

Black Futures Learning Journey

IMPACT STORIES OF FUTURE IN THE MAKING



This report describes the activities of the Black Futures Project that led community events and gatherings both online and in-person in 2025.



**Impact Organizations
of Nova Scotia**



**Canadian
Race Relations
Foundation**

PAGES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THERE
ARE
BLACK PEOPLE
IN THE
FUTURE

1

Futuring as a Practice: What Becomes Possible

2

Architects of the Future - Outcomes of Our Codesign Sessions

3

Ripple Effects - Translating Beyond Community to the Sector

3

Impact Story Interviews facilitated by Tania Cheng

Teri Brezner on Bending Time, Building Trust & Emergence

Darren Okafu on Taking the Conversation from NS to Canada/Globe

Shelley Fashan on New Ideas, Future Thinking & Diversity

Andre Anderson on Intentional Design, Individual & Collective Identity

Aba Owusu-Biney on Resonance, Feeling Heard & Seen

Bria Miller-Chiome on Belonging & Connection

Carmen Boyko on the Liberatory Leadership Cohort

3

Takeaways & Future Ripples to Anticipate



FUTURING AS A PRACTICE: WHAT BECOMES POSSIBLE

About the Black Futures Project

In 2025, Impact Organizations of Nova Scotia (IONS) received project funding from the Canadian Race Relations Foundation to build the next iteration of Black History Learning Journey project. This included hosting a Black Futures Gathering that leads to calls to action for the Community Impact (nonprofit) Sector and a learning cohort for sector leaders to manifest the vision of Black futures through implementing liberatory practices and pro-Black policies.

Often, conversations about the Black experience and anti-racism are rooted in the oppression and trauma of our past. Knowing and telling the truth about our history is essential, AND, there is more to the story. This project was an opportunity to hold space and conversations that center the African Nova Scotian and Black community; rooting in our joy, rest and creativity. The Black Futures Learning Journey uplifts the voices, perspectives and work of leaders who are practicing the future, and asking: "What is possible for Black Futures when we reimagine our world?"



"Black radical imagination is not only about escaping the realities of oppression – it's about constructing the blueprints for freedom."
– Robin D.G. Kelley, Freedom Dreams

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Why Black Futures?
Why Us? Why Now?

What futures are possible when we center land, culture, and healing?

What does Black freedom look like in the future we are building?

What becomes possible when Black joy leads the way?

What will we each hold and manifest?

How do we honor our past while imagining our future?



Spring 2025
Black Futures
Gathering & Co-
Design Session at
Tribe Network (HRM)

Summer 2025
Co Design
Visionaries (South
Shore)

ARCHITECTS OF THE FUTURE

In 2025, the Black Futures Project invited community leaders to “step into a portal to the future” by hosting a series of public and online co-design sessions and gatherings with the intention of realizing visions for liberatory, inclusive and impactful work that eradicates the effects of racism.

Summer 2025
Planning & Actioning
Outcomes of Co-Design
Sessions & Planning
Gathering

Summer 2025
Co-Design
Visionaries
(Virtual)

Late Summer 2025
Public Launch of Black to
the Future
at Black Cultural Centre
(Dartmouth)

Fall 2025
Black to the Future Co-
Design Retreat

Winter 2026
Launch Liberatory
Leadership Cohort

Winter 2026
Black Futures Black
Joy Gathering

Step into a
Portal to
the Future

Illustration by Bria Miller-Chrome

BENDING TIME, BUILDING TRUST & EMERGENCE

An Interview with Teri Brezner

When Teri Brezner, Director of Learning Networks at Impact Organizations of Nova Scotia (IONS), began designing the Black Futures project, she started with a set of guiding questions: **"How might we design something that would allow for community to be together and be in a space of dreaming? What is the future we want to see? And how do we do this in a way that is led by voices of the community?"** The timeline, however, was tight. "I have to do this in three months," she recalled. But instead of rushing towards predefined deliverables, "We'll bend time," Teri kept saying – a mantra that became a shared philosophy as the project unfolded.

What emerged was shaped less by workplans and more by conversations, and it took this deeply relational approach to build the necessary trust and to sense clearly what the community needed most. Early on, Teri met with respected community elders and organizational partners **Bernadette Hamilton-Reid and Sylvia Parris** to identify key co-designers. **Louise Adongo joined the project as the Engagement Lead**, facilitating connections with other key voices in the African Nova Scotian community and shared critical history and context on past efforts. Trying to gather busy leaders together in one place during the summer proved to be difficult. Responding to the realities of the community, Teri spent time weaving together insights from multiple one-on-one conversations, and in person co-design sessions with leaders in community across the province.

Navigating organizational and funder timelines while honouring community rhythms created internal tensions, but it also surfaced an important line of inquiry. **"This is not work plan work,"** she reflects. **"Whose time are we operating on?" "How can time replicate control and domination in the ways we work?"** How do we actually experience moving in a relational time scale?"



We witnessed how slowing down and building trust leads to lasting impact. In the design of the launch event held at the Black Cultural Centre, every detail was thoughtfully considered. **Tara Taylor joined the project as Creative Director** to produce the event, screening films by local ANS filmmakers that sparked imagination and introduced the idea of Afrofuturism. Tara facilitated connections to local artists, businesses and leaders, ensuring all the project resources went back into community. As a result, the event was a full house. People didn't just attend; they connected. At one table, three generations of one family sat together in conversation. At another, newcomers who had arrived in Nova Scotia just weeks earlier found themselves "so connected" to a history and community they hadn't previously known.



The trust cultivated in the lead-up continued to bear fruit a month later at the Black Futures Retreat, where almost nothing went according to plan. When last minute scheduling changes arose, "we just literally threw out the agenda and embraced emergence," recalls Teri. But because she had already spoken with each participant, there was a shared sense of ownership and an underlying belief that "there's always enough time." During the opening circle, just as introductions were about to begin, Sobaz Benjamin, started drumming and offered, "Let's each stand up and say our name and our ancestors we are bringing into the circle" - a spontaneous offering that turned out to be a "beautiful emergent moment" and an embodiment of the shared trust and agency in the room.



As Teri says, over the two days they moved at "a different rhythm," one that followed "the flow of our bodies and the land". Meals happened when people were hungry, not when the clock dictated. "We ended up having a whole two-hour conversation about our relationships to time." For her, it was her "most embodied practice of emergent strategy," and "the first time I genuinely felt belonging fully with the multitudes of my Blackness in a space."

NEW IDEAS, FUTURE THINKING & DIVERSITY

An Interview with Shelley Fashan

What is most vivid for Shelley Fashan when she reflects upon the Black Futures retreat is not a particular moment or outcome, but a feeling. **"There was a real strong connection with the people there. You could feel a lot of good energy and a lot of hope in the future,"** she recalls.

Set at Tidal Bore Rafting in September 2025, the two-day Black Futures Retreat brought together Black and African Nova Scotian leaders working in the Community Impact Sector across generations and diasporas, from African Nova Scotians with deep ancestral roots to newcomers from Africa and across the Caribbean. Shelley appreciated the diversity, noting that "we're a very relational kind of people."

In a sector often constrained by urgency, funding pressures, and systemic barriers, the retreat created space to think expansively and collectively. The mind-stretching conversations about the decolonization of time, sensing beyond the six senses, and possibilities for the future were especially memorable. "People came up with a lot of different ideas and concepts and original kinds of ways of doing things."

The opportunity to connect through art, rhythm, and story allowed participants to not only imagine change, but also experience what it could feel like. "It was really great to be in the drum circle where people got to really express themselves artistically," Shelley remarks.

For Shelley, a lifelong community organizer and a pillar in the African Nova Scotian community, the gathering was vital precisely because of what it makes possible. **"It laid the foundation for thinking about reshaping where we are... and the way we want it to be. It was looking at how we can move forward differently."**

She sees this "fusion of ideas" as only the beginning. "I was able to be more positive about a lot of things," she says, pointing to the lasting influence of retreat. In a context where progress is often met with resistance - "as soon as you move forward, something knocks you back" - that sense of possibility is itself a critical outcome. Her dream is to see more Black leaders represented in the cultural sector, the "true histories" of African Nova Scotians be told through the education system, and the protection of their lands through community land trust and development plans. **Her message to funders of the Community Impact Sector: "If you want to see a better future for Black and African Nova Scotian communities, support this work."**

There was a discussion on time and how it was structured, how time as we know it is something from the industrial era, and that many cultural societies don't see time that way.



It felt like adult camp. I think my feedback would be, I want more of that, please!

EMBODIED BELONGING & CONNECTION

An Interview with Bria Miller-Chiome



The decision to take part in the Black Futures project was an easy one for artist and graphic facilitator Bria Miller. They had known Teri Brezner and community leader Bernadette Hamilton-Reid for years, so “any time they reach out,” they said, “I’m like, yes, please.”

In fact, seven years ago, Bria and Teri had attended adrienne maree brown’s training on emergent strategy in Detroit and had since talked together about creating similar experiences at home. Bria was drawn by the possibility of gathering in a different way, of having the space to connect, dream, and “bend time” together – and, for a moment, to escape the colonial structures that they feel are “sucking all of the joy and creativity” because of the need to fit into “restrictive, harmful, often racist, boxes and spaces where we’re often expected to learn, teach, and perform all at the same time.”

As someone who lives with a dynamic migraine disability, Bria often feels socially isolated, so the attention and care given to the design stood out. “Teri’s constant invitation and checking in felt really good. I felt very moved that I was still brought along the whole way.”

Bria’s described the atmosphere as “wholesome” and full of “belonging”. Participants listened to music, made art, and cooked meals together. It was a space of shared facilitation and creativity, with everyone offering their skills and strengths, from art to drumming to photography. “It felt like being in someone’s living room,” they said. “I’m an anxious little bean,” they joked, “and I felt very cozy, even just getting to be there on the one day.”

Bria noted that “the theme of Ubuntu and Sankofa was embodied” by organizers and participants, creating the conditions for transformation. For instance, they witnessed honest conversations and people “dismantling [stereotypes] in real time”. “That doesn’t happen unless we’re in a room together,” Bria reflected.

Since the retreat, Bria has reconnected with participants and established professional collaborations that bridge their artistic practice with food sovereignty work. The retreat also affirmed for them the importance of having intentional spaces for Black communities. “We need these spaces for so many reasons,” Bria said. “For healing, for education, for respite... for just being together.”

Looking ahead, Bria sees the momentum continuing. They point to the ongoing conversation in the group email thread as an indication of the strong commitment and desire to sustain the connections built at the retreat. Their wish is for dedicated funding to grow this work and to extend it to more rural communities, and for more intergenerational connection and mentorship. “I think this work is really worthwhile, and I just know that [sustained funding] would support all of us to feel more grounded and confident in our leadership roles as we continue to work in our communities.”

CENTERING COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE THROUGH INTENTIONAL DESIGN

An Interview with Andre Anderson

Filmmaker Andre Anderson was introduced to Black Futures project when he was invited to screen his short film at the launch event held at the Black Cultural Centre in August 2025. It turned out to be a deeply affirming experience. "Everybody really connected with [the film] – not just Black men." He jumped at the opportunity to participate in and film the two-day retreat that followed.

If he were to sum up his experience at the retreat in one word, it would be "intentional". "It was a space for an intentional gathering," he says, noting that from the outset, participants were "mentally and physically ready to contribute." "When everyone arriving knows the purpose of why they're there, you can start the work early... We can go deep."

For Andre, a 10th generation African Nova Scotian whose work is rooted in storytelling and shifting narratives about Black experiences, the retreat stood out for how deliberately it centered Black and African Nova Scotian voices. "Oftentimes, our experiences aren't centered and it's a strong reason why I became a director in the first place... so that was a big thing for me, feeling intentionally centered."



During the retreat, Andre experienced a profound sense of belonging that stood in stark contrast to when he had visited the same site over a decade earlier as a student. "I was the only Black person in an all-white classroom." Returning now, looking at all the Black faces around the circle, "it was pretty emotional". "By feeling so included the second time, I could see what the difference is," he reflects. **"By allowing Black people in Nova Scotia to really reclaim time and space... it allows you to go from a state of feeling a normalized otherness into a sense of 'I belong here', and 'my community belongs here', and 'our stories belong here'."**

Set in a place that provided "emotional and mental rejuvenation," the retreat created the conditions for something deeper to unfold. "You need to be in a safe environment that fully allows you to do so in a way that you're not going to be judged or looked at or othered by speaking your vision," notes Andre. Through shared ancestral grounding practices and space to imagine together, participants began envisioning possible futures, including one where Black leaders hold positions at the highest levels of society.

I definitely feel connected more to IONS, because I didn't really know much of it beforehand. But it felt really nice to know that there's an organization that's really devoted to making positive change here in Nova Scotia."



I think it's so important to document these experiences for people internally and people externally. There are ripples of benefits for different communities. I was really thankful to be able to do that.

"THE BLACK FUTURES RETREAT FELT LIKE STEPPING INTO A MEMORY OF THE FUTURE — A SPACE WHERE HEALING, CREATIVITY, AND POSSIBILITY COEXISTED IN REAL TIME. EVERY CONVERSATION AND ACTIVITY REMINDED ME THAT WE ARE BOTH THE DREAM AND THE BUILDERS OF WHAT COMES NEXT. THE GATHERING CREATED ROOM FOR TRANSFORMATION — ACROSS GENERATIONS, EXPERIENCES, AND DISCIPLINES — AND SHOWED HOW COLLABORATION CAN BE A LIVING PRACTICE, NOT JUST AN IDEA. I LEFT GROUNDED, INSPIRED, AND CONVINCED THAT WHEN WE MOVE TOGETHER WITH PURPOSE, OUR COLLECTIVE IMAGINATION CAN RESHAPE THE WORLD." -ANDRE ANDERSON



AFROFUTURISM AS A PORTAL TO BELONGING

An Interview with Daren Okafo

“What would have happened if Africville had been funded as opposed to gutted?”

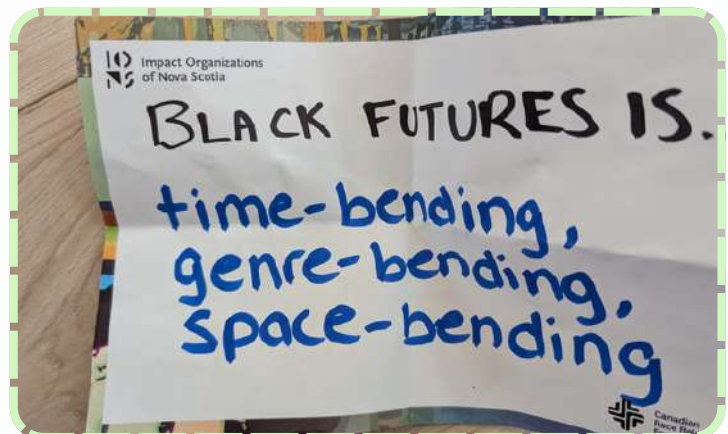
This was one of many thought-provoking questions posed by Daren Okafo, Consulting Director of Collective Leadership at the Tamarack Institute and an Afrofuturist researcher at the University of Bristol, during the session he facilitated on Afrofuturism and counter narratives at the Black Futures Retreat. Participants dreamed up a vibrant alternative reality for Africville, featuring a centre for spirituality and community-based grocery stores. “It was remarkable. It was really something special,” Daren reflects.

Daren, a Black man who grew up in Dublin in a white family, shared that “code switching is a normal part of my life” and that “discomfort and not belonging is a very normal way for me to feel.” Entering the retreat, he was unsure how he would be received within the African Nova Scotian community. Instead, he experienced something quite different: “In no way was anybody made to feel like their Blackness wasn't valid”.

For Daren, seeing participants that reflected the “varying shades of Blackness” – including newcomers from the African diaspora, African Canadians, and African Nova Scotians – allowed “fragments or elements of my Blackness to surface in a way that maybe I wasn't even prepared for.” Immersing himself in conversations that created room for the full spectrum of Black lived experience without collapsing them into a single narrative reinforced why he feels **“looking at people as opposed to constructs is a really important step in combating racism.”**

It's not often that you get events that are designed to bring folks together like that and to do it in a way that doesn't center trauma.

Transmuting trauma into something constructive, critical and compelling - a model for other equity seeking groups.



THE RIPPLE EFFECT - CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION IN THE SECTOR

The lessons and insights from the retreat rippled out to the broader Community Impact sector in Nova Scotia via our Liberatory Leadership Cohort - a four week online learning series where 44 leaders from across the province came together to reflect on their cultures of time in their organization, what liberatory practices they embody through their own leadership and how to design for greater belonging.

Each session was lead by African Nova Scotian leaders, offering their stories and practices in more liberatory practices.



Cohort Celebration & Community of Practice Launch

Friday, Mar 6, 12:00 – 2:00 PM AST

In person



LLC Session 4: Liberatory Organizational Design for Radical Rest

Thursday, Feb 26, 12:00 – 2:00 PM AST

Virtual



LLC Session 3: Belonging is a Vibe

Thursday, Feb 19, 12:00 – 2:00 PM AST

Virtual



LLC Session 2: Embodied Liberatory Leadership

Thursday, Feb 12, 12:00 – 2:00 PM AST

Virtual



LLC Session 1: Fostering Belonging through Liberatory Time

Thursday, Feb 5, 12:00 – 2:00 PM AST

Virtual

SHAPING CHANGE IN COMMUNITITES OF PRACTICE

Months after the initial launch and retreat, IONS invited the ANS and Black community back together in February for a **Black Joy Gathering**, however the energy was affected from the larger context. **Meeting a day after more than 1.3 Million dollars of cuts** were announced by the provincial government, the vibes weren't exactly joyful, that day our Black Joy looked different.

The timing actually turned out to be just right, as a group of **intergenerational Black leaders sat around the kitchen table at Tribe Network**, sharing the impact of the cuts to their organizations, lessons from the past, regrounding in visions for the future and collective strategies for moving through this moment.



The event attracted new participants who hadn't been to previous events like Aba Owusu-Biney Youth Program Team Lead at YWCA Halifax. What stood out to Aba most was the intimacy and "close-knittedness" of the space. "At the time I had been having a hard time at work and wanted a space to talk about systemic racism and feeling alone in the non-profit sector," she says. The "kitchen table" setting created the sense of closeness needed to have honest conversations about experiences with systemic racism. **"I felt heard, seen and encouraged to speak, to say my own opinions and even safe to voice out if I had a different opinion from others in the room."**

Aba left with a deepened sense that the community holds "so much strength, wisdom and talent". These gatherings are powerful because as she reflects, "It's important for us to learn from each other, better support each other to better navigate the system and make progress." She hopes to see more funding and support for opportunities like the Black Joy Gathering, educational cohorts, and sector-specific learning conversations about the systemic barriers faced by Black and African Nova Scotian communities to further share the 'wealth of knowledge' that is out there.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Carmen Boyko, Director Philanthropy & Communications at Junior Achievement Nova Scotia, one of the participants in the Liberatory Leadership Cohort shared:

Since the cohort, **"I've been reflecting on my relationship to time and how it influences my interactions with others.** I have been practicing being thoughtful about how I work versus how others work to change how I support, guide, and reply to others."

"I'm comfortable with people leaving with question marks that they didn't have before they got there. That's work for me. That can often have more community-driven ripple effects outside of what I would prescribe or even hope for." Reflecting on the Black Futures Retreat and the cultivation of imagination, creativity, adaptability, and resilience, he puts it simply: "the return on investment is immense."

Daren plans to extend the retreat experience by connecting with fellow participants and launching an Afrofuturism innovation lab in Halifax, where he will continue his counter narrative process to craft an "imagination manifesto" for next year's Black Futures Month.



I think it helped to really build a systematic and consistent platform for collaboration. It's a demonstration of turning conversation into action. It's a model that's worth repeating and scaling." These experiences also help to strengthen a shared sense of identity strong enough to withstand external pressures, while honouring individual experiences.

THE FUTURE IS CALLING...

"I LONG FOR A FUTURE WHERE OUR STORIES ARE NOT JUST PRESERVED, BUT PROPELLED — WHERE BLACK IMAGINATION BECOMES THE BLUEPRINT FOR SYSTEMS OF CARE, EDUCATION, AND GOVERNANCE. MY CALL TO ACTION IS TO KEEP CREATING SPACES WHERE WE DREAM COLLECTIVELY AND ACT INTENTIONALLY, ENSURING THAT THE NEXT GENERATION INHERITS NOT MERELY OUR STRUGGLES, BUT OUR STRATEGIES, OUR ART, AND OUR HOPE."

- ANDRE ANDERSON