



The Black Belt Community Foundation

DATA IMPACT CENTER

The Black Belt Bulletin

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BBCF Helps Lead Meaningful Research Supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

The Black Belt Community Foundation has a long history of collaboration with and support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), including disaster relief and sustaining the operations of the BBCF.

Since 2017, the BBCF has engaged with RWJF through their Interdisciplinary Research Leaders (IRL) program. The IRL was created by RWJF to bring together researchers, community foundations, and community members to engage in applied research in support of a Culture of Health rooted in equity, leading to living longer, healthier lives. To date, BBCF has been a co-leader in three IRL projects directly engaging Black Belt counties in Alabama.



Led by the 2017 IRL fellows, the RCRC initiated the Sowing Seeds project to encourage the development & enhancement of food production as well as to provide farming training and education.

From 2017-2020, BBCF served as the fiscal agent for an IRL project based in Marengo County. This project focused on health, health equity, and the culture of health with the intent of connecting production agriculture, land ownership, and cooperative development to traditional knowledge. Using a community-based, participatory approach, lead researchers listened and learned the “true” needs of the community by establishing the

Community Resilience Council (CRC) and becoming “co-learners” in the process. In March 2020, with additional funding, the CRC became the Regional Community Resilience Council (RCRC) and initiated the “Sowing Seeds Project”. This outreach project served the African American communities in Marengo and surrounding counties encouraging food production, farming education and health equity.

Since 2021, the BBCF has continued its collaboration with the IRL in Wilcox County. Two studies (a second one initiated in 2022) address the issues of childhood obesity, racism and rural communities as they impact Head Start families with children ages birth to five years. Based on their findings, these projects intend to help build community power and modify the structures that cause childhood obesity.



BBCF Head Start provides nutrition services that educate the child, family, and community. A primary goal is to help children maintain healthy weights by increasing physical activity while reducing the number of overweight children.

“The collaboration between the BBCF and RWJF has proven to be a tremendous asset to Alabama’s Black Belt and RWJF’s work to develop a Culture of Health,” says BBCF President and current IRL Fellow, Felecia Lucky. “BBCF looks forward to continued applied research projects and other collaborations with RWJF in an effort to enhance the lives of members of the local community.”

Support for this research was provided by grants from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Interdisciplinary Research Leaders program. Interdisciplinary Research Leaders is a national program of the RWJF led by the University of Minnesota. The Black Belt Community Foundation is supported in part by grants from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect the views of the Foundation.

Sources: irleaders.org, irleaders.org/cohort/2017-2020, and irleaders.org/cohort/2021-2024.

– ALABAMA BLACK BELT– INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH LEADERS

Cohort Two: 2017-2020



GRANT AWARD
\$350K

Team Members: Marcus Bernard (left), Veronica Womack (middle), & Tracy McCurdy (right)
Grant Period: Oct. 1, 2017 - Sept. 30, 2020
IRL Theme: Individual & Community Resilience
Project Title: Resilience and Food Security in Black Belt Alabama Through Land-Based Cooperative Economics and Communal Landholdings

Cohort Six: 2021-2024



Team Members: Felecia Lucky (left), Lilanta Joy Bradley (middle), & Jen Nickelson (right)
Grant Period: Oct. 31, 2021 - Oct. 30, 2024
IRL Theme: Structural Racism
Project Title: Centering the lived experience of Head Start families to investigate intersections of structural racism, rurality, & childhood obesity

GRANT AWARD
\$78K

GRANT AWARD
\$125K

Team Members: Felecia Lucky (left), Lilanta Joy Bradley (middle), & Jen Nickelson (right)
Grant Period: May 14, 2022 - Oct. 30, 2024
IRL Theme: Structural Racism
Project Title: Centering Head Start families to investigate intersections of structural racism, rurality, & childhood obesity