

WA-BLOC

Vision/Mission:

WA-BLOC's mission is to build and nurture intergenerational leaders through transformative education and revolutionary social action. Their vision is for South Seattle to be an epicenter where Black and Brown folx thrive.

What community/communities does the organization serve?

WA-BLOC serves South Seattle, specifically the Rainier Beach Community. They partner with young BIPOC scholars at Rainier Beach High School, Emerson Elementary and Dunlap Elementary as well as school families and administration.

What does the organization do?

WA-BLOC implements three main programs in their goal of equitable education in South Seattle. They lead The Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools summer program (a 6-week free summer literacy and cultural enrichment program to support students and families), the Restorative Justice program (an alternative path to punitive, exclusionary discipline practices where students and staff participate in restorative circles, meditation, mentoring and de-escalation support), and social justice organizing (where they have apprentice-style participation in the Black Student Union, transportation justice town halls, rent injustice, school board presentations, and coalition-building community circles).

How does the organization maintain proximity to the community it serves?

WA-BLOC follows the leadership and voices of young people in the Rainier Beach community and is deeply rooted in the public school institutions that it seeks to transform. WA-BLOC hosts healing circles as one practice to listen to the Rainier Beach community. Staff are also majority BIPOC and the organization is in the process of creating a unique board structure to include community voices.

Describe the impact of an unrestricted grant for this organization.

WA-BLOC has gained a lot of traction in its Restorative Justice works and wants to bring on more staff to support this growing endeavor. They will struggle to be able to do this due to their funding cycle (40% comes from government contracts and they are between funding cycles). Additionally, one of their major funders pivoted to school-based grants so they recently lost significant funding for their Restorative Justice work and summer Freedom program. They would like to use this grant in year 1 to hire new staff and take their Restorative Justice work to a new level as a response to community needs.

Describe how the organization affects individuals/communities/systems:

WA-BLOC's Freedom Schools are one example how a summer literacy program grounded in social and racial justice principles led to the enactment of a new city program that enabled access to transit for students. WA-BLOC supported Freedom Schools scholars to organize a march to protest against 2.5-mile walk zone policy (meaning a student did not receive an ORCA card if you lived within 2.5 miles from the school) launching a multi-year campaign ultimately leading to the Youth Orca Card Program which provides free ORCA cards for middle and high school students; walk zone policy reduced to one mile. Additionally, when the announcement came that students would be out of school at the beginning of the COVID pandemic, WA-BLOC knew there would be an immediate need of feeding students and their families. They mobilized staff, community members and Black-owned restaurants and businesses to provide hot meals to their students and their families, even switching to delivery when the rainy season hit. This effort, Feed the Beach, poured \$50,000 back into the Black businesses while responding to the immediate needs that arose with COVID.

How does the organization's leadership and financial position reflect stability and capacity to execute its mission?

WA-BLOC has strong and energetic leadership and is in-process of forming its first board (which will include community voices). They are fiscally sponsored by Rainier Valley Corps (RVC). This relationship has been integral in helping to expand the human and organizational capacity of WA-BLOC as they develop. They doubled their budget this past year from \$500K to \$1MM investing heavily in staff hirings and salary increases, office space, and an expected cushion needed for a gap year (due to funding cycle).

What are the compelling reasons for Impact 100 to partner with this organization?

WA-Bloc is a trusted name amidst students and schools in South Seattle as a leader in the social justice movement (i.e. providing food to low-income students during COVID, expanding Restorative Justice within schools, mobilizing the community to address rent justice). WA-BLOC's Restorative Justice team works to interrupt the school to prison pipeline by offering an alternative to punitive, exclusionary discipline practices which disproportionately affect BIPOC students and focus instead on inclusion and equity. Their youth advocacy and empowerment focus birthed a youth-led advocacy campaign that resulted in a youth ORCA program providing all Seattle Public School (SPS) students with free, year-round ORCA cards. WA-BLOC is also currently supporting SPS scholars to advocate to end Seattle Public Schools' relationship with the Seattle Police Department.