



2025 PILOT
STATE OF BLACK OHIO:
VOTERS' VOICE

*Insights from Cleveland's Central
Neighborhood & Statewide Survey Launch*

OLBCF IS A NONPARTISAN 501(C)(3) ORGANIZATION

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Stand with Us: Empowering Black Voices for Change.

CALL TO ACTION

Here in Ohio community and lawmakers have the power to reshape our state. By amplifying Black voices and fostering genuine change, we can create a future of equity and justice. Your involvement is essential. Let's unite and make a lasting impact. The inclusion of Black voters voice is beneficial for all Ohioans' to thrive!

Key Points: Choose one action today. Then bring two people with you.

- **Participate in the Survey:** Share your voice by taking the survey and helping shape the policy agenda (see Page 11).
- **Attend Community Events:** Join us at local events to engage directly with leaders and policymakers. Your presence is vital.
- **Support Initiatives:** Contribute by **donating, volunteering, or sharing** the survey and this report with your network. It takes all of us.
- **Advocate for Change:** Contact your elected leaders and speak up on the issues that matter most in your community.

Actionable:

- **Donations:** Your contribution helps sustain advocacy, education, and policy efforts that uplift Black communities across Ohio. **[Donate to Support Our Work.](#)**
- **Volunteer Opportunities:** Support our mission by volunteering your time and skills. Contact us at office@olbcfoundation.org to learn more.
- **Spread the word:** Help amplify Black voices by following and sharing our work on social media.
- **Roundtable Membership:** Join the Roundtable to engage in policy-focused dialogue, collaboration, and leadership that drives meaningful change. **[Learn more about Roundtable Membership.](#)**
- **Annual Membership:** Become an individual member of OLBCF and support advocacy efforts that benefit communities across Ohio. **[Join as an Annual Member.](#)**

A Final Word:

Black Ohioans' are not a side note in this state's story; we are central to its future. This project is how we move from being talked about to being heard, counted, and centered in the decisions that shape daily life now and in the years ahead. Whether you are a neighbor, community partner, funder, or elected leader, I am asking you to take this work seriously and treat it as part of your responsibility to Ohio. Use this brief in your meetings. Ask hard questions with it in your hands. Invest in the organizing, research, and infrastructure it will take to carry this agenda through 2026 and beyond. Stand with OLBCF as we build on this pilot for The State of Black Ohio Agenda rooted in data, grounded in community, and focused on real change for Black Ohioans' and for everyone who calls this state home. When Black communities have what we need to thrive, All of Ohio is stronger. -President & CEO, Shayla L. Davis

In Their Own Words

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Black Ohioans know what they need and they're ready to be heard. For too long, decisions about our schools, jobs, health, safety, and neighborhoods have been made without us. This pilot project changes that.

The Ohio Legislative Black Caucus Foundation (OLBCF) is a nonpartisan 501(c)(3). We launched this initiative to listen first, then act. We began in Cleveland's Central neighborhood, where residents spoke clearly about what's working, what's broken, and what needs to change.

Their words shaped a short statewide survey (7/10 minutes) that asks:

- What matters most to you?
- What solutions do you support?
- What gets in the way?

The survey covers six areas that impact daily life:

- Public education
- Economic Power and Work
- Fresh, Affordable Food
- Mental Health and Care
- Safety and Justice
- Civic Power, Trust, and Information

This brief is a call to action:

- Lawmakers can fund what works, remove barriers, and make results visible.
- Residents can take the survey, ask questions at public meetings, and host listening sessions so neighbors are heard.

OLBCF's role is to collect, publish, and translate community voice into policy. This is not just another report. It's a launchpad for better decisions, measurable change, and a stronger Ohio where Black families thrive. This is also about reclaiming civic power. This project is about reigniting participation so our voices shape the future. This brief is a tool for community members, funders, and lawmakers to use in meetings, hearings, and conversations about Black Ohio's future.

Your voice is the agenda. Take the survey. Share it. Show up.

PROJECT FRAMEWORK



Il led the pilot listening session in Cleveland's Central neighborhood. Black voters deserve to be heard where decisions are made. We listened first. Now we build together. — Dr. Adrienne Hatten

ROADMAP: HOW THIS WORK MOVES STATEWIDE



WHAT THIS IS

A statewide community-voice initiative led by OLBCF to elevate Black Ohioans voices in policymaking through surveys, town halls, and public briefings. This project turns community input into a practical, time-bound policy agenda that state leaders can act on while also ensuring the reengagement of voters, and strengthen civic participation across the state. This pilot brief launches 2025-2026 engagement and reporting; the full State of Black Ohio: The Voters' Voice report and policy agenda will be released in Winter-Spring 2027.



HOW IT WORKS

Community:

- Take the State of Black Ohio Survey (7/10 minutes).
- Joins town hall style focus groups throughout 2026.
- Engage in civic life by attending meetings, asking questions, and voting.

OLBCF :

- Analyzes survey and town hall data.
- Publishes quarterly updates by region.
- Develops a policy agenda based on community voice.
- Works with state leaders to move legislation.
- Continue to seek funding to expand outreach, access, and reporting.

Leaders:

- Host focus groups and share the survey.
- Review results and adopt the community-informed plan.
- Champion legislation and policy changes alongside of OLBCF.
- Report back publicly on progress.



WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

- 5,000 survey responses statewide.
- Town halls in every region, including rural and metro areas.
- Clear themes from community input and legislative action tied directly to community voice.
- Quarterly public updates with charts, maps, and next steps.
- Transparent process with community feedback at every stage.
- Public release of the State of Black Ohio: The Voters' Voice report and policy agenda (Winter-Spring 2027).

Community Insights

PUBLIC EDUCATION

Strong schools build strong futures—and strong voters.



WHAT WE HEARD

- Less high-stakes testing that crowds out learning.
- More CTE and apprenticeships that lead to real credentials.
- After-school programs, arts, and tutoring so kids have safe places to grow.
- Safe transportation to and from school and activities.
- Clear and fair graduation rules.
- Extra help for low-wealth districts.
- Keep public dollars in public schools (be transparent when money leaves a district).



POLICY CONCEPTS

- Set limits on high-stakes tests and expand multiple paths to graduation (CTE, apprenticeships, industry credentials).
- Create a statewide fund for after-school and safe transportation, focused on Black neighborhoods.
- Use a simple, public “weighted funding” model so low-wealth districts get what they need.
- Require full transparency when public funds go to private options.



COMMUNITY ACTION

- Attend one school board meeting this month; ask about CTE and after-school plans.
- Share the survey with families and teachers in your school community.



QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR LEADERS

- Will you support limits on high-stakes testing and expand CTE/apprenticeships?
- How will you make sure extra funds reach low-wealth classrooms in my ZIP code?
- What is the plan for after-school and safe transportation where I live?

Community Insights

ECONOMIC POWER & WORK

Black Ohioans face hiring bias, slow/costly licenses, and limited access to startup capital.



WHAT WE HEARD

- Better pay and benefits.
- Fair hiring and fair promotions.
- Faster, cheaper job licenses and license transfers from other states.
- Startup money that is not debt, like grants or revenue share.
- Help fixing credit tied to jobs, small business, or home repair.
- Clear help to find and win public contracts and local supplier work.



POLICY CONCEPTS

- A Black small business fund that uses grants and revenue share, not just loans.
- Basic rules for bias-free hiring and promotion with simple public reporting for large employers.
- Fee waivers and fast-track license transfers, including for returning citizens.
- Credit building and debt relief pilots tied to small business, home repair, and energy upgrades.
- A simple statewide “how to bid” guide and coaching so more Black firms can win public work.



COMMUNITY ACTION

- Share the survey with workers, church groups, and small business owners in your area.
- Join or host a short “how to bid on public contracts” info session with a local partner.
- Make a list of three local buyers your business could supply and ask about vendor signup.



QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR LEADERS

- Will you support a fund that provides non-debt capital to Black-owned startups and firms?
- What steps will you take this year to make hiring and promotions fair and open?
- How will you help Black firms find and win city, county, school, and state contracts?
- Will you back faster, cheaper licensing and license transfers for in-demand jobs?

Community Insights

FRESH & AFFORDABLE FOOD

Healthy food helps families learn, work, and stay well. Many Black neighborhoods don't have a full grocery store nearby. This makes food cost more and choices worse.



WHAT WE HEARD

- Start and support community gardens and small urban farms.
- Build community-owned food co-ops so profits stay local.
- Bring a full-line grocery store to food deserts.
- Use mobile markets and fresh food trucks in hard-to-reach areas.
- Let clinics give “produce prescriptions” to patients who need healthy food.



POLICY CONCEPTS

- A Healthy Food Access fund that helps open stores and co-ops in food deserts.
- Small “micro-grants” for gardens, farms, and school-based food projects.
- Support for clinics and health departments to offer produce prescriptions.
- Cut red tape so mobile markets can operate more days and in more places.
- Simple, public scorecards that track new stores, co-ops, gardens, and market days.



COMMUNITY ACTION

- Start a block garden team; list a small space, volunteer hours, and a lead contact.
- Ask your clinic or health department about produce prescriptions and mobile market dates.
- Map where people in your church or group buy food and share the gaps with city or county staff.



QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR LEADERS

- What's the plan to bring a full-line grocer to my neighborhood?
- Will you fund micro-grants for our garden or co-op opportunities?
- Will you work to ensure that clinics/doctors offer produce prescriptions?

Community Insights

MENTAL HEALTH & CARE

When help is easy to get, families stay safe and well. But many people wait weeks for care or only get help in a crisis.



WHAT WE HEARD

- Free or low-cost services at places people already go (clinics, schools, churches).
- More local clinics and shorter wait lists.
- More inpatient and outpatient slots
- Care that fits the culture and uses trusted local providers.
- Teams that answer crisis calls with a clinician and first responders together (co-response).
- Insurance that treats mental health the same as physical health.



POLICY CONCEPTS

- Put a clinician on crisis calls in every county (co-response teams).
- Fund more community clinics and set a target to cut wait times.
- Grow the number of beds and evening/weekend appointments.
- Support trusted, community-led and faith-friendly services.
- Enforce parity so insurance covers mental health like physical health.
- Offer school-based counseling and easy tele-health options.



COMMUNITY ACTION

- List the clinics near you and ask about new patient wait times.
- Share the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline and local crisis numbers.
- Join a county meeting and ask for a co-response plan and timeline.
- Host a short info session at a church or school on where to get help.



QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR LEADERS

- Will you fund co-response teams with a clinician in our county?
- What is your plan to cut wait times for care in our ZIP code?
- How will you add clinics and beds close to where people live?
- How will you support trusted, culturally rooted providers?

Community Insights

SAFETY & JUSTICE

People want to be safe and treated fairly at the same time. When stops feel biased or court rules depend on money, trust breaks. Real safety grows when we prevent harm, treat people with respect, and fix problems early.



WHAT WE HEARD

- Clear, bias-free rules for stops and searches.
- Fair pretrial rules that do not depend on wealth.
- Diversion to treatment when it fits (mental health, substance use).
- Better traffic-stop practices and de-escalation.
- Regular community-police problem-solving meetings with public follow-up
- Real investment in youth safety and prevention.
- Simple, public reporting people can read.



POLICY CONCEPTS

- A model policy for stops, searches, force, and duty-to-intervene, used across the state.
- Pretrial decisions based on risk, with options like reminders and check-ins instead of cash bail.
- Clear rules for diversion and treatment for eligible cases.
- Youth jobs, mentoring, and violence-prevention programs that have results.
- Easy-to-read public dashboards on stops, searches, force, complaints, and outcomes by race and location.
- Standard de-escalation and communication training with refreshers each year.



COMMUNITY ACTION

- Go to your city or county public-safety meeting; bring this brief and ask the questions above.
- Learn how to file a complaint and what follow-up looks like in your area.
- Join or start a neighborhood safety group and invite local officials to a problem-solving session.
- Share the survey with five neighbors and ask them what would make them feel safer.



QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR LEADERS

- Will you adopt a public, bias-free stops and searches policy and publish the data?
- What is your plan to make pretrial decisions based on risk, not wealth?
- How will you expand diversion and treatment options that work?
- What will you fund this year for youth safety and prevention?
- When will the public see simple dashboards and follow-up on promises?

Community Insights

CIVIC TRUST & INFORMATION

People are more likely to take part when the rules are clear and the info is easy to find. Trust grows when leaders explain choices, show where the money goes, and report back in plain language.



WHAT WE HEARD

- We need clear information on who represents us and how to reach them.
- People want to see where public money actually goes in their neighborhood.
- Residents want decisions explained before and after votes, not just press releases.
- People want simple, one-stop places for voting info, meetings, and public notices.



POLICY CONCEPTS

- Plain-language budget summaries that show, by neighborhood, where dollars go.
- Easy-to-read online dashboards with basic info: who represents each ZIP, how to contact them, meeting dates, and key votes.
- Regular “report-back” meetings or newsletters where leaders explain decisions and next steps.
- A one-stop “Know Your Government” hub that pulls together voting info, meetings, and contact info in one place.



COMMUNITY ACTION

- Attend one public budget hearing or council meeting and bring this page.
- Sign up for your city or county’s email/text alerts and share them with neighbors.
- Host or attend a “Know Your Government” session with your church, block club, or community group.
- Share the survey link with five neighbors and ask what would build more trust for them.



QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR LEADERS

- How will you show, in plain language, where money goes in my neighborhood?
- Where can residents see upcoming meetings, votes, and decisions in one place?
- How often will you report back to the community on what changed because of our input?
- What will you do this year to make it easier for Black voters to know what is happening and how to be heard?

Take the Survey

ADVANCING VOTERS' VOICE (OHIO)

SCAN TO SHARE YOUR VOICE

Time: 7–10 minutes



WHO SHOULD RESPOND

Black Ohioans in cities, suburbs, small towns, and rural/Appalachia

YOUR PRIVACY

Your responses are completely anonymous. We only use your zip code to understand regional trends and ensure that every area's voice is heard.

INCENTIVE (OPTIONAL)

Enter a drawing for one of five \$100 gift cards. If you'd like to enter, leave your contact info at the end. Rules: No purchase necessary. One entry per person. Winners selected at random; odds depend on entries. Contact info used only to notify winners.

Need help or a paper copy? Email office@olbcfoundation.org

By The Numbers Why This Work Matters

VOTER POWER IN OHIO

Eligible Black Voters (Ohio)

**1.04
million**

ACS 2019–2023)

**603K
Voices
Missing**

Estimated eligible Black Ohioans who did not vote. These estimates combine eligible population data with turnout rates.

Behind every number is a voice waiting to be heard.

*DISENGAGED NOT
DISINTERESTED*

*BARRIERS LIMIT
CIVIC POWER*

*LISTENING LEADS
TO ACTION*

Method Note & Sources

- U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS), 2019-2023
- Current Population Survey (CPS) Voting & Registration Supplement, 2018 & 2022
- These estimates combine eligible population data with turnout rates to show the scale of civic disengagement.

By The Numbers Why This Work Matters

VOTER POWER IN OHIO

Midterm Participation Among Eligible Black Voters in Ohio



Eligible Black Voters (Ohio)

1.04 million (ACS 2019-2023)

Estimated Midterm Non-Participants

~603,000 (Turnout estimates; see methodology)

What the Data Suggests

- Evidence of significant voter non-participation among eligible Black voters.
- Participation gaps may reflect access, trust, or structural barriers.
- Data highlights opportunity for targeted civic reengagement efforts.

Method Note & Sources

- U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS), 2019-2023
- Current Population Survey (CPS) Voting & Registration Supplement, 2018 & 2022
- These estimates combine eligible population data with turnout rates to show the scale of civic disengagement.

With Gratitude,
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



We want to extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who made this project possible.

A special thank you to the **Cleveland Foundation** for their generous funding and unwavering support. We are deeply grateful to the bold and vocal residents of the Central neighborhood who showed up, shared their voices, and helped shape this work from the ground up.

We also want to thank our partner organization, **Friendly Inn Settlement House**, and their Executive Director, **Yolanda Armstrong**, for generously hosting our community forum.

A warm thank you as well to OLBCF's newest **Vice Chair, Monica L. Womack**, for her invaluable support behind the scenes in ensuring that this vision and project came to light.

We also want to thank our dedicated **OLBCF staff**, past and present for their tireless work and commitment to making this vision a reality. Your efforts are the backbone of everything we do. Also, thank you **Steve Tugend, our Roundtable Chair**, for his ongoing leadership, and all our Roundtable members across Ohio. Thank you all for being part of this journey and helping us move toward a more equitable Ohio.

Learn more about the organizations whose partnership made this work possible.



From Community Insights to Policy

METHODS & SOURCES



SURVEY DEVELOPMENT

In July 2025, OLBCF's researcher conducted a pilot focus group in Cleveland's Central neighborhood at Friendly Inn Settlement to test engagement methods and refine survey content. The statewide survey is the primary tool for broad community input, and we will continue to refine engagement methods as responses and feedback are collected.



UPCOMING DATA COLLECTION

With the survey launched, we will begin gathering responses from Black Ohioans across various regions, seeking broad participation.



ANALYSIS

Once data collection is complete, we will analyze both quantitative and qualitative responses. These insights will be pivotal in crafting the State of Black Ohio Policy Agenda, ensuring that our advocacy and legislation is firmly grounded in the community's needs and priorities.



SOURCES

- Pilot Focus Group (Cleveland's Central Neighborhood): Used to test engagement methods and refine survey content and question wording.
- U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (2019-2023): Provided demographic and voting eligibility data.
- Current Population Survey (CPS), Voting and Registration Supplement (2018 & 2022): Used to estimate voter turnout and registration trends.



CONCLUSION

This structured approach ensures that our findings will be comprehensive and reflective of the community's needs and voices. Additionally, we have intentionally written this report in plain language to ensure it is accessible and easily digestible for everyone across Ohio and beyond.



QUESTIONS?
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