

INJUSTICE
ANYWHERE
IS A THREAT TO
JUSTICE
EVERYWHERE

-DR Martin Luther King Jr.

Toward Liberation

Black Organizing on the Path to Power

Spring 2020

COMMUNITY
Power from the
ground up **CHANGE**

Foreword

I have a vision of thriving Black communities in America.

In that America, our zip codes no longer limit our life expectancy and our blackness is no longer a footnote to the national conversation about well-being. We dream, and those dreams do not require escape.

But 400 years after 20 some African men and women were first sold as property in this country, we are fighting for the right for Black people to exist and create the conditions for us to thrive.

More than 50 years after the Kerner Commission reported on our two Americas, entrenched, racialized, generational poverty persists unabated. It is a structural problem—the result of policies designed to benefit a few at excruciating cost to many.

For the past five decades, individuals, communities, movement groups, and organizations like Community Change have worked to overcome the long half-life of our country's original sin. We have attempted to vote, legislate, protest, and organize our way toward the ideal where all people can live with dignity.

Yet, Black people—regardless of our place in the diaspora—continue to suffer the concrete consequences of policies that divest resources, displace people, and extract life from our communities. The Economic Policy Institute found that Black people experience:

- Unemployment roughly twice the white unemployment rate.
- Homeownership trailing 30 points behind the white homeownership rate.
- Incarceration more than six times the white incarceration rate.

I saw and lived this reality in Kansas City when I was the executive director of Communities Creating Opportunity. We studied the life-shortening impact of residing in different zip codes and found a decade or more of difference in life expectancy between Black and white households sometimes separated by just a few blocks.

Researchers like Raj Chetty at Harvard University have shown the lasting and devastating impact of racism in America. Racialized poverty is persistent, intergenerational, and in cities across the Midwest and the South, blackness and poverty take years—even decades—off our lives. Without intervention to disrupt these cycles, patterns of disparities and African American economic immobility will persist.

Community Change convened the Black Freedom Collective because we believe that this reality is unacceptable and that the people closest to the pain are the ones with the expertise required to solve it. Communities Creating Opportunity was one of the founding members of the Black Freedom Collective, embracing the goal to build the power and capacity of Black groups and organizers to lead the multi-racial movement for liberation and the freedom to thrive.



We need bold, structural change that rewrites the dominant narrative of anti-Black racism and repairs the harm of the policies that flow from it. And that will only be possible if we radically rebalance power in this country.

No single organization can bring about that scale of change. The Movement for Black Lives and organizations like Color of Change have dramatically changed the conversation and mobilized millions of people. *The New York Times*' 1619 Project and writers like Ta-Nehisi Coates have driven a newly popular analysis of race and blackness in dominant culture.

Their important work—without on-the-ground, grassroots organization that builds lasting power—is not enough.

Community Change and the Black Freedom Collective are building power from the ground up as our role in strengthening the movement for racial justice.

Our strategy to realizing such a strong, powerful movement includes:

1. Organized people in the struggle for liberation, committed to shared goals for the long term, bound together in what former organizer Barack Obama once called: the “beauty and strength of everyday people.”
2. Bold ideas that define a new common sense, emerging from the expertise of lived experience and strengthened in collaboration with academics, policymakers, and other thinkers.
3. Political clout—the ability to create political opportunity and enact a governing agenda—which starts with changing the electorate and speaking to those who have despaired of the promise of democracy.

We are committed to building power in Black communities because we believe that the path to transformational change runs through Black, Brown, and immigrant communities - linked together in a multi-racial movement for justice and equity.

Join us.

Seft Hunter, Ph.D.
Director of Black-Led Organizing and Power Building
Community Change

Why Organize?

Community Change builds power from the ground up. Born into the chaos and heartbreak that followed the deaths of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Sen. Robert F. Kennedy in 1968, Community Change brought together leaders from the civil rights and labor movements, from Sen. Kennedy's campaign and the "War on Poverty". Their vision and their charge—to build power from the ground up—are just as relevant today.

The people closest to the pain—those who cannot walk away from the fight—are the key to liberation. Drawing from Black feminist theory, we see deep commitments to Black organizing infrastructure as strategically necessary for the success of the movement. The Black Freedom Collective is our commitment to the organizing infrastructure required to win racial equity.

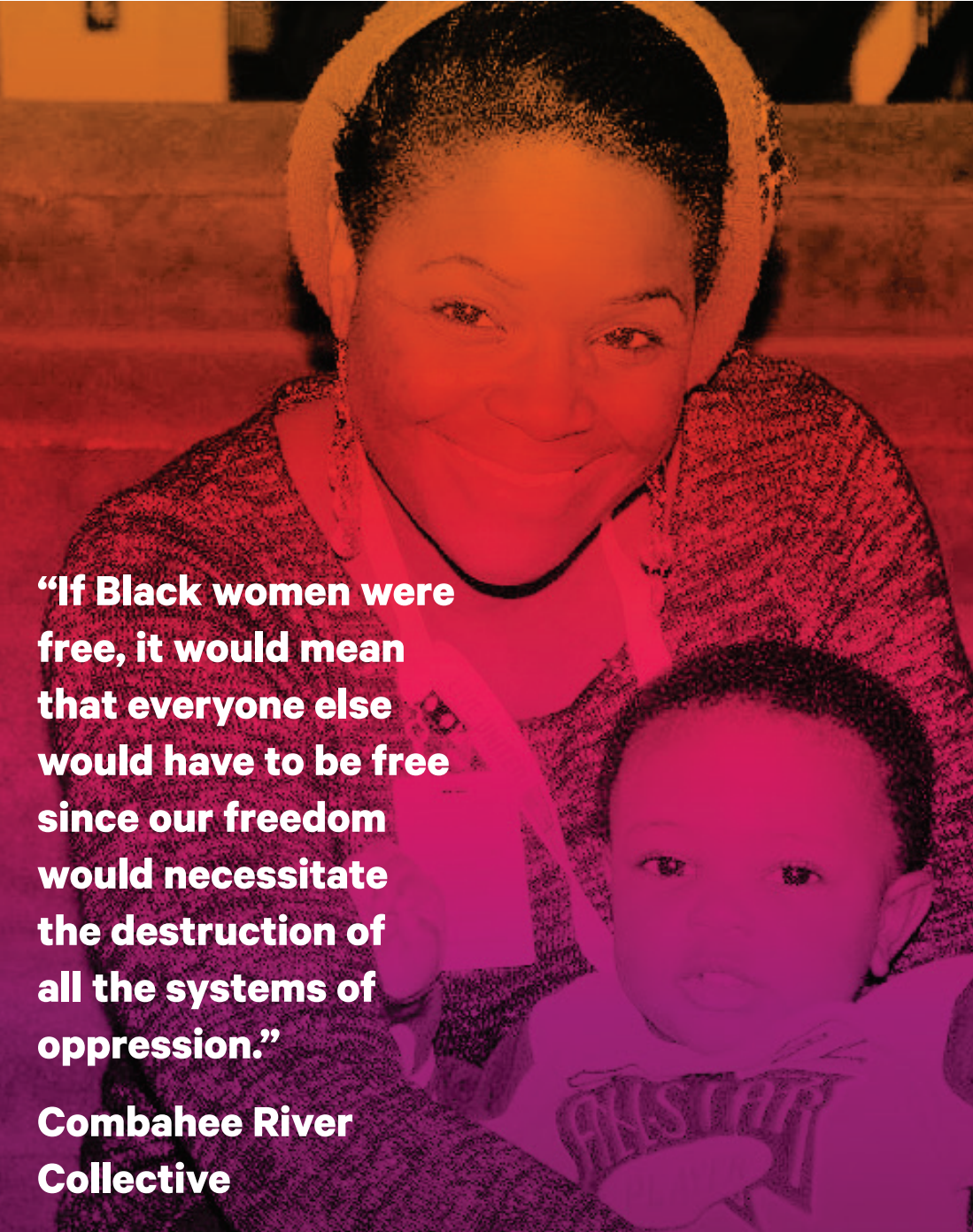
The Black Freedom Collective includes community-based organizations with Black leadership and Black organizers working within Community Change's other partner groups. Its groups are diverse in size, capacity, and longevity. They work in different issue areas with distinct strategies, and their members include people from within the diaspora and across the multi-racial movement for social justice.

Community Change and the Black Freedom Collective recognize that our destinies are intertwined; therefore, our work must be collective. We are united in a demand for significant and long-term investment in building organizing infrastructure that is led by Black people.

Despite the upsurge in Black mobilization and digital activism, Black organizations capable of building power *on the ground* have been disinvested and dramatically weakened. Empirical research supports our partners' reports that Black-led groups face deep and protracted challenges to develop consistent, long-term funding streams. This affects other areas such as staff recruitment and retention, as Black-led groups often operate with three or fewer paid staff, each of whom carry out multiple critical functions. As a result, bodies of work that require extensive personnel support and coordination are especially challenging. This is particularly true in (1) Board and organizational development and (2) Membership and base engagement.

Community Change is committed to the long-term project and investment in Black organizing, including by providing leadership development and peer learning spaces; raising the bar on organizational best practices and risk management; bridging and connecting grassroots groups and national influencers to reshape narratives; and financing Black-led groups, both with direct subgrants and as a partner in fundraising.

We are fighting to repair the damage of centuries of economic assaults on Black communities and to open opportunities for a self-determined quality of life. Our commitment to Black organizing infrastructure is core to our strategy for achieving structural change.



“If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression.”

Combahee River Collective

Our Strategy

Community Change and the Black Freedom Collective are building three-dimensional power from the ground up: the power of organizing, ideas, and politics.

1. Organizing builds power through community and social networks.

It taps into the power that resides in each person. Movements rooted in community-based organizations reset the agenda, change the narrative, and shift the structures of institutions, rules, and policies. They use strategic disruption to shift power relations, and they nurture strategic leaders who organize ordinary people as agents of change. They can take many years to build. But the people power they build is the core of the idea of the *demos*, of The Democracy.

The Black Freedom Collective fills a gap in the movement infrastructure. Although providing critically important momentum and entry-points to engage, digital mobilization and online advocacy alone do not create the kind of deep relationships and sense of shared fate necessary to sustain the long fight for structural change.

The Black Freedom Collective's 11 organizations reach a base of nearly 50,000 people in eight states, and we are building the capacity of our partners in the Collective to engage a universe of 500,000 by 2024. Community Change also connects Black-led groups with each other, aiming to create a "liberated space" where groups can help each other navigate the anti-Black racism that persists even in our movements, our organizations, and philanthropy.

We aim to ensure the next generation of Black organizers and Black-led organizations are strong, strategic, and at the center of today's movement for change. That vision includes helping groups integrate traditional methodologies of organizing with state-of-the-art digital tools and strategies.

2. Bold ideas are the framework for a different reality.

The people closest to the problem understand injustice in a way that is only possible through experience. When we recognize and embrace the wisdom and imagination of directly affected people, we can realize the extraordinary creative potential of the combined wisdom of grassroots leaders, policy analysts, and academics.

The Black Freedom Collective places Black people as the experts of their own experience and leaders in shaping a new narrative and common sense for this political moment. Because of the experience and perspectives of its members, the Black Freedom Collective is uniquely positioned to vie for power in shaping the big ideas and alternative vision that translates to policy priorities.



3. Political clout and the ability to enact a governing agenda requires that we change the electorate.

We need an electorate that looks more like this country, where people struggling to make ends meet—people of color, and people who have been systematically excluded from democratic practice see themselves and their interests represented in the electoral arena.

But in too many communities, centuries of marginalization has led to a place of political, economic, and social despair. The Black Freedom Collective organizes in many of these communities, which have seen their interests ignored by politicians of every race and party. Our approach to increasing political clout begins with civic engagement writ large: voter participation, but also campaigns to hold politicians accountable, efforts to ensure an accurate count of Black people, and issue fights across Community Change, including to advance demands for water equity in Detroit and fight for child care justice in Cincinnati and Kansas City.

With Community Change Action, the Collective's sister advocacy organizations engage in sophisticated electoral politics and accountability work, targeting the specific voter universes necessary to change electoral outcomes and demonstrate the clout of Black voters.

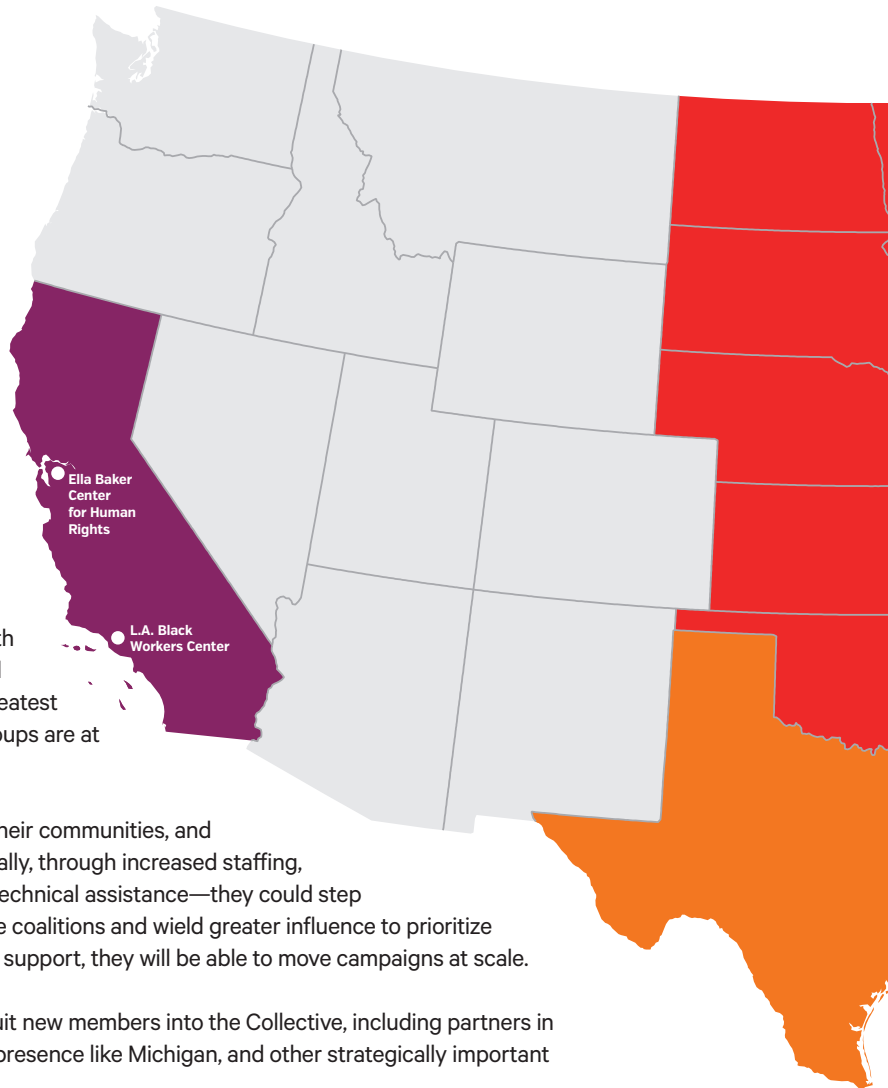
The Black Freedom Collective: Current Partners & Expansion Plan

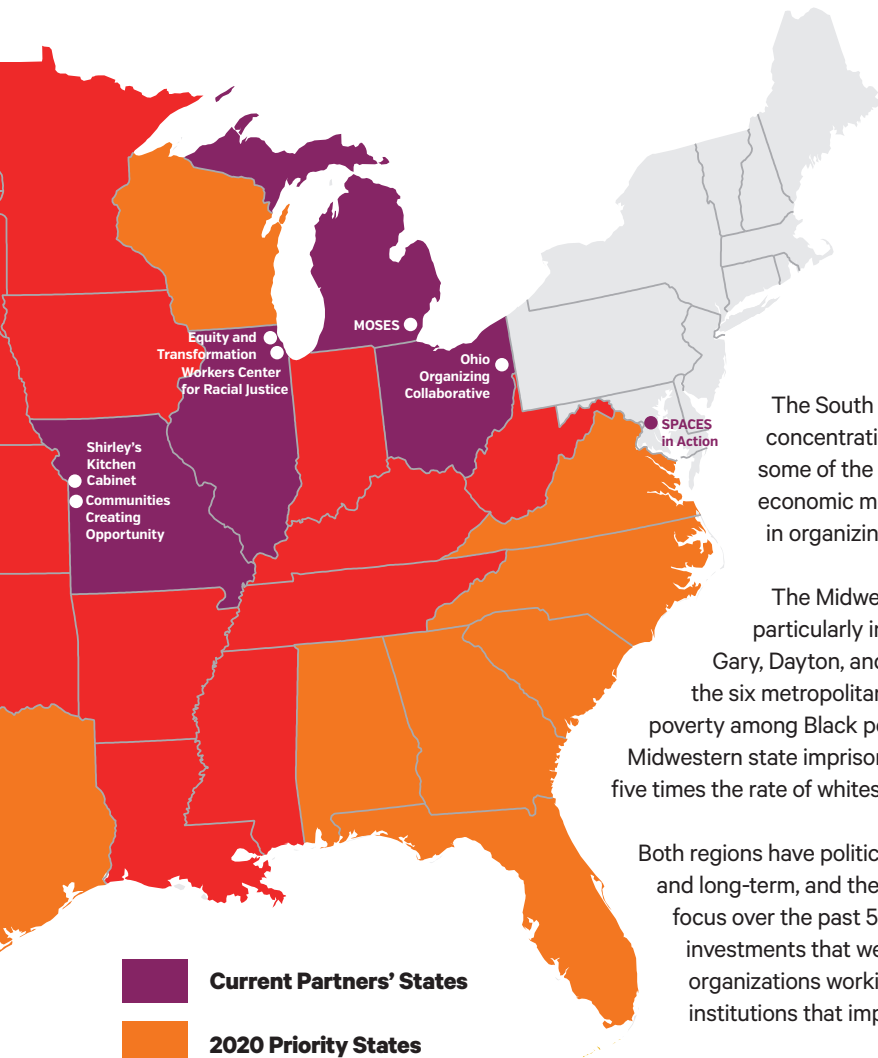
The Black Freedom Collective includes Black-led groups that are building the power and capacity needed to lead and win statewide campaigns.

Community Change is working with the organizations that are situated with the people in the places of greatest concern. The majority of these groups are at a pivot point.

They are able to win on issues in their communities, and with a little more support—financially, through increased staffing, better technologies, training and technical assistance—they could step into greater leadership within state coalitions and wield greater influence to prioritize Black communities. With strategic support, they will be able to move campaigns at scale.

Beginning in 2020, we aim to recruit new members into the Collective, including partners in states where we have an existing presence like Michigan, and other strategically important states in the Midwest and South.





- Current Partners' States**
- 2020 Priority States**
- Future Priority States**

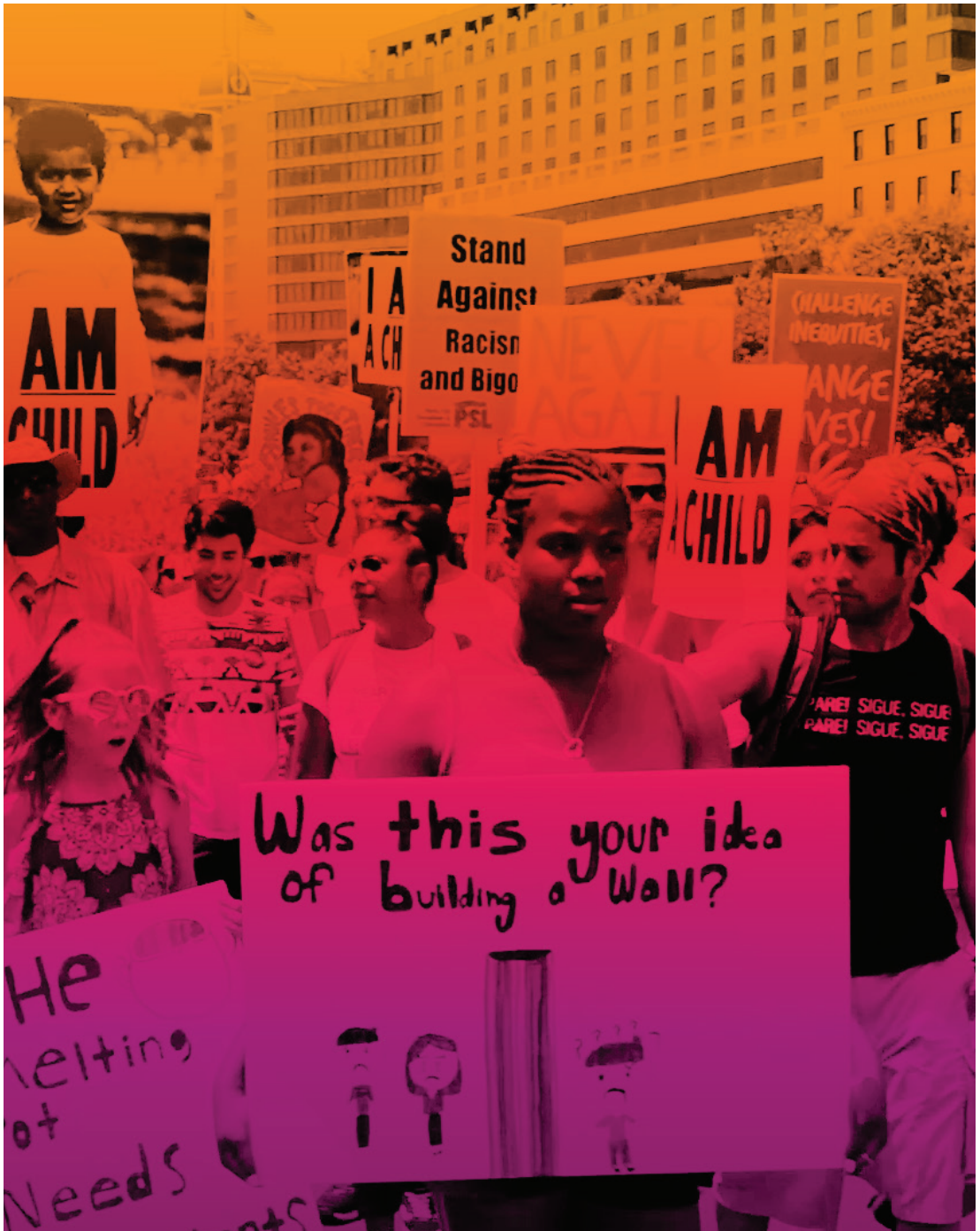
The South is home to the largest concentration of Black people as well as some of the deepest poverty, lowest rates of economic mobility, and scarcest investments in organizing infrastructure.

The Midwest replicates many of these trends, particularly in cities like Detroit, Milwaukee, Gary, Dayton, and Cleveland, which are five of the six metropolitan areas in which concentrated poverty among Black people exceeds 40 percent. Every Midwestern state imprisons African Americans at more than five times the rate of whites.

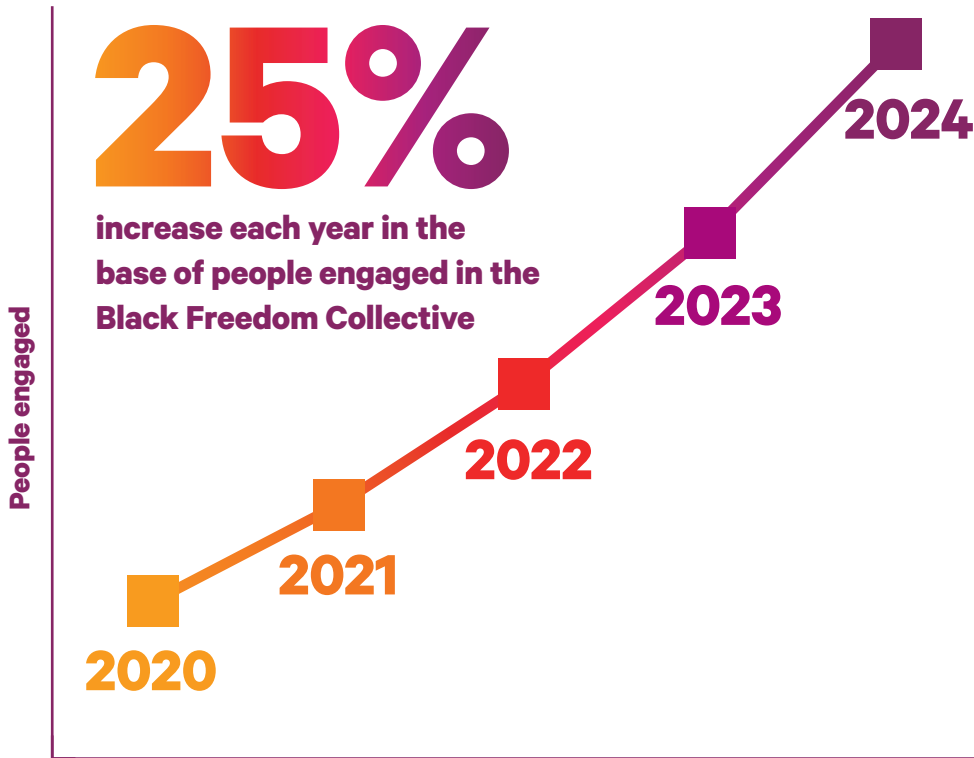
Both regions have political significance for the short-term and long-term, and they align with Community Change's focus over the past 50 years and the sustained investments that we have made in the people and organizations working to change the policies and institutions that impact low-income people of color.

With our partners, we will:

- 1. Improve economic security and quality of life** by protecting and expanding the social safety net and access to anti-poverty supports. For example, MOSES is working with 50 congregations in Detroit to build issue task forces that engage the broader community to take action on water equity and green infrastructure job development. In Kansas City, Communities Creating Opportunity is developing a long-term agenda for investment in, and the restoration of Kansas City's Black community that confronts the institutional and environmental forces responsible for low life expectancy rates. Our plan for growing the Black Freedom Collective begins with engaging Black-led groups already working with Community Change on economic justice issues, such as partners in the campaign for early learning and care.
- 2. End the criminalization of blackness** by supporting the leadership of directly impacted people. For example, Tanya Fogle is an advocate, formerly incarcerated woman, and organizer from Kentucky who describes her work as seeking “to break the generational curse of incarceration.” Through our fellowship for formerly incarcerated and impacted women of color, Community Change supports Tanya and eight other women with stipends, training, and political education so they can establish how power is attained and wielded at home, work, and their communities, envision themselves in a different reality, and shape a policy agenda to achieve it.
- 3. Strengthen and expand Black participation in the U.S. Census count and elections at every level.** For example, 9to5 Georgia is working in communities of color and hard-to-count areas leading up to the U.S. Census to educate and engage the community on the importance of being counted. They are also connecting their get-out-the-count efforts with non-partisan civic engagement activities, including voter education and mobilization. They aim to register 9,000 new Black voters for the 2020 election cycle, focusing on households led by single Black women over the age of 18. In addition to traditional methods such as canvassing, 9to5 Georgia is also seeking out voters in non-traditional spaces for voter registration such as barber shops and beauty salons, community cookouts, and social events in the community.
- 4. Expand the politically possible by** sharing ideas and new ways of thinking about the well-being of Black communities. We need policies rooted in a different set of values like *a freedom to thrive* and *radical equity*. For example, Equity and Transformation in Chicago is reimagining the narrative of work in the informal economy from one of criminality to survivability, rooted in both the history of exclusion from formal labor markets and the depth of creativity in the development of alternative labor systems for survival. Their narrative change work directly informs efforts to expunge marijuana-related convictions for 800,000 people as part of legalization in Illinois.



Our Goals: 2020-2024



2020

Groundwork in place for future work to recruit, cultivate, and hold accountable:

- Champions in prosecutor and district attorney offices in future years
- Black elected officials committed to supporting and advocating for equitable economic and racial justice policies.

20 Organizations in the Black Freedom Collective

2021

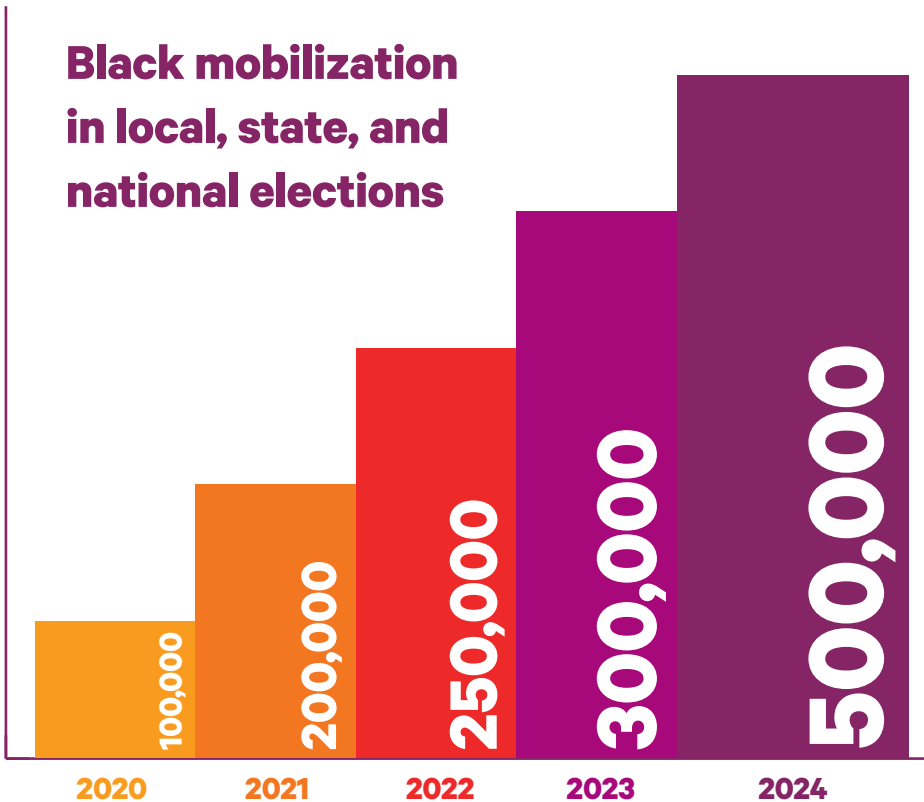
Progressive prosecutor candidates are recruited and supported by the Collective's advocacy organizations and held accountable by their members.

Policies with the most promise to improve the material conditions for black people in the South and the Midwest tested and replicated

30 Organizations in the Black Freedom Collective

Black mobilization in local, state, and national elections

Black people mobilized



2022

12 prosecutors or district attorneys publicly commit to support criminal justice reform and are held accountable by the Collective's members

50% reduction in the difference in wait times between Black and white polling places in cities where Black voters are a critical bloc in a progressive coalition

40 Organizations in the Black Freedom Collective

2023

5 municipal or state policy victories to expand child care

Primary elections center the voices and aspirations of Black people

50 Organizations in the Black Freedom Collective

2024

Eliminated the difference in wait times between Black and white polling places in cities where Black voters are a critical bloc in a progressive coalition

55 Organizations in the Black Freedom Collective

Support the Black Freedom Collective

Community Change builds three dimensional power with the Black Freedom Collective's individual organizations and through our shared work. We have built the power and capacity of grassroots groups for more than 50 years, and we bring that experience to the individual plans we have developed with each organization:

Our leadership development includes specific programs for ascendent leaders of color to learn and hone leadership skills at the national level through Community Change's campaigns and projects.

We raise the bar for organizations' regulatory compliance as well as best practices in communications, electoral operations, policy advocacy, and innovations in community organizing.

We create intentional spaces for peer support, incubating the space for partner groups to learn from each other and the people within organizations to build relationships and connections for long term sustainability.

We facilitate access to national thought leaders and policymakers, bridging the grassroots and national influencers to shape narratives and create political opportunities.

We provide sub-grants and connect the Collective's members with other funding opportunities to support the unglamorous work of building capacity.



Over the next two years, we must lay the groundwork for structural change. To win deep transformation in our communities, we must build power from the ground up.

Our goal is to raise \$3.65 million in 2020 so that we can support the ambitious work described.

Annual grants to support partners' capacity-building efforts and issue campaigns: To overcome the persistent fundraising barriers that community-based, Black-led organizations face, we aim to provide subgrants of \$80,000 to \$100,000 to each partner each year. Based on our growth model for the Collective, this will require \$1.6 million in 2020, growing to \$5.5 million in 2024.

Two in-person convenings and peer learning sessions each year: As a collective, Black-led groups can identify common challenges and translate solutions across different geographies. That kind of shared learning requires deep relationships and trust, which the Black Freedom Collective uniquely provides. Community Change supports this space at a cost of \$300,000 per year.

Dedicated staffing and strategic support for the Black Freedom Collective: With current staffing levels, Community Change has been able to create and convene the Black Freedom Collective and provide strategic support to specific campaigns and groups. To reach scale—and to broaden the dimensions of our groups' power—we need to grow our capacity by bringing on an experienced organizer and administrative support. To support the team's full capacity, outside consultants, and the institutional costs associated with the program, we seek to raise \$1.75 million.

Community Change is starting 2020 with commitments of \$1.1 million. We aim to raise an additional \$2.55 million this year toward the goal of dramatically increasing philanthropic support for Black organizing infrastructure. Join donors and funders from across the country.

The road to economic justice, to racial equity, and to a more perfect union begins in Black communities. Join Community Change and the Black Freedom Collective in the work to reimagine the systems that pit communities against one another and realize our vision of Black thriving.



Contact Seft Hunter, Community Change's Director of Black-Led Organizing and Power Building, shunter@communitychange.org, to learn more.



“Community Change” is both our name and a statement of our purpose. We are a national organization founded in 1968 by leaders of the civil rights, labor, and anti-poverty movements following the deaths of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Sen. Robert F. Kennedy. Our founders’ vision and their charge—to build power through grassroots leadership, to challenge the government to be a force for good, to focus on poor people, especially poor people of color—are just as relevant today as at the time of our birth.

This is a joint project of Community Change, a 501(c)(3) organization, and Community Change Action, its affiliated 501(c)(4) advocacy arm. The sister organizations share a mission and vision, but they operate independently and in compliance with the law.

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