

Berkshire Taconic COMMUNITY FOUNDATION



Equity Fund Impact Report 2024

Empowering Communities and Creating Lasting Change

By Aljcia Bacon, Community Engagement Officer for Equity and Inclusion

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|---|
| Mission and Vision: Building an Equitable Future Together | 3 |
| Key Focus Areas..... | 3 |
| Grant Guidelines: Centering Impact and Inclusivity | 4 |
| Empowering Communities: Key Grants Awarded..... | 4 |
| Community Empowerment & Cultural Preservation | 4 |
| Educational Equity & Leadership Development..... | 5 |
| Health Equity..... | 5 |
| Economic Empowerment, Racial & Social Justice | 6 |
| Responsible Stewardship: Maximizing Donor Impact..... | 6 |
| Full Grant List..... | 7 |
| Photo Reflections | 9 |

Thank you for your partnership!

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Mission and Vision: Building an Equitable Future Together

The Equity Fund, founded by Gwendolyn VanSant in partnership with BTCF, is dedicated to dismantling systemic racial barriers and advancing racial and social justice, economic empowerment, and leadership development for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) in the Berkshire Taconic region.

Our vision is a society where equity is not just an ideal, but a lived reality. Through targeted investments, strategic partnerships, and community-led grantmaking, we are actively fostering sustainable, systemic change that empowers individuals and strengthens communities.

Key Focus Areas

Racial and Social Justice

Investing in initiatives that address systemic racial inequities.

Economic Empowerment

Supporting programs that create economic mobility and stability for BIPOC communities.

Educational Equity

Ensuring every student has access to quality education, mentorship, and resources.

Community Empowerment & Cultural Preservation

Investing in cultural preservation, storytelling, and artistic expression to strengthen community identity, resilience, and intergenerational knowledge-sharing.

Health Equity

Expanding access to holistic and preventive healthcare in historically marginalized communities.

Leadership Development

Cultivating the next generation of BIPOC leaders and changemakers.

Grant Guidelines: Centering Impact and Inclusivity

The Equity Fund prioritizes high-impact, community-centered projects that align with our mission. Our funding is available to nonprofits, community groups, coalitions, and individuals that meet the following criteria:

BIPOC-Led or Centered

Organizations that are BIPOC-led, BIPOC-majority staffed, or whose mission directly serves BIPOC communities.

Community-Driven Impact

Projects demonstrating tangible benefits for BIPOC individuals and families.

Alignment with Focus Areas

Initiatives must address at least one of our key areas (racial justice, economic empowerment, educational equity, health equity, or leadership development).

Commitment to Collaboration

Programs should demonstrate community engagement and partnerships that enhance collective impact.

Our participatory grantmaking process, led by the Leadership Advisory Committee (LAC), ensures that funding decisions reflect the real needs and aspirations of the communities we serve.

Empowering Communities: Key Grants Awarded

In 2024, the Equity Fund awarded over \$237,585 across 22 grants supporting initiatives in three counties. Below are select highlights:

Community Empowerment & Cultural Preservation

African American Archive of Columbia County, *Van Burgen Overmantel Comes to Life*

Supported the preservation of a historical artifact depicting the ethnic diversity of the Hudson Valley in the colonial era.

Jazz in the Berkshires, Inc., *Jazz Education & Cultural Programming*

Hosted a series of concerts highlighting the contributions of Black jazz musicians, expanding access to cultural heritage programs.

Who We Be!, 5th Annual Columbia County Juneteenth Celebration

Hosted a monthlong series of community events, including historical site tours, cultural programming, and a gospel performance, celebrating Black heritage and resilience.

Multicultural BRIDGE, Solidarity Meeting House & Solidarity Stewards

Expanded a community-based equity initiative, reinvesting resources directly into BIPOC-led projects.

Educational Equity & Leadership Development

Blackshires Community Empowerment Foundation, Black Community/Economic Empowerment Leadership Accelerator

Developed a community-driven leadership education platform fostering collaboration between organizations, community members, and stakeholders to address local challenges. The program consists of three structured phases, culminating in the creation of a resident-led Community Development Corporation with the skills and capacity to manage funds for revitalization efforts. Participants engage in weekly workshops, building a collective understanding of leadership principles and effective strategies for community development.

Rites of Passage & Empowerment, Ghana Connections

13 scholars and 3 young ambassadors participated in an international service-learning experience, supporting education initiatives in Ghana and engaging in cultural exchange.

Greater Hudson Promise, Back to School Support & Chronic Absenteeism Mitigation

Provided financial support for school supplies and uniforms to low-income families, addressing educational inequities and chronic absenteeism.

Choices Mentoring Initiative, Social-Emotional Learning & Alternative Experiences

Designed a mentorship and skill-building program for at-risk youth, creating pathways for educational success and personal development.

Health Equity

Blackshires Community Empowerment Foundation, BIPOC Health Equity Idea Jam

Launched a resident-led Community Development Corporation and facilitated BIPOC-led health equity planning sessions.

Wildseed Community Farm & Healing Village, We Are Made of Stardust & In the Well of the Senses

Provided restorative healing spaces for BIPOC community members through camping, sound therapy, yoga, and cultural rituals.

Jaago Hudson, Multilingual Guidebook on Sexual Assault Awareness for the South Asian Diaspora

Developed a multilingual illustrated guidebook to educate the South Asian diaspora on sexual assault awareness and how to support survivors. This guidebook fills a critical gap by providing *culturally relevant resources that validate survivors, encourage disclosure, and equip loved ones to offer meaningful support.*

Economic Empowerment, Racial & Social Justice

Rock Steady Farm & Flowers, Fall Gathering for QTBIPOC Food & Farm Community

Created a regional gathering for QTBIPOC farmers and entrepreneurs, supporting community-building and business development.

Columbia County Sanctuary Movement, Community Empowerment & Self-Determination

Provided **holistic services and organizing support** for immigrants navigating unjust systems.

The Institute of Afrofuturist Ecology, Environmental Stewardship & Community Resilience

Expanded programming that connects BIPOC communities with land stewardship and ecological justice.

Beautiful Racket, Expanding Creative Access

Hired a dedicated staff member to diversify arts programming, increasing access for historically marginalized communities.

Responsible Stewardship: Maximizing Donor Impact

As of March 7, 2025, the Equity Fund holds a balance of \$ 377,802.88

Financial Overview

- Total Funds Raised: \$ 595,347
- Total Funds Distributed: \$ 237,585
- Number of Grants Awarded: 22
- Average Grant Size: \$10,799

We maintain a low administrative overhead, ensuring that most donor contributions go directly to programs.

Full Grant List

| Date | Grantee | Amount |
|------------|--|--------------|
| 2024-07-03 | Blackshires Community Empowerment Foundation | 22,500.00 |
| 2024-07-10 | Who We Be! | 16,835.00 |
| 2024-09-04 | African American Archive of Columbia County | 10,000.00 |
| 2024-09-04 | Choices Mentoring Initiative | 10,000.00 |
| 2024-10-09 | Brianna Christie | 1,500.00 |
| 2024-10-09 | Greater Hudson Promise Neighborhood, Inc. | 3,000.00 |
| 2024-10-09 | Rock Steady Farm and Flowers | 15,750.00 |
| 2024-11-06 | Blackshires Community Empowerment Foundation | 15,000.00 |
| 2024-11-06 | Hudson/Catskill Housing Coalition | 8,000.00 |
| 2024-11-06 | Mumbet's Freedom Farm | 8,000.00 |
| 2024-11-20 | Hudson/Catskill Housing Coalition | 2,000.00 |
| 2024-12-04 | BRIDGE | 25,000.00 |
| 2024-12-04 | Rites of Passage and Empowerment Inc. | 10,000.00 |
| 2024-12-04 | Wildseed Community Farm & Healing Village | 10,000.00 |
| 2024-12-18 | Berkshire Immigrant Center | 10,000.00 |
| 2024-12-31 | Operation Unite New York, Inc. | 25,000.00 |
| Total | | \$192,585.00 |

The following grants were made in 2025 but were part of the 2024 cycle:

| | | |
|------------|------------------------------------|-------------|
| 2025-02-26 | Beautiful Racket | 10,000.00 |
| 2025-02-26 | Columbia County Sanctuary Movement | 10,000.00 |
| 2025-02-26 | Institute of Afrofuturist Ecology | 10,000.00 |
| 2025-02-26 | Jaago, Inc. | 10,000.00 |
| 2025-02-26 | Jazz in the Berkshires, Inc. | 5,000.00 |
| Total | | \$45,000.00 |

Grand Total

\$237,585.00

Photo Reflections

“... we are / the ones / we have been waiting for.”

- June Jordan, “Poem for South African Women”

THE LEADERSHIP ADVISORY COMMITTEE



The Leadership Advisory Committee (LAC), ensures that funding decisions reflect the real needs and aspirations of the communities we serve. Committee members pictured here include Tanya Jackson, Gwendolyn VanSant, Elena Mosely, Monti Lawson, and Alÿcia Bacon, at the Equity Fund Celebration.



BLACKSHIRES: HEALTH EQUITY JAM KEY IMPACT DATA

Attendance numbers:

- Total attendance 50 community members and facilitators 10;
- Total 60 community stakeholders in attendance.
- 30 Health Agency Stakeholders from BHS/BPRC.City of Pittsfield /CHP
- 35 BIPOC Community Members
- 80% from Westside Neighborhood
- 20% from Morningside or other



Materials shared and platforms used for dissemination:

- In Person Event/Cultural Summit
- 50 reports printed for attendees



Demographic information of the communities reached:

- 99% Black
- 1% Hispanic
- Over 90% Pittsfield Residents
- 95% Black Women
- 5% Black Male



BRIANNA CHRISTIE

MASTERS THESIS AWARD WINNER



“The Equity Fund granted me the opportunity to share my research with a broader audience than my graduate institution. As a woman of color who did research regarding sexual violence in my community, my ultimate goal is to share my work across fields and professions. The Equity Fund allowed me to begin this step by granting funds for me to attend the National Communication Association Conference where I was a panelist and was awarded the Masters Thesis of the Year award. It was a great experience and I see myself sharing my work further.”

- Brianna Christie, MA

University of Maine, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts

ROCK STEADY FARM: 2024 BLOCK PARTY



“Support from the Equity Fund was instrumental in the success of our largest and farthest reaching community event of the year, the 2024 Block Party. The Farm Block Party was a dynamic celebration of community connection and collaboration, featuring live music, delicious food, and a marketplace with diverse vendors. The event brought together urban and rural BIPOC farmers, community members, and allies, celebrating the creativity, resilience, and intergenerational connections of the QTBIPOC community.”



AFRICAN AMERICAN ARCHIVES OF COLUMBIA COUNTY

African American Archive of Columbia County received a grant for: Van Burgen Overmantel Comes to Life, supporting the preservation of a historical artifact depicting the ethnic diversity of the Hudson Valley in the colonial era.



CHOICES MENTORING INITIATIVE

- Social-Emotional Learning & Alternative Experiences
- Designed a mentorship and skill-building program for at-risk youth, creating pathways for educational success and personal development.



MUMBET FREEDOM FARM

Alÿcia Bacon and Sunder Ashni at the Equity Fund Celebration.

Mumbet's Freedom Farm is a Black & Brown Femme led farm and community sanctuary for connection, creativity, education, and wellness.



ROCK STEADY FARM

Rica Bryan and Monti Lawson pictured at the Equity Fund Celebration with Gwendolyn VanSant and Michael Obasohan



BLACKSHIRES

Black Community / Economic Empowerment Leadership Accelerator



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