

**2022**

# SEEDING GRANTS

United Way of  
South Central Michigan



Calhoun | Clinton | Eaton | Ingham | Jackson | Kalamazoo

# Seeding Grants Program

## Overview and Impact

### Background

In 2019, United Way of the Battle Creek and Kalamazoo Region (UWBCKR), now known as United Way of South Central Michigan (UWSCMI), sent out a survey to funded partners with a request for racial demographic data on their executive directors. A year later, we sought similar information on program staff. Seeking this information was a way of holding ourselves accountable when it comes to funding decisions, recognizing that Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)-led organizations tend to be underfunded, if funded at all. In nonprofits led by White people, program staff - especially those who engage with the community frequently - tend to be BIPOC and bear the brunt of the work.

We discovered that although we funded several BIPOC-led organizations, our process was riddled in bias; for example, excluding a Black-led organization from progressing in our investment process because they did not meet our financial requirements. We discounted their potential impact due to financials when we should have offered support and coaching to strengthen their application, while internally unpacking our bias and reviewing our requirements. As much as we perpetuated the very same disparities in the philanthropic sector that we were trying to help resolve, we also had the responsibility to confront these systemic inequities, “examine our own relationships to power, and be willing to give up some control in a spirit of service and collaboration with those who are closer to the issues at hand.” (<https://www.trustbasedphilanthropy.org/overview>).

We began confronting and rectifying this through the Seeding Grants Program, as we simultaneously re-designed our overall investment process centered on a similar anti-racist approach.

At the same time, UWBCKR was one of four cohort members in Michigan awarded a multi-year grant by W.K. Kellogg Foundation titled Catalyzing Community Giving. This was an initiative that supports communities of color in using philanthropy to become agents of their own change and positively impact the lives of children and families in their communities. With this grant, United Way hoped to boost the financial resources going to communities of color from communities of color and also see an increase in participation by people of color in how those resources are distributed within their community. In order to do that effectively, former Senior Director of Data & Equitable Systems Dr. Nakia Baylis held listening sessions with a cohort of Black and Brown leaders in Battle Creek. The themes from these sessions further re-affirmed the redlining present in philanthropy when it came to the inequitable distribution of resources by funders into BIPOC communities.

## The Revolution

Under the leadership of former Associate Director of Impact and Equitable Systems Irene Muthui, UWBCKR developed an investment process that aims to revolutionize our traditional grantmaking. The new process - called the Seeding Grants Program - centers Black and Brown communities and allows for innovative and equitable principles and values rooted in social justice to drive investments.

UWBCKR staff utilized the following research to inform the process:

- Community Conversations;
- Learnings from funders that have successfully implemented a similar approach;
- In-depth research on trust-based philanthropy's values and practices;
- Groundbreaking readings such as "Decolonizing Wealth" by Edgar Villanueva, which provides an analysis on the dysfunctional colonial dynamics at play in philanthropy and money drawing from Native traditions and Indigenous Ways of Knowing.

The Seeding Grants Program, which was implemented as a closed investment process, is focused on growing partnerships with BIPOC-led and/or BIPOC-serving organizations through the provision of financial and capacity building support. With this equity centered work, United Way is building more equitable grant-making mechanisms based on trust that foster partnerships, transparency and sharing of power.

This closed investment process allowed us to be intentional in rebalancing resources toward organizations that had been excluded or deemed uncompetitive in our traditional grantmaking process, and implement learning and practices from this program to our larger investment process. The criteria and process were centered on values "rooted in advancing equity, shifting power, and building mutual accountable relationships... [which allowed us] to demonstrate humility and collaboration in what we do and how we show up in all aspects of our work as grantmakers."

(<https://www.trustbasedphilanthropy.org/overview>).

We focused on organizations that met the following criteria:

- 501c3 (or with fiduciary);
- BIPOC-led and/or serving organizations;
- Located in Kalamazoo County or Greater Battle Creek;
- Showed alignment with our ALICE work (<https://www.unitedforalice.org/consequences>).
- Had pursued or reached out to explore funding within the past 5 years but were excluded from receiving (either because they were ineligible based on current eligibility criteria or they applied but were not awarded funding).

## Values and Key Practices

During this process, we implemented practices that allowed us to act on our values.

For example, upon realizing that we were burdening applicants with numerous forms and applications that took them away from their primary roles in community, we decided to streamline this process. We invited them to apply through a simple conversation with a United Way staff member, who in turn would practice transparency and vulnerability to encourage the grantees to show up more fully. This allowed the grantee and the staff member to center dialogue and learning, which led to deeper relationships and mutual accountability.

Another key practice was the provision of unrestricted funding, which provided the grantee flexibility to utilize the funds as they saw fit, be it paying salaries or piloting a new program. This created a culture of re-affirming the power and expertise of Black and Brown-led organizations and the communities they serve. It also demonstrated how we can share power with grantees and communities through trust and thought partnership, rather than the traditional prescriptive nature of funders. This gave us the opportunity to be partners in a spirit of service and encouraged us to embrace learning from our communities.

Other practices that fostered deeper relationships included consistent check-ins to learn more about their work, which allowed us to be responsive to the needs of our grantees.

## United Way Organizational Impact

The practices of the Seeding Grants Program do not end with a final report. Rather, they catalyze the embedding of these values into our organization. Through this program, we learned about the impact of tight restrictions attached to grants solely for programmatic work, which can often result in the under-resourcing of the nonprofit organization. When Executive Directors cannot pay themselves, offer competitive pay and benefits for program staff, or have a location to provide services, programs and outcomes are affected. These, among other learnings, have continued to influence the redesign of our overall investment process, ensuring that we are more intentional in investing in the capacity building of grassroots organizations, inclusive of organizations led by marginalized people, and conscious of the health, wellness and professional development of marginalized leaders through United Way programs such as Seeding Leaders and Seeding Health.

Additionally, we have been privileged to share our learnings with organizations in other cities and states looking to take a similar approach with varying investment portfolios, and authentically collaborate with funders around equity centered projects in philanthropy and the public sector.

## Grantees

Through the Seeding Grants Program, UWBCR funded six organizations. All are led by BIPOC leaders with the exception of Justice Hub, which currently has an interim Executive Director and is in the process of searching for one that is representative of the community they hope to serve.

Organization	Leadership	Community
<u>Black Wall Street Kalamazoo</u>	BIPOC	Kalamazoo
<u>Intrepid Professional Women's Network</u>	BIPOC	Kalamazoo
<u>Justice Hub</u>	White	Kalamazoo
<u>Milk Like Mine</u>	BIPOC	Battle Creek
<u>RISE Corp</u>	BIPOC	Battle Creek
<u>Sugar &amp; Spice</u>	BIPOC	Battle Creek

# Grantee: Black Wall Street Kalamazoo

Black Wall Street Kalamazoo, founded by entrepreneur Nicole Triplett, and Sisters in Business, founded by sisters Alisa, Tiffany, Teleshia and Nicole Parker, collaboratively developed and piloted a culturally competent training program designed to equip, support and resource Black entrepreneurs. The program, called Black Entrepreneur Training Academy (B.E.T.A) – aims to combat the locking out of critical resources to grow and sustain Black businesses, and provide wraparound development programming to prepare businesses to be bankable, scalable, employable and/or acquirable. With the Seeding Grant, B.E.T.A was able to add more participants than they had initially expected, from more diverse sectors.

## Impact

The program had 10 participants, all African American between 17-70 years old, with 100% retention and 100% participation in a pitch competition and contracts with six Black business development experts who served as instructors. Program highlights include:

- 2 businesses in ideation phase successfully launched during the program.
- 1 business increased product distribution from 3 to 9 stores since being in B.E.T.A.
- 2 businesses have successfully been accepted into competitive business incubators.
- 9 out of the 10 have reported increased revenue since being in the B.E.T.A. program.
- All program participants have opened business banking accounts and incorporated some form of accounting system.
- 1 of the services-based businesses has hired staff.
- 1 business has acquired an additional property to expand business.
- All 10 businesses applied for other forms of funding; some have secured additional funds.
- Program instructor was able to test new service product through BETA, that is now a full-service offering in their business.



[blackwallstreetkalamazoo.org/](https://blackwallstreetkalamazoo.org/)

“From our reporting session with Black Wall Street Kalamazoo, they shared that “the funding had an exceptionally positive effect on our organization. It enabled us to align our goals and begin to execute our vision. As a program partner, we appreciated your approach and openness, and with this being a pilot program, we were thankful for your willingness to walk alongside us through the process and trust the work.”

# Grantee: Sugar & Spice

Sugar & Spice has been a pillar of childcare in Battle Creek for more than 49 years and was founded by Battle Creek's first female mayor, Maude Bristol Perry, appointed in 1984. Perry, who was also the first Black woman on the Calhoun County Board of Commissioners, is the current Executive Director of Sugar & Spice and is also the co-lead for the Early Learning Neighborhood Collaborative of Battle Creek.

Sugar & Spice seeks to serve children who do not have access to a place to play, which is critical to building physical, social and emotional health. They envision a Battle Creek where every child can experience the play they need to thrive - regardless of race, zip code and family income. The Seeding Grant they received supported the continuation and augmentation of Sugar & Spice's early learning services through the investment in playground equipment and upgrades to their building interior. This project will increase sustainability by providing a safe environment for kids to play and will help the organization obtain longer term funding by acquiring a better Great Start Readiness Program rating.

## Impact

Sugar & Spice incorporated community voices by gathering input and ideas for the playground from parents and children. They have designed a safer program and environment that is inviting for children by providing an updated natural playground setting with a barn, wooden elements that allow children to use their imagination, and space for outside classrooms.



[sugarandspicebc.com/](https://sugarandspicebc.com/)

“Our values seem to be in alignment around ensuring children have a better, nicer and more enriching place to learn, grow and develop.”

# Grantee: R.I.S.E. Corp

R.I.S.E Corp. is a nonprofit organization that helps youth realize their potential through life-altering strategies that address their social and emotional well-being. Damon Brown teamed up with Tim Reese, a former Battle Creek Public Schools principal, to start the grassroots organization R.I.S.E Corp and is the current Executive Director. As a former offender himself, Brown works to share his life experiences with youth to help guide them toward successful, productive lives. R.I.S.E Corp was awarded Seeding Grant funding to support educational programming focused on out of school learning. This included recreational and social-emotional services, volunteering and counselling, physical and health components that addressed food insecurities, nutritional meals, and educational support through homework help and 1:1 tutoring. Through a partnership with Battle Creek Public Schools, they were able to accommodate students who were suspended, and were also supported by coaches and staff.

Although their programming targeted areas such as Washington Heights and Post Franklin, R.I.S.E Corp served everyone who walked through their doors and expanded their services to include youth in other communities. With Damon's experience, he was able to include a criminal justice lens and has been exploring possible connections with the police and juvenile courts.

## Data

They had 43 K-12 youth in their program, with diversity in race and ethnicity and gender (40 BIPOC, and 3 White, 28 Male and 15 Female). They discovered that 98% of the youth came from families with low income or identified as ALICE, 90% exhibited severe or challenging behavior, 30% were diagnosed or had an identified disability, and 95% faced environmental risks such as food insecurity.

## Story

One participant in the program was receiving infractions every day for things like assault and possession of a BB gun before joining R.I.S.E Corp's Educational Program. Since participating in the program, he has only received one infraction.

“What you all did for us was tremendous. You kept the train running.  
If not for this, I feel - I know - we would not be able to do this program.”



# Grantee: Milk Like Mine

Milk Like Mine was cofounded by Rickeshia Williams and Stephanie Freeman, who share a passion for breastfeeding and a concern for the African American disparities in their community. They have recently expanded their work to serve all women of color, with the goal of helping mothers of color and their families succeed in breastfeeding. As a recently founded grassroots organization, they were exploring sustainability and subsequent expansion. They utilized their Seeding Grant for crucial operational needs such as staff compensation, increasing staff capacity, workspace, and payment of utilities.

## Impact

Milk Like Mine was able to secure a building and pay for the accompanying utilities. This allowed them to provide an inviting space for demonstrations and walk-in visits. Additionally, they grow their team, and adequately compensate themselves and their staff for their time. This increase in capacity has allowed them to not only focus on the sustainability of their future fund development but also hone on parts of the work they are individually passionate about. The latter is evident in Rickeshia and Stephanie's integral work in providing updated, guiding information about human milk during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Policy Impact

With the Supreme Court ruling to overturn Roe v. Wade and the formula crisis, Milk Like Mine anticipates an increased need from families. They have started fielding conversations with clients who are fearful of what sustenance of their child will look like moving forward. According to Rickeshia, this places even more importance on their breastfeeding efforts to support sustenance of the child, and also support the reconnection of bonds between the birthing person and their child. "We can use this as an opportunity to showcase that as much as choice has been taken away, we can help them find things they can reclaim with their bodies."

## Report

[View Milk Like Mine's end-end-of-grant report in full.](#)



[milklikemine.com/](https://milklikemine.com/)

# Grantee: Justice Hub

The Justice Hub of Kalamazoo is an initiative and soon-to-be nonprofit organization that will serve as a central organizing space for social justice leaders and an incubator for organizations and projects that address systemic oppression in Kalamazoo County. In 2018, Mia Henry, Founder and CEO of Freedom Lifted, and Matt Lechel of ONEplace met with local organizations to explore the idea of a Justice Hub and approached local funders with the concept. Although the project was not initially funded, the urgency and importance of the concept re-emerged as a priority in early 2021. The Kalamazoo Community Foundation commissioned an exploratory study led by Mia Henry and Bailey Mead. Upon completion of the study, United Way, Stryker Johnston Foundation and Kalamazoo Community Foundation jointly seeded the development of the initiative. Bailey Mead serves as lead consultant, guiding the development of the organization along with Mia Henry, the board, and the Soul Trust (an advisory group and play on the word braintrust). The hub offers space for experimentation, capacity-building support, shared resources, and fiscal sponsorship. All services are designed to help project leaders decrease their administrative burden so they may work boldly and creatively towards a more just community. In addition to fiscal sponsorship, services will include financial management, website development, coaching and mentorship, professional development, access to software and paid subscriptions, a physical address, and custom support for each project.



[justicehubkalamazoo.com/](https://justicehubkalamazoo.com/)

## Impact

You can find more on Justice Hub here:

- <https://www.mlive.com/news/kalamazoo/2022/02/social-justice-efforts-in-kalamazoo-county-get-boost-with-15m-grant-to-create-justice-hub.html>
- <https://www.facebook.com/kalfound/videos/516644909845310>
- <https://www.facebook.com/kalfound/videos/284368017164805/>

# Grantee: Intrepid Women's Professional Network

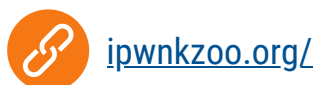
With an increasing number of Afghan refugees and the presence of refugees from other countries that are resettling in the Kalamazoo County, Ms. Pamela Jenkins, the Executive Director of IPWN, is collaborating with Dr. Mioara Diaconu, Associate Professor in the School of Social Work at Western Michigan University, in order to (1) fill-in some of the existing service-related gaps, and to (2) explore the current refugee engagement eco-system through engaging in research partnerships with community stakeholders through assessment.

Refugees resettled in SW Michigan have their basic needs met only for the first 90 days by refugee and immigrant resettlement agencies. Unfortunately, due to numerous barriers, most of these individuals (women & girls in particular) are not integrated in the community at the end of the 90 days. Some of these barriers are as follow: limited language skills, low educational levels, cultural mores, lower levels of acculturation (not being able to fully understand and navigate the community programs related to health and human services, as well as the educational, employment, financial, and legal systems), stigma, emotional distress due to previous traumatic experiences, etc. Although some local churches and a few community-based service providers are doing their best to deliver additional support, there are still numerous gaps when it comes to relevant resources as well as accessible programs and services targeting this population.

It is expected that the efforts of IPWN will lead to a better understanding of refugees' needs, support the creation of new programs that could fill in the existing gaps, and help establish a greater community understanding and support for this population. The IPWN will utilize the Seeding Grant funds for administrative, programmatic, and research support (e.g., service delivery, assessment, analysis).

## Impact

With this being the most recent award, and this program being in the early implementation stages, it is too early to assess its impact. Nevertheless, it is expected that the findings will lead to empowerment, self-sustainability, and civic engagement of the refugee population resettled in SW Michigan.



# Committed to Change

As a result of this emerging work, UWBCKR identified additional ways to integrate learnings and develop new programs that were responsive to community needs. Below are several examples of how UWBCKR has integrated these learnings and practices.

## Seeding Leaders

Through conversations with community members and data collected through UWBCKR's existing funding processes and programs, it was recognized that the nonprofit sector faced a gap in unrestricted resources available to support the professional development of local leaders. As a result, the Seeding Leaders program was developed and launched in Spring 2022, providing 10 \$2,500 mini-grants to individuals. The grants provided support for conferences, executive coaching, leadership/nonprofit management credential, college courses, enabled rest via compensation for time off, healthcare costs, and reimbursement of personal resources utilized for professional/leadership development in the past two years.

## Seeding Health

In addition to data gathered influencing the development and launch of Seeding Leaders, there was also overwhelming information gathered through the Seeding Leaders program that identified a need for healthcare access in the nonprofit sector. As a result, UWBCKR was awarded funds through the City of Battle Creek's American Rescue Plan Act funding process to support eligible nonprofits within the City of Battle Creek capital to address the negative impacts of COVID-19 by creating or increasing equitable access to healthcare for nonprofit employees. This funding process was launched in Fall 2022 and is currently underway at the time of this report's creation.

## Multi-Year Grantmaking

In September 2022, UWSCMI launched a new grant funding process for multi (3) year funding to begin July 1, 2023. This process integrates learning from the Seeding Grants program and attempts to scale those learnings to a much larger pool of grantees. Some of the key changes made include:

- Outreach to agencies who we have not historically funded to ensure they have awareness of the funding opportunity and to build relationships.
- Translation of materials and interpretation available as part of meetings with staff, to ensure access for those who may prefer to discuss and/or pursue the funding opportunity in a language other than English.
- Changes to payment cadence (quarterly vs. monthly to get larger payments in the hand of grantees)
- Unrestricted funding (including Capital expenses which were previously not eligible for UW support)
- Grantees able to report internal outcomes—improvements to their operations, capacity or sustainability that occur because of UW funding.
- A strong audit of the prior application to significantly reduce questions and required information, ultimately decreasing the amount of time needed to complete an application with UW.