



UNITED BLACK FUND
OF GREATER CLEVELAND

Harvesting Our Legacy

Resilient Roots Bear Good Fruit

Strengthening Systems. Expanding Opportunity.

Building the foundation for a stronger community.



United Black Fund of Greater Cleveland

2025 Annual Report

Harvesting Our Legacy: Resilient Roots Bear Good Fruit
Strengthening Systems. Expanding Opportunity.

Leadership Message

In 2025, the United Black Fund of Greater Cleveland took significant strides in honoring our legacy, recognizing that strong roots nurtured through intentional investment and meaningful partnerships ultimately yield fruitful outcomes for the community. Under the guidance of our former CEO, Cecil J. Lipscomb, we entered a transformative year that marked a pivotal shift in our leadership as Cheryl Perez stepped into the role of executive leader. Our commitment remained unwavering: to not only enhance the services we offer but also to improve the methods we employ in delivering them.

This year stood out as a hallmark of transition and transformation. Moving away from conventional practices, the United Black Fund embraced a strategic shift to develop comprehensive systems, bolster partnerships, and significantly invest in our organizational capacity. This proactive approach is designed to lay the groundwork for sustainable, long-lasting impact within our community.

As we prepare to step into 2026, our focus will pivot toward activation. We are dedicated to ensuring that the systems we have established translate into tangible opportunities, expanded access, and increased economic mobility for those we serve. Through this work, we aim to empower individuals and families, fostering an environment where growth and prosperity are within reach for all.

About UBF

The United Black Fund (UBF) is dedicated to promoting equity and expanding opportunities through thoughtful and targeted grantmaking and fiscal sponsorship. As part of its evolution in 2025, UBF expanded its mission beyond merely providing financial support. It has taken on the role of a systems-builder, actively working to align resources, foster partnerships, and implement innovative programs. This comprehensive approach aims to create lasting, positive changes within communities, ensuring that the impact of its efforts is sustainable and far-reaching.

Our Approach in 2025

In 2025, UBF prioritized capacity before scale. Through direct engagement with community partners, it became clear that strengthening nonprofit infrastructure was essential to achieving workforce outcomes. UBF invested in building organizational readiness, aligning partners, and designing systems that support long-term success.

Grantmaking: Investment to Impact

UBF has made a **significant investment of \$400,000**, distributing funds to **61 organizations across four essential focus areas**. This strategic funding aims to tackle both urgent needs and promote sustainable long-term outcomes for the community.

- 32 Organizations received funding in the Basic Needs Category
- 27 Organizations received funding in the Workforce Development Category
- 9 Organizations received funding in the Social Justice Category
- 27 Organizations received funding in the Education Category

The impact of these investments is far-reaching, resulting in expanded access to safe and stable housing, as well as critical essential services that improve quality of life.

Additionally, there has been a notable increase in workforce training opportunities, empowering individuals with the skills they need to succeed in the job market. Programs that foster youth development have been enhanced, providing young people with valuable resources and support for their growth.

Furthermore, the funding has bolstered advocacy efforts, ensuring that community voices are heard and represented. By collaborating with **34% new partners**, UBF has successfully broadened its ecosystem, integrating fresh leaders and innovative approaches into the community impact pipeline. This initiative not only strengthens existing programs but also invites fresh perspectives and solutions to address the complex challenges faced by the community.

Program Spotlight: CDTO

The Center for Diverse and Thriving Organizations (CDTO) stands as UBF's most substantial investment in enhancing the capabilities of nonprofit organizations. Funded with \$350,000 from Cuyahoga County's American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), CDTO was meticulously crafted to empower nonprofit leaders with essential tools and resources for developing robust workforce programs.

Through a comprehensive eight-session cohort model, participants engaged in collaborative learning and hands-on projects, creating innovative capstone initiatives that directly address workforce needs across various sectors, including healthcare, manufacturing, technology, and hospitality.

The outcomes of this initiative have been noteworthy:

- Organizations have significantly strengthened their operational capacities, enabling them to function more effectively.
- Tailored workforce strategies have been developed, ensuring alignment with the demands of local employers and enhancing job readiness for community members.
- Pathways have been established to actively serve 200 residents, providing them with the training and resources needed to enter the workforce.

CDTO not only positions nonprofits as catalysts for workforce development but also amplifies their influence in the community, fostering a ripple effect that extends the benefits of individual programs into broader, impactful community outcomes.

Program Spotlight: MORTAR

The MORTAR Entrepreneurship Academy stands as a pivotal foundation for fostering economic mobility within the community. In 2025, a diverse group of 18 ambitious entrepreneurs embarked on an innovative dual-cohort program, meticulously designed to cater to both those in the early stages of their business journeys and those looking to expand their established ventures.

This comprehensive initiative featured a variety of enhancements aimed at maximizing participant success. Entrepreneurs benefited from structured coaching sessions that provided personalized guidance and strategic insights. Additionally, the program offered expanded networking opportunities, allowing participants to connect with industry leaders, potential investors, and fellow entrepreneurs, thus enriching their business ecosystems.

The outcomes of this initiative were remarkable:

- Every participant successfully completed the program, culminating in a competitive pitch event where they showcased their business ideas.
- Each entrepreneur secured funding to propel their ventures forward, enabling them to take concrete steps toward realization and growth.
- As a result, their businesses were strategically positioned for both scalability and long-term sustainability in an ever-evolving marketplace.

MORTAR plays a crucial role in strengthening the pipeline of Black-owned businesses, equipping them with the tools, resources, and networks necessary to engage effectively in regional economic systems and drive lasting impact within their communities.

Looking Ahead: 2026

In 2026, following the establishment of its systems in 2025, UBF will launch initiatives to connect Northeast Ohio Grassroots organizations with valuable opportunities that will advance mobility and economic development in our community. This strategic phase will focus on significantly expanding programming, fiscal support, and grant-making, allowing more community members to benefit from these resources. Additionally, UBF will implement robust tracking methods to gauge measurable outcomes, ensuring that the efforts made translate into real, positive changes within the community. This transition marks a crucial shift from a focus on development to one centered on impact, with a commitment to ensuring that all investments contribute to meaningful, tangible results for the communities served.

2025 Leadership & Governance

Board Officers:

Lynn Johnson, Board Chair

Sharron Murphy-Williams, Vice Chair

Grady Burrows, Secretary

Amos Mahsua, Treasurer

Board of Directors:

Aaron O'Brien

Andrew Newsome

Cheryl Cooper-Perez

Kent Whitley

LaToya Smith

Regenia G. Lane

Roderick H. Adams Jr., D.D.S.

Shelley A. Tobias

Tenora Edwards

Tiarrah Kent

Vicki Dansby

John Gerak

Executive Leadership:

Cheryl Perez, Interim CEO

Twyla N. Turner, Director of Program Resources

Staff & Program Leadership:

Venica Hearst, Executive Assistant & Program Leader

Celeste Terry, Grants Manager

We Are Building Opportunity

In 2025, we made deliberate investments to strengthen the systems, partnerships, and organizations that support our community.

The foundation is now in place.

As we move into 2026, our focus is clear:

to activate this work—connecting the community to opportunity, advancing workforce pathways, and delivering measurable outcomes that strengthen economic mobility across Greater Cleveland.

Join Us in Expanding Opportunity



Partner

Collaborate with us to strengthen community impact



Invest

Support the infrastructure that drives lasting change



Engage

Advocate, connect, and help amplify this work

United Black Fund of Greater Cleveland

www.unitedblackfund.org

Resilient roots have been planted. The work ahead is to ensure they bear fruit for generations or *ceens*.