BGCF Grants $500,000 for Accelerating Innovative + Equitable Workforce Pathways

Blue Grass Community Foundation, with support from the Walton Family Foundation, awards a grant to Jubilee Jobs and Black Male Working Academy for an innovative youth workforce development program.

January 17, 2024 (Lexington, Ky.)— With support from the Walton Family Foundation, Blue Grass Community Foundation (BGCF) recently offered a funding opportunity for the development of new programs designed to accelerate innovation and equity in education-to-workforce experiences to better prepare Fayette County students in grades 6-12 for in-demand, high-wage employment opportunities.

Jubilee Jobs and the Black Male Working Academy were jointly awarded a grant of $500,000 to be dispersed over two years for their new collaborative initiative, “Innovate to Elevate,” a program designed to bridge the educational and professional performance gap prevalent among young men of color.

Through innovative workforce development curriculum, VR technology, career simulations, and mentorships from leading voices in the Lexington community, the initiative seeks to empower young African American men for successful careers in a 21st-century workforce.

“Jubilee Jobs is incredibly excited for BGCF and the Walton Family Foundation's monumental investment in the 'Innovate to Elevate' initiative,” said Jubilee Jobs CEO, Mason King. "With these funds, Jubilee Jobs and BMW Academy is set to launch impactful initiatives like virtual reality career exploration and the Youth Chamber of Commerce trip, to broaden the opportunity horizon and engage Lexington's youth. We believe that the future of Central Kentucky's workforce lies in the great potential of our young neighbors, and we are eager to actualize that potential over the next two years.”
“The BMW Academy, Inc. and Jubilee Jobs of Lexington are so excited and are looking forward to working together in making a difference in the lives of the young people in our city,” said Roz Akins, Executive Director of the Black Male Working Academy. “This awesome grant that is being sponsored by the Walton Foundation and Blue Grass Community Foundation is going to set a new course in workforce development in helping young people understand the difference between a job and a career. We hope that through this grant, we will educate, motivate and activate the potential for excellence that lies within every person who participates in this grant!”

With a combined vision, the collaborative initiative seeks to redefine the future for African American males in Fayette County. The new program will directly benefit 175 participants in the Black Male Working Academy, as well as an additional 500 Fayette County students of color, regardless of gender, who will have access to some of the more broadly offered resources.

Commerce Lexington is also a project partner and will serve as a bridge, connecting students with Lexington’s business community. They are sponsoring a Youth Chamber of Commerce trip that was birthed through this joint initiative and their involvement ensures the project is rooted in real-world applications and future-forward strategies.

The Request for Proposals (RFP) for BGCF’s Accelerating Innovative + Equitable Workforce Pathways Grant was designed by a community-based team that represented a wide cross-section of organizations and professionals working in the education and workforce development sectors. The RFP team also included college and high school students. After receiving thirteen applications eligible for consideration, an independent, intergenerational, community-based Grant Review Committee evaluated the grant proposals and made the final award recommendation.

“Blue Grass Community Foundation is honored to lead this collaborative, philanthropic effort to create more innovative, equitable career pathway opportunities for local youth who can benefit the most,” said BGCF President and CEO, Lisa Adkins. “We appreciate the significant investment of the Walton Family Foundation but a second round of grant funding to be offered later this year would not be possible without our local funding partners including the 3.14 Going Forward Charitable Fund, Marksbury Family Foundation, Middleground Capital Management Foundation and Toyota Motor Manufacturing of Kentucky.”

For more information on Jubilee Jobs or the Black Male Working Academy, visit jubileejobsoflexington.org and bmwacademyky.org, respectively. For information on Blue Grass Community Foundation and current available grants, visit bgcf.org.

**Media Contacts**
About Blue Grass Community Foundation

At Blue Grass Community Foundation, we know philanthropy has the power to transform a community. That's why we work every day to grow charitable giving to create a more generous, vibrant, engaged and equitable Central and Appalachia Kentucky. We connect charitable individuals, families and businesses with nonprofit organizations and causes they care about to meet community needs and make a difference. We provide leadership on key community issues, and we’re passionate about ensuring equitable access to education, greenspaces and public places, and healthy and vibrant neighborhoods.

To learn more about Blue Grass Community Foundation, visit www.bgcf.org or contact President/CEO Lisa Adkins at 859.225.3343.

About The Walton Family Foundation

The Walton Family Foundation is, at its core, a family-led foundation. Three generations of the descendants of our founders, Sam and Helen Walton, and their spouses, work together to lead the foundation and create access to opportunity for people and communities. We work in three areas: improving education, protecting rivers and oceans and the communities they support, and investing in our home region of Northwest Arkansas and the Arkansas-Mississippi Delta. To learn more, visit waltonfamilyfoundation.org and follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.