

United is *the way* to Champion Change | Black-led Social Change

Recognizing that poverty disproportionately impacts Black families in our region, Black-led Social Change is focused on bringing greater diversity of solutions and thought leadership to the work of United Way of Greater Cincinnati. The 2018 United Way of Greater Cincinnati's [Black-led Social Change Cincinnati report](#) shaped our approach by providing a better understanding of the unique strengths, opportunities and challenges in our region and guided our efforts to reduce disparities by race and place.

CHAMPIONS OF CHANGE

The Champions of Change program, the first of two efforts, is aimed at increasing the investment of time, talent and treasure in community-based Black-led ideas addressing poverty. The program began in 2019 by selecting 15 community leaders with diverse backgrounds, skills and perspectives to work together to create social change in Greater Cincinnati.

Champions commit to participating in a one-year leadership and design program, rotating annually. With resources and support from United Way and other community partners, Champions:

- Learn alongside grassroots leaders and other experts
- Build on knowledge and skills around grantmaking and other topics
- Use their collective wisdom and networks to address community needs

Each year Champions will work on a shared project that improves outcomes for Black people in Greater Cincinnati. In its inaugural year, the Champions designed the Black Empowerment Works program.

BLACK EMPOWERMENT WORKS

Black Empowerment Works is a program that uplifts and promotes Black economic and social prosperity by providing resources and funding to Black-led, grassroots ideas, programs and projects. At its core, it is an equity-focused grant and support program that will help to address poverty in Greater Cincinnati. In 2020, the program awarded more than \$600,000 in grants to 29 local, Black-led initiatives with focus areas in education, financial stability, health and community connectedness. Grant disbursements ranged from \$8,500 to \$25,000.

One of the biggest benefits of the program, grantees also receive beneficial resources to support their ideas, including access to volunteers and mentors, training and other opportunities.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR CHAMPIONS OF CHANGE & BLACK EMPOWERMENT WORKS

Champions of Change will launch its second Leadership Class in Fall 2020. The new class of participants will focus on a new project, while providing support to Black Empowerment Works.

The current Black Empowerment Works leadership group will continue to connect the 2020 grantees with dedicated volunteers and mentors who provide additional support to their work. United Way of Greater Cincinnati is committed to continuing the Black Empowerment Works grant program into 2021.

United is *the way* to champion change.

BLACK EMPOWERMENT WORKS GRANTEES SEE THE VALUE OF UNITED WAY

"Small businesses don't have access to resources such as these, they simply can't afford them," said Steven Easley, owner of the Easley Blessed Foundation, which received a \$25,000 grant to provide multi-media education that helps people and nonprofits voice their stories.

"When United Way steps in and fills that gap, that is generational change, because these are the seeds of something that will grow this community. When you invest in me, the return is so much greater because I am here, my kids go to school here, my wife goes to work here – I am invested in this community. You are helping me to do more."

Easley's Foundation will provide multi-media training in software, photography, videography, content creation and more with goals of building career pathways and producing more content created by Black people.

BLACK EMPOWERMENT WORKS SUPPORTS COMMUNITY LEADERS LIKE MARQUICIA



Marquicia Jones-Woods founded Q-KIDZ 39 years ago with a single purpose: empowering youth living in poverty in the West End. What started as a one-woman effort to engage youth in positive after-school activities has grown into a nationally recognized, award-winning dance program. The organization has empowered more than 100 girls, nurturing and building their leadership potential. For the first 37 years, Marquicia personally funded the program, not wanting to turn away any girl because of an inability to pay the nominal tuition. Black Empowerment Works is the first major grant the organization has

secured, and it will give Marquicia and her team the ability to focus more of their time and attention on accomplishing the mission so more young girls can experience the program.

INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE?

We welcome partners! For more information about Black-led Social Change, Champions of Change or Black Empowerment Works visit uwgc.org/black-led or contact Jena Bradley at black-led@uwgc.org or 513-762-7118.