



**Moving Cincinnati Forward:**  
**Economic Mobility and Racial Equity**

2021

## Table of Contents

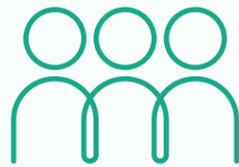
<b>04</b> About Cohear 58,59. Our Team	<b>12</b> <b>Theme 1</b> <b>RELATIONSHIPS ARE THE KEY TO SUCCESS</b> Fostering mentorship and connections in the corporate world
<b>05</b> Introduction	<b>20</b> <b>Theme 2</b> <b>AFFORDABLE NON-WAGE SUPPORTS</b> Childcare, transportation, food, or tuition
<b>07</b> Overview of Key Themes	<b>30</b> <b>Theme 3</b> <b>DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE</b> Promoting greater representation in leadership, communication, and marketing
<b>09</b> Context	<b>38</b> <b>Theme 4</b> <b>EQUITY REQUIRES ACTION</b> Promoting greater representation in leadership, communication, and marketing
<b>10</b> Who We Engaged	<b>47</b> <b>Theme 5</b> <b>VALUING TALENT</b> Provide equitable pay and access to capital
<b>11</b> Demographics	<b>57</b> Conclusion

## Thank You

Community foundations play a critical role in catalyzing change by advancing innovation and social justice and through supporting the infrastructure of the non-profit sector. In Cincinnati, the Greater Cincinnati Foundation has been leading collective efforts to reckon with the legacy and present realities of racism, and is playing an instrumental role in shaping a more inclusive future for the city. We recognize and deeply appreciate GCF's commitment to addressing these challenges head on, and to trying to bring as many partners along the way as possible. I'd like to thank the Greater Cincinnati Foundation for their leadership, and for making sure that the voices, ideas, and energy of the Everyday Experts are front and center in shaping the path forward. We are so grateful to have gotten to play a role in these efforts.



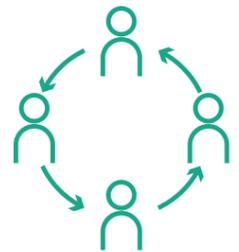
# About Cohear



## WHO WE ARE

Cohear is a community engagement and strategy company

Better decisions happen by getting the right people - The Everyday Experts - to the table.



## WHAT WE DO

We help leaders develop meaningful solutions to difficult problems

We do this by organizing with community members to engage with lived experience that drive insights.



## WHY WE DO IT

We believe living an issue everyday makes you an expert

Decision makers need this wisdom to accelerate impact and produce better results.

# Introduction

Cincinnati has one of the [fastest growing](#) economies in the Midwest and a labor force of around 1 million workers. In order to translate that growth into shared gains, it is critical that upward economic mobility is accessible to everyone in the region. Unfortunately, there are clear racial and gender disparities when it comes to achieving broad-based economic mobility. In Greater Cincinnati, Black women are [disproportionately underemployed and earning incomes below the poverty level](#). The Greater Cincinnati Foundation (GCF) believes that this region can only unlock the full potential of its growing economy and concentration of large, influential businesses if it can be a place where Black women and other people of color are able to access upward mobility.

The Greater Cincinnati Foundation partnered with Cohear to engage those who know this issue best - Black women and other people of color across the socio-economic spectrum - to develop actionable insights and strategies to pursue the type of equitable economic mobility that could catalyze sustained regional growth. Cohear organized and conducted six focus groups that brought together GCF leadership and the “Everyday Experts” to better understand

the challenges faced and brainstorm potential solutions and interventions.

This report emphasizes the need for progress within Cincinnati’s corporate and non-profit culture, as well as potential next steps and actionable strategies. All of the ideas and themes in this report reflect the Everyday Experts’ feedback, experiences, and ideas. It is important to note that when this report references the ideas and opinions of Black women or Everyday Experts, we are only conveying the insights we gleaned in this process, rather than trying to convey a collective perspective on behalf of an entire demographic group.

Across focus groups, some key themes emerged: Cincinnati can be an exclusionary city in which it is difficult to progress professionally without the proper connections, such as those obtained through paid membership organizations. Additionally, many Black women described finding themselves in work environments that are dominated by white men. These women report not being paid what they feel they are worth, and that they are having to work twice as hard to earn the same wages and receive similar promotions as their white peers.

According to the Everyday Experts we engaged, relationships, networking opportunities, and access to ownership and capital are the keys to economic mobility for Black women, particularly those who are new to Cincinnati. Flexible supports such as childcare or reliable transportation were also identified as critical to economic success, especially because those services are less accessible for marginalized communities and communities of color. Fair wages, proper allyship, and a focus on diverse representation and leadership in the workplace also emerged as themes for uplifting Black women and their professional success.

By expanding opportunities for women of color, Cincinnati can emerge as a leader of change and unlock its full potential for economic growth and revival. According to the women we engaged, getting to that more equitable future will require more than diversity statements or symbolic inclusionary gestures, but will instead take meaningful and tangible changes to the status quo. Some of those changes are highlighted in this report.



# Overview of Key Themes

<b>Theme 1</b>	<b>RELATIONSHIPS ARE THE KEY TO SUCCESS</b> Fostering mentorship and connections in the corporate world
<b>Theme 2</b>	<b>AFFORDABLE NON-WAGE SUPPORTS</b> Childcare, transportation, food, or tuition
<b>Theme 3</b>	<b>DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE</b> Promoting greater representation in leadership, communication, and marketing
<b>Theme 4</b>	<b>EQUITY REQUIRES ACTION</b> Addressing workplace discrimination, and meaningful allyship
<b>Theme 5</b>	<b>VALUING TALENT</b> Provide equitable pay and access to capital

## Context

The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly impacted industries such as retail, home, healthcare, and food services. These are industries that generally employ [large numbers of women, specifically Black women](#), many of whom have not yet returned to the workforce. According to data from a 2021 [report by the Women's Fund](#), Black women in Cincinnati have the highest unemployment rate across all gender-racial cohorts studied. For Black women who are employed, nearly half make less than \$15/hr. Furthermore, 57 percent of Black women are underemployed, with a higher educational attainment than their occupation requires. 32 percent of Black women with a Bachelor's degree make less than \$15/hr.

In addition to a drop in labor force participation brought on by the pandemic, Black women face long-standing systemic challenges when employed, including difficulty finding childcare, wage disparities, access to reliable transportation, and the education needed to take advantage of the changing labor market. Because women, on average, remain the primary caretakers for children --both professionally and within the home--working moms are struggling to find childcare in order to return to work, and low childcare enrollment rates during the pandemic have resulted in estimates that

up to [40% of childcare centers have or will permanently close as a result of COVID-19](#). Shuttered childcare centers have resulted in further job losses for largely female employees.

Among Ohio's working poor, women of color are [significantly overrepresented](#). 19 percent of working Black women and 19 percent of working Latina women between ages 25 and 64 are classified as working poor, compared to only 8 percent of White women in the same age group. Public transportation has been slow to reflect the changes needed to provide access to job centers, which has further hindered low-income African Americans' abilities to work. 16 percent of Black workers making less than \$15,000 per year rely on public transit, compared to just 4 percent of white workers in the same wage bracket. Lowering or removing these barriers to employment may lead to a higher percentage of women of color in the workforce earning livable wages.

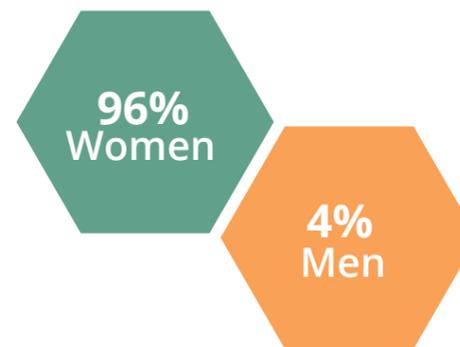
# Who We Engaged

## SIX FOCUS GROUPS

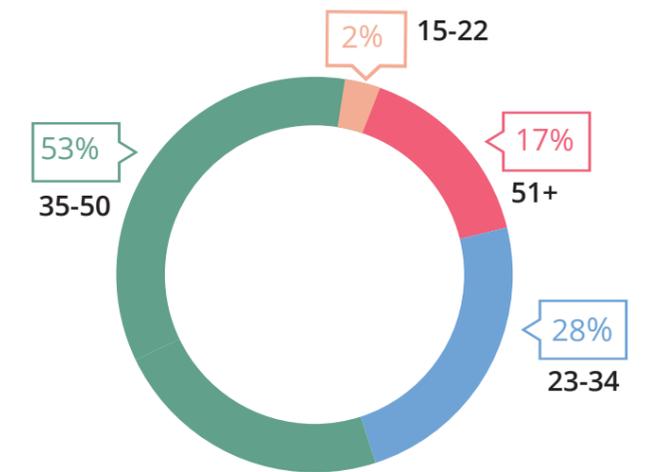
- 1 Black women in entry-level roles
- 2 New American women in entry-level roles
- 3 Black women in mid-career
- 4 Black women entrepreneurs
- 5 Black women executives
- 6 Black women and men who left Cincinnati for economic reasons

# Demographics

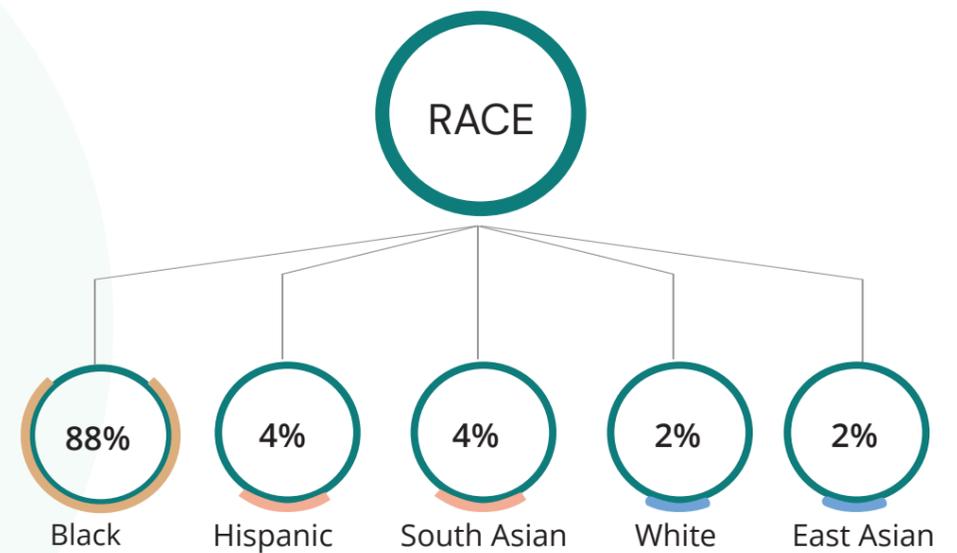
GENDER



AGE



RACE



## Theme 1

### RELATIONSHIPS ARE THE KEY TO SUCCESS

#### Fostering mentorship and connections in the corporate world

Mentorship and personal relationships have played a crucial role in shaping the journey toward economic mobility for many Black women. Without extensive network connections, it can be difficult to move ahead in professional careers. This disadvantage is magnified for women of color, who are [overrepresented](#) in low wage positions and feel that they are frequently overlooked for promotions, raises, and job offers in favor of their white colleagues. Among focus group participants, there was a widespread desire to have access to spaces where individuals can network with others and be provided with mentorship and support when navigating workplace discrimination, pivotal career decisions, and self-advocacy. They noted that having someone to vouch for them has been an important part of their success. Networking and mentorship clearly play a central role in driving economic mobility for women of color, making them essential areas for GCF and its partners to invest in and support.



#### IN THEIR WORDS:

#### Examples of Current Challenges

---

*It is challenging to be successful in Cincinnati unless you have connections or are part of a paid professional network. This challenge is magnified for Black women, especially those who are not from Cincinnati. They are competing in what they describe as a “clique-based” social and professional environment dominated by white men who have grown up in the city.*

“Professional advancement [in Cincinnati] sometimes can become stagnant. You really need to be in the right circle here in order to advance. You could know a whole bunch of really important people and they’ll vouch for you and get you that conversation with somebody that you want to communicate with.” **--S, executive**

“A lot of my white counterparts do have mentors or access to boards, nonprofits, or jobs when they first become available and someone who knows refers to you... I think that’s something that we’re lacking in our community.”

**--R, professional who left Cincinnati**

“I feel like at some point I hit a ceiling in Cincinnati... I got put into a box... It was really hard to get my own personal ventures off the ground. I also thought that it was very territorial, once people realized I was not from Cincinnati, I would get called out by all kinds of people. That became challenging and limited the possibilities. I tried to use someone from my Cincinnati experiences as a recommender, and they literally tried to stop my progress.”

**--B, professional who left Cincinnati**

“When I became President [of a major higher education institution], it was the relationships that got me there, which was really different, because it was the internal relationships with the faculty, that people started to realize ‘we need a president who can really move this organization’, so it’s not always about your external, but what you can do internally.” **--M, executive**

“Cincinnati is a very difficult city to move to. If you’re not from here, the networks are really hard to break into. I wasn’t able to have those networks until I had children and they were playing sports, in Jack and Jill; and I met wonderful women in the healthcare industry, but it took a while. Healthcare is a very interesting field, there are very few Black women that make it to the CEO position particularly in this city.”

--S, executive

## POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

### Provide more opportunities for Black women to access career and advocacy mentorship.

Mentorship is a crucial tool for learning, connecting with other professionals, and feeling supported in their journey. Provide access to resources and mentoring opportunities that could provide the advocacy and guidance many of them feel they need to grow professionally.

“The mentor thing was huge for me... Since I’ve met her, she has, if I call her about anything when it comes to nonprofit, she’s like, ‘I got you.’” --T, entrepreneur

“Giving the tools on how to address [discrimination], because when you’re younger you don’t know who you should talk to or what you should say, or whether something is worth it or not... Mentorship is important in that instance to help decide whether it is worth it, or to just ‘tuck it in your file’ of microaggressions or incidents that are small, but add up; and when it’s time you bring out that folder” --C, executive

“I was literally in this space with another coworker, and he called my wig a raccoon or a rat or something... I downplay everything so as to not cause a scene, but [my mentor] recognized me and she saw me. And I think at that moment she became a mentor. And I realized that I’ve had these people in my life. I’ve had these people in my space.” --T, executive



"More resources for Black women that need help... like guidance assistance, more resource assistance. Whether it's looking for a job or you're trying to go back to school and you don't know what steps to take."  
--B, in an entry-level role

## Create opportunities for Black women to train to become mentors and leaders in professional settings.

Many participants attributed their success to other Black women who have provided encouragement, mentorship, and role modeling. Leadership training and resources could impart the skills needed for Black women to become confident mentors.

"I find that I am the only African-American woman that has my role, out of 50 people that have a job similar to mine and an organization of 18,000 employees. I have made it my passion to create a mentoring circle of other African-American women... I'm there to be a support, a sounding board, to do practice interviews, behavioral interviews, and just to reinforce that they can do it, because our confidence gets shaken along the way, and we have to pick ourselves up."  
--S, executive

## Make access to mentorship and networking spaces available free of charge in order to be inclusive of all Black women.

Mentorship and peer networks often come at a cost, which can exclude those most in need of support. Create more opportunities for Black women to network and make connections without having to pay a

membership fee or know someone to get in the door. This can be through direct subsidy of entire programs, or more sponsorship of specific positions within existing networking structures.

“Create a space that is not based on nomination, it’s not based on membership of any kind or having a certain title, and an opportunity for women to opt in to get the mentorship so it’s up to the participants to raise their hand. For example, ‘Hey, I’m a junior analyst, but I want to hear from the highest ranking African-American woman from Cincinnati Children’s,’ versus that African-American leader has to nominate me because she knows me. How do you know me if I just started? ...I feel like Cincinnati is very cliquish, very who you know... I feel like GCF is in a position to break down barriers such as that.” --A, in her mid-career

“It would be good for us to create some type of consistent networking, to be able to come together and build new relationships. Unfortunately, a lot of the networking that goes on, there is a cost to membership, but a lot of times you’re paying for what? I don’t mind paying for a meal or a ticket to an event, that’s different, because I want to network with this group.” --S, executive



“When I think about what GCF could do, they could think about a fellowship built strategically over the course of a year or even cohort based, so that people can engage with each other, then you go sip wine. During the day, there are activities that connect fellows. Creating those opportunities, free of charge, where GCF raises money to send [us] somewhere. Free executive coaching is a must.” --S, executive

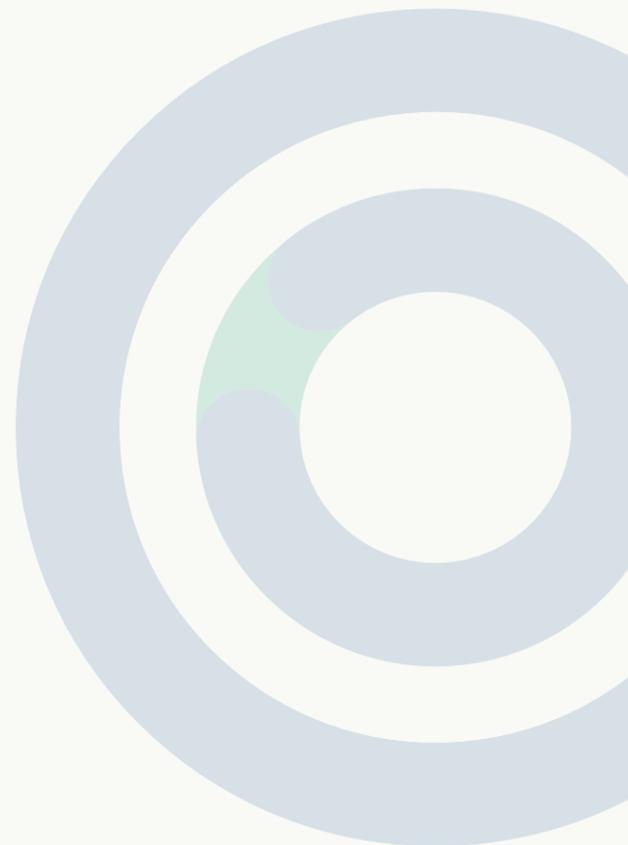
## Theme 2

### AFFORDABLE NON-WAGE SUPPORTS

#### Childcare, transportation, food, or tuition

For many, career success can depend on access to benefits or services such as affordable childcare or accessible transportation. These kinds of support structures would remove some of the barriers for working mothers and those in their early career. Additionally, education, licensure, or certification may be required to advance a career, but comes at an unattainable cost for some. Providing funds for continued education, affordable childcare, and car or bus transportation is crucial in supporting women of color as they build their careers.

For women who have chosen to start their own business, additional support is needed. Many new entrepreneurs have concerns about business credit, renting brick-and-mortar spaces, and government paperwork. Resources for first-time entrepreneurs would be helpful as they navigate an exciting and challenging new venture.



### IN THEIR WORDS:

#### Examples of Current Challenges

---

*Upward mobility may require investments in education, which are out of reach for some.*

"I would love to make over 15 dollars an hour, but of course to make that amount of money I need an education, and then it cycles back to needing money."

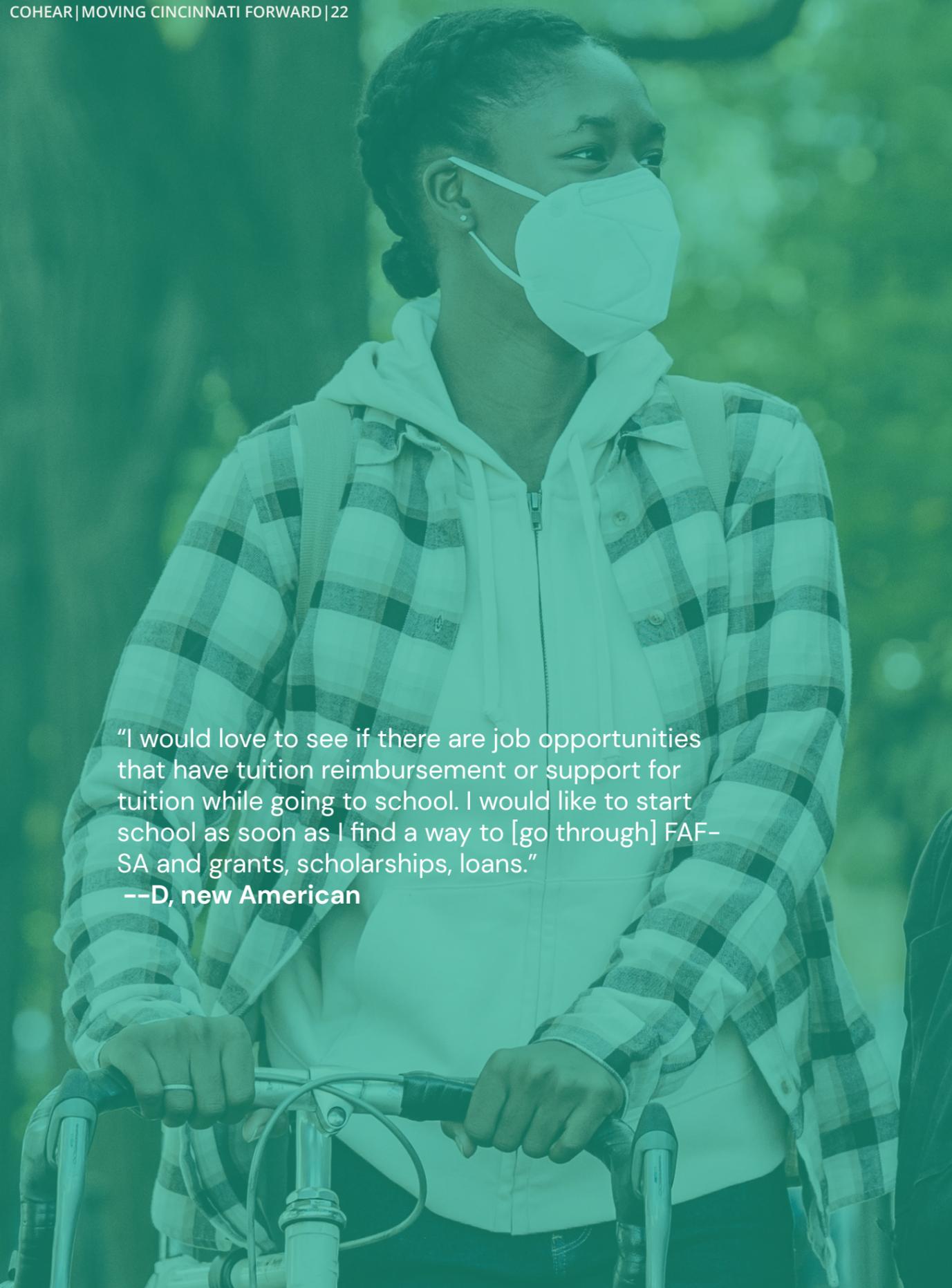
**--M, new American**

"To help women navigate... how to get loans or grants for higher education for immigrants, for women, to make it a little easier... It was difficult just trying to fill out the papers." **--C, new American**

*Employers are often inflexible when it comes to childcare needs.*

I was able to get a collections job working from home, and I was able to do that for about three months... having to pick [my daughter] up and drop her off [at school], because they didn't have bus services, I had started getting negative attendance points for going to get her, going over my breaks, so it kind of became a blessing and a curse, knowing that I wasn't fulfilled, I just kind of set out on faith and quit."

**--D, in an entry-level role**



"I would love to see if there are job opportunities that have tuition reimbursement or support for tuition while going to school. I would like to start school as soon as I find a way to [go through] FAFSA and grants, scholarships, loans."  
--D, new American

## POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

### Create programs to support the cost of obtaining licensure and employment certifications

Tests and training for certifications such as a teaching license can be expensive, but without them, career success can stagnate. Funding for career training and certifications could help.

"In Philadelphia, where I went to school, they had a program where you could get hired on and be an actual classroom teacher getting teacher's salary, all that stuff, without a [teaching certification]... you're in the process of getting it while you're there..." --A, in an entry-level role

"[CPS] just came out with a program... you can apply, get two letters of recommendation, and then be able to work on your [teaching] certification... I think that's innovative, and I hope the other districts follow suit." --E, in an entry-level role

Provide additional support to working mothers, such as laundry services at work and take-home meals.

Finding creative ways to support busy working moms, such as providing a meal or laundry services, could make a huge impact.

“I think [laundry] is something people really do need, a lot of people live in affordable housing, a lot of times, their apartments, they don’t have washers and dryers.”

**--B, in an entry-level role**

“A lot of times women find themselves in those positions where... they have to go back and forth to get those kids. It would be wonderful if there could be something set in place to where they could go get those kids and... have a facility closer to their job... [or have] the opportunity to possibly be able to work from home [sometimes]... [or] maybe you guys are providing dinner or, just the small things to be able to take something off of mom’s plate.”

**--D, in an entry-level role**

Subsidize flexible transportation assistance: help navigating the bus system, getting and maintaining a car, and getting a driver’s license.

Transportation is one of the biggest barriers to employment. Though many agreed that the bus system in Cincinnati is not adequate, providing monetary and navigational help for those who may be able to utilize it could

still be helpful. Van shuttles to and from daycare would also be beneficial--but ultimately, assistance with obtaining a driver’s license and a car would provide the maximum flexibility and independence.

“I would make it more affordable for people to have better transportation to and from the workplace and...daycare... maybe they can provide a van.” **--V, in an entry-level role**

“To help [people] get a car, fix a car, keep a car would be helpful.” **--C, new American**

“Another major issue I have is transportation. I don’t have a car and I don’t know how to use the Metro system, I’ve never done it before.” **--N, new American**

“Transportation is really poor in Cincinnati... [We need] a better bus system.” **--A, new American**

“There’s no transportation. I have a temporary driver’s license, I would like to take [the test for] my driver’s license, but you need money for those classes...And I would love to work, [but I need that transportation].” --N, new American

## Coordinate affordable childcare during evenings and weekends.

For people working toward certifications or degrees while working full-time or those working second shift, flexible childcare hours are extremely beneficial. Find ways

to provide women with affordable childcare that works for their schedules.

“It’s the confidence, support [at my current job], they go around my hours taking the kids to school... they work with you on your schedule. Nowhere else where I worked at would work with me... they helpful, everybody help everybody.” --M, in an entry-level role

“I would suggest having longer hours for daycare. Free if [someone] has Medicaid, or maybe extended hours for those parents that do [need] it... It all comes down to money.” --N, new American

A woman with dark hair is styling a young girl's hair. The woman is wearing a light-colored sleeveless top and a patterned skirt. The girl is wearing a checkered shirt and light-colored pants. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

“Daycares during the daytime close around 5pm. So if I do go to work or I do go to school twice a week in the evening, there’s no daycare for my child. Having childcare on Saturdays and Sundays, or even evenings... that’s less costly [would be ideal].”  
--M, new American

## Help small, Black-owned nonprofits and for-profits alike file government paperwork and apply for certifications.

Running a business requires numerous steps that may not be on the radar for a first-time entrepreneur. Create a resource which walks new business owners through

the necessary processes and provides training so that they can better understand what they need to do and how to do it.

“The resources that would be helpful would be... a one-stop shop for nonprofits, right, so... everything you need to know, this is a guide to how to be successful, these are how to make sure your paperwork is filed, make sure you have your 990s filed, make sure there’s no misconceptions and that you’re covered fully.”  
--K, entrepreneur

“On the for-profit side, with our company, a commercial cleaning company, it is extremely, if not--I’m not going to say impossible, but having our certifications, like, we’re WMBE, we’re MBE, we’re SBE, however, but when you’re bidding on projects they take the lowest bid.”  
--K, entrepreneur

## Theme 3

### DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Promoting greater representation in leadership, communication, and marketing

A lack of diversity in any workplace can create an uncomfortable or even hostile environment for those in it, particularly people of color. This is certainly the case for Black women who work in predominantly white spaces, such as executive leadership or the nonprofit space. Having a clear path to success, placing more Black women in high-ranking positions, and highlighting their achievements is vital in order to create organizations which are equitable from the top down. Instead of tacking on extra DEI duties to Black employees' existing jobs, corporate leaders must create holistic organizational change through their staffing choices. It is also essential that companies are held accountable by way of a DEI tracking system for Cincinnati institutions. Prioritizing diversity and inclusion in the workplace can make a real difference in Black women's career success.



### IN THEIR WORDS:

#### Examples of Current Challenges

---

*Isolation is common for Black women in intensely white corporate and academic spaces.*

"I [was] the only Black student in the entire environmental studies program, which is a small program, but I didn't have a lot of people that I could kind of relax around all the time." --A, in her mid-career

*Some participants chose to leave their previous positions because they faced discrimination from their bosses or coworkers.*

"I found myself working in corporate America selling someone else's dream, and while I was very successful, there was a glass ceiling... I was told it was initially because of my appearance. And I had went from being relaxed hair down my back to short, natural, and curly... the role that I was actually applying for was given to a younger caucasian woman with blonde hair and blue eyes..." --B, entrepreneur

"I was helping a mom... she had just got a job at [a hospital] working 12-hour shifts... I went into the food pantry [at my work], which I had a key to, and got her food, breakfast for her family in the morning... the next day, I was pulled into my director's office... my then-supervisor had basically insinuated that I stole the food from the food pantry to help my children, and not even asked what it was for... That year is the year that I launched Cincinnati Parent Empowerment network, because again, I never wanted another family to feel bad for needing help." --C, entrepreneur

## POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

### Encourage employers to highlight Black women who have risen through the ranks.

It's important for Black women to not only be adequately represented at a company, but feel adequately represented in management and leadership roles. Employers should be encouraged to spotlight their

employees in various ways on their social media, marketing materials, and websites so that other Black women can see themselves represented in high-ranking positions.

"More promotion of like, upward mobility, and seeing it advertised in a way where I feel like I can, I might have a chance... internally, you might think, 'oh dang, they got all these other people that will probably be more qualified for this role'... look into targeting Black women for those roles... going out of their way to get [Black women] to take [being considered for] those positions seriously." **--A, in an entry-level role**

### Give employees at every level input and ownership over key decisions.

For a workplace to be truly inclusive, all staff must be empowered and encouraged to provide input on decision making that will affect them.

"Starting with upper management, hearing from everyone all the way down to the janitor. Creating a way that there can be input... A lot of times, especially with bigger companies, the decisions are made up here, but those decisions don't affect the people up here--they actually affect the people down here. The people on the lower level have no input on decisions that are totally going to affect them... Creating a way where everyone can have input [will also] open it up to giving a chance to someone we don't quite know." **--D, in her mid-career**

"I notice here [in Pittsburgh], whenever there's a big decision to be made, my superiors will come to me and ask for my thoughts." **--R, professional who left Cincinnati**

## Prioritize representation among small business incubator staff and mentors.

---

It would be valuable for Black female entrepreneurs to have the option to be mentored by other Black women, who can better empathize with and understand their experiences.

Fostering more diversity in mentorship programs could help accomplish this.

"I do enjoy SCORE, but... if there were more diversity in SCORE... I think that there, sometimes, there's nothing wrong with mentoring people, and again, my mentor, he was wonderful, however there are certain levels and certain challenges that we face as African-Americans that a person from another culture may not be able to speak to." --S, entrepreneur

## Create corporate spaces in which Black women can feel truly comfortable being themselves.

---

Many women described having to be one person at work, and a different person at home, because their workspaces were not culturally inclusive or accepting. By breaking

down some of these harmful cultural expectations, Black women can feel more comfortable in the workplace.

"We have been conditioned to accept that I have to work harder and be better so someone can see what I was capable of to get the promotion. I believed straight hair was professional, there was no way I'd ever go to work with my natural hair, because I have been conditioned to believe this is what's acceptable." --S, executive

## Hiring Black DEI officers is not enough, it is also critical to hire Black women in other executive positions.

---

Companies that place value in DEI through programmatic and policy choices are laudable, but those initiatives are ultimately too inconsequential if the same organizations

do not value Black women as much as they value white men and women in executive roles.

“The significant roles that we’ve seen changes in hiring have been in DEI positions... I haven’t seen major announcements about Black women or men going into the C-Suite here in Cincinnati. We’re okay to add positions for Black people to go down the hall and complain to, but are we able to give up those major roles, which is something I haven’t seen. Here in Cincinnati, we have specific roles, mainly non profits, where we’re comfortable with women leading, and we keep them in those roles, we have other roles that are comfortable with white women and there’s not much room. Are we really ready as a city to have those conversations?” **--C, executive**

## Create a DEI report card for major Cincinnati institutions.

---

Accountability is essential if large Cincinnati companies are to ever truly evolve. Find a way of tracking DEI efforts, such as inclusive hiring at all levels--including upper leadership --which make a concrete difference.

“We were talking about DEI when the Health Alliance formed back in 1994, we had the first D&I committee then and have had very little progress. What are we measuring as it relates to Black women and men and corporate upward mobility? How are we holding those in positions to make a difference accountable for that change? It’s not going to change if we just talk about it. “

**--S, executive**

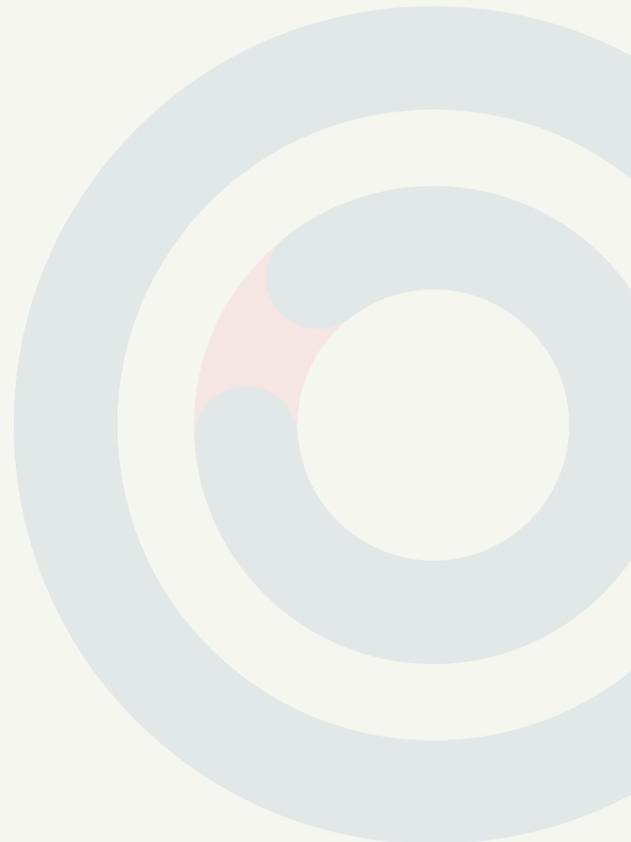
“Particularly when it’s tied to money, we’ll see more movement with companies. If you have a report card that’s showing where they are with DEI and they’re not leading the metrics, the community can respond and they can face consequences. In law, many companies won’t work with firms that don’t have diversity, or are valuing those associates that are minorities; and I think a similar idea would work here. “ **--A, executive**

## Theme 4

### EQUITY REQUIRES ACTION

#### Addressing workplace discrimination, and meaningful allyship

In many organizations, connections and prior relationships can help spur promotion, and for a variety of reasons those are most often held by white men and women. Women of color say that they need to work twice as hard as their white counterparts to achieve the same status in their organization, citing experiences such as having extra duties added to their job description, discriminatory hiring practices, and micro-aggressions from colleagues. Furthermore, when women of color are given a DEI role, their coworkers are not open to hearing about Black women's experiences or ideas for change. The onus should not be on Black women to change their workplace's exclusionary practices. Instead, the Everyday Experts that we engaged noted how important meaningful white allyship could be in creating more inclusive workplaces. That is the type of allyship that does more than point out discriminatory practices, but actually works against them and seeks to shift internal organizational paradigms.



### IN THEIR WORDS:

#### Examples of Current Challenges

*Black women are facing discrimination in primarily white spaces. Many have experienced some form of discrimination in the workplace because of their race, gender, or citizenship status.*

"Everything that we as Hispanics do, we are often discriminated against for not having papers, for not having proper documentation. Sometimes they give us extra work in order to discriminate, and they will send us to multiple places here and there without giving us a lot of information."

**--R, new American**

"The field I got [into] wasn't really open to hiring women, and [especially] women of color. In my graduating class there were only three of us--two Black girls and one white girl. And that white girl was the only one who got a job." **--A, new American**

*"In the nonprofit sector, typically what you find is a hierarchy where white women kind of own the space, there's some guys sprinkled around, maybe they're the CEO or CFO or doing operations, and the lower you get on the totem pole, the browner the organization gets."*  
**--V, in her mid-career**

*Many Black woman executives continue to feel like outsiders despite their robust networks, and have been overlooked for opportunities in favor of white male counterparts.*

"I'm one of five Black women who have been a partner at a large firm in Cincinnati, and I'm the first Black woman associate to make partner at [a major Cincinnati law firm.] A lot of other people come in and they get a pass, it's just assumed they want to make partner, or want to be a litigator, whereas I constantly had to raise my hand, announce my presence, and say what I wanted to do."

**--A, executive**

"When you're white or a male, you get chances. A CEO of a local hospital had no hospital experience beforehand, yet they gave him a shot... They don't do that for us. So I was looking just to do community relations and I had years and years of in depth solid community experiences from a volunteer end and all I would get is, 'well, you're a lawyer' or 'you've never done it as your job,' and you'd watch these white folks walk in the door and it's not problem."

**--C, executive**



“Coming back to Cincinnati [after 14 years], it was a bit of an adjustment, in part from living in such diverse places, and even though I may have been the minority in my work, I still had these other networks, and being in New York, I constantly saw people that looked like me, even just walking the streets. I have networks here, but when I walk down the street, I still feel more like a minority than being in bigger cities.”

--A, executive

*Black women frequently have to alter their behavior to make white colleagues more comfortable.*

“I was telling a fellow colleague about the issues I was having with [a white male coworker], and he was just like, ‘You know, I see your interactions with him, and you have to stop showing him up.’ And I was like, ‘What do you mean? I’m not purposefully trying to show him up.’ He’s like, ‘Right, but he has an issue with women. Somewhere along the line, someone really overpowered him, and he has an issue with women. On top of that, it’s because you’re Black.’”

--D, in her mid-career

“No matter what language we use, no matter our size, our complexion, the first place that non-people of color go is that we are intimidating. I can literally do the exact same thing as a white male, a white female, but I’m intimidating. Like really, you’re bigger, you’re faster, you’re stronger, but I’m intimidating?”

--A, in her mid-career

*Black women have had diversity and inclusion duties added to other full-time duties, but have also been criticized for making others uncomfortable while doing that work.*

“This white male calls me into his office and says, ‘you know all the Black students on campus, don’t you?’ I said, ‘Actually, I do not. But how can I help you?’ And he was like, ‘Well, I’m trying to get you promoted... to associate director, and I feel like you need to pick up more responsibilities. So maybe you should do diversity for the entire college.’ And I was like, huh, that’s interesting--and I’d keep my current responsibilities in Career Services... I knew it was not part of a job, it was a full job in itself.”

--A, in her mid-career

“It would be far-fetched to highlight me as the prototype for an angry Black woman, but I’ve literally had that presented to me. As, ‘You intimidated your peers in this space, and they thought you were really angry.’ And it’s like, well, we’re talking about issues around race and equity; things that, previously, those same people were like, ‘Yes, go for it! Tell that story, we really want to do this work.’ But then when you actually tried to do that work, ‘Well, you’re making the other people feel uncomfortable, and that’s not okay.’”

--V, in her mid-career



“If I tell you that this person is racist and I don’t want to have to deal with them anymore, and the pushback is on me, there’s a disconnect there... If the people within your organization don’t feel like they have any type of ability to actually live [your equity policy] out within the organization where they work, then your statement doesn’t mean a lot.” --V, in her mid-career

## POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

### Host welcome events especially for new Cincinnatians of color.

For those who are new to the city, Cincinnati can feel like a very closed-off place. Sponsor events that bring employers and community leaders together to welcome and provide introductory networking opportunities for

new Cincinnatians to meet new people and break into a professional space.

“My welcome experience was fantastic, the welcome event through my program really rolled out the red carpet for me. From a programmatic standpoint my introduction to Cincinnati really set a bar for the other cities I lived in.”

--B, professional who left Cincinnati

Educate white professionals to become allies, and hold them accountable for their actions--don't expect Black women to solve the problems of workplace discrimination.

---

The burden of fixing a broken system should not be on Black women. Instead, true allies are needed for true, systemic change to occur.

"Part of that trauma and stress for Black women is that it is always put on us, 'how do we deal with it? How to coach each other to deal with it?' As opposed to training people to not make microaggressions. What type of DEI training is happening on a systems level at every single corporation in Cincinnati to make sure people are aware of these things." --S, executive

"In corporate there's been competition between white women and Black women, where the white women feel like 'I'm in the woman category, and you're in the Black category.'... That tension has been the enemy to allyship. That's something we have to work on moving past, but first acknowledge the issue." --C, executive

Educate employers on how their hiring practices might be discriminatory.

---

Discrimination and implicit bias based on race or immigration status has deeply affected many careers. Bring together employers to educate them around how to stop address bias among hiring personnel, diversify their

human resources staff, and retain professionals of color, rather than placing a burden on employees to find organizations which hire equitably.

"Non-profit organizations could bring companies together, specifically those that hire immigrants such as myself, to explain to them that they need to stop discriminating against us. That just because we're immigrants doesn't mean that we don't deserve the same conditions and pay as other workers."

--R, new American

"These conversations are helpful, but if nobody here is a decision maker, then it's not doing us any good to have the conversation... Maybe a luncheon or a dinner where you have these conversations about how to keep and retain Black professionals." --R, professional who left Cincinnati

Help those without the necessary legal status obtain documentation to enable them to access better work and housing prospects.

New Americans cited challenges in obtaining the requisite forms of identification and documentation that would allow them to pursue better work and housing. Coaching

and assistance navigating confusing government requirements might help.

“In order to really find good rent in Cincinnati, you need more money first of all...But also, with our family specifically, we have that extra problem of a lack of documentation. If I were to get some help in getting the documentation I need to provide to have a better home for my family, that would be very helpful.”  
--O, new American

## Theme 5

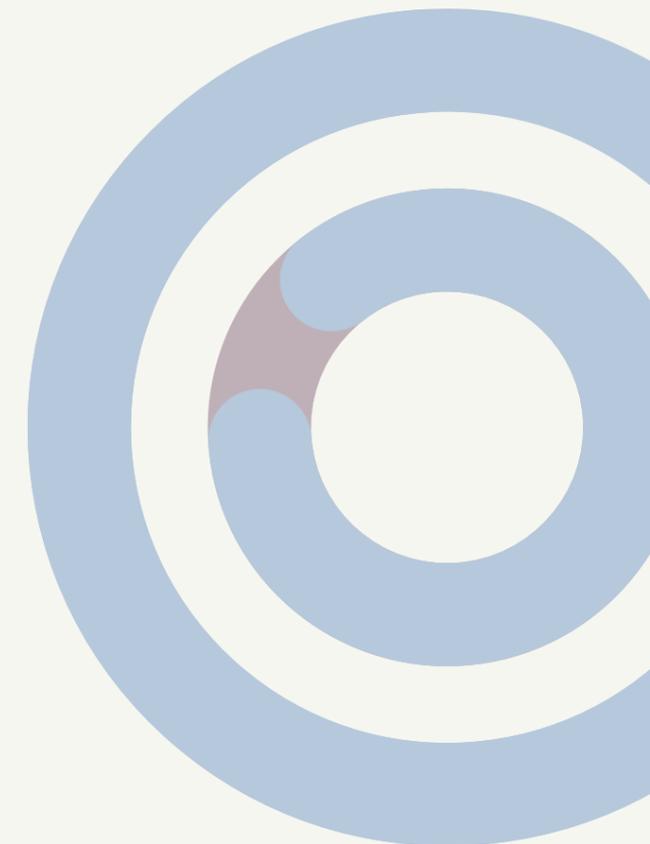
### VALUING TALENT

Provide equitable pay and access to capital

Fair compensation is a clear benchmark of career success. Equitable pay can make all the difference in economic mobility; however, Black women are disproportionately likely to work jobs that don't pay a living wage for themselves, let alone their families. This challenge is magnified by the fact that many women of color feel that they are not being paid what they are worth based on their prior experience or education, suggesting that their value is not being recognized by the companies they work for. It is vital that Black women are paid equitably for the skills they bring to work.

Additionally, new entrepreneurs may need help applying for business credit and accumulating funds for the costs associated with getting their business off the ground. Entrepreneurs named access to capital and investors as imperative for financial security and growing a business, and would like to see more big companies in Cincinnati bringing Black-owned businesses to the table. Additionally, covering the cost of incubator programs would allow Black female business owners to benefit from

the mentorship and guidance offered by these programs without incurring additional fees that could hinder long-term growth. Lowering the barrier to entry will free up more Black women to pursue their entrepreneurial goals.



## IN THEIR WORDS:

### Examples of Current Challenges

---

*Women are not making adequate wages to meet their needs.*

"I was working the suicide hotline for Talbert House... It was intense. I had to quit working there not just because I was getting burnt out but because... they didn't want to give out raises [or] bonuses. It wasn't enough money." **--A, new American**

"I've worked so many places and never made 15 dollars an hour."

**--C, new American**

"I've worked many jobs... None of [them] really paid a lot of money. I had my son when I was 23... and it was a struggle trying to raise him [while] barely making minimum wage." **--K, new American**

"This company [I am at] right now, I make 13 dollars an hour and I work around 40 hours a week, but that's still not enough because I have to pay for daycare for my son." **--M, new American**

*Many are not being paid what they deserved based on their qualifications, industry, or the amount of hours they put in.*

"[I didn't get paid what I hoped I would for nannying], especially since I did this [after] getting a degree. So I have a degree, in like, teaching children, and you're not paying me worth that degree to watch your kids. I essentially had a degree in watching kids... but no, it was terrible pay."

**--A, in an entry-level role**

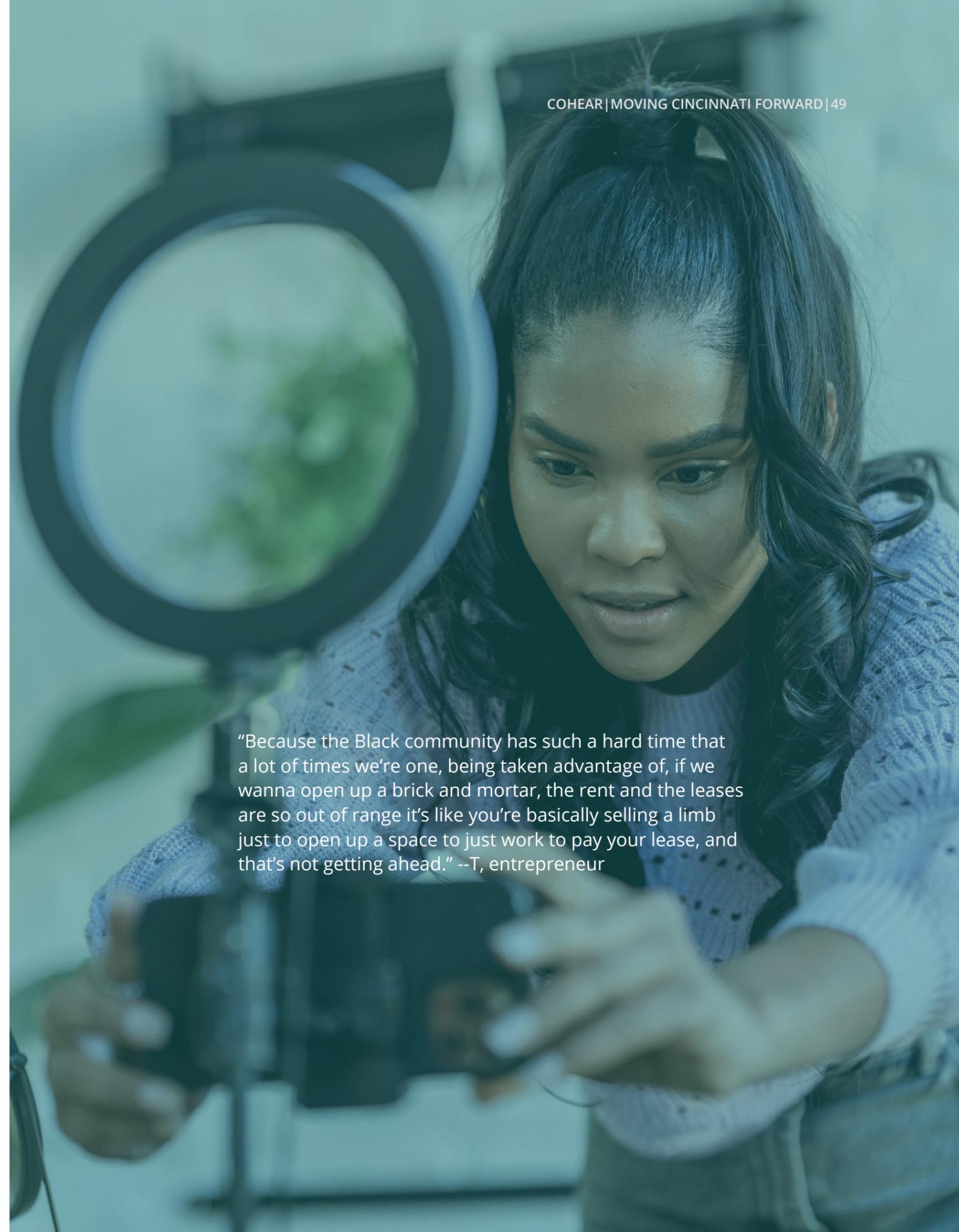
"With my years of experience... my stability in the field, my salary should be much higher than what it is... I had to make the sacrifice and lose benefits to be a sub, and what I'm hearing is... You can work 34 days and get first-year teacher salary, but what Cincinnati Public Schools does is they pull you out of the classroom on day 33... so you don't get the first year teacher's salary with benefits."

**--E, in an entry-level role**

"I have a lot of hustles and things of that nature because a lot of positions... will be independent contracts, sometimes they won't be full time and stuff... you might really want a position, but the position might not pay well, especially if you want to work in a small nonprofit space."

**--J, in an entry-level role**

"Because the Black community has such a hard time that a lot of times we're one, being taken advantage of, if we wanna open up a brick and mortar, the rent and the leases are so out of range it's like you're basically selling a limb just to open up a space to just work to pay your lease, and that's not getting ahead." **--T, entrepreneur**

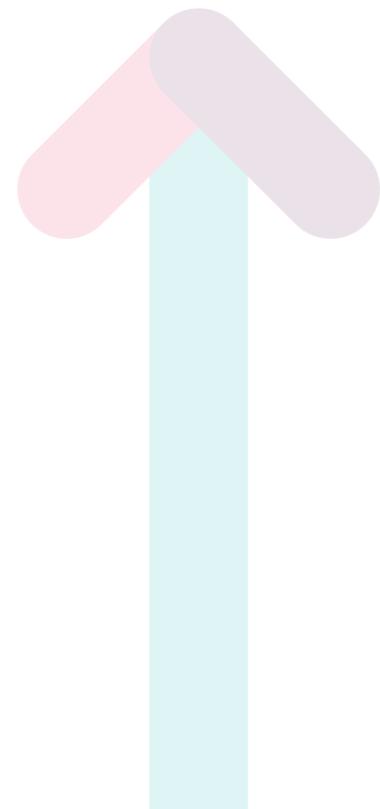


*Black Consultants - especially younger creatives  
- are often asked to work for free*

“The collaborations are always attached to a check in other places, I’m always asked to do things in Cincinnati out of the kindness of my heart, they expect young people to do things out of passion and no compensation.”  
- R, professional who left Cincinnati

*Entrepreneurship can be hindered by exorbitant costs upfront.*

“Because the Black community has such a hard time that a lot of times we’re one, being taken advantage of, if we wanna open up a brick and mortar, the rent and the leases are so out of range it’s like you’re basically selling a limb just to open up a space to just work to pay your lease, and that’s not getting ahead.” --T, entrepreneur



## POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

**Connect Black women entrepreneurs to local small business incubator programs, and consider covering any costs.**

Incubators can be an extremely helpful resource when launching a business. Free access to these programs would be even more beneficial.

“I participated in Sustainable Cincy... kind of taking different classes and incubator programs, different things like that, because it allows me to build a network and have multiple people who might be going down the same path... I’m a part of that network, they’re more apt to say, ‘reach out to this person or that person’... more of a warm handoff versus me cold calling somebody.” --K, entrepreneur

“I went to Explore [through Aviatra] in 2019... My experience was wonderful. They talked about your pitch... it was basically stepping stones to get to that point. So we did a canvas model, which included your validation, your pain points, and where are you gonna get your customers from... business banking, talked about business credit.”

--S, entrepreneur

## Increase employee and consultant pay – and always compensate for work.

Opportunities for higher pay in other cities may cause young Black talent in Cincinnati to leave, so it is crucial that their value is reflected in their compensation. Equitably promoting these individuals is also essential.

“I think what I’ve experienced is that the check sizes are bigger and they take risks with young professionals [outside Cincinnati]... and Cincinnati, I would get promoted and then a white male would be promoted over me. Cincinnati has incredible density, and I’m seeing my friends rise up the scale, but still having these glass ceilings.”

**--B, professional who left Cincinnati**

## Provide training on business credit and strategies to access capital.

Business credit is extremely important when starting a business, and may be a barrier for new entrepreneurs. Provide training and resources on gaining access to capital more generally.

“What I’ve learned... these are the things that you really need to have in place, you really need to have your credit score here because no bank is going to look at you.” **--T, entrepreneur**

“It would be great to actually have some type of network or class talking about business credit... I was never educated on that, so I think that would be a great type of class to have for entrepreneurs.” **--T, entrepreneur**

“Access to capital obviously is huge... and just making sure that you have all those things in order to be able to apply and have your credit score and all the things in place... that’s where a lot of small businesses fail, because a lot of times we’re just not financially... able to do so.” **--T, entrepreneur**

## Prioritize funding small and Black-owned businesses.

Larger companies may be able to make an impact, but they can often do so on their own without additional funding. Allocate funds instead toward small and Black-owned

businesses in order to enable them to expand their reach.

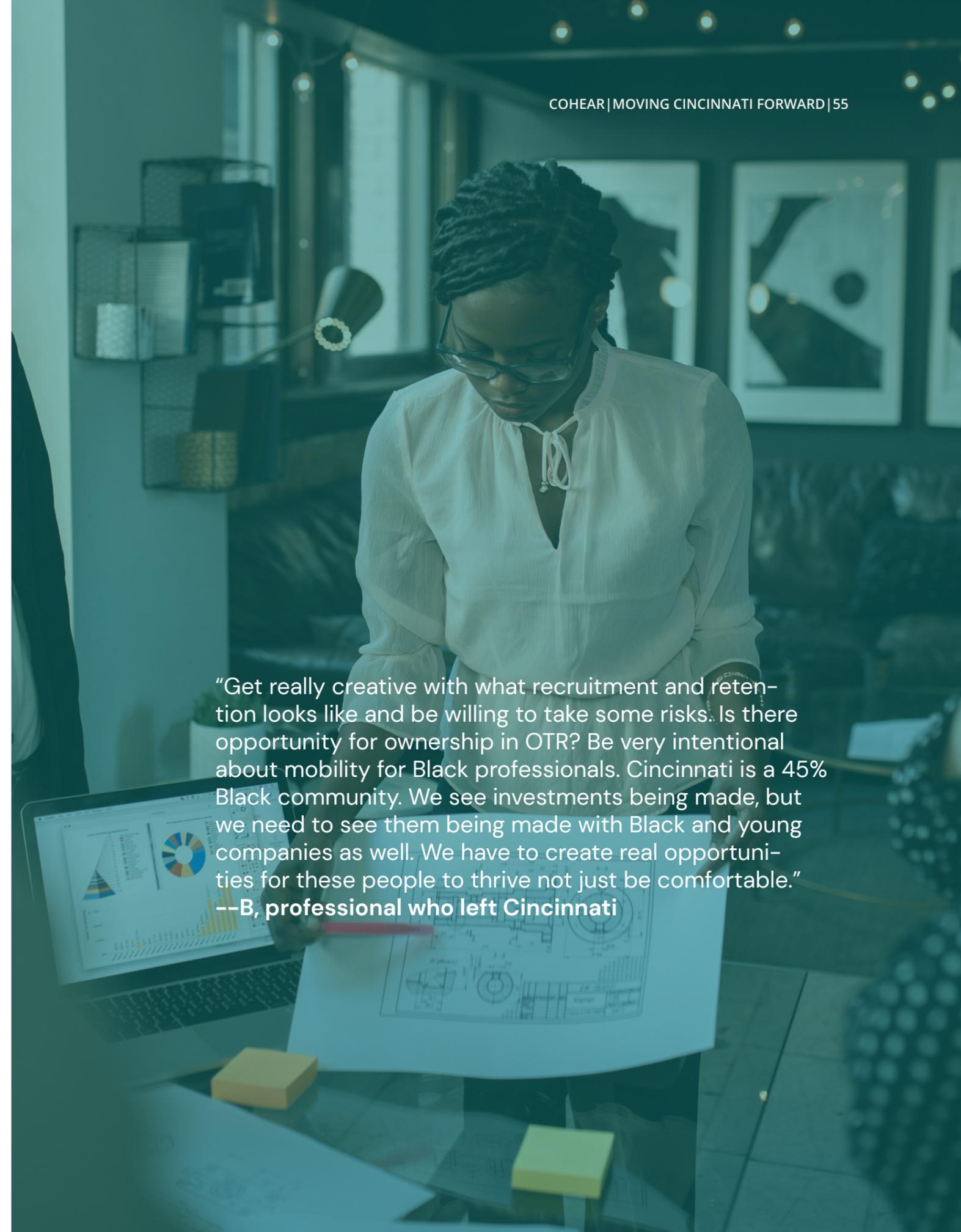
"I would like for GCF to not give funding to those large entities, because there are so many small companies that could use funding, that promote our youth of tomorrow."

**--N, professional who left Cincinnati**

"People always go to who they know. Corporations need to take a chance on someone else. You might not know about the temp agency that's owned by a Black woman, but you know about the one that's nationally recognized. Go to the one that's owned by the Black woman here locally, and see how that works out. Give people a chance." **--L, in her mid-career**

"Get really creative with what recruitment and retention looks like and be willing to take some risks. Is there opportunity for ownership in OTR? Be very intentional about mobility for Black professionals. Cincinnati is a 45% Black community. We see investments being made, but we need to see them being made with Black and young companies as well. We have to create real opportunities for these people to thrive not just be comfortable."

**--B, professional who left Cincinnati**



"Get really creative with what recruitment and retention looks like and be willing to take some risks. Is there opportunity for ownership in OTR? Be very intentional about mobility for Black professionals. Cincinnati is a 45% Black community. We see investments being made, but we need to see them being made with Black and young companies as well. We have to create real opportunities for these people to thrive not just be comfortable."

**--B, professional who left Cincinnati**

## Conclusion

By investing in Black women's economic mobility and career success, GCF has a tremendous opportunity to support a large, skilled workforce in the greater Cincinnati region. Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic and the increased national focus on equity and diversity, now is the time to break down the systemic barriers that exist in Cincinnati's professional environments to uplift women of color in the workplace. This is the only way that this region will live up to its potential as a place where racism and sexism don't continue to hold back women of color in large institutions.

While there is no one solution to the current challenges women of color are facing in the workplace, their priorities are clear. Mentorship and networking, access to childcare, reliable transportation, investments in education and certification, equitable pay, meaningful allyship, and a diverse workplace are crucial to ensuring career success. Additionally, making ownership of businesses and leadership in the workplace more accessible to Black women will increase representation and ultimately establish Cincinnati as a place where every person has the opportunity to succeed.

# Meet the team



**DANI ISAACSOHN**  
HE/HIM  
Founder / CEO



**NIA BAUCKE**  
SHE/HERS  
Chief Strategy Officer



**JESSICA MOORE**  
SHE/HERS  
Community Organizer



**ADAM DENNEY**  
THEY/THEM  
Creative Director



**NIKITA ANDERSON**  
SHE/HERS  
Director of Community



**AIMEE DIRIG**  
SHE/HERS  
Operations and Policy Manager



**AKUA WILSON**  
SHE/HERS  
Communications Intern



**AKUA WILSON**  
SHE/HERS  
Communications Intern



**JASMINE AYRES**  
SHE/HERS  
Columbus Lead Organizer



**MONIQUE GILLIAM**  
SHE/HERS  
Cincinnati Lead Organizer



**DANIEL OPOKU**  
HE/HIM  
Design Intern

COHEAR | MOVING CINCINNATI FORWARD



GREATER  
CINCINNATI FOUNDATION