

Columbus Urban League

Annual Report 2023 - 2024



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Message from President & CEO Stephanie Hightower

Dear Friends, Partners, Sponsors, and Investors,

I'm excited to share with you the outcomes and impact of your Columbus Urban League – and introduce you to our updated mission to grow an inclusive economy that benefits our entire region.

First, please know that unrestricted investments are extending and intensifying our effectiveness. In three years, we've more than doubled the numbers of those we served through our workforce development initiatives, increased our outreach to entrepreneurs by 76%, and nearly doubled the numbers of people benefiting from home buyer education, credit, rental and mortgage counseling. Investments in talent, technology and organizational infrastructure clearly count – and they will continue to do so.

But opportunities and challenges demand that we shift our focus. We've listened to clients, surveyed the community, scoured the data, and researched the trends. Central Ohio's transformation into America's Silicon Heartland calls us to re-frame and turn a social service organization into a wealth-building powerhouse. We make this mission possible by focusing our resources and expertise in preparing people for the high-wage jobs of the future, growing small businesses, and teaching smart money management.

Real change is rarely easy. But our people and economy cannot wait nor maintain the status quo. Columbus ranks nearly dead last among 54 cities for economic inclusion. A McKinsey and Company Study tells us that if we stay on our current trajectory, it will take 700 years to realize an economy where everyone contributes.

Your support and guidance will be greatly valued and more important than ever. This is about creating shared prosperity that will catapult our region to become one of America's best and most sustainable communities. Please join US.

Sincerely,

Message from Board Chair Jim Negrón

Dear Friends and Supporters,

As Chair of the Columbus Urban League Board of Directors, I am honored to share a message of profound importance. I firmly believe in the transformative power of the work being done at the Columbus Urban League and its essential role in fostering equity and opportunity in the greater Columbus region.

I am continually inspired by the resilience and ambition of our neighbors. The data consistently reflects a profound hunger for opportunity— opportunity that the Columbus Urban League is uniquely positioned to provide. Our initiatives are not just services; they are lifelines to pathways of prosperity and success.

Our city, despite its vibrancy and potential, remains one of the most racially segregated in the nation. This stark reality underscores the urgent need for robust, sustained investment in organizations like the Columbus Urban League. While transactional investments are valuable, it is the transformational investments that truly drive meaningful change. These are the investments that enable us to tackle systemic disparities, bridge the wealth and opportunity gap, and build a foundation for lasting impact.

I want to extend my deepest gratitude to those who have already committed to supporting us and our mission. Your investment in our work is not merely a donation; it is a crucial contribution to a larger movement toward equity and empowerment. As we move forward, your continued support will be vital in amplifying our impact and ensuring that we meet the evolving needs of our community.

The journey ahead requires unwavering dedication and collective effort. I encourage each of you to remain engaged and consider deepening your support. Together, we can close the gap between potential and opportunity.

With gratitude and resolve,



Thank you to our 2024 Board of Directors

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and Workforce Development

Our Why

Mission

Your Columbus Urban League is a trusted, community-driven organization. We empower Black and underrepresented groups through economic, educational, and social progress.

Vision

A fully inclusive economy where everyone is supported and can achieve their full potential and contribute to the greater good.

Values

We are a trusted Advocate that delivers innovative, transformational services with the highest integrity and respect for the people we serve. We are a relevant and effective provider for our families, communities, stakeholders, and partners.



2023 - 2024 Executive Summary

This past fiscal year has been pivotal in reinforcing the core impact areas of The Columbus Urban League: Workforce Development, Entrepreneurship Services, and Financial Empowerment. We have honed our strategic focus to address the pressing needs of historically underserved communities, preparing them for success in the high-wage jobs of the future and fostering a talent pool that will propel regional economic growth.

We are dedicated to enhancing our workforce initiatives by equipping individuals with the skills and opportunities necessary to excel in a rapidly evolving job market. Our entrepreneurship services are tailored to support emerging businesses and empower Black, women, and veteran entrepreneurs, driving innovation and economic opportunity. Additionally, we are enhancing our financial education programs to help individuals maximize their net worth and build long-term financial stability and sustainability.

Through these focused efforts, the Columbus Urban League is committed to creating transformative outcomes that strengthen our communities and stimulate economic advancement.



Columbus Urban League Areas of Impact



Closing the Wealth Gap: Columbus Urban League in Action

1

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Our Workforce Development Initiatives saw a 26% increase in Average Starting Wages when compared to 2021 placements.



Helped clients increase collective earning power by **\$4.6 Million in Salaries**



Supported the next wave of Columbus workforce with internships, trainings and **\$682k in Wages**

2

ENTREPRENEURSHIP SERVICES

Our Entrepreneurship Initiatives saw a 76% increase in New Businesses created and a 75% increase in access to financing and contracts compared to 2021.



Infused **1,592 new businesses** into the Columbus Economy



Assisted entrepreneurs gain access to **\$7 Million** in financing and contracts

3

FINANCIAL EMPOWERMENT

Our Financial Empowerment Initiatives found success in a housing market that saw the fewest recorded home sales in a year since 2014.



Facilitated client journeys to homeownership with access to **\$7.8 Million** in mortgage loans



Improved clients financial health with an average credit score increase of **32 Points**



**all stats based on the 2023 - 2024 Fiscal year*

Workforce Readiness Training University

Work Readiness Training University (WRTU) is dedicated to equipping our youth with the essential skills and knowledge they need to thrive in the rapidly evolving job market of Columbus and beyond. Our training program is built on four key development foundations:

Empowerment: We believe in fostering a sense of agency in our participants. By equipping them with decision-making skills and encouraging self-advocacy, we prepare young people to take charge of their career paths and personal growth.

Innovation: In today's fast-paced world, creative problem-solving is crucial. WRTU emphasizes innovative thinking, teaching participants how to adapt and think critically in various situations. We encourage them to explore new ideas and approaches, ensuring they can contribute effectively in any work environment.

High-Performance: We strive for excellence in everything we do. Our program instills a strong work ethic, goal-setting strategies, and the importance of perseverance. Participants learn how to set high standards for themselves and understand the value of hard work in achieving their aspirations.

Equity & Justice: We are committed to creating a fair and inclusive environment for all participants. WRTU emphasizes the importance of diversity and understanding different perspectives. By addressing systemic barriers and promoting social justice, we aim to prepare young people for a workforce that values equity and inclusivity.

At Work Readiness Training University, we are passionate about nurturing the next generation of leaders, innovators, and change-makers. Together, we are building a brighter future for our community.

Scan QR Code to Watch WRTU's Documentary!



Scan QR Code to Watch Dr. Luckey's Workforce Development Story

Our workforce development impact area is dedicated to empowering historically underserved communities by bridging the information and opportunity gaps. We aim to provide essential resources, access, and opportunities through targeted upskilling, job training, and job placements. By forming strategic partnerships with key employers, we ensure that our communities are well-represented in future job markets and equipped to thrive in emerging opportunities.



Scan QR Code to Watch Erika's Entrepreneurship Journey

Our Entrepreneurship Services impact area focuses on empowering small business owners and entrepreneurs by providing crucial access to capital, contracts, and certifications. Recognizing Black women the fastest-growing demographic of entrepreneurs, we prioritize support in this area to maximize our impact. We are dedicated to assisting Black-owned, veteran-owned, women-owned, and other minority-owned businesses with the resources, information, guidance, and structure they need to thrive.



Scan QR Code to Learn about Kendrea's Wealth Building Journey

Our Financial Empowerment impact area is dedicated to educating and empowering clients with essential knowledge for achieving financial stability. We focus on increasing credit scores, boosting savings, reducing debt, and providing budgeting education—all while meeting clients where they are without judgment. A key priority is closing the wealth gap, with a significant emphasis on homeownership. We recognize that owning a home is a powerful tool for building generational wealth and offering stability and security.

Key Investments



“A core component of The Columbus Foundation’s mission is to strengthen and improve the community for all its residents. An investment in the Columbus Urban League focused on operational infrastructure, governance, and strategic outcomes is an important double bottom line in strengthening both the organization from within and, more broadly, the work in does in the community. We’re grateful for the leadership and intentional internal work of the Columbus Urban League, as it allows the organization to strengthen all they do across central Ohio.”

-Dan Sharpe,
Vice President for Community Research and Grants Management, The Columbus Foundation



“We are a proud partner of the Columbus Urban League, who for 106 years has built bridges in Columbus to elevate, educate, and grow the Black and urban community. Ranked in the top five percent of all NUL affiliates, CUL is a trusted advocate proven through a track record of success. Numerous programs showcase their dedication, including education initiatives like the Young Geniuses program that immerses youth in STEAM activities to spark the next generation of great thinkers. We also share CUL’s deep passion for racial justice and equity in all aspects of our community. At Honda, we believe in Respect for the individual, a value that we live by understanding that different experiences make us all stronger and better. The work that CUL does to empower their community benefits everyone who calls Columbus home.”

-Yvette Hunsicker,
Vice President and Division Lead of Corporate Social Responsibility and Inclusion & Diversity, Honda



“For over a decade, Huntington Bank has been proud to partner with the Columbus Urban League. We take great pride in supporting events and programming that make a real impact on the Central Ohio community.”

At Huntington Bank we are committed to fostering self-sufficiency and promoting social and economic equality. We are grateful for the opportunity to work alongside the Columbus Urban League and look forward to continuing our collaboration in the years ahead.”

- Daphne McKinnie
Vice President-Community Development Relationship Manager, Huntington



JPMorganChase is proud to partner with the Columbus Urban League, showcasing our commitment to economic empowerment and social justice in Central Ohio. Through programmatic support and event sponsorship, we have contributed to initiatives like the Financial Empowerment Center and Journey to Wealth, enhancing economic mobility in our community.

We are happy to intentionally support the Accelerate Her initiative to empower Black women entrepreneurs through resources and mentorship. We deeply appreciate the Columbus Urban League’s dedication and are proud to collaborate on initiatives that foster growth and prosperity.

- Corrine Burger
Columbus Location Leader, JPMorganChase



“For more than a century, the Columbus Urban League has been a vital force in the city. Nationwide and the Nationwide Foundation are privileged to support their efforts to advance economic opportunity within our community.”

Our partnership, spanning more than 30 years, reflects Nationwide’s core values of fostering a strong, resilient community where everyone has the chance to thrive. We take pride in providing support that strengthens the Columbus Urban League’s ability to make a meaningful impact. Thanks to the leadership of Stephanie Hightower and her team, our city is a better place for everyone.”

- Chad Jester
President, Nationwide Foundation



As Mayor of Columbus, I am committed to creating equitable opportunities for every resident. This mission aligns closely with the work of the Columbus Urban League, whose efforts in economic growth, support for minority-owned businesses, and housing stability are vital to our city’s prosperity.

The Urban League’s initiatives complement our Neighborhood Safety Strategy, which aims to reduce violent crime and enhance community safety. Both efforts contribute to a more inclusive and thriving Columbus.

My dedication to diversity is reflected in the appointment of our city’s most diverse mayoral leadership cabinet, highlighting the strength that diverse perspectives bring. Together with the Urban League, we share a common goal of ensuring prosperity for all Columbus residents.

- Andrew J. Ginther
Mayor, City of Columbus



As County Administrator of Franklin County, my top priority is to ensure our county remains well-governed and offers opportunities for resident success.

The Columbus Urban League aligns with this mission through its dedicated efforts to boost the economy, stabilize families, and remove barriers. By supporting minority entrepreneurs and promoting homeownership, they play a vital role in closing the wealth gap and enhancing economic stability.

When residents succeed, the entire community benefits. I fully support the Urban League’s initiatives and recognize their crucial impact on our county’s progress.

- Kenneth N. Wilson
County Administrator, Franklin County

Thank you to our Key Investors

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all our investors, with special recognition for those whose transformational giving is essential to the success of the Columbus Urban League.

These key investors are truly “all in,” demonstrating unwavering belief in our mission and partnering with us as we strategically address the greatest needs of the communities we serve. Their commitment not only fuels our initiatives but also inspires us to push boundaries and drive meaningful change.

Together, we share the conviction that when we are all in, we all win. Your support makes a significant difference, and we are deeply thankful for your partnership on this journey. We couldn’t do this important work without you.

Empowerment Day 2023 Sponsors

Premier Sponsors: (\$100,000)

HONDA

Presenting Sponsors: (\$75,000)



Ambassador Sponsors (\$50,000):



Advocate Sponsors: (\$25,000)



Partner Sponsors: (\$15,000)



Champion Sponsors: (\$10,000)



Additional thank you to our Pillar, Friend, & Supporter Sponsors



Herstory Makers 2024 Sponsors

Premier Sponsors: (\$30,000+)



JP MORGAN
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Presenting Sponsors: (\$15,000+)



Partner Sponsors: (\$10,000+)

Bath & Body Works



Champion Sponsors: (\$5,000+)



Additional thank you to our Pillar, Friend, & Supporter Sponsors

Thank You to Our Columbus Urban League Staff!



Together We Are Empowering Communities and Changing Lives!



INVEST, FOLLOW, LEARN MORE!

Scan QR Code for More Information: <https://linktr.ee/ColumbusUrbanLeague>

