

# FY 23 ANNUAL REPORT



July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2023

### Message from our CEO, Luz Urrutia

**Over the past two years, entrepreneurs launched a groundbreaking 14.6 million new businesses – boosting economic growth nationwide.** Yet small businesses continue to grapple with longstanding and emerging challenges, including threats to minority entrepreneur programs and federal funding for Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs). These circumstances underscore the urgency and importance of the work we do at Accion Opportunity Fund (AOF).

A spirit of innovation and collaboration has consistently guided our work. In recent years, we have continued to embrace new approaches through partnerships forged in response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Initiatives like the **California Rebuilding Fund** and the **Southern Opportunity Resilience Fund** have leveraged technology, outreach, and strategic financing to help under-invested entrepreneurs rebuild, pivot, and grow.

It's important to note that we didn't accomplish the achievements you'll find in these pages alone: Every step was made possible through support from donors, funders, and community partners.

I take pride in the collaborative programs we have initiated to connect entrepreneurs with the knowledge and financial capital essential for their success. These encompass the **PepsiCo Foundation's Impacto Hispanic Business Accelerator; LegalZoom's Fast Break for Small Business program; FedEx's E-Commerce Learning Lab; Samuel Adams Brewing the American Dream; the Truist Foundation,** and more. We have also become a participating lender in the **New York Forward Fund 2,** a state-sponsored effort backed by the State Small Business Credit Initiative (SSBCI).

In addition to these endeavors, we also renewed our inaugural partnership with the **Global Atlantic Foundation** and expanded our board leadership to include Samuel Ramos, their Chief Legal Officer.

Our research and advocacy team achieved significant milestones in advocating for fair and equitable policies before Congress and other decision-makers.

I am grateful for the relentless commitment of our team, Board, Leadership Council, donors, funders, investors and partners who remained steadfast in guiding our mission and vision.

While our core mission and vision have not changed, they were fine-tuned in the past year. In all our work, we recognize that unity strengthens us—an understanding that no single entity can create an inclusive financial system, and **we are stronger together than we can be alone.** 

With Gratitude,

M2 LINE

Luz Urrutia, CEO, Accion Opportunity Fund



**Click or Scan Luz's Video Message** 



### Meet Stacy Blanco, Owner of <u>Curl & Co</u>.

Stacy Blanco, a Brooklyn, New York, native, was always drawn to the sanctuary of Black beauty salons and the creativity she could express as a hairstylist. Her first introduction to the industry was as a teenager working in a hair salon after school and on the weekends. The salon was owned by a family friend, a Louisiana native who migrated to New York seeking new opportunities.



"Seeing a Black woman own a business and seeing other women in a salon in a welcoming and safe space ... being bosses and making their way in the world was inspiring," Stacy said.

After working in the music industry and as a legal assistant for fifteen years, Stacy returned to her initial love of beauty salons and started her journey to entrepreneurship.

Stacy attended the Aveda Institute of New York and earned her license in cosmetology in 2012. On a mission to open a salon, she used her own savings and financial support from her family to open Curl & Co. Hair Studio in Harlem in 2014.

For the next four years, she worked with a group of dynamic and close-knit women who held down the shop, while Stacy continued to work full-time as a legal assistant by day and hairstylist in the evening.

In 2020, when the COVID pandemic hit, the salon closed for over three months, leading to bills piling up, significant financial losses, and stylists pivoting in new ways to keep businesses

afloat. Stacy decided to close her Harlem location and relocated into a salon suite in New York City's Manhattan district, on 59th Street, between Park and Lexington Ave.

"Hairstylists are beholden to our clients... I still feel like I have not recovered from [being out of work] for over three months. Now, many people are working from home and not coming into hair salons as much, they are learning to cut their hair on social media ... consumer behavior and spending is changing."

When Stacy was seeking working capital to support her operating needs, she Googled "loans for Black women small business owners" and found AOF. She used a \$5,000 micro loan to pay her monthly business operating expenses, including rent, shampoos, conditioners, hair color, and other inventory.

"Every injection of capital into my business helps," Stacy said. "The [AOF] loan was an opportunity to increase clientele and awareness, and support people investing in self-care and hair love."

### **Small Business Lending Impact**

In Fiscal Year 2023 (July 1, 2022, to June 30, 2023), AOF:



### **Who We Serve**

Approximately **93%** of the small business owners we serve are people of color, women and/or low-income entrepreneurs.



### **Top 5 States for Loan Volume**



### **Top Industries for Our Borrowers**





### Meet Sheneka Frieson, Owner of Romares Apparel

Sheneka Frieson, a Huntington College business management graduate, transitioned from corporate life to entrepreneurship, launching Romares Apparel in May 2017–a curated shop specializing in sports and everyday wear.



Despite initial challenges and discouragement, she used personal savings to start the business and quickly sold out during her first Alabama football game day as a pop-up vendor. Following her initial success, Sheneka sought additional financing to expand her inventory but faced rejection, even when applying for just half the needed amount. "Being told 'no' has been one of the hardest hurdles in my journey," Sheneka said.

In the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Sheneka obtained crucial financial support through the Economic Injury Disaster Loan. Subsequently, she discovered the FedEx E-Commerce Learning Lab in collaboration with AOF. This program offers hands-on learning opportunities for entrepreneurs to launch online storefronts and receive a start-grant to support their growth plans.

In the E-Commerce Learning Lab, Sheneka collaborated with entrepreneurs and certified coaches, devising a digital marketing and web growth strategy. Connecting with a nationwide network, she formed lasting relationships and

engaged in collaborative digital marketing. The grant she obtained post-Learning Lab enabled her to acquire inventory, secure a web hosting subscription, and enlist marketing support.

Sheneka is now an AOF ambassador who has participated in multiple AOF webinars, including <u>Start Up: From Idea to</u> <u>Open for Business</u> and <u>What's Ahead: Empowering Excellence: Building Ecosystems for Black Entrepreneurs</u>. She also developed social media content promoting AOF's products and programs on TikTok.

What's ahead for Sheneka? She is working to develop a growth plan that would allow her to generate income outside of e-commerce and game-day sales. She plans to purchase and manage self-service kiosks that would allow Romares Apparel to be accessible in local airports and other locations across the South.

### **Business Advising and Education**

Fiscal Year 2023 (July 1, 2022, to June 30, 2023):





with webinars, in-person events, education programs, and grant programs

Demographic and gender identities of clients who engaged with coaching, webinars, events, and programs (demographic data does not include Business Resource Library)

89%

entrepreneurs of color, including:

67% Black, African, or African American

**12%** Hispanic, Latino, or Latinx

female entrepreneurs 2,126 clients received coaching



**1,027,137** total users

accessed the Business Resource Library









AOF's Coaching Hub connects small business owners with business coaches for 30-minute sessions to help bring their business to the next level. We engage both in-house and independently contracted coaches — who are themselves small business owners — to provide expert advising on a variety of topics, including access to capital, business and startup strategy, certification and procurement, financial management, legal support, marketing, social media, and more. Thanks to the generous support of our philanthropic partners, AOF offers these sessions to entrepreneurs free of charge.

In FY23, AOF added specific credit advising expertise to the Coaching Hub to support growing demand on this topic. Our research has shown that access to capital is

one of the greatest challenges that small business owners face, and this added expertise enables us to support entrepreneurs' efforts to access capital more effectively.

AOF provided one-on-one business coaching to 2,126 entrepreneurs in FY23, with many entrepreneurs attending multiple sessions. 92% of coaching clients said they feel more prepared to run their business after receiving business coaching, and 88% would recommend AOF coaching to a fellow entrepreneur.

**28,500+** Views of Our Webinars Our signature educational webinars have been offered to entrepreneurs since the pandemic, and we have seen continued growth in demand. Our free webinars provide expert advice on timely topics such as e-commerce, financial management, social media, marketing, staffing, and more. Since AOF launched the webinar program in March 2020, there have been over 28,500 cumulative views. Our monthly view rates rose last fiscal year, and in April 2023, webinar views reached a new high of roughly 650 views – and they have continued to increase into this fiscal year. Feedback from viewers has been overwhelmingly positive:

89%

say they've learned something they can directly apply to their business
+

would recommend AOF webinars to a fellow small business owner

Our <u>Business Resource Library</u> includes free webinar courses, educational videos, and curated articles in English and Spanish.

[My business coach] has provided excellent financial coaching. He has helped with growth projections and financial planning and has provided exceptional resources. I feel professionally and financially empowered and excited to work on our business goals. Not only is he a financial whiz, personally he is kind, patient, and supportive. I feel extremely grateful for AOF and [my business coach].

> - Kristopher Robinson, owner of Afrodesea in Los Angeles, California, and a one-on-one coaching client

I can't even say how much I am very fortunate I discovered this program. As a small business we are seeking funding and support but right now learning how to run a business and get connected in the community is so important. It was a very very very good experience. One of the best I ever had because the pandemic was rough. It was perfect timing for me.

- Sudarat Wongkittikraiwan, owner of Thai Yummy Foods in Portland, Oregon, and a graduate of the Accelerator for Local Restaurants (hosted by AOF in partnership with DoorDash)



# Building Strong Communities with New Markets Tax Credits

Our New Markets Tax Credit (NMTC) program leverages federal tax credits to invest in constructing, rehabilitating, and expanding nonprofit-operated facilities in the Western U.S. that provide basic safety net services (healthcare, housing for those experiencing homelessness, education, youth services) to low-income communities.

In FY23, we were the recipient of a \$55 million allocation award to deploy to nonprofit projects aiming to provide necessary services to low-income communities. We deployed \$48 million for the following four projects:

### Towne Twin Village (San Antonio, TX)



NMTC will finance the construction of an 82-unit microhome community that will provide permanent supportive housing and support services including meals, laundry facilities, a health clinic and more to persons experiencing chronic homelessness over 50 years old. The residents will be offered opportunities to earn income working at the community convenience store or site maintenance and participate in an array of programs and courses to improve literacy and employability skills. Once completed, the facility is expected to serve 300 unique individuals annually, 95% of whom will be low income.

### SAY Sí Westside Campus (San Antonio, TX)



NMTC will finance the rehabilitation of a 96,195-square-foot former warehouse that will increase SAY Si's capacity to provide tuitionfree creative arts, media, and technology-based programs for middle and high school youth, focusing on members of marginalized communities, specifically people of color, women LGBTQ+, and economically disadvantaged individuals. The campus is anticipated to serve 350 unduplicated students annually, 95% of whom are minorities.

### Urban Peak Youth Shelter (Denver, CO)



NMTC will finance the construction of a new 66,578-square-foot homeless services campus including 6,303 square feet of programming space and a 136-bed capacity. The facility will co-locate shelter, transitional style dorm housing and offer integrated services for unhoused youth ages 15-24, including case management, a medical clinic, onsite mental health services, education, healthy food, a teaching kitchen, employment services, and life skills. The new shelter will serve 600 unique at-risk youth annually.

### Northern Nevada HOPES (Reno, NV)



NMTC will finance the construction of a 43,000-square-foot Federally Qualified Health Center that will provide adult primary care, chronic disease prevention, case management, pharmacy and behavioral health care to medically underserved populations. In total, the building will feature 4 clinical modules with space for up to 60 patient rooms. Once constructed, the health center will serve 10,515 unduplicated patients annually, 90% of whom are projected to be low income.

# **NMTC Impact in Fiscal Year 2023**

Jobs\*

(July 1, 2022, to June 30, 2023):



Created\*\*

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## **A Busy Year Advocating for Small Businesses**

AOF knows that change on a systemic level is necessary to continue advancing access to credit for small businesses, and our advocacy efforts focus on increasing capital access and building greater transparency in small business lending. In fiscal year 2023, our Policy team was quite active at both the state and national level.

#### **Testimony before Congress and in state legislatures**



- CEO Luz Urrutia testified in front of US Congress for the <u>Section 1071</u> rule to collect industry-wide data on small business lending.
- Chief Legal Officer Chris Pilkerton testified before the House and Senate Entrepreneurship committee panels on ways to improve the <u>SBA's efforts to expand access to capital</u>.
- Then-President and COO Michael Rapaport testified in front of California's Senate Banking and Financial Institutions Committee on <u>California Senate Bill 33 (SB 33)</u> to make APR disclosure permanent in the state, which has since become law.
- VP of Research and Policy Joshua Miller testified in the Maryland General Assembly for <u>Maryland State Bill 496 (SB 496)</u>, which would have required lenders in the state to disclose APR and other important terms.

#### Advocating for transparency in small business lending



AOF has long advocated for a robust, comprehensive data collection effort under Section 1071 of the Dodd-Frank Act, and in March 2023, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau published its final guidelines. Under the rule, small business lenders must collect and report certain data to determine adherence to fair lending practices and to better understand the needs of historically underinvested small business owners.

#### Our first-ever Congressional policy agenda



AOF's first-ever <u>Congressional Policy Agenda</u> outlines objectives that we believe Congress should prioritize. This includes providing the CDFI Fund with \$1 billion to maximize the impact of CDFIs, investing in CDFI technology to improve customer experience, and making the New Markets Tax Credit (NMTC) Program permanent for long-term, sustained benefit to low-income communities.

We have been building relationships with elected officials on both sides of the aisle to advocate and build momentum for policies that support CDFIs, like Accion Opportunity Fund, and the diverse communities we serve.

#### Introducing a national Truth-In-Lending law for small business financing



As a founding member of the <u>Responsible Business Lending Coalition</u>, we helped introduce the Small Business Financing Disclosure Act of 2023. This bill would require lenders across the country to disclose important terms and details—APR, payment amount, payment frequency—in a concise and clear manner. Enacting this law would save small business owners across the country hundreds of millions of dollars.



" ... Access to capital for small businesses is a bipartisan priority. There are Mom and Pop stores in communities that are rural and urban; red and blue; Black and White, Hispanic, and Asian—and they are all powering our economy."

- **CEO Luz Urrutia** speaking before the U.S. House Subcommittee on Economic Growth, Tax, and Capital Access, on March 28, 2023



# **The Power of Catalytic Philanthropy**

Accion Opportunity Fund was formed in early March 2020 at a crucial time for small businesses — shortly before an international pandemic catapulted the need for more access to flexible capital, online business resources, and coaching. Later that same month, our fundraising went into overdrive and our efforts were catalyzed by a \$15 million grant from philanthropist MacKenzie Scott. This transformational gift launched the Equity Campaign with an original fundraising goal of \$90 million over three years in philanthropy. The Equity Campaign was further catalyzed by the remarkable leadership and generosity of the Board of Directors, Leadership Council, and many other supporters. In just three years, AOF ended up raising over \$103 million in philanthropy and \$83 million in impact investment notes pumping a cumulative \$185 million into fueling the small business renaissance.

The timing was opportune: A record 14.6 million new small businesses emerged during COVID, and women – especially women of color – led the way. The Equity Campaign enabled AOF to invest in the resiliency of small business owners nationwide as they shifted from survival to sustainability – allowing us to accomplish the following impact:



The overwhelming success of the Equity Campaign demonstrates how philanthropy not only unlocks the power of financial resources but also mobilizes the community in support of our mission by creating a movement for small business entrepreneurship. Philanthropic dollars from institutions, corporations, banks, foundations, and individuals enable Accion Opportunity Fund to provide accessible capital, coaching, and support for underinvested entrepreneurs while helping AOF to continue scaling operations to meet the ever-rising, always-changing demand to serve small business owners.

Now approaching the 30th anniversary of Accion Opportunity Fund's work in the community, we chart the path forward from the successes and lessons learned throughout the long history of our mission-driven work – and especially during the most turbulent times of the pandemic.

AOF remains committed to not only rebuilding – but also reimagining – a more inclusive and abundant landscape for all entrepreneurs. Thank you for your continued support catalyzing a brighter, more equitable future.

The Equity Campaign raised over \$103.6M in philanthropy and nearly \$83M in impact notes for a total of \$185.7M

Dr. Corrie Amos The Spice Theory

# Expanding Access to Capital and Strategic Support for Black-Owned Small Businesses

Community Development Financial Institutions, like AOF, were founded on the principle that equal access to capital, strategic networks, and resources to help advance economic justice is key to building a more inclusive financial system and upending economic inequities. We know that by building programs and services tailored for Black-owned businesses, we are creating opportunities for all to thrive through job creation and economic growth.

Black entrepreneurs have been systemically excluded from affordable capital and opportunities to build wealth which have contributed to the growing racial wealth gap. Black entrepreneurs face challenges accessing capital and professional support to start or grow their businesses and are more likely to have financial losses than profits after closing their businesses compared to their white counterparts (Prosperity Now, 2023). Despite these inequities, entrepreneurship is the second driving force of wealth-building for Black families (Brookings, 2024).

AOF is committed to supporting the growing number of Black-owned businesses to help them achieve the potential of financial security that entrepreneurship brings. In FY23, our business advising and coaching program reached over 4,500 Black entrepreneurs (an impact 75% higher than FY22) with one-on-one coaching, educational webinars, cohort-based learning, and grant programs to help entrepreneurs navigate challenges and take actionable steps to start and grow their businesses. Our one-on-coaching program reached 60% more Black entrepreneurs in FY23 with coaching (from 911 in FY22 to 1,531 in FY23), and we disbursed \$12 million in small business loans to 651 Black entrepreneurs, more than doubling our loans funded to Black entrepreneurs since FY21.

We were able to reach more Black-owned businesses in FY23 through support from our philanthropic supporters and community partners. From Legal Zoom's <u>Fast Break for Small Business</u> program that supported 50 black-owned small business owners with \$10,000 grants and free legal consultations or business formation assistance to a multi-year commitment from Fifth Third Bank in support of our work to expand access to capital and coaching for Black-owned businesses. We leveraged these partnerships along with public-private partnerships like <u>Southern Opportunity</u> <u>Resilience Fund (SOAR)</u>, <u>American Express</u>, and a contribution from JPMorgan Chase through the <u>Entrepreneurs of Color Fund</u> to channel investments and resources to Black-owned small businesses. We partnered with mission-aligned organizations like <u>Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC)</u>, <u>Hello Alice</u>, and <u>Mogul Millennial</u> on outreach campaigns to connect with, support, and close the resource gap for more Black-owned businesses.

We are thankful for these partnerships that make us stronger, together.

**Partnerships** 

# **Financials**

Accion Opportunity Fund Community Development and Subsidiary Fiscal Year 2023 (July 1, 2022, to June 30, 2023)

#### Assets

Other assets	23,242
Loans receivable - small business, net	121,445
Program cash	50,497
Cash and cash equivalents	28,474

### **Liabilities and Net Assets**

Notes payable	148,683
Other liabilities	7,302
Total net assets	77,673
Total liabilities and net assets	\$233,658

#### Revenues

Net earned revenue	15,625
Contributions and grants	22,615
Total revenues and contributions	\$38,240

30,488
,
10,022
\$40,510

### Change in net assets

All figures above are in USD\$ and presented in thousands, unless otherwise stated. Our full financial statements are available online at <u>aofund.org/annual-reports-financials</u>.

\$(2,270)

**Our Funders** 

### **Our Funders**





**Z** LEGALZOOM











As a national nonprofit lender, we rely on philanthropy to reach under-resourced entrepreneurs who depend on CDFIs to access capital and networks to achieve their dreams. We are grateful to the donors and funders who provide AOF with greater financial stability and enable us to provide innovative programs and tailor our approach to support the changing landscape of our small business community. While this list is not exhaustive, we express our heartfelt gratitude for the generosity of these supporters and many others.

#### 72 and Sunny

**Bank of America - LA Bloomberg Philanthropies Budweiser Capital One Cathay Bank CBS Group Ceiba Fund City National Bank Coastal Enterprises, Inc. (CEI)** Coca-Cola **David Friedman and Paulette Meyer** Discover **eBay Foundation Fifth Third Bank Foundation First Citizens Bank Goldman Sachs** Google.org Harman Cain Foundation **Harman Family Foundation HexClad Jordan Brand** Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) **Manufacturers Bank** MasterCard Worldwide **Molson Coors PennyMac Power Digital Ralph M. Parsons Foundation Robert and Bess Cook Foundation Sand Hill Foundation Sobrato Philanthropies The California Endowment** The Franklin and Catherine Johnson Family Foundation **The Rhode Futures Foundation Thomas and Judy Iovino Family Fund Tides Foundation** Tito's Handmade Vodka **Tom and Wende Hutton** Travelers W. K. Kellogg Foundation Western Alliance Bank



**Whitehill Family Foundation** 

## **Board of Directors**

Accion Opportunity Fund recognizes and thanks our Board of Directors, Leadership Council, committee members, and task forces for their service. Listed below are Board members who served from July 1, 2022, to June 30, 2023.

Esteban Altschul, Accion, COO Greg Avis (Chair), Bangtail Partners **Todd Baker, Broadmoor Consulting** Swati Bhatia, Goldman Sachs **Phil Black, True Ventures** Dickson Chu, Copper, Inc. Caretha Coleman, Coleman Consulting Solana Cozzo, Mastercard Joni Cropper, Cropper Family **Debra Engel, Engel Family Fund** Madeleine Fackler, International Rescue Committee Brian Graham, Klaros Group Parker Hudnut, ICEF Public Schools Mickey Konson (Assistant Secretary), StreetShares Jim Koshland (Vice Chair & Secretary), DLA Piper (Retired) Lata Krishnan, Shah Capital Partners Juanita Lott, Portfolia Investments Nathalie Molina Niño, Known Holdings Samuel Ramos, Global Atlantic Financial Group Michael Schlein, Accion, President and CEO **Diana Taylor, Accion, Board Chair** Luz Urrutia, Accion Opportunity Fund, CEO



Roberta Hatchett and Monique Copeland <u>VinBohême</u>, AOF Client

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# We help small businesses thrive.