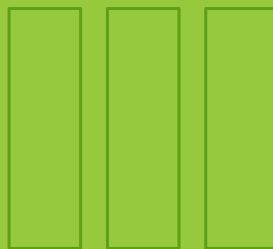




# **Bridging the Gap: Building Pathways to Racial Economic Justice**

**Outcomes & Impact of Filene's  
Racial Economic Equity (REE) Incubator**



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The success of the Racial Economic Equity (REE) Incubator is a testament to the collective efforts and generosity of a diverse group of organizations and partners. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to those who have contributed to the program's growth and impact.



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## SUPPORTERS

We extend our heartfelt thanks to the **TruStage Foundation** and others for their transformative support and collaboration throughout the Racial Economic Incubator. Their commitment to racial and economic equity has provided the resources necessary to drive meaningful change. We also wish to thank the **African American Credit Union Coalition** (AACUC) for their contributions, which have helped accelerate the growth and expansion of our participants' programs within their communities.

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## REE INCUBATOR EXPERT COACHES

Our sincere gratitude goes to the **Community Entrepreneurship and Innovation Institute**, **Native Women Lead**, and **Urban Strategies, Inc.** for their exceptional guidance and mentorship. These organizations have been instrumental in supporting our participants to refine their strategies and create impactful solutions that advance economic equity.

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## PARTICIPANTS

We are profoundly grateful to the credit unions and community partners who have participated in the REE Incubator. Their commitment to advancing racial economic equity through innovative initiatives is the heart of this program. Their collaborative efforts continue to inspire and drive positive change within their communities.

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## ABOUT FILENE

**Filene Research Institute** strengthens organizations through innovative research and incubation to improve consumer financial well-being. As an independent cooperative finance think tank, Filene's membership network connects a community of leaders and bright minds to change lives through innovation, truth and cooperation. In addition to delivering cutting-edge, actionable academic research, Filene also provides incubators to test and scale solutions, events to spark organizations into action and advisory services to help accelerate and implement innovation. For more information, visit [filene.org](https://filene.org) and follow on LinkedIn.

## ABOUT TRUSTAGE FOUNDATION

The **TruStage Foundation** is a registered 501(c)(3) that serves as the philanthropic arm of TruStage. Efforts of the TruStage Foundation center on building equity in the communities where we live and serve. TruStage is a financially strong insurance, investment and technology provider, built on the philosophy of people helping people. We believe a brighter financial future should be accessible to everyone, and our products and solutions help people confidently make financial decisions that work for them at every stage of life. With a culture rooted and focused on creating a more equitable society and financial system, we are deeply committed to giving back to our communities to improve the lives of those we serve. For more information, visit [trustage.com](https://trustage.com).

## ABOUT THE COMMUNITY ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND INNOVATION INSTITUTE (CEI INSTITUTE)

The **Community Entrepreneurship and Innovation Institute** (CEI Institute), a registered 501(c)(3) organization, offers business coaching and consulting services to under-represented communities for business ownership and entrepreneurship. The Institute is also designed and organized to support both new, emerging and existing businesses focused on racial economic equity and growth. For more information, visit [ceiinstitute.org](https://ceiinstitute.org).

## PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS & COMMUNITY PARTNERS





**EXECUTIVE  
SUMMARY**

The racial wealth divide in America tells a troubling story: in 2021, Black families saved \$75 billion less annually than white families<sup>1</sup>, illustrating not just an income disparity but a generational cycle of financial exclusion. Such disparities are a persistent shadow over the promise of the American Dream across communities of color, impacting everything from homeownership to entrepreneurship.

In response, Filene and its partners launched the Racial Economic Equity (REE) Incubator in 2023. **This initiative was designed to empower credit unions in developing and implementing customized, community-driven solutions aimed at reducing economic inequity among Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, Indigenous American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander populations.**

**The incubator was structured in three phases: Co-Design, Launch, and Share Learnings.** The Co-Design phase involved collaboration with community stakeholders to create tailored solutions, which were then implemented in the Launch phase with Filene's support. The Share Learnings phase aimed to evaluate outcomes and expand successful strategies.

Over the past 18 months, the REE Incubator has advanced economic equity by addressing critical needs in underserved communities. **Housing initiatives**, such as Kauai Federal Credit Union's down payment assistance and Veridian Credit Union's collaborative Achieve Financial Empowerment Program, have supported wealth-building in low-income communities, disbursing over \$300k and enabling more than 30 new homeowners. Programs like MCU's Financial Education Initiative, which reached 150 Bronx youth, and Chartway Credit Union's partnership with Norfolk State University, have **equipped young people with essential financial skills**. Efforts to provide individualized financial planning, like MSUFCU and GreenPath Financial Wellness' Project Greenome, and to **support minority-owned businesses**, such as Allegiance Credit Union's Latino-led Small Business Training Program, have **furthered economic empowerment**. These successes highlight the importance of trust, cultural relevance, and strategic local partnerships in creating lasting impact.

As we move forward, Filene remains committed to scaling the impact of the REE Incubator by empowering credit unions through the Entrepreneurial Ecosystems (EE) Incubator and deepening innovation efforts via the Community Entrepreneurship and Innovation Institute (CEI Institute). Lasting change requires more than just institutional

support—it calls for continued commitment from individuals, organizations, and communities alike. Together, we can close the wealth gap, uplift marginalized populations, and ensure that economic opportunity is truly available to all. The journey may be long, but with sustained effort, we can turn the tide.



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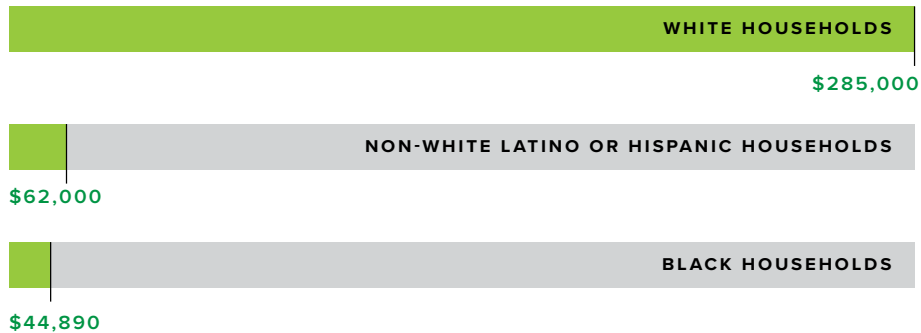
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Key findings from the program and proposed strategies for future growth.

## The Opportunity

Despite the promise of equality, economic disparities in the United States remain stark, with racial inequities continuing to shape financial experiences.

**In 2022, the median wealth of Black families was \$44,890 and \$62,000 for non-white Latino or Hispanic households—compared to \$285,000 for White households.<sup>2</sup>**

### MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD WEALTH BY RACE



**These wealth gaps are further compounded by disparities in income, savings, and financial security:**

- Median annual wage for Black workers is approximately 30% lower than that of White workers.<sup>2</sup>
- Black households save \$75 billion less annually than White households, largely due to income disparities.<sup>1</sup>
- 44% of Native Hawaiians households fell below the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) threshold in 2022.<sup>3</sup>
- Latino households hold only 1/5 the wealth of white households, and only 4.2% expect to receive an inheritance in the future.<sup>4</sup>

These inequalities—spanning wages, savings, and access to essential resources—have far-reaching consequences, stifling economic mobility and restricting access to homeownership, education, and other essential pathways to building long-term wealth. Disparities in access to healthcare, technology, affordable housing, and other critical services further compound these challenges, making it increasingly difficult for communities to break free from cycles of financial instability. For many, these barriers are more than just statistics—they reflect a daily reality of exclusion from the full promise of economic prosperity.

## Getting Started

In 2023, Filene and its partners joined forces to help credit unions address these disparities in the communities they serve through the launch of the Racial Economic Equity Incubator. **The REE Incubator focuses on Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, Indigenous American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander populations, aiming to address several dimensions of economic impact:**

1. Personal Finance
2. Homeownership
3. Education & Professional Development
4. Community Factors

In selecting credit union participants, we prioritized those who were committed to designing solutions *with*—not *for*—communities of color. By focusing on initiatives with the potential for quick, meaningful impact, the incubator has launched nine projects across these communities and created compelling cases for action.

### THE PROCESS & COHORT OVERVIEW

#### Designing the Road to Equitable Solutions

The REE Incubator was founded on the hypothesis that a network of credit unions and community partners could achieve greater impact through collaboration—both within their respective communities and collectively across the program.

To bring this vision to life, the program convened cohorts of credit unions and community organizations from diverse focus areas and geographies, spanning from New York to Hawaii. With support from this larger network, a core curriculum, and dedicated coaching, participants engaged in collective learning, co-designed and launched solutions tailored to their communities, and shared insights and best practices across the network.

## Key Roles in Creating Impact

The Incubator's success relied on three core components, each playing a vital role in driving impact:

- **Community Partners:** Credit unions collaborated closely with equity-focused community organizations to engage underserved populations, build trust, and co-create solutions tailored to community needs.
- **Dedicated Expert Coaches:** Coaches provided ongoing guidance, facilitated decision-making, and ensured accountability, helping teams stay focused and achieve their goals.
- **Collaborative Network:** Participants engaged with a broader network of peers, sharing insights and testing the hypothesis that collaboration amplifies local and collective impact.

## The Three Phases of the REE Incubator

Over 18 months, the REE Incubator guided credit unions and their community partners through three structured phases, progressing from inception to execution and reflection.



JAN 2023–  
AUG 2023

### PHASE I: CO-DESIGN

Partners engaged with equity experts to develop solutions, meeting bi-monthly in learning cohorts to explore ways to deepen impact within their credit unions and communities. Throughout this phase, participants followed a curriculum based on Filene's Method of Innovation, incorporating new best practices in human-centered design and co-creation.



SEP 2023–  
JUN 2024

### PHASE II: LAUNCH

In this phase, participants implemented and tested their solutions to address racial economic disparities. Filene provided technical support throughout, facilitating ongoing knowledge-sharing between participating credit unions and the broader credit union ecosystem.



JUL 2024–  
DEC 2024

### PHASE III: SHARE LEARNINGS

The final phase focused on analyzing outcomes and documenting learnings, with Filene and participants exploring opportunities to scale the most successful solutions for broader impact.





*“Although we live in the community, we don't always know about everything that's going on in the community. So having a collaboration where we freely share referrals and information about each other's programs has been really helpful. It not only helps our agencies but it is really helping the citizens of Blackhawk County that need our services the most.”*

– MADYLYN RIDGEWAY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, 24/7 BLAC

## Collective Impact: Validating the Collective Power of Collaboration

The REE Incubator successfully validated the hypothesis that a network of credit unions and community partners, sharing insights and working together, can drive greater impact. Through collaboration, cohorts were able to amplify their efforts both individually and collectively. Across all cohorts, the program achieved the following:

- **Community Engagement and Collaboration:**
  - **9 credit unions** partnered with **15+ community organizations** to advance equity in their communities.
  - **45+ participants** engaged in collective learning and solution design.
  - **400+ community members** were engaged to provide insights and help inform solutions.
  
- **Homeownership and Financial Support:**
  - **40+ community members** became new homeowners.
  - **100+ new loans** expanded access to financial resources for underserved individuals and communities.
  - **\$1 million in green loans** supported sustainable and environmentally focused residential projects.
  
- **Education and Empowerment:**
  - **800+ individuals** received financial counseling and education.
  - **\$15k+ in scholarships** supported student access to education.
  
- **Overall Program Impact:**
  - **6,400+ individuals** were positively impacted by the program's solutions.

## Cohort Overview

The table below provides an overview of the participating credit unions and community partners that shared insights at the Filene Spark! 2024 concluding event, summarizing their focus areas and action plans. This serves as a central index, offering a glance at the diverse approaches taken across the cohort, with more detailed narratives on the initiatives to follow in subsequent sections.

COHORTS	POPULATION	ACTION PLAN STRATEGIES
<b>Allegiance Credit Union &amp; Scissortail Community Development Corporation</b>	Latino business owners in Oklahoma City, OK	Small business training program addressing financial barriers for Latino entrepreneurs
<b>Chartway Credit Union &amp; Norfolk State University</b>	African American undergraduates at Norfolk State University	Financial literacy focus groups to understand and address financial security needs
<b>Kauai Federal Credit Union &amp; Hawaiian Community Assets</b>	Native Hawaiians in Kauai, HI	Homeownership assistance, down payment aid, cesspool-to-septic conversion loans
<b>Michigan State University Federal Credit Union &amp; GreenPath Financial Wellness</b>	Black and Brown women-led households in Detroit, MI	Partnership with The Community Builders, focus group discussions, individualized financial counseling, financial-trauma and cultural competency training
<b>Municipal Credit Union &amp; The Bronx Community Foundation</b>	Bronx youth (ages 18-25) in New York, NY	Financial education and empowerment webinar series, community surveys and focus groups
<b>Veridian Credit Union &amp; 24/7 BLAC, Iowa Heartland Habitat for Humanity, House of Hope, Try Pie and the City of Waterloo</b>	African Americans in Waterloo, IA	Achieve Financial Empowerment Program with financial mentoring, discounted car loans, and down payment and home improvement assistance



Kauai Federal Credit  
Union with Hawaiian  
Community Assets

Coach:  
Beverly Wolfe, PhD

## Addressing Economic Barriers for Native Hawaiians

Kauai residents, especially Native Hawaiians (Kānaka Maoli), face major barriers to homeownership and wealth generation due to low wages in extractive industries, high living costs, and systemic obstacles.

### KEY CHALLENGES

- Only 1 in 5 households can afford a mortgage on a median-priced \$1.6M home.
- High financial stress, out-migration, and lack of affordable housing.

### IMPLEMENTED SOLUTIONS

- **Home-buying Accessibility & Down Payment Assistance:** Bridging the gap for families, particularly Native Hawaiians, by offering financial counseling and down payment assistance.
- **Cesspool-to-Septic Conversion Loans:** Helping homeowners comply with state environmental mandates, increasing property value and reducing ecological harm.

### IMPACT & PROJECTED OUTCOMES

- Kauai FCU aims to provide 12 down payment assistance grants and assist 50+ clients, addressing home affordability for first-time buyers.
- 30 cesspools will be converted, improving both environmental and financial sustainability for homeowners.



Municipal Credit Union (MCU) with Bronx Community Foundation

Coach:  
Peter Holmes, PhD

## Empowering Youth in the Bronx Through Financial Education

With nearly 27% of Bronx residents living below the poverty line, young people face significant challenges including financial illiteracy, low access to capital, and economic insecurity.

### IMPLEMENTED SOLUTIONS

To achieve their vision of ensuring Bronxites aged 18-25 are financially empowered to eradicate inequity and build sustainable futures for all, MCU and The Bronx Community Foundation partnered to develop:

- **Financial Education Campaign & Youth Webinar Series:**
  - **Webinar Series:** Bi-weekly Financial Education series for youth focused on five key topics: Financial Success, Checking Account Basics, Credit Matters, Paying for College, and Money Skills for Financial Independence.
  - **Communications Campaign:** Social media and email campaign developed to drive awareness of education and other important resources.
- **Data-Driven Listening & Survey Sessions:**
  - **Financial Health Survey:** Surveys were conducted to understand financial needs and barriers across various financial health indicators.
  - **Focus Groups:** Discussions with high school and college-aged participants from trusted community partners generated critical insights that informed future action.

### IMPACT & PROJECTED OUTCOMES:

- **Community Reach:** The webinar series has reached over 150 youth members, achieving a 54% email open rate and 455 social media impressions, significantly enhancing financial literacy. By focusing on budgeting, credit management, and college financing, the program aims to foster long-term financial independence for Bronx youth.
- **Future Strategies:** Feedback from focus groups identified key barriers such as education gaps, inflation, and limited access to capital. Future work with MCU and its partners is poised to create even deeper impact in these areas through continued financial educational efforts, expanded resources for homeownership, support for educational and professional pathways, and other community-tailored approaches.



MSU Federal Credit  
Union (MSUFCU)  
with GreenPath  
Financial Wellness

Coach:  
Peter Holmes, PhD

## Building Financial Confidence in Detroit's Black and Brown Communities

MSUFCU identified systemic challenges faced by Detroit residents, particularly Black and Brown women-led households, including financial instability, limited credit access, and barriers to building long-term wealth. These issues are further compounded by economic disparities, low financial confidence, limited trust, and a lack of community-tailored financial education.

### IMPLEMENTED SOLUTIONS

- **Formed Partnerships:**
  - Collaborated with The Community Builders Staff to engage a community of 87+ Black and Brown women-led households. Built trust and a deeper understanding of unique community needs through consistent presence at meaningful events, including nine resident-focused initiatives.
- **Co-Created Financial Education Programs:**
  - Customized MSUFCU's existing financial education offerings for residents, developing a suite of courses focusing on four key learning pathways: homeownership, money management, budgeting, and credit building.
  - Graduates of the program have the opportunity to apply for membership and specialized loans to further support financial access and advancement.
- **Resident-Led Initiatives:**
  - Residents selected courses via a survey, creating personalized empowerment paths.
  - Established financial health baselines for tracking progress over time.

### IMPACT & PROJECTED OUTCOMES

- **Personalized Empowerment Paths:** Community members across all 350+ of The Community Builders residences now have access to personalized empowerment paths, including tools to track financial health progress.
  - 28 individuals have registered for the program, with 10 graduates completing each of the six curriculum courses.
  - Over 10 hours of instruction have been provided, offering access to knowledge and resources to support growth.
  - Residents also benefit from access to specialized MSUFCU outreach programs designed to provide vital financial education to support diverse, underbanked communities.
- **Geographic Expansion:** Project Greenome continues to scale, with plans to expand into Chicago and Richmond TCB programs, increasing access to financial support for 1000+ additional households.



Chartway Credit  
Union with Norfolk  
State University

**Coach:**  
Shellee A. Mitchell

## Understanding Financial Challenges Among HBCU Students

Chartway Credit Union and Norfolk State University, an HBCU, partnered to assess financial service access and financial literacy levels among African American students. Together, they aim to identify ways to enhance students' financial health during college and equip them for life after graduation.

### IMPLEMENTED SOLUTIONS

- **Discovering Opportunities:** Conducted population data analysis and led focus groups with 17 NSU students to pinpoint gaps in financial education and needs. They discovered multiple critical themes:
  - African American workers were often overrepresented in lower-income jobs, which constrained their ability to build wealth.
  - Students needed the foundational financial education to help prepare for life both in college and after graduation, and often turned to books, family members, and online sources rather than financial service providers for advice.
  - Many students lacked checking accounts and access to financial services and turned to check cashing services to support themselves, incurring substantial fees.

### IMPACT & PROJECTED OUTCOMES

- **Student Engagement:** Beginning this fall, Chartway plans to meet with NSU's athletic community quarterly to share information about financial literacy and how to save and plan for spending. Additionally, they will lend certified coaches to NSU to help students manage their finances, especially during times of financial inflows, such as during disbursements of grants and scholarships.
- **Curriculum Integration:** Chartway is partnering with NSU to collaborate on a financial literacy portion of a core course required for all students. This will enable all 5,500 students to receive foundational financial education.



Allegiance  
Credit Union  
with Scissortail  
Community  
Development Corp

Coach:  
Shellee A. Mitchell

## Empowering Latino Business Growth

Oklahoma City's rapidly growing Latino population, 80% of whom are Mexican, has fueled a rise in Hispanic-owned businesses. Despite a 24% increase in such businesses between 2012 and 2017, many face significant barriers to accessing financing, limiting their potential for future growth and sustainability.

### IMPLEMENTED SOLUTIONS

In partnership with Scissortail, Allegiance Credit Union designed a community-driven approach to support Latino business owners:

- **Demographic Focus:** Targeted the southern Oklahoma City footprint served by Allegiance CU, home to a significant Latino population.
- **Community Engagement:** Leveraged Centurions (Latino community stakeholders) to gather input from local business owners and build trust.
- **Small Business Training Program:** Created a program specifically led and taught by Latino educators and business leaders, focusing on enhancing business credibility, financial security, and long-term growth strategies.

### IMPACT & PROJECTED OUTCOMES

- **Latino Branch Expansion:** Based on demand, Allegiance CU committed to opening a Latino-focused branch in 2025 in a highly populated area to improve access to financial services.
- **Education & Legacy Building:** The training program aims to strengthen business credibility for Latino owners, offering tools for securing financing and building business legacies. Members who complete all three classes receive \$250 upon opening a business checking account and gain access to an active support system and resources for ongoing assistance.
- **Community Influence:** Several Latino educators and business owners have committed to leading and implementing the training program, ensuring cultural relevance and community engagement.



Veridian Credit Union with City of Waterloo, 24/7 Blac, Try Pie, House of Hope, Habitat for Humanity

Coach: Terri L. Quinton

## Tackling Financial Barriers and Inefficiencies in Waterloo, Iowa

In 2018, Black Hawk County in Waterloo, IA, was ranked as the worst place for African Americans in the nation, with the community facing:

- Limited community awareness of available financial programs
- Redundant efforts by organizations, causing inefficiencies
- A need for leadership and collaboration to create unified solutions

### SOLUTIONS IMPLEMENTED

Veridian CU, together with five partners, aligned on a powerful central vision: that all African Americans in Black Hawk County are liberated to have financial stability and build wealth. To bring this vision to life, they formed Achieve Financial Empowerment Program, a collaborative initiative to address community needs. Key actions included:

- **Community Survey:** Identified financial challenges through direct engagement with the affected community.
- **Streamlined Collaboration:** Created a flow chart mapping each organization’s role and offerings, building key program efficiencies.
- **Cohesive Branding:** Launched the Achieve Financial Empowerment Program brand to unify communications and provide clear guidance on assistance stages and outcomes.

### IMPACT & RESULTS

- **Homeownership:** Enabled 30 new homeowners, improving long-term financial stability
- **Financial Growth:** 71% of participants increased savings or reduced debt
- **Financial Mentorship:** 161 individuals completed mentoring programs
- **Housing Information:** 108 people accessed homeownership information
- **Transportation Support:** 7 participants secured reliable transportation
- **Collaborative Success:** 40% of participants utilized services from more than one partner, maximizing program reach
- **Learn More:** Stay updated on the impact of Achieve Financial Empowerment Program through their website: [achievefep.com](http://achievefep.com)



**FINDINGS  
& FUTURE  
PATHWAYS**

Over the past 18 months, the REE Incubator has driven impressive progress in communities of color through strategic partnerships, tailored education, and trust-building. While many initiatives are still unfolding, the progress made so far reflects the power of these focused efforts.

**EMPOWERING YOUTH THROUGH FINANCIAL EDUCATION**

Programs targeting financial literacy, particularly among underserved youth, were a central focus across several credit unions. **MCU's Financial Education Initiative** reached 150 Bronx youth, equipping them with the tools and confidence to make informed financial decisions and build lifelong independence. Concurrently, **Chartway Credit Union** collaborated with Norfolk State University to pinpoint financial knowledge gaps among African American students through focus groups, leading to tailored education programs designed to promote financial stability after graduation. Project Greenome, developed in partnership by **MSUFCU** and GreenPath Financial Wellness, also extended individualized financial education not only to young adults, but also to women-led households of color. By focusing on diverse communities, these initiatives empower individuals of color to bridge gaps in financial literacy early, equipping them with the knowledge to make informed decisions to build their financial health and achieve future goals.



**CREATING PATHWAYS TO HOMEOWNERSHIP AND GENERATIONAL WEALTH**

Housing access initiatives like those led by Kauai Federal Credit Union and Veridian Credit Union are driving significant progress toward closing wealth gaps for Native Hawaiian and low-income communities. **Kauai Federal Credit Union's** down payment assistance program, which disbursed over \$300,000 and converted 30 cesspools to address environmental concerns, helped families secure homes in a high-cost market. Similarly, **Veridian Credit Union's** partnership in the Achieve Financial Empowerment Program enabled 30 individuals to become homeowners, while helping 71% of its participants increase savings or reduce debt. Together, these efforts enhance financial security, promote economic resilience, and reinforce homeownership as a cornerstone of long-term wealth-building for their communities.



## STRENGTHENING MINORITY-OWNED SMALL BUSINESSES

Economic inclusion drives sustainable communities, as seen in the impact of **Allegiance Credit Union's Latino-led Small Business Training Program**. This initiative tackled the barriers faced by Latino entrepreneurs in Oklahoma City, offering financial tools, business knowledge, and community support to help grow their ventures. The program's long-term impact is evident in the increasing number of Latino-owned businesses, reflecting greater economic empowerment for this historically underrepresented group.

## CROSS-CUTTING IMPACT: TRUST, CULTURAL RELEVANCE, AND PARTNERSHIPS

The successes of such initiatives were underpinned by a common theme: the importance of trust and cultural relevance. By partnering with local organizations that deeply understood the needs of their communities, credit unions were able to tailor their programs to fit cultural contexts and effectively address barriers to financial inclusion.

## Looking Forward

While we have made significant strides in the past 18 months, the journey toward racial economic equity is far from complete. Thus, the conclusion of this incubator program marks not an end, but a catalyst for ongoing transformation. Reflecting on our progress, we see the need for continued support for these vibrant communities. The lessons learned and relationships forged will guide our next steps as we pursue two key pathways to amplify our impact and foster lasting change.

### 1. ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEMS (EE) INCUBATOR

Building on the insight that supporting diverse entrepreneurs is crucial to achieving racial economic equity, Filene launched the **Entrepreneurial Ecosystems** Incubator in May 2024, with activities continuing through early 2025. The EE Incubator empowers credit unions to become key drivers of economic growth by building entrepreneurial ecosystems within their communities. Given that half of new small businesses close within their first five years<sup>5</sup>, this initiative directly addresses the critical need for both access to financial services and comprehensive business support.

Entrepreneurs selected to participate in the Incubator will engage in the Bridge for Billions mentorship program, gaining valuable insights to help accelerate the growth of their business. Credit unions will also engage in a

reciprocal learning experience to gain deeper understanding of the unique challenges entrepreneurs face, fostering collaboration and mutual growth.

## 2. CEI INSTITUTE (COMMUNITY ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND INNOVATION INSTITUTE)

Looking ahead, we are exploring a second iteration of the REE incubator through the CEI Institute. This next phase aims to:

- **Scale Collaborative Solutions:** Build on the successes of the REE Incubator to promote models that effectively foster racial economic equity.
- **Establish Sustainable Ecosystems:** Equip credit unions with strategies and tools to create lasting impacts and refine measurement practices.

*“Knowing that everyone still needs help and it's never too late to start over”*

– RESIDENT, THE COMMUNITY BUILDERS (DETROIT, MI)

## How YOU Can Support This Work

If you're a credit union leader or community stakeholder passionate about advancing racial economic equity, here's how you can contribute:

- **Learn from the EE Incubator:** Stay tuned for insights from this initiative, to be published early 2025. Engaging with these resources will enhance your ability to support local entrepreneurs and nurture a collaborative ecosystem.
- **Implement Inclusive Practices:** Apply insights from the REE incubator to develop financial programs tailored to the needs of underserved populations, ensuring they receive necessary support.
- **Engage with Community Partners:** Build strong relationships with local organizations to create a more integrated support system for entrepreneurs.
- **Leverage CEI Institute Resources:** Engage with the CEI Institute to explore how you can participate in the next cohort of impact-driven credit unions through a future iteration of the REE initiative. Alternatively, reach out

to explore opportunities to gain important expertise and support to help your credit union advance equity initiatives directly within your own community.

By taking these steps, you can play a vital role in driving systemic change and creating a more inclusive financial ecosystem.

### Advice for Making Impact in Racial Economic Equity

In our journey through the REE incubator, we have gathered invaluable insights from community partners and participants. These stories reveal not just challenges, but also actionable paths forward:

- **Prioritize Community-Centric Approaches:** Actively listen to community members to understand their needs and challenges. This builds trust and ensures your initiatives are relevant.
- **Seek Complementary Partners:** Collaborate with local organizations that share your goals. Effective partnerships can amplify impact and resources, as demonstrated by our work with trusted community partners.
- **Focus on Holistic Solutions:** Address economic issues through a comprehensive lens—consider education, financial literacy, and trauma-informed approaches to create lasting change.
- **Pilot and Evaluate Programs:** Implement pilot initiatives to test strategies before a wider rollout. This allows for adjustments based on community feedback and ensures intended outcomes are met.
- **Communicate Clearly:** Use accessible language in outreach efforts to make information easy to understand. This is crucial in building trust and engagement.

For any questions or to learn more about getting involved, Filene is here to support you. Reach out to us, and together, we can continue this important work.

#### THANK YOU

Filene would like to thank all the REE participants for their support and contributions in making this incubator possible.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ***[Bringing Together HBCUs and Community Financial Institutions](#)***— In 2023, Visa and the Filene Research Institute convened a group of leaders from community financial institutions and the ecosystem of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) to identify opportunities for collaboration and impact for their shared communities. Read their report to gain more insight into how partnerships can drive impact in creating racial economic equity.
- ***[Tech and Trust: Building Credibility in Your Community](#)***—Trust is currently at an all-time low in the financial services sector, particularly among low-income and minoritized communities. This report examines and recommends strategies for credit unions to build credibility with these underserved populations.
- ***[Photovoice: A Facilitator's Guide](#)***—This report provides a guide for implementing a new way to engage with and better understand credit union members using Photovoice. This platform helps credit unions gather valuable insights by capturing community members' experiences through photography, offering a powerful tool for shaping more inclusive services.

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