes

Self-reported knowledge gain as described by before and after ratings have gone from 2.5 on a four-point scale to 3.6 on a four-point scale. Some executive directors

interviewed reported **greater clarity in their mission or areas for improvement**. Others said they developed a **new understanding of how to approach key areas of their work** (e.g., to see “resource development as part of each line of business”) and how to launch organizational development processes such as strategic planning or succession planning. Most also cited the importance of the **opportunity to work with, hear, and learn from their sister/fellow cohort members**. Many appreciated the ability to come together, share knowledge and resources, and potentially partner with other BLOs **in a non-competitive and supportive way**.

Interviewees were unanimous in reporting that:

- Their expectations of the Accelerator were met—“We have a new way of working... see ourselves as a catalyst for change,” “I felt my belonging was not questioned and that usually doesn’t happen.”
- The experience was worth their time—would otherwise not have had an environment and opportunity “to work with organizations across other fields... comparing notes and gaining other perspectives;”
- It made them feel closer to EBCF—citing Byron Johnson’s desire to see the groups succeed and his investment in building relationships; and
- It made them feel closer to their fellow/sister cohort members—due in large part to its “energizing, Black, positive space,” “convening locations that were conducive to learning,” and environment the consultants created allowing leaders and their teams to be vulnerable while focusing on “assets not gaps.”

// This initiative is the future of how we could work together.”

“We’re not only in a moment, but building a movement. This has felt like a two-way interest between the Foundation and the groups. For a lot of these organizations, they haven’t had the investment in being a BLO that EBCF is attempting to do, with the intention or limitations that BLOs have experienced in the broader world.”

Aspirations for the future

Overall the ASCEND:BLO was appreciated and seen by participants as groundbreaking for its asset-based, comprehensive, Black focus. In terms of room for improvement, some expressed a desire for more clarity on how to work with consultants to make best use of that support, set appropriate expectations, and get more time beyond the initial six months. Another hope for the future was to find ways to communicate about ASCEND:BLO to a larger audience, to celebrate the Initiative's approaches and successes.

Advice for Collaboratives Considering a Similar Initiative

Be clear about who it will serve – e.g., ASCEND:BLO is intentionally Black, not African American or people of color

Offer “multiple ways in”—e.g., funders’ collaborative, networking events with capacity building, accelerator, stabilizer

Build funder/donor interest. This is based on relationships.

Give the initiative ample ramp-up time to plan; without adequate planning time, it adds unnecessary complexity to “build the plane while flying it.”

Find someone with deep capacity building wisdom to lead. The effort will benefit from someone who “gets” nonprofits and their struggles.

Be clear on the capacity building model you want to use. Is it market-driven, putting the choice in organizations’ hands? Or is it a pre-selected team of capacity builders?

Be clear on the role of the backbone organization and what the lead funder will do vs. what other partners might best coordinate – e.g., assigning Be the Change to serve as a hub for capacity building coordination.



IV. Key Findings and Recommendations

The ASCEND:BLO Initiative is pioneering work. It draws from a mixture of approaches that have been attempted in different places, but have not been combined in quite this way before. In light of both the challenges and successes surfaced in this report, we present the following recommendations for the ASCEND:BLO as it continues to unfold, followed by advice for other groups that may wish to pursue a similar initiative.

Overall: First and foremost, this effort must continue. It is uniquely valuable in its focus on strengthening BLOs and providing a brave, safe space to be proudly Black. In centering race, it powerfully disrupts “philanthropy as usual.” In addition:

- Consider the value of cross-generational learning (i.e. bringing together leaders who have been at this work for a very long time with the younger generation of BLO leadership)

For the Funders’ Collaborative: Continue to maintain the quasi-board oversight role of funders as keepers of the vision, and to identify and draw in other funders and Black major donors by reaching out and developing those relationships. In addition:

- Fine-tune the purpose of continuing meetings
- In forming the Advisory Group, pay attention to the relationship and interaction of the two
- Speak to funders that are interested in this model elsewhere (e.g., in the South, on the East Coast, etc.)

For the Accelerator: Continue to mine for short- and longer-term results as to how participants are strengthening their individual and organizational capacity, recognizing that one year may be too soon to see significant results. In addition:

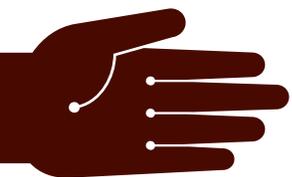
- Explore geographic expansion to other counties where Black communities have relocated (like Pittsburg, Antioch) but with center of gravity in Alameda/Oakland

For Capacity Building: Continue to invest in building the capacity of a wider capacity building cohort and build the pipeline of Black capacity builders. In addition:

- Consider market- or need-driven capacity building by placing the budgets in BLOs' hands to choose
- Retain a backbone group such as the role that Be the Change has played to serve as an organizing and coordinating central point for capacity building
- Decide what the focus of the capacity building sessions is: pitch a bold idea or to build capacity more broadly. If it's capacity more broadly, what is that capacity specific to each group, and then line up the coaching and capacity building more in line with the focus. As this was somewhat blurry, it resulted in some inefficiencies in timing and planning.

For the Network: Continue this unique and vibrant networking space. In addition:

- Identify priority topics to galvanize and cross-pollinate
- Consider how to leverage these network spaces for more community building, solidarity, sharing of resources, connections



Conclusion

Overall, the ASCEND:BLO initiative is universally appreciated for breaking new ground as an asset-based, comprehensive, unapologetically Black-focused effort. EBCF is recognized and commended for taking this bold leadership responsibility and running with it, standing on the shoulders of the initial BABUF report authored by Connie Walker.

By hiring a highly capable and caring Initiative Officer, Byron Johnson who comes to this work with extensive expertise as a capacity builder, ASCEND:BLO has gotten off to a successful start. Members of the Funders Collaborative have continued to be engaged, and actively providing the oversight to this effort.

The Network events have been well organized and enthusiastically attended –evidence that when intentional spaces are created for Black leaders to feel comfortable in their culture and in their affection for each other, Black excellence and love abound. The capacity building consultants have worked hard to provide brave, supportive, and energetic learning spaces that inspire the Accelerator organizations to do their best work and to partner with one another. Most important, Accelerator participant leaders anticipate emerging from the initiative more capable, more sustainable, and more effective.

To continue to document and reflect on this journey will tell us about the sustained impact of ASCEND:BLO beyond year one. While some changes are needed to strengthen the program, most of the foundational pieces are now in place for this effort to endure and excel. ■

The evaluation team is grateful to those we interviewed for this report. We thank you for your candor and insights:

1. Cedric Brown, The Kapor Center
2. Shomari Carter, District 5, County Board of Supervisors Keith Carson's Office
3. Sandra Davis, The California Endowment
4. Don Gilmore, CHDC
5. Melorra Green and Melonie Green, AAACC
6. James Head, East Bay Community Foundation
7. Byron Johnson, East Bay Community Foundation
8. Sangita Kumar, Be the Change
9. Stacy Manley, East Bay Community Foundation
10. Tanya Mayo, Be the Change
11. Aquil Naji, Roots Community Clinic
12. Brandon Nicholson, Hidden Genius
13. Bob Uyeki, Y & H Soda Foundation
14. Connie Walker, Walker and Associates
15. Sachi Yoshii, East Bay Community Foundation

Appendix A. ASCEND:BLO Theory of Change

THEORY OF CHANGE FOR A JUST EAST BAY

STRATEGIES

Grantmaking

Provide strategic & responsive grants that have an interdependent approach to building power that connects populations, issues and strategies

Use community organizing as a primary strategy

Fundraising & Donor Alignment

Influence donors/DAFs & other philanthropic partners with our grantmaking to expand our full pool of resources

Capacity Building

Provide intentional &/or sustained efforts that help leaders, organizations, and movements committed to social justice to realize their full potential

Advocacy, Policy & Narrative Change

Resource & amplify campaigns, change narrative thru messaging, OpEds using EBCF's voice

Conduct and support mission-aligned lobbying

Network Building & Connections

Weave & strengthen public + private sector partners across the ecosystem: community, business, government & philanthropy

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES 1-5 YEARS

For boys and girls of color, immigrants, low-income, undocumented, system-impacted youth, LGBTQIA, formerly incarcerated folks

Grantee partners & EBCF together achieve a minimum of 40 concrete policies resulting from organizing and policy campaigns across the two counties

\$250M in public resources, newly generated or re-allocated aligned to support our priority populations and issues

\$1.5M in donor resources, newly generated or re-allocated aligned to support our recommended groups in our priority strategies (2:1 anchor leverage)

The language of racial equity is more the norm. Perspectives on our priority populations shift from deficits to assets. Oppressed communities see themselves differently as positive change makers

Nonprofit infrastructure in historically under-resourced areas are stronger: southern Alameda, central and east Contra Costa & other potential areas—increased resources, stronger leadership bench, more efficient & effective mission work

INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES 6-10+ YEARS

Equity gaps decrease: Concrete policies & resources result from organizing & policy campaigns

More tangible people power: Community organizing result in stronger individual and collective power: leadership, skills, civic engagement, agency, voice

More collaborative funding with a regional mindset with more donors in alignment

Community groups are more resilient, able to adapt to changing environments & responsive to community context

Social narratives promote community strengths, hope & opportunity; challenge & denounce white supremacy & promote racial equity; elevate values & roles nonprofits add and play

Art & culture

EBCF's investments are aligned with our stated values

LONG-TERM TRANSFORMATIVE OUTCOMES 25+ YEARS

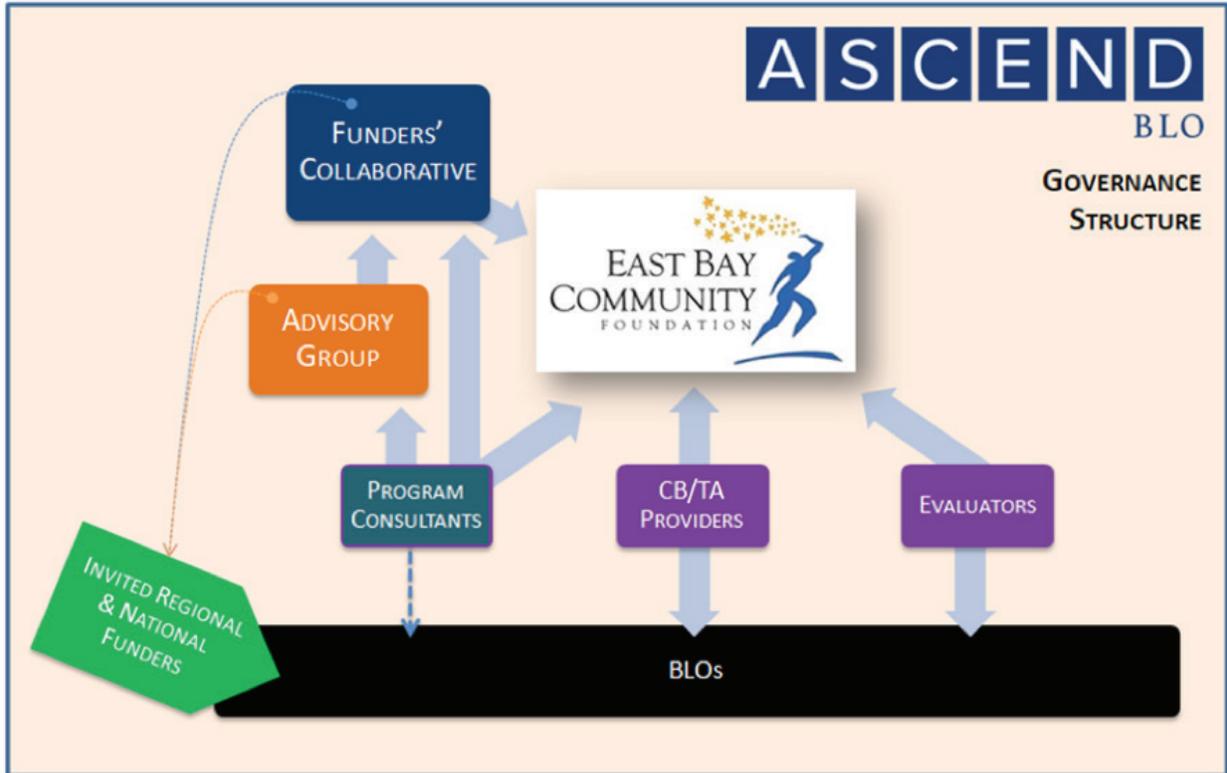
People who call the East Bay home and who are historically excluded are organized, control resources, set the agenda and shape narratives about themselves and their beloved communities

Health, opportunities and life outcomes are not pre-determined by race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality or zip code

EBCF is seen and experienced as the catalytic "Go-To" place that connects donors/funders and community organizations, government and business to bring about systemic change for equity and social justice

Appendix B. ASCEND:BLO Governance Structure

The Funders' Collaborative is comprised of a diverse group of representatives from community, family, and private foundations and County government who serve as the main governing body of the ASCEND:BLO Initiative.



Appendix C. List of Donors and Amount of Financial Support

Date	Funder	Amount	Term	Type
12/9/2015	Y & H Soda Foundation	\$5,000.00		Foundation Grant
8/2/2016	The California Wellness Foundation	\$40,000.00		Foundation Grant
8/18/2016	The San Francisco Foundation	\$159,000.00		Foundation Grant
9/28/2016	Y & H Soda Foundation	\$60,000.00		Foundation Grant
12/2/2016	The East Bay Community Foundation	\$100,000.00		Foundation Grant
2/3/2017	The East Bay Community Foundation	\$100,000.00		Foundation Grant
3/8/2017	The California Endowment	\$200,000.00		Foundation Grant
3/30/2017	Cestra Butner	\$100,000.00		Individual Support
4/14/2017	The California Wellness Foundation	\$30,000.00		Foundation Grant
5/17/2017	Alameda County - Keith Carson's office	\$200,000.00		Government Grant
5/17/2017	The Akonadi Foundation	\$20,000.00		Foundation Grant
8/23/2017	The San Francisco Foundation	\$159,000.00		Foundation Grant
10/11/2017	Walter & Elise Haas Fund	\$25,000.00		Foundation Grant
12/11/2017	Y & H Soda Foundation	\$75,000.00		Foundation Grant
12/20/2017	The California Endowment	\$450,000.00	2 years	Foundation Grant
2/23/2018	The California Wellness Foundation	\$150,000.00	3 years	Foundation Grant
3/20/2018	The California Wellness Foundation	\$30,000.00		Foundation Grant
5/31/2018	The Akonadi Foundation	\$20,000.00		Foundation Grant
6/1/2018	The San Francisco Foundation	\$150,000.00		Foundation Grant
6/15/2018	The East Bay Community Foundation	\$100,000.00		Foundation Grant
10/12/2018	The Ellebie Fund	\$15,000.00		Individual Support
10/18/2018	Y & H Soda Foundation	\$50,000.00		Foundation Grant
11/2/2018	Millikan Family Fund	\$100,000.00		Individual Support
	TOTAL	\$2,338,000.00		

Appendix D. Advisory Group role and Membership

The Advisory Group’s charge is to provide informed yet nonbinding strategic advice and support to the ASCEND:BLO Funders’ Collaborative and provide advocacy for the Initiative. There are no formal legal responsibilities, liabilities or decision-making authority. Members are asked to commit to attending two meetings per year, in-person or remotely. The Advisory Group will focus primarily on the following areas:

- Accelerator Pitch Panel Development – Informing process design and providing access and ideas to encourage donors and funders to invest in the bold ideas of the ASCEND:BLO Accelerator Cohort(s)
- Issue and Speaker Identification – Lifting up important topics and providing access to speakers with the potential to inform and inspire the ASCEND:BLO Network
- Impact & Learning – Sharing updates and impact data from the initiative to shine a light on the work and ensure learnings can be reapplied in the field

Advisory Group Members:

- Julia Beatty, Program Office, Borealis Philanthropy
- Tom Ellebie, Consultant, Retired HR Executive at Eastman Kodak
- Juliet Ellis, Chief Strategy Officer & Asst. GM, San Francisco Public Utilities Commission
- Fran Jemmott, Principal & CEO, Jemmott Rollins Group
- Susan Taylor Batten, President & CEO, ABFE
- Sherece Y. West-Scantlebury, Ph.D., President & CEO, Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation
- Thurman V. White, Jr., Chairman & CEO, Progress Investment

Appendix E. Capacity Building Team and Other Consultant Partners

Capacity Building Team:

Be the Change Consulting – Sangita Kumar, Principal & Founder; Tanya Mayo, Owner/Operations; Fong Marcolongo, Trainer/Coach; Candice L. Wicks, Trainer/Coach; Jenjii Hysten, Trainer/Coach; Franklin Hysten, Trainer Coach; Anita Steinbach, Trainer/Coach

Blooming Willow Coaching – Leslie Brown, Principal/Owner; Kim Fowler, Coach; Damon Gbuduala Azali-Rojas, Coach; Nicky Avant, Program Manager

Jeweld Legacy – Carol F. Burton, LMSW, Founder & CEO; Summer N. Jackson, MA, Project Manager; Frank J. Omowale Satterwhite, Ph.D., TA Provider; Barbara W. Fane, MA, TA Provider; Katie Kramer, MSW/MPH, TA Provider

MMAPEU Consulting – Ashara Ekundayo, Senior Consultant; Rev. Dr. Diane J. Johnson, Ph.D., President & Founder; Geraldo Marin, Consultant

Saad&Shaw – Bob Poole; Lewis M. Rambo; Mel Shaw; Pearl Shaw

Evaluators:

Teng & Smith, Inc. – Shiree Teng and Rogear Purnell-Mack, Co-Team Leads; Jakada Imani and Calvin Williams, Senior Associates; Mzima Scadeng, Associate

Consultants:

Connie Walker and Jeannine Walker, Walker and Associates Consulting, LLC

Appendix F. Capacity Builder Reflections on the Initiative



Appendix G. Accelerator Curriculum Overview



ACCELERATOR CURRICULUM OVERVIEW

SESSION ONE: READINESS AND ASSESSMENT -- SATURDAY, JUNE 23RD

- BUILD COMMUNITY/OPENING CEREMONY
- CONDUCT READINESS ASSESSMENT
- INDIVIDUAL/TEAM COACHING TO BUILD ALIGNMENT

SESSION TWO: IDEATION AND IMPLEMENTATION -- SATURDAY, JULY 14TH

- FROM BIG IDEA TO WORKING/PLANNING
- LINKING STRATEGY AND FINANCE
- CONTINUE BUILDING COMMUNITY/LEARNING

SESSION THREE: MESSAGING AND PITCHING -- SATURDAY, AUGUST 11TH

- BUILDING MOTIVATION, INTEREST, AND SUPPORT
- PITCH DEVELOPMENT & PRACTICE
- STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE MANAGEMENT

SESSION FOUR: FUNDRAISING/RESOURCE DEV. -- SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 15TH

- DEVELOPING A FUNDRAISING PLAN
- CAMPAIGN & PLAN ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES
- GUEST SPEAKERS – WHAT GETS FUNDED/SUPPORTED

SESSION FIVE: EVALUATION & SUSTAINABILITY --- SATURDAY, OCTOBER 13TH

- BUILDING ASSESSMENT TOOLS
- BUILDING LEADERSHIP, THE BOARD, AND THE BENCH
- EVALUATION STRATEGIES/NEXT STEPS
- CELEBRATION AND CLOSING CEREMONY

ASCEND:BLO Accelerator Showcase: The Spirit of Ubuntu

INAUGURAL COHORT—2018 LIVE POLL RESULTS REPORT

By Learning and Evaluation Team: Rogear Purnell-Mack and Mzima Scadeng

December 17, 2018

ASCEND:BLO Background

What started as a small group of concerned funders coming together to discuss the sudden closure of several Bay Area Black-Led Organizations (BLOs; registered nonprofit organizations with Black staff and/or Board Leadership) has grown into **ASCEND:BLO** (Accelerating and Stabilizing Communities through Equitable Nonprofit Development), **an initiative to ensure the long-term vitality of BLOs and the communities they serve** while applying a fresh, dynamic and replicable approach to collaborative capacity building that further develops the sector- with a lens towards race and equity.

ASCEND:BLO Accelerator

The Accelerator component is an intensive six-month cohort-based program launched in June 2018 designed to bolster the growth and sustainability of emerging, innovative community anchors that have a vision for growth, promising ideas and a willingness to work in new ways to catalyze personal, organizational and community change. Since June 2018, the inaugural cohort of five extraordinary BLOs—[African American Art and Culture Complex](#), [Black Organizing Project](#), [Community Housing Development Corporation](#), [The Hidden Genius Project](#) and [Roots Community Health Center](#)—has participated in a **learning cohort and built community as they honed their bold ideas for organizational and community impact. Participants receive an initial stipend** to offset the time commitment of their three-person teams along with a **three-year financial investment and ongoing coaching, capacity building, and mentorship.**

BLO Accelerator Cohort Showcase

On Monday, December 17, 2018, from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at Google's Community Space in San Francisco **the cohort showcased their sense of community and bold ideas in 15-minute pitches** as an audience of other cohort members, funders, investors, and ASCEND:BLO leaders, celebrated and supported their accomplishments.

A panel of funders and investors provided input and feedback on their bold ideas and announced awards of grants (\$10,000 for each cohort) and pro bono professional services. This panel included: Cedric Brown, Chief of Community Engagement at the Kapor Center; Sandra Davis, Program Manager at The California Endowment, Makulla Godwin, RN, MS of the Henry E. and Willie Mae Carter Ubuntu Fund, and Richard Tate, Vice President of Public Affairs at The California Wellness Foundation.

After each cohort's pitch, **the audience (minus the judging panel) gave feedback in the form of a live poll**. Question 2 of the 4-question live poll was used to determine the "Best in Class/Peer Choice" winner of an additional \$15,000 grant. The announcement of the winner took place after the panel members gave feedback to all of the cohorts. The following report includes the results of the 5 live polls conducted at the BLO Accelerator Cohort Showcase.

Live Poll Participants

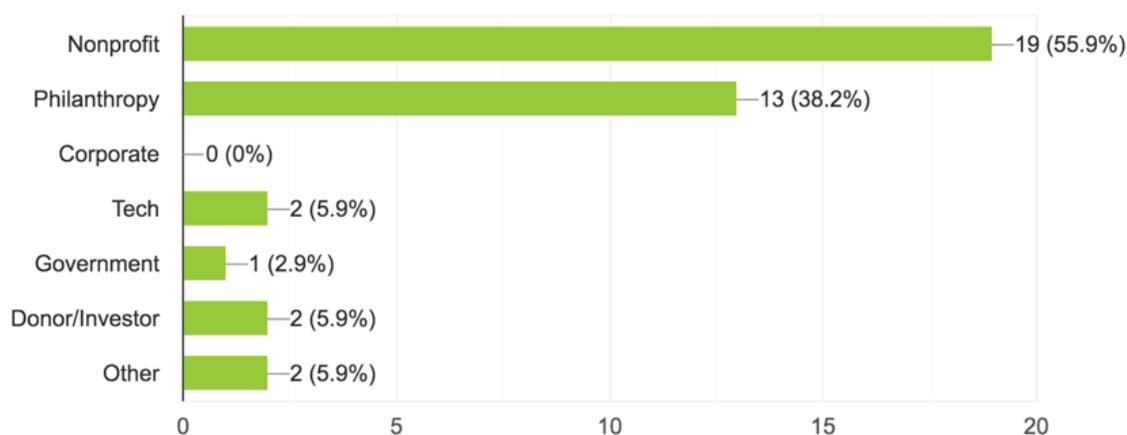
The audience was invited to participate in each live poll using their personal cell phone or other internet-connected device. Thirty-four people submitted responses to the first live poll conducted (for the Black Organizing Project). The second poll (for the Community Housing Development Corporation) collected thirty-two responses. Thirty participants submitted responses to the following three live polls for the African American Art and Culture Complex, the Roots Community Health Center and The Hidden Genius Project.

Question 4 asked, "What sector(s) do you represent? Select all that apply."

The following graph shows the responses to the poll, which included the most participants (n=34). The answers to this question varied slightly within the other polls because the other polls included fewer respondents (n=32 to 30).

What sector(s) do you represent? Select all that apply.

34 responses



The great majority of participants represented either the Nonprofit (n=19; 55.9%) or Philanthropy sectors (n=13; 38.2%). Only seven participants represented other sectors, including Tech (n=2; 5.9%), Other (n=2; 5.9%), Donor/Investor (n=2; 5.9%), and Government (n=1; 2.9%).

Conclusion

All five cohorts received positive results and feedback from the judges' panel and the audience. All of the presentations were deemed good to exceptional, with only one audience member voting once for "Needs Improvement." Specific feedback for each BLO cohort varied but common strengths included passion, vision, and clarity. The values "Purpose" and "community building" were popular across the board, receiving 70% or more votes in each live poll.

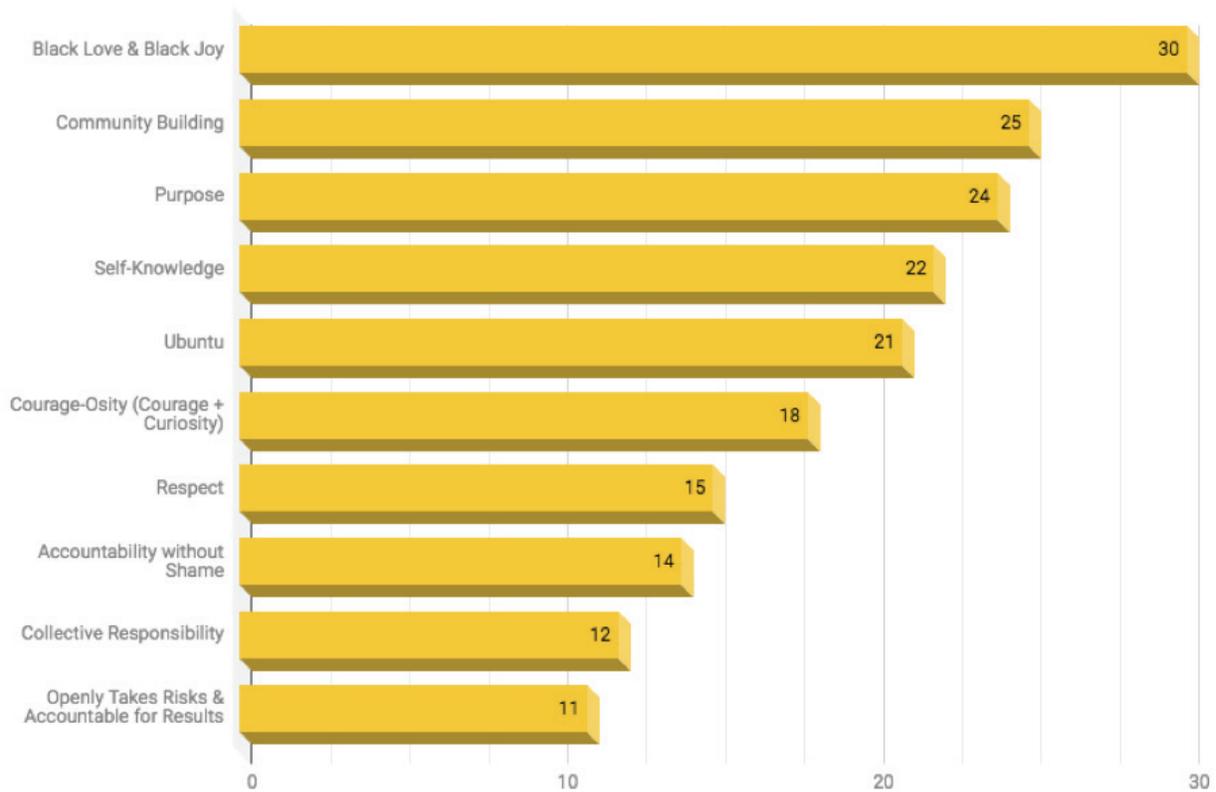
Feedback for Each BLO

The live polls provided an opportunity for the audience to share their opinion of each cohort's strengths and areas for possible improvement. The following are charts showing the results of each poll.

■ African American Art and Culture Complex

Which value(s) did the team most exhibit? Select all that apply.

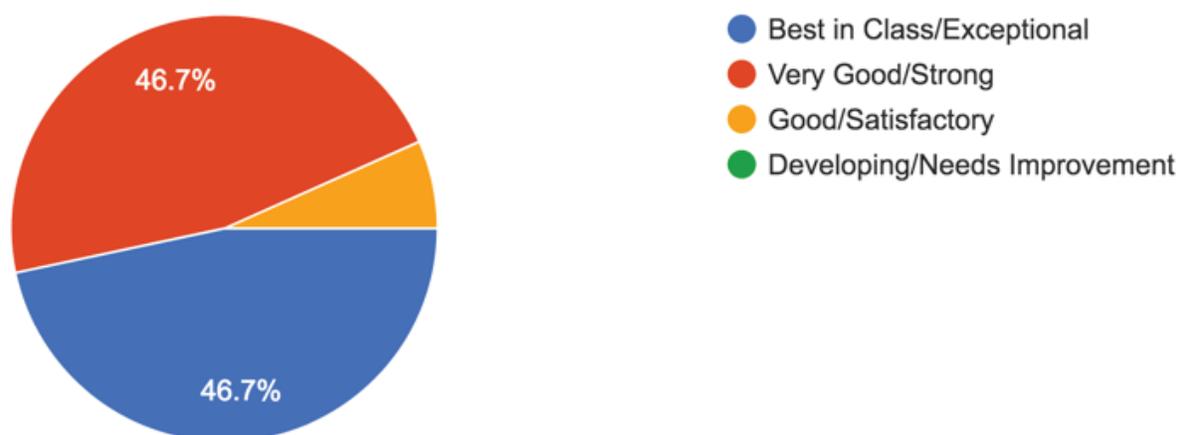
African American Art and Culture Complex - 30 Respondents



- "Black Love & Black Joy" received a vote from all thirty respondents.
- "Community Building" was the second most voted for value with twenty-five votes (83.3%).
- Only 36.7% of respondents chose "Openly Takes Risks & Accountable for Results."

What is your overall assessment of the team's presentation (content and delivery):

30 responses



The responses to this question determined the winner of an additional \$15,000 grant. The winner was determined by calculating which cohort received the highest percentage of “Best in Class” votes. The African American Art and Culture Complex won the award with 46.7% of their 30 responses choosing “Best in Class.”

Audience Loved:

- Energy, vision, and purpose
- Diverse funding
- Multimedia presentation

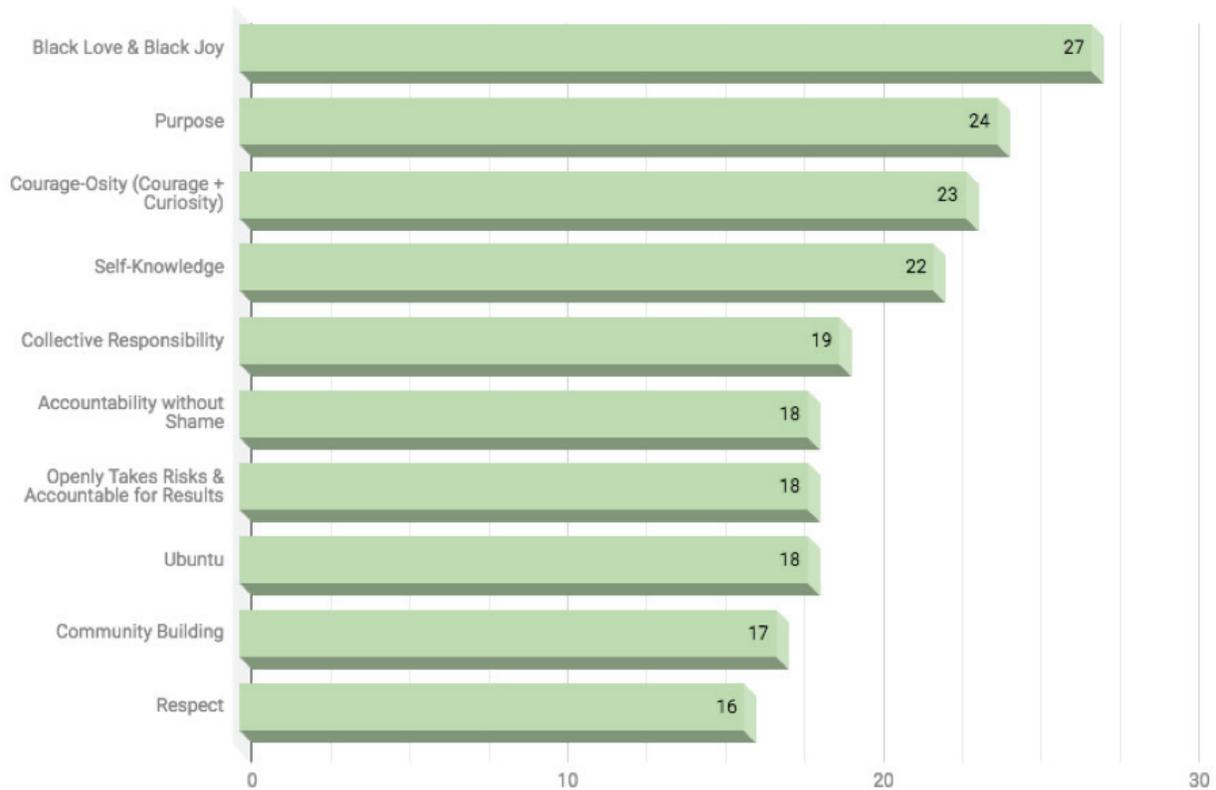
Audience wanted:

- To know more about who their demographic is
- To know what their actual programming is and how does it impact their areas of focus
- Stronger case for how their mission affects the community

■ Black Organizing Project

Which value(s) did the team most exhibit? Select all that apply.

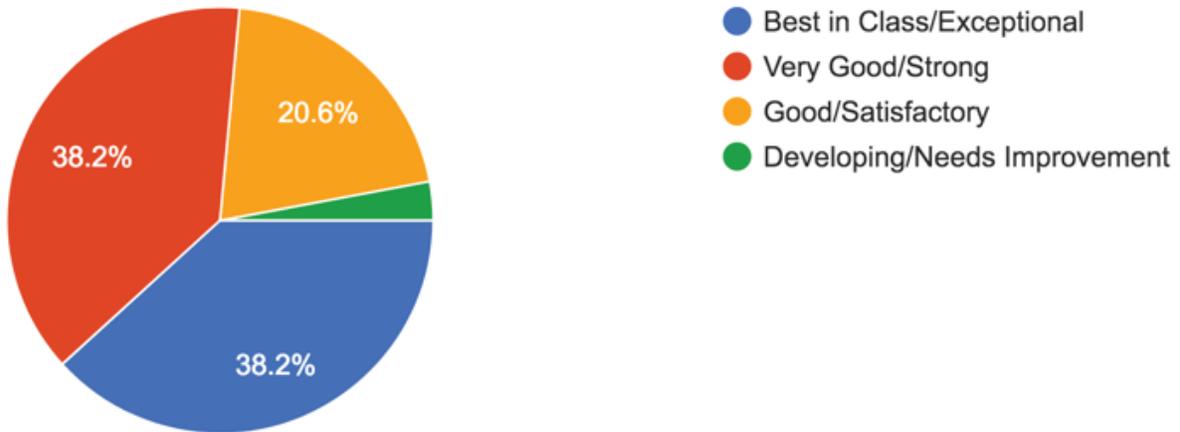
Black Organizing Project - 34 Respondents



More than half of the respondents voted for all of the values, with the exception of respect, which was still a high 47.1%. According to the audience, Black Organizing Project's strongest exhibited values were "Community Building" (91.2%), "Black Love & Black Joy" (79.4%), "Purpose" (70.6%), and "Courage-Osity (Courage + Curiosity)" (67.6%).

What is your overall assessment of the team's presentation (content and delivery):

34 responses



Of the thirty-four people who responded to this question, thirteen voted for “Best in Class/Exceptional” and thirteen voted for “Very Good/Strong”. Only one person (3%) voted “Developing/Needs Improvement.”

Audience Loved:

- Unapologetic in their mission, objective, and strategy
- Passion for and commitment to their community
- Spirit
- Their presentation and the way that each member shared the spotlight and contributed

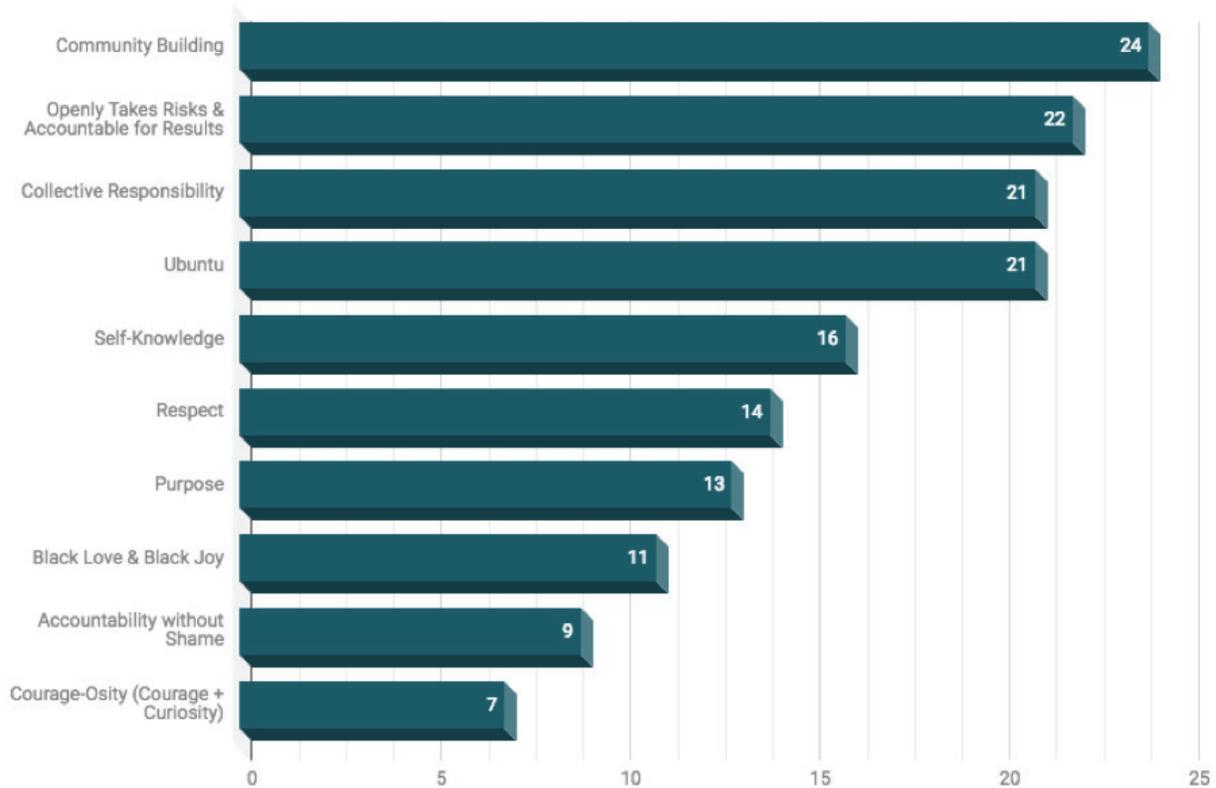
Audience wanted:

- More specifics about the organization

■ Community Housing Development Corporation

Which value(s) did the team most exhibit? Select all that apply.

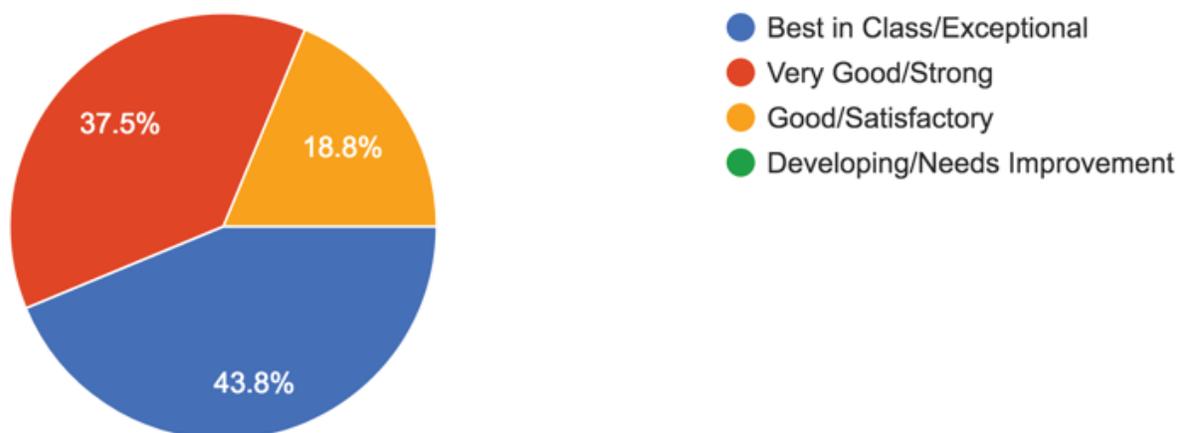
Community Housing Development Corporation - 32 Respondents



The most popular values voted for the Community Housing Development Corporation were “Purpose” (84.4%), “Community Building” (75%), “Openly Takes Risks & Accountable for Results” (68.8%), and “Collective Responsibility” (65.6%). The least popular values were “Courage-Osity (Courage + Curiosity)” (21.9%) and “Accountability without Shame” (28.1%).

What is your overall assessment of the team's presentation (content and delivery):

32 responses



Six people voted "Good" while everyone else voted "Very Good" or "Best in Class". No one voted "Developing/Needs Improvement" for the Community Housing Development Corporation's presentation. They had the second highest percentage of "Best in Class" votes (43.8%) amongst the BLO cohorts.

Audience Loved:

- Urgency of the problem they address
- Clear vision and purpose
- Expressed understanding of what project will take
- Building on work that already exists
- Sustainable Business model that will require a one-time investment

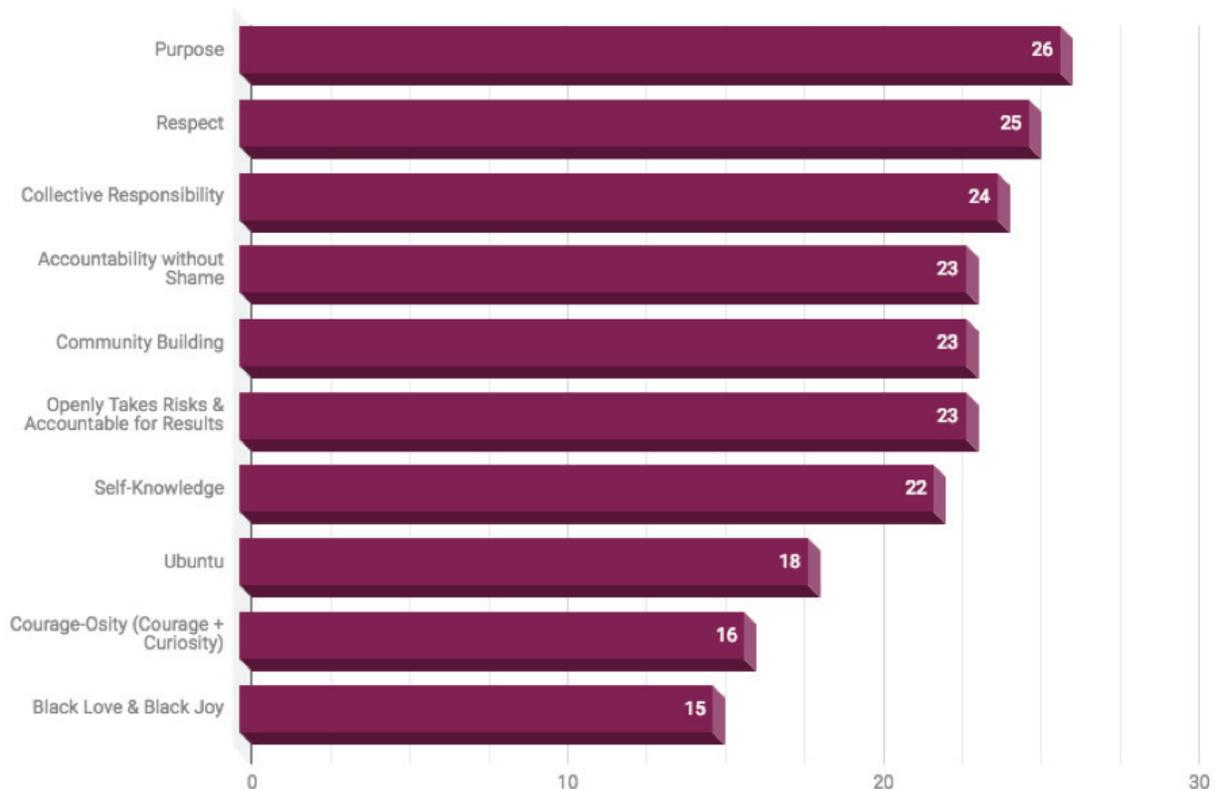
Audience wanted:

- More stories incorporated to bring the data to life
- More elevation of the women in the organization

■ Roots Community Clinic

Which value(s) did the team most exhibit? Select all that apply.

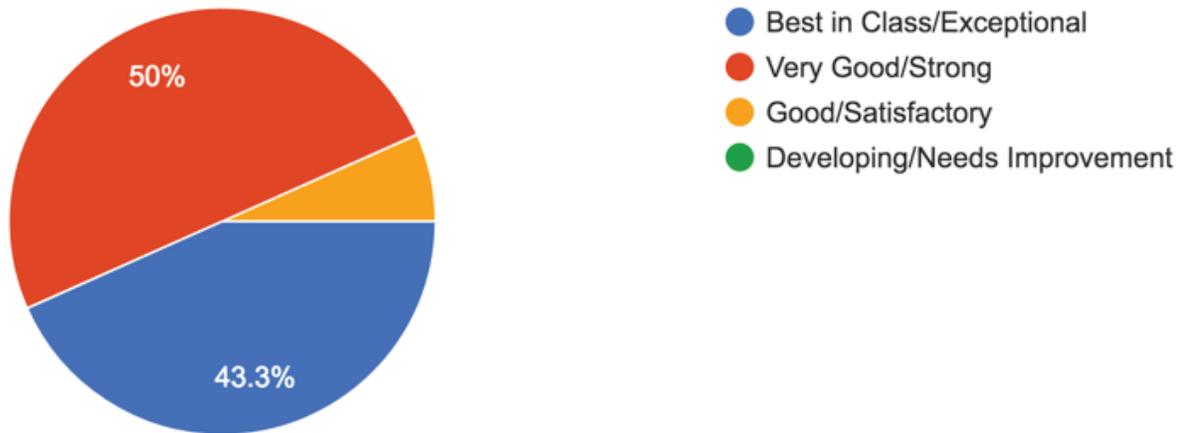
Roots Community Health Center - 30 Respondents



Of the thirty respondents, twenty-two to twenty-six voted for the top seven values: "Purpose", "Respect", "Collective Responsibility", "Accountability without Shame", "Community Building", "Openly Takes Risks & Accountable for Results", and "Self-Knowledge". The less popular values received fifteen to eighteen votes each (50%-60%): "Black Love & Black Joy", "Courage-Osity (Courage + Curiosity)", and "Ubuntu."

What is your overall assessment of the team's presentation (content and delivery):

30 responses



The audience voted favorably for the Roots Community Health Center's presentation. They received 50% votes for "Very Good/Strong". Their 43.3% votes for "Best in Class" scored them as a close third place for the audience choice award. None of the thirty respondents voted for "Developing/Needs Improvement."

Audience Loved:

- Social Entrepreneurship aspect
- Serving immediate needs
- Good understanding of the community
- Strong Financial model
- Clear ask
- Dynamic and skilled team

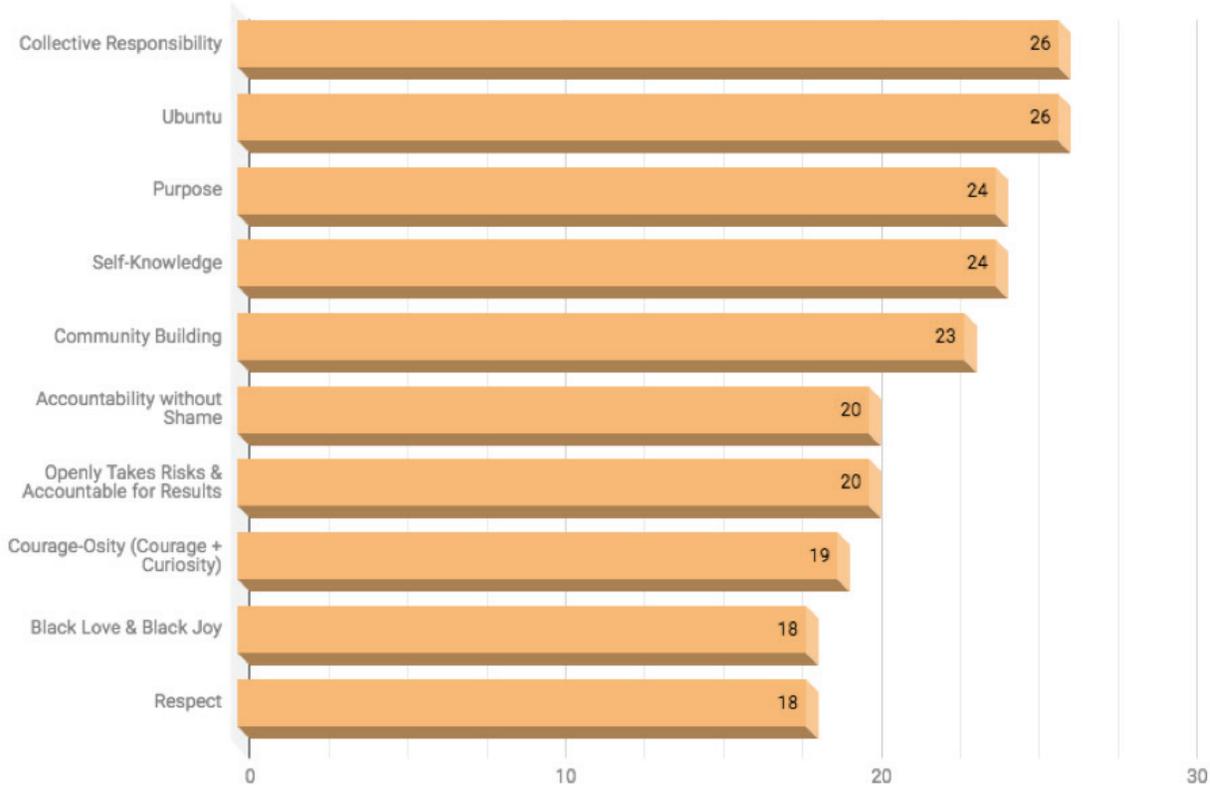
Audience wanted:

- To know more about the roots of the entrepreneurship program
- To know more about collaborations with others

■ The Hidden Genius Project

Which value(s) did the team most exhibit? Select all that apply.

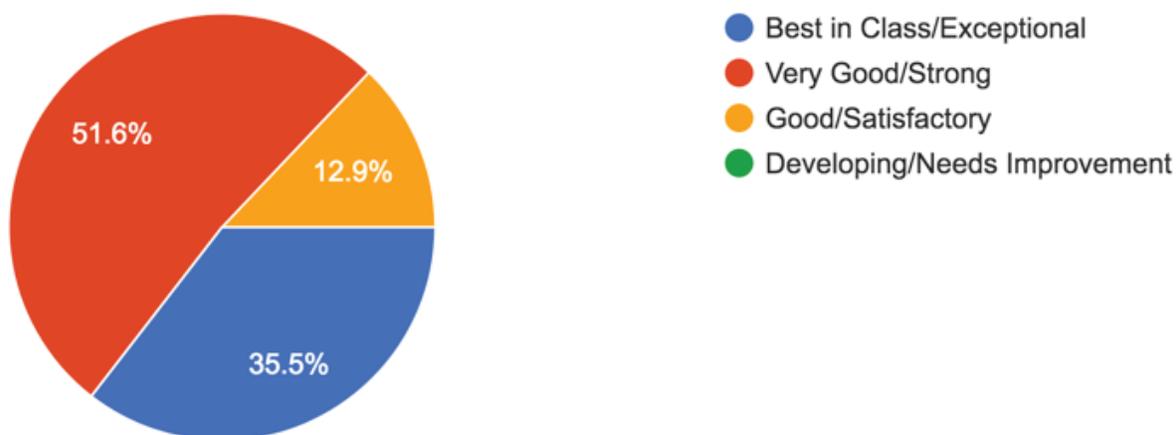
The Hidden Genius Project- 31 Respondents



Of the thirty-one respondents, The Hidden Genius Project received the most votes for “Collective Responsibility” (83.9%) and “Ubuntu” (83.9%). All of the values received at least eighteen votes (58.1%).

What is your overall assessment of the team's presentation (content and delivery):

31 responses



The audience rated The Hidden Genius Project's presentation highly. Of the thirty-one responses, "Good/Satisfactory" received the least votes (12.9%), 51.6% were for "Very Good/Strong", and 35.5% were for "Best in Class/Exceptional."

Audience Loved:

- The target population
- Collective impact idea: leveraging strengths
- The discussion about "Why"
- The love, strength, and warmth shown for their work

Audience wanted:

- To know more about the Stockton organizations that want to partner with them
- To understand why the focus on Stockton (e.g., context and partners)

Evaluation Team

Shiree Teng and Rogéair Purnell-Mack, Co-Team Leads

Jakada Imani and Calvin Williams, Senior Associates

Mzima Scadeng, Associate

Melissa Mendes-Campos, Editor

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EBCF at bjohnson@eastbaycf.org

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