

The Impact of BLAC (2021-2024)



The Black Appalachian Coalition (BLAC) was founded in June 2021 to amplify Black voices, dismantle the white-washed colonized narrative of Appalachia, and ensure that accurate accounts of Black people’s contributions are told. BLAC uses story-based strategies to drive solutions that center on the voices and lived experiences of Black Appalachians for racial justice and equity.

BLAC’s multi-faceted project, including listening sessions, policy summits, community trainings, and more, helps bring Black Appalachians to the decision-making tables so that future policy and investments in the region center Black Appalachians and reduce negative environmental and disparate economic impacts experienced by Black people in the region.

Our priorities have included:

- [Amplifying Black Voices](#)
- [Fighting for Environmental Justice](#)
- [Strengthening Community Power](#)
- [Trauma-Informed Advocacy: Creating Healing Spaces](#)

Amplifying Black Voices

- [Launched BLAC Podcast](#), “Black ReMembering: Highlighting the Heavy and the Hope,” with 28 recorded episodes, with the top podcasts averaging 100 downloads in the first week. Examples of topics we’ve discussed are:
 - [Building Bridges to Environmental Equity](#)
 - [Highlighting the Heavy and the Hope of a Civil Servant](#)
 - [Rebuilding History with Dr. Tee Ford-Ahmed](#)
- Issued the first BLAC Paper: [“Black Storytelling and Policymaking in Appalachia.”](#) with findings from the listening sessions that revealed storytelling must be considered not only for participatory policymaking but the lived experience and voices of those most impacted, more specifically communities of color, remain absent from the table.
- [Launched a website](#) that includes a clickable interactive “story map,” which allows people to navigate the region’s geography to find the stories of Black community members.
- Hosted five virtual listening sessions to hear from Black Appalachians, webinars with the Department of Energy on federal grants available for Appalachian communities, and presented on Community Benefit Agreements with our partner, ReImagine Appalachia.



“The Black Appalachian Coalition has opened up opportunities to link our rich regional legacy with public policy and address the heavy “kitchen table issues” while revealing the persistent hope that resides in our communities.” – Marie Cochran (Toccoa, GA)

Fighting for Environmental Justice

- [Launched the Freedom to Breathe campaign](#)
- Currently hosting an eight-part “Your Health & Your Environment” Lunch & Learn Series
- Hosted a five-part Petrochemical Lunch & Learn Series and created an [Educational Toolkit](#)
- [Organized Clairton ceremony event with We Refuse to Die](#)
- [Organized MetCoke World Summit protest with partners](#)
- Submitted policy comments to local Environmental Protection Agencies in Pennsylvania and West Virginia



- [Received media coverage on our initiatives](#)
- Participated in environmental conferences, including Summit on Climate and Environmental Justice, Racism, and the Law; Green and Healthy Homes; Environmental Defense Fund Summer of Action and Midwest BDC Equity Summit

"The Black Appalachian Coalition has meaningfully impacted my life and my grandchildren! Archbishop Marcia Dinkins listened and heard my cries. She also took action where possible, encouraging me to continue my advocacy and narrative organizer work. BLAC allows a small town like Clairton to have a say in clean and green ideas from the Appalachian region!"

– Melanie Meade (Clairton, PA)

Strengthening Community Power

- Serves on community-led grant-making committees that help bring funds to BIPOC communities
- Hosted events with nearly 1000 event attendees
- [Launched a Storytelling Toolkit: Building Power through Storytelling and Narratives](#)
- Hosted two BLAC Policy Summits to amplify Black voices and influence effective, community-centered policies.
- Hosted 1st BLAC Strategy Summit: "Voices of the People – Planning the BLAC Agenda"
- Created the BLAC Fellows Program to increase the outreach and impact in communities throughout the region.
- Engaged our supporters and allies and directly impacted people with action opportunities
- Participated in conferences including Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Building Community Power, Up End Conference, and Free Her Conference



"Bearing witness to the multitude of voices and stories of Black people in the Appalachian region is an honor. It's one thing to know about the term Affrilachia; it's another thing to understand what it means to be Affrilachian. BLAC promotes the understanding of our identity and the salience of Affrilachia."

– NitaJade (Bristol, VA)

"BLAC understands that it's vitally important that more funds get allocated to Black communities in this region. As a lifelong resident of Kentucky, I feel so passionate about this that I joined the team to help! We are sharing funding opportunities with communities and helping them along the way. We also serve on local funding boards so that Black voices are represented."

– Shana Goggins (Richmond, KY)

Trauma-Informed Advocacy: Creating Healing Spaces

- Presented trauma-informed training regionally in Appalachia, the Midwest region, and with national and international organizations for healing-centered engagement in environmental justice spaces to address the multi-faceted and multi-layered traumas.
- Developed, trained, and facilitated workshops on Trauma-Informed Approaches to Social Change and Healing Centered Engagement at conferences, including:
 - US Climate Action Network
 - Black Climate Action Network
 - Midwest Building Decarbonization
 - Roots & Remedies
 - Environmental Protection Network
 - Water Collaborative of Greater New Orleans

"BLAC understands that we must heal for change, and to do this, I've become a certified train-the-trainer on trauma-informed approaches. In addition, to moving beyond symptomatic thinking to seeing people from the harms that have happened in their lives. The first line of defense is understanding "self and healing of one self" and BLAC is doing that one person, one community, one city, one state, one region at a time with the view of national healing." – Bishop Marcia Dinkins (Toledo, OH)

Thank You for Your Support!

This important work has only been possible over the past three years with the support and advocacy of our community, partners, and funders. Our mission thrives on the collective efforts of people who believe in creating positive change.

Thank you to everyone who has donated money to support a project or when you were inspired by a story. We are putting values into action together. Thank you to everyone who has listened to one of our podcasts. We are changing hearts and minds together. Thank you to everyone who participated in one of our education webinars, Lunch & Learn series or advocacy events. We are building community and learning together.

We extend our deepest appreciation and look forward to continuing this movement with you.

Want to stay connected with BLAC?

[Sign up for our newsletter here](#), and follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter/X](#).