



ELEVATE
INITIATIVE

ELEVATE

SUMMMER 2024

REFLECTIONS

& INSIGHTS

table of CONTENTS

1 What is the Elevate Initiative?

2 Learning from the Process

3 Key Learnings

4 Recommendations



WHAT IS THE ELEVATE INITIATIVE?

The Elevate Initiative uplifts effective strategies that can reduce barriers to economic mobility and workforce development presented by structural racialization. Elevate was created through the support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's Economic Mobility and Opportunity portfolio.

The initiative is rooted in the understanding that Black and brown people and BIPOC-led organizations are best positioned to identify and advance solutions that address their communities' most pressing needs. Therefore, the initiative redefines the grantee-funder relationship to center grassroots leadership, foster a community of practice where learning is shared, and connect participating organizations to the technical assistance and resources they want.

Since the Winter of 2021, the Elevate Initiative has provided grant funds and technical support to sixteen established and fifteen emerging organizations nationwide. In the Winter of 2024, a second Request for Proposal (RFP) process was completed, awarding an additional cohort of nine established and eight emerging organizations. You can explore more about the alumni and current grantees of the Elevate Initiative on the [website](#).



LEARNING FROM THE PROCESS



The grantees have been instrumental in many of the accomplishments of the Elevate Initiative. For example, they shared their learnings with other nonprofit and philanthropy leaders on panels at conferences such as Unity Summit and the Association of Black Foundation Executives (ABFE). In addition, several of their stories of Black food justice impact were featured in *Nonprofit Quarterly*, a publication that provides resources for the nonprofit sector.

This context is crucial, as the learnings below are not just about the Elevate Initiative but also about the broader outcomes and impact that can be achieved through intentional investments in Black and brown leaders, their organizations, and the communities they serve.



5 KEY LESSONS

1

Connection is Foundational and Essential

Spaces for connection and engagement are invaluable. In-person meetings (structured and unstructured) allow for deeper relationship building.

3

Transparent and Consistent Communication is Key

Open communication and updates on funding cycles and learning opportunities allow grantees to plan and deliver services from an informed perspective about the program's execution.

5

Diversity and Inclusion are Necessary in Pursuing Equity

Grantees appreciate being in cohorts with organizations supporting disciplines and regions different from their own and the opportunities to learn from one another.

KEY Lessons about program design/structure and creating an initiative that centers grantee voice and expertise:

2

Trust Accelerates Impact

Grantees can maximize their impact with the funds received, targeting key programmatic opportunities and challenges without funder scrutiny.

4

Frequent and Tailored Workshops Create an Effective Learning Community

Multiple online check-in meetings and workshops offer points of connection and relationship with the Elevate Initiative staff, as well as across the cohort. Grantees have asserted that the design of workshops reflects their expressed needs and feedback.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

We are grateful for the partnership and ongoing feedback the Elevate Initiative community continues to share as we continue to provide support to organizations advancing the economic mobility of Black and brown communities. The following are recommendations for the future of the Elevate Initiative based on ongoing feedback and learning from the community of practice.

Recommendations For Elevate:

- 1** Continue to provide funding and non-monetary resources such as technical assistance and learning opportunities, programming, and innovation.
- 2** Share more emerging learnings from the field with grantees to help inform their funding strategies and better equip them to approach other funders.
- 3** Encourage and engage other funders to expand grantee access to a broader network of resources.
- 4** Remain open to ongoing learning and shifting. Equity in practice means continuous learning and growth in the program design and implementation—sometimes even in the middle of implementation.
- 5** Create even more space for reflection and connection at in-person engagements.
- 6** Continue exploring unique and distinctive methods for economic mobility and workforce development outside the traditional ideas.
- 7** Build trust and partnership through grant-making by allowing for risk, pilot programming, and innovation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This learning material was initially prepared for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The findings and conclusions contained within are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

These learning insights and reflections were derived from learning material compiled and analyzed by Frontline Directors, Helly Lee, Brandon Williams, and Consultants, Melissa Howell and Monique Gamble.

This report was curated and edited by Joanna Carrasco and Nadia Owusu.



ELEVATE
INITIATIVE

frontlinesol.com