



African American  
Community Fund

An affiliate of

FOUNDATION FOR APPALACHIAN OHIO

Second Baptist Church of Steubenville | 2025 grant recipient



Bless Purpose Inc. | 2025 grant recipient



Sistah's Acts of Kindness | 2025 grant recipient



# African American Community Fund 2025 Annual Report

BUILDING A LEGACY OF SUPPORT AND OPPORTUNITY FOR OUR COMMUNITIES



## ABOUT US

**The African American Community Fund** (AACF), an affiliate of the Foundation for Appalachian Ohio (FAO), provides a way for everyone to support the region's African American people and communities, today and for years to come.

Established by and for the Black community as a way to grow resources and create opportunities, AACF also serves as a vehicle to address disparities and improve the physical, economic and structural conditions that affect quality of life in Appalachian Ohio. A committee of volunteers sets AACF's programmatic direction and makes grant decisions, with FAO providing back-office support.

With the support of our donors, we award grants annually to Black-led and Black-serving nonprofit and public organizations for projects and programs that advance opportunities across five funding areas, known as our Pillars of Prosperity.



Arts & Culture



Community & Economic Development



Education



Environmental Stewardship



Health & Human Services

## Our committee

- **Ernest A. Bynum**
- **Rosetta Carter**
- **Trevellya Ford**
- **Lawrence Funderburke**
- **John Jackson**
- **Mark Lomax**
- **Ruth Lomax**
- **Ken Mason**
- **Michele Reynolds**
- **Ralph Smithers Jr.**

## Want to learn more?

For more information about planned giving, to make a gift to AACF or to create a fund to support a cause closest to your heart, please contact us!



740.753.1111



[AACF@ffao.org](mailto:AACF@ffao.org)

[www.AppalachianOhio.org/AACF](http://www.AppalachianOhio.org/AACF)

## 2025 GRANTS

The African American Community Fund, with support from its donors and in partnership with the Foundation for Appalachian Ohio, awarded 17 grants, totaling \$32,350, in 2025.

### BESS PURPOSE INC.

Bess Purpose Inc. provides individuals and families seeking a brighter future with resources and wrap-around services as they navigate paths to stability, self-sufficiency and success. This grant is helping the nonprofit organization implement a comprehensive support initiative for displaced families and veterans in Mahoning County.

### THE BIRTH CIRCLE

In 2025, the Birth Circle launched the International Families Connection Circle, a monthly program aimed at supporting international students and families living in Athens County and surrounding areas. This grant is helping to bring together individuals from diverse backgrounds to connect, share experiences and access resources that support their parenting and family journeys.

### DRESS TO SUCCEED OHIO

For more than 15 years, Dress To Succeed Ohio has helped individuals in need overcome one barrier to opportunity: lack of access to suitable clothing and hygiene essentials. This grant is supplying children in underserved communities in the Mahoning Valley with appropriate clothing for school, including uniforms and professional attire for job fairs and interviews.

### ENTERPRISE MUSKINGUM

Enterprise Muskingum seeks to create a brighter future for every child, with a focus on the needs of children of color and those experiencing generational poverty in Muskingum County. This grant is helping to fund operational expenses and support the Beautiful Mom Cohort, empowering local mothers and building a stronger, supportive community.



Rita Tate founded Bess Purpose Inc. in 2023 with a vision of providing hope, encouragement and practical support to women, veterans and families in need. Over the past two years, the nonprofit has grown to serve both Mahoning and Trumbull counties and has helped hundreds of individuals and families.



Enterprise Muskingum's Beautiful Mom Cohort provides a supportive community where mothers can grow stronger, healthier and more confident together. An AACF grant is supporting this opportunity for Muskingum County mothers.



Students from the National Center for Urban Solutions in Youngstown participate in Hyer Merit Association's Life Hacks, a training program that teaches them skills they can add to their resumes and provides them tools to manage responsibilities and ease the pressures that come with growing into adulthood.

## 2025 GRANTS

### HYER MERIT ASSOCIATION

Hyer Merit Association's The Bridge Project is a creative and workforce development initiative for Black youth and young adults in Mahoning and Trumbull counties. This grant is supporting the initiative's "Life Hacks" training program, a 12-week series that provides 16- to 18-year-olds mentorship, skill development, certification access and workshops in financial literacy, independent living and career readiness.

### JOHN GEE BLACK HISTORICAL CENTER

Every year, the John Gee Black Historical Center hosts local students, community organizations, civic groups and more, providing educational and cultural experiences that preserve and build upon African American history in Gallia County and beyond. This grant will allow the center to purchase audio and visual equipment to expand its programming, educational services and community events.

### KOOL BOIZ FOUNDATION

Since 2019, the Kool Boiz Foundation Young Men's Empowerment Series Mentoring Program has provided developmental assistance – including workshops on leadership, entrepreneurship, financial literacy and a successful mindset – to hundreds of boys and young men of color in Youngstown. This is the fourth year an AACF grant is investing in the program and the future success of our young people.



In 2025, the John Gee Black Historical Center, which preserves the history and legacy of Bethel A.M.E. Church of Gallipolis, was added to the National Park Service's National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom. Since its founding in 2020, AACF has awarded four grants to support the center and its mission.

### MACEDONIA MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH

It took many hands, partners and perseverance to restore Lawrence County's Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church, a cornerstone of African American history in Appalachian Ohio and a national historic site. (See story on page 7.) This grant is supporting operations of the historic landmark as it returns to service as an educational and community center.



Second Baptist Church of Steubenville added a new element to its Juneteenth celebration in 2025 – a Juneteenth parade. A grant from AACF funded the parade, extended the opening ceremony and helped with entertainment expenses for the three-day celebration.

### **NELSON T. GANT FOUNDATION**

In 2024, the Nelson T. Gant Foundation launched a campaign to fund a bronze statue of Gant, who was born into slavery and became a successful businessman – and a source of inspiration – in Zanesville. This grant is supporting the creation of the 7-foot-tall statue, a tribute to Gant's life and legacy – and to freedom.

### **OHIO VALLEY YOUTH NETWORK**

Jefferson County youth in the Sycamore Volunteer Service Corps Mentoring Program engage in community service – from packing food for cancer patients to cleaning a home for pregnant women facing homelessness. They also participate in skill-building classes and run small businesses. This grant is helping fund these activities, designed to develop the character and employability of our youth.

### **PLANT THEE SEED MINISTRIES**

Plant Thee Seed Ministries launched a new summer youth development program in Trumbull County that spans creative expression, academic enrichment and science discovery, character building, physical wellness, mentorship, and community and family engagement. This grant helped provide some of the program's healthy meals, curriculum and supplies.



Youth in the Sycamore Volunteer Service Corps Mentoring Program are a visible force for good in Jefferson County. In 2025, their community service included distributing meals to children, helping an elderly resident relocate to a new home in the middle of winter and much more.

### **SECOND BAPTIST CHURCH OF STEUBENVILLE**

Second Baptist Church of Steubenville held its first Juneteenth celebration in 2016, building on its now nearly 135-year ministry to Jefferson County. The event expanded to a multi-day celebration in 2024. This grant supported the church's 2025 celebration, honoring African American history and heritage through food, fun and fellowship.



Children served by Sistah's Acts of Kindness enjoy some summer fun, courtesy of the nonprofit and its supporters. A 2025 AACF grant helped support the nonprofit's back-to-school event and other programming.

## 2025 GRANTS

### SISTAH'S ACTS OF KINDNESS

Sistah's Acts of Kindness provides a community-centered violence prevention initiative to Clermont County children in grades K-5 with special needs and struggles. The program begins with a back-to-school event and continues with year-round after-school programming. This grant supported its 2025 event and programming that includes academic help, social-emotional learning, field trips and access to mental health support.

### THRIVE MAHONING VALLEY

Thrive Mahoning Valley served about 100 people at its first Thrive Thru, a free drive-through community meal initiative in Youngstown, in May 2025. This grant is supporting this initiative, which is expanding the nonprofit's commitment to provide new and longtime residents with access to critical resources and the experience of a welcoming community.

### UNDERGROUND RAILROAD MUSEUM

In 2026, the Underground Railroad Museum in Belmont County will hold its first Flight to Freedom Adventure Race, a triathlon recreating the historic trek freedom seekers made and raising awareness of the historical significance of the Underground Railroad in the Ohio Valley. This grant is supporting the inaugural event – and an organization dedicated to preserving the past for future generations.



Youngstown-area residents enjoy Thrive Mahoning Valley's June 2025 Thrive Thru, a free monthly drive-through community meal initiative. The new program provides nutritious meals in an area designated as food insecure while building community connections.

### WARRIORS 2 WILDERNESS

In 2024, Warriors 2 Wilderness in Muskingum County hosted 35 veterans experiencing the effects of PTSD for four-day holistic retreats that include immersive outdoor experiences and therapeutic activities that promote mental well-being, emotional healing and personal growth. For the second consecutive year, an AACF grant is supporting these experiences for veterans.

### YOUNIQUELY GIFTED

This grant is supporting Youniquely Gifted's plans to implement the ROX (Ruling Our eXperiences) Program, a co-curricular experience to enhance girls' self-discipline, physical fitness and social skills, at Youngstown's Woodrow Wilson Alternative School. The 20-week program, which will include martial arts training, is designed to support, empower and equip girls with the skills they need to navigate today's challenges.

## OUR IMPACT

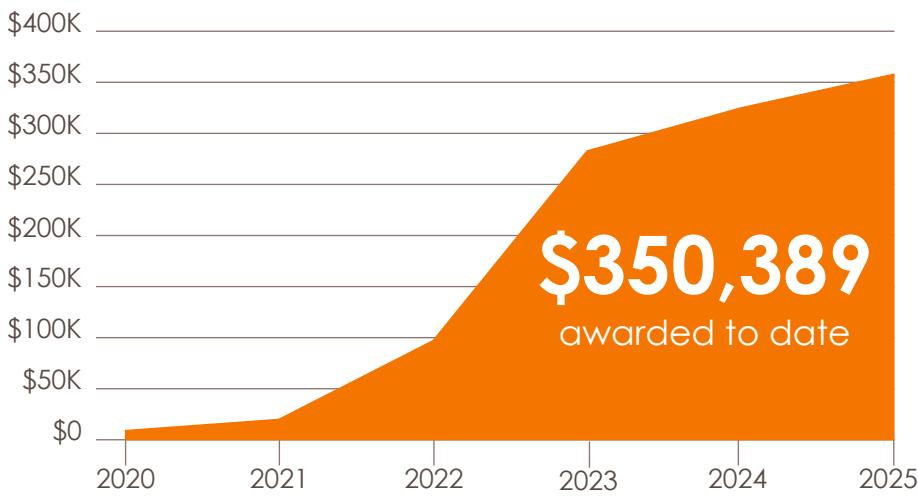
**\$958,764**

in assets across  
our family of funds  
(As of Nov. 30, 2025)

**\$32,350**

awarded in grants  
in 2025

### Total grants awarded



\* These unrestricted named funds contribute to AACF's annual grantmaking. Gifts to these funds as well as AACF's endowment fund are invested and generate earnings in perpetuity. Those earnings fund AACF's grants year after year, decade after decade, generation after generation.

### A LOCAL, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL TREASURE IS REBORN

2025 saw the fulfillment of a dream decades in the making: the restoration of Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church, the first Black church west of the Appalachians, the only surviving antebellum Black church in Ohio and a national historic site that served as a stop on the Underground Railroad.

Since 1849, the church has stood as a testament to freedom, resilience and community. Its restoration and return to service as an educational and community center is the result of many partnerships with FAO serving as the project's fiscal agent.

AACF has awarded three grants to advance the rebirth of this historic treasure, preserve the legacies of those who shaped our region and nation, and inspire future generations.

### Our family of funds

- African American Community Fund
- Black Appalachian Regional Community Fund
- Ernest E. Bynum Memorial Fund for African American Communities\*
- Ken and Adele Mason Family Fund\*
- Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church



PHOTOS BY JASON LUCAS/JASON LUCAS PHOTOGRAPHY



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An Affiliate of the Foundation for Appalachian Ohio

## Help support the people, places and future of Appalachian Ohio's African American communities

### GROW AACF'S ANNUAL GRANTMAKING

Gifts to the African American Community Fund's endowment fund are invested. The earnings generated from those investments fund the grants AACF awards each year to nonprofit and public organizations working to increase quality of life in our communities.

#### Give to AACF's endowment fund by:



Scanning the QR code or visiting  
[www.AppalachianOhio.org/AACF/give](http://www.AppalachianOhio.org/AACF/give)

or mailing your gift to  
**African American Community Fund**  
**c/o Foundation for Appalachian Ohio**  
**35 Public Square**  
**Nelsonville, OH 45764**

You can also establish an unrestricted fund – named in honor of your family or a loved one – that will contribute to AACF's grantmaking each year.

### FUND WHAT MATTERS MOST TO YOU

Provide sustained support for what's closest to your heart by establishing a restricted fund through AACF. We can help you create endowments to support specific charitable organizations or schools; donor-advised funds for family or corporate giving; funds that benefit an area of interest; and more.

### LEAVE A LEGACY WITH A PLANNED GIFT

Include charitable giving in your estate planning, giving you the peace of mind of knowing the communities and causes closest to your heart will continue to receive your support beyond your lifetime. The Foundation for Appalachian Ohio can assist you and/or your advisors with charitable research, provide options and create necessary documents or language for your plan.

### Gifts to the African American Community Fund are tax-deductible and can be made in a variety of ways, including:



CASH



STOCK



REAL ESTATE



ROYALTIES



QUALIFIED CHARITABLE  
DISTRIBUTIONS FROM IRAs

**Gifts of all sizes and kinds make a difference!**

For more information about establishing a fund or planned gift, **contact us today!**

**AACF@ffao.org | www.AppalachianOhio.org/AACF | 740.753.1111**