BLACKROCK
CENTER FOR THE ARTS















BLACKROCK CENTER FOR THE ARTS

2025-2026 ANNUAL REPORT

HOW TO REACH US:

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Germantown MD 20874



LETTER FROM LEADERSHIP

Dear Friends,

We began FY26 with an extraordinary affirmation: BlackRock Center for the Arts was named Nonprofit of the Year by the UpCounty Chamber of Commerce! We end the year with an even greater sense of possibility for what BlackRock can become.

Throughout the year, more than 43,000 people came together at BlackRock, to experience live performance and visual art, learn something new, celebrate culture and history, and simply be in community. Our partnerships continued to grow, and BlackRock increasingly served not only as an arts center, but as a creative, cultural, and civic gathering place for UpCounty Montgomery County. That role feels particularly important right now. At a time when the ways we tell our history, celebrate culture, and represent diverse experiences are being challenged across the country, BlackRock remains committed to creating a place where many voices and stories belong. Our commitment to diversity is not separate from our artistic mission - it is central to it.

We also experienced a powerful demonstration of community support for BlackRock itself. When County funding was initially removed from the FY27 budget, our community and partners spoke up. The Montgomery County Council ultimately voted unanimously to restore that support, affirming the value of sustaining a cultural anchor in Germantown and UpCounty.

At the same time, we continued investing in BlackRock's future - from plans for the transformation of our Great Lawn and Outdoor Stage to public art, technology, and a long-term vision for our campus.

As we look toward BlackRock's 25th anniversary in 2027-2028, we ask an exciting question: *What does the best of BlackRock look like?*

We believe it is a BlackRock that realizes the full potential of its people, programs, partnerships, and place - a thriving cultural campus where artists create, young people discover, organizations connect, neighbors gather, and our entire community is reflected.

FY26 brought us closer to that vision. Thank you for believing in BlackRock and helping make this work possible.

Together, we are building what comes next.



Katie Hecklinger
Chief Executive Officer



Lawrence M. Paska, Ph.D.
Chair, Board of Trustees

OUR VALUES

BlackRock envisions an accessible and inclusive community anchor for creative expression, cultural exchange, and belonging, where artistic growth thrives.

1. Celebrates the diversity of Upper Montgomery County, Germantown, and the surrounding areas through arts and culture,
2. Nurtures and builds artistic, cultural, and educational experiences,
3. Elevates historically excluded people and art, and
4. Dismantles systemic barriers

GOALS

1. Solidify financial sustainability in alignment with the organization's Purpose.
2. Engage the community to bring their visions into BlackRock.
3. Broaden community connections to elevate a sense of belonging.

- 43,082 People Engaged
- 68 Live Performances
- 31 Arts Education Classes
- 14 Gallery Exhibitions
- 38 Artist Talks
- 9 Free Community Festivals
- 88 Free Special Events
- 1,750 Students Served

BlackRock serves as a platform for artists, educators, nonprofits, cultural organizations, schools, civic partners, and community leaders to bring people together.

BLACKROCK PRESENTS — We curate and present.

RESIDENT PARTNERSHIPS — We shape the season together.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS — We provide a platform for others to realize their vision.

7.7% increase in FY26 attendance over FY25

OUR YEAR IN REVIEW



SUMMER 2025

BlackRock came alive with Summer Camp and our free Summer Series, bringing live music, movies, DJs, artisan markets, and community gathering to the lawn.

In the Gallery, Genevieve and Candace Phelps opened the year with Together, followed by Bringing Congo to the Heart of America, connecting art, culture, and conversation.



FALL 2025

Acclaimed Cuban pianist Chuchito Valdés brought Afro-Cuban and Latin jazz to the BlackRock stage.

More than 3,000 people gathered for OctoberFest, while Diwali and Councilmember Marilyn Balcombe's Back-to-School Party brought families and community together across our campus.

In the Gallery, Colores, presented in partnership with the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Montgomery County, celebrated Hispanic and Latino artists, while Tae Hwang's BIG VALUE extended into the community through a kimchi workshop.

Fall also marked an important step toward BlackRock's future as we unveiled the design concept for our new Outdoor Stage and embarked on a comprehensive Master Plan.



WINTER 2025–2026

Winter began with Celebrates the Season and Germantown's first community menorah lighting, followed in January by our signature SAY IT LOUD Festival honoring the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

During Black History Month, Howard University joined us for weekend Takeover featuring its Gospel Choir and Jazz Ensemble, while the legendary Sun Ra Arkestra brought jazz, experimentation, and Afrofuturism to the BlackRock stage.

The Gallery featured a live art performance by VILLAGER and the CORE Exhibition, while BlackRock dance students traveled to Arena Stage for a grant-supported field trip.



SPRING 2026

Spring brought an extraordinary range of arts and community experiences, including a Women's History Month Celebration, the largest MoComCon in Montgomery County history, GreenFest, Holi, and a visit from the Harriet Tubman statue alongside local historian Tony Cohen.

The Gallery presented Fierce Planets, Michaela Harrison's Whale Whispering, and Youth Art Month + ALOG, while Nao Yoshioka closed out BlackRock's Jazz Series.

The year culminated with BlackRock's largest Juneteenth Celebration to date, welcoming more than 6,000 people for music, art, culture, history, and community and receiving Congressional recognition from Congresswoman April McClain Delaney.

AWARDS & RECOGNITION

GAITHERSBURG GERMANTOWN UPCOUNTY CHAMBER

LEADERSHIP MONTGOMERY

GGUC

BLACKROCK CENTER FOR THE ARTS - NONPROFIT OF THE YEAR

EMERGING LEADERS

REVA THOMPSON

LEADERSHIP MONTGOMERY

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
MONTGOMERY COUNTY • MARYLAND

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DEPT. OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

OUTSTANDING EFFORTS IN WASTE REDUCTION - SCRAP HAPPY ART SUPPLY THRIFT

THE PIERIANS, INC.

REVA THOMPSON

EDUCATION PROGRAMS - LOVE THE SKIN YOU'RE IN

STRATEGIC PLAN PROCESS

FROM VISION TO IMPACT

FY26 marked another year of putting BlackRock's Strategic Plan into action. Across three interconnected goals, we focused on strengthening financial sustainability, creating more opportunities for the community to shape what happens at BlackRock, and broadening the relationships that foster connection and belonging.

GOAL 1: SOLIDIFY FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY IN ALIGNMENT WITH THE ORGANIZATION'S PURPOSE

FY26 strengthened BlackRock's financial foundation while broadening the resources supporting our work.

Progress included:

- $118,434.76 in individual contributions
- Corporate in-kind giving increased 65%
- Strong rental performance
- Expanded funding for capital improvements, public art, security, technology, and community programming
- Added a second full-time marketing position

Next: Continue diversifying revenue, strengthening donor and corporate engagement, and expanding earned-income opportunities.

GOAL 2: ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY TO BRING THEIR VISIONS INTO BLACKROCK

BlackRock continued evolving from a place where the community experiences programming into a place where artists, organizations, & community members help shape what happens here.

Progress included:

- Expanded partnership-driven programming and cultural celebrations
- Increased use of BlackRock as a platform for nonprofit and community-led experiences
- Community participation in public art
- Expanded outdoor programming and gathering
- Launch of the Master Plan and Outdoor Stage design

Next: Create clearer, more equitable and sustainable pathways for community partnership.

GOAL 3: BROADEN COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS TO ELEVATE A SENSE OF BELONGING

BlackRock continued building relationships and creating new ways for people to see themselves, their communities, and their experiences reflected here.

Progress included:

- More than 43,000 people engaged, up 7.7%
- Expanded school and youth partnerships
- Candidate forums and Germantown Sector Plan engagement
- Major community gatherings including GreenFest and MoComCon
- Increased cross-sector partnerships and community outreach

Next: Strengthen feedback, measure community impact, and continue building relationships with people and organizations that have not historically seen BlackRock as a place for them.

ARTS EDUCATION

CREATING, LEARNING, & BELONGING



Arts education at BlackRock creates opportunities for young people to discover creativity, develop skills, build confidence, and experience the arts as a place where they belong.

FY26 IMPACT

BlackRock offered 31 arts education classes, with two Theatre for Youth classes selling out. Two camp sessions at BlackRock reached capacity, along with several sold-out weeks at the Maryland SoccerPlex.

Partnerships with Montgomery County Public Schools brought visual arts programming directly into two schools, while a new partnership with the Boys & Girls Club in Germantown expanded access beyond BlackRock's traditional class structure.

BlackRock dance students also traveled to Arena Stage through a grant-supported field trip, connecting classroom learning with professional performance.

EXPANDING ACCESS

More than $7,500 in scholarships helped remove financial barriers to participation. FY26 also brought an extraordinary long-term commitment through the Sonie Mathew Scholarship Fund, providing $20,000 annually for ten years to support access to arts education.

LOOKING AHEAD

Following a comprehensive review of BlackRock's arts education framework in Spring 2026, FY27 will focus on expanding partnerships with schools and community organizations and bringing more arts learning into the community.

Our goal is to create more pathways for young people to explore who they are, discover what they can do, and know there is a place for them here.

PARTNERSHIPS

BETTER TOGETHER

Partnership remained at the heart of BlackRock's work throughout FY26. Collaborations with **GottaSwing, Montgomery County Public Libraries, the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Germantown Town Center, the Indian Dance Educators Association, CORE Foundation, Montgomery County Public Schools**, and many others expanded what was possible across our stages, classrooms, galleries, festivals, and community spaces.

Throughout the year, BlackRock worked alongside nonprofits, schools, cultural organizations, government agencies, businesses, artists, and community groups—providing space, technical expertise, communications reach, relationships, and opportunities to connect with the community.

Partners including **Creative Outlets, Cornerstone Montgomery, Interfaith Works, Tacy Foundation, HOPE Foundation, SAMP, AfriThrive, CORE Foundation, ArtStream, Montgomery College, the Boys & Girls Club,** and others brought their own ideas, expertise, and vision into our shared work.

At BlackRock, partnership is more than a way to deliver programs. It is central to how we fulfill our mission.

In FY27, BlackRock will develop clearer pathways for collaboration and expand opportunities for partners to bring their ideas into our spaces. Our goal is not to do everything ourselves, but to recognize what becomes possible when we work together.

BUILDING THE FUTURE

FY26 marked significant progress toward a long-term vision for BlackRock's campus—one that improves accessibility, supports artists and community partners, creates more opportunities to gather, and prepares BlackRock for its next generation of service.

ENVISIONING BLACKROCK'S FUTURE
BlackRock embarked on a comprehensive Master Plan exploring how our campus can evolve to meet the artistic, educational, cultural, and community needs of a growing Germantown and UpCounty.

THE GREAT LAWN & OUTDOOR STAGE
Supported by an Arts Capital Grant from the Maryland State Arts Council, BlackRock advanced plans to transform the Great Lawn and Outdoor Stage with a new stage, landscaping, accessible pathways and ramps, seating, lighting, signage, and wayfinding. The redesigned space will expand outdoor programming while creating a welcoming gathering place for everyday community use.

PUBLIC ART | BRING WHAT YOU CARRY
With support from Maryland's Public Art Across Maryland program, artist Brandon Donahue-Shipp is creating a permanent artwork shaped by meaningful objects and stories contributed by the Germantown community.

The public process began during Juneteenth, when approximately 40 community members contributed objects and stories that will become part of the artwork.

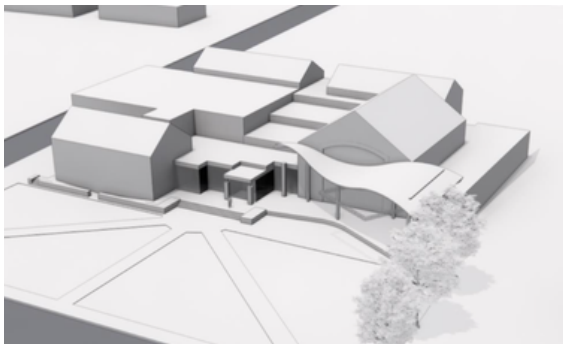






INFRASTRUCTURE BEHIND THE ART
BlackRock also began modernizing more than two decades-old production systems through an Arts and Humanities Council of Montgomery County Advancement Grant, while a Montgomery County security grant supported expanded campus safety.

Together, these investments are building a BlackRock designed to support creativity, strengthen community connections, and grow alongside the community it serves.



FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP

FY26 strengthened BlackRock's financial position through careful expense management, diversified fundraising, strong rental activity, and increased public and private investment.

FY26 FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

Excluding a one-time federal tax credit, BlackRock generated $1.87 million in revenue, including significant investment designated for capital improvements.

Strong rental performance and contributed revenue supported operations, while education, corporate sponsorship, and earned performance revenue remain opportunities for growth.

GROWING & DIVERSIFYING SUPPORT

Individual giving reached $118,434.76, with Scrap Happy generating $30,334.93. Corporate in-kind giving increased 65%, and the Sonie Mathew Scholarship Fund established a commitment of $20,000 annually for ten years.

Support from Montgomery County, the Arts and Humanities Council of Montgomery County, the Maryland State Arts Council, foundations, corporations, individuals, and community partners helped fund operations, programming, education, public art, security, technology, and capital improvements.

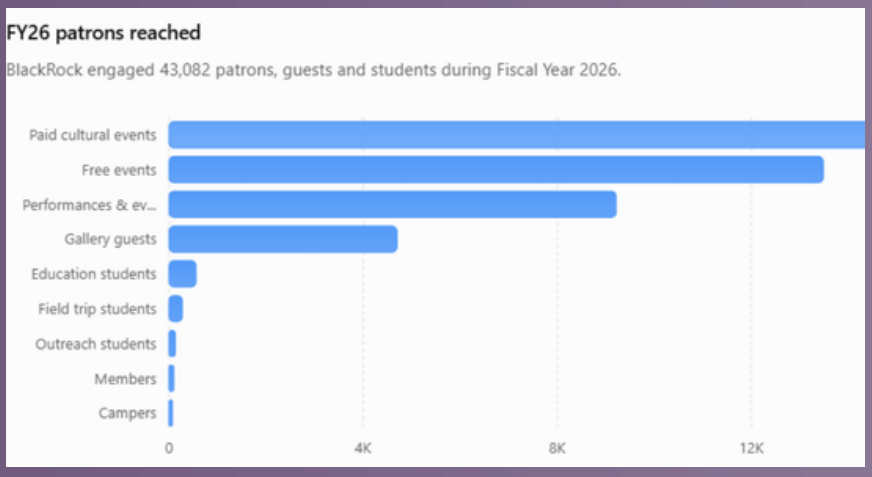
BUILDING FINANCIAL RESILIENCE

FY26 also strengthened BlackRock's cash reserve position, increasing our ability to manage cash flow, respond to unexpected challenges, and make thoughtful investments in the future.

Financial sustainability means ensuring BlackRock has the resources and resilience to fulfill its purpose for years to come.

GROWING OUR REACH

BlackRock's digital community continued to expand in FY26, with particularly strong growth across Instagram, email, web traffic, and search visibility—creating more opportunities to connect new and returning audiences with our work.



OUR SUPPORTERS

INVESTING IN WHAT'S POSSIBLE

Everything that happens at BlackRock is strengthened by people and organizations who believe in our mission.

Throughout FY26, donors, members, businesses, foundations, and government partners helped sustain programs, expand access, welcome thousands of people to our campus, and invest in BlackRock's future.

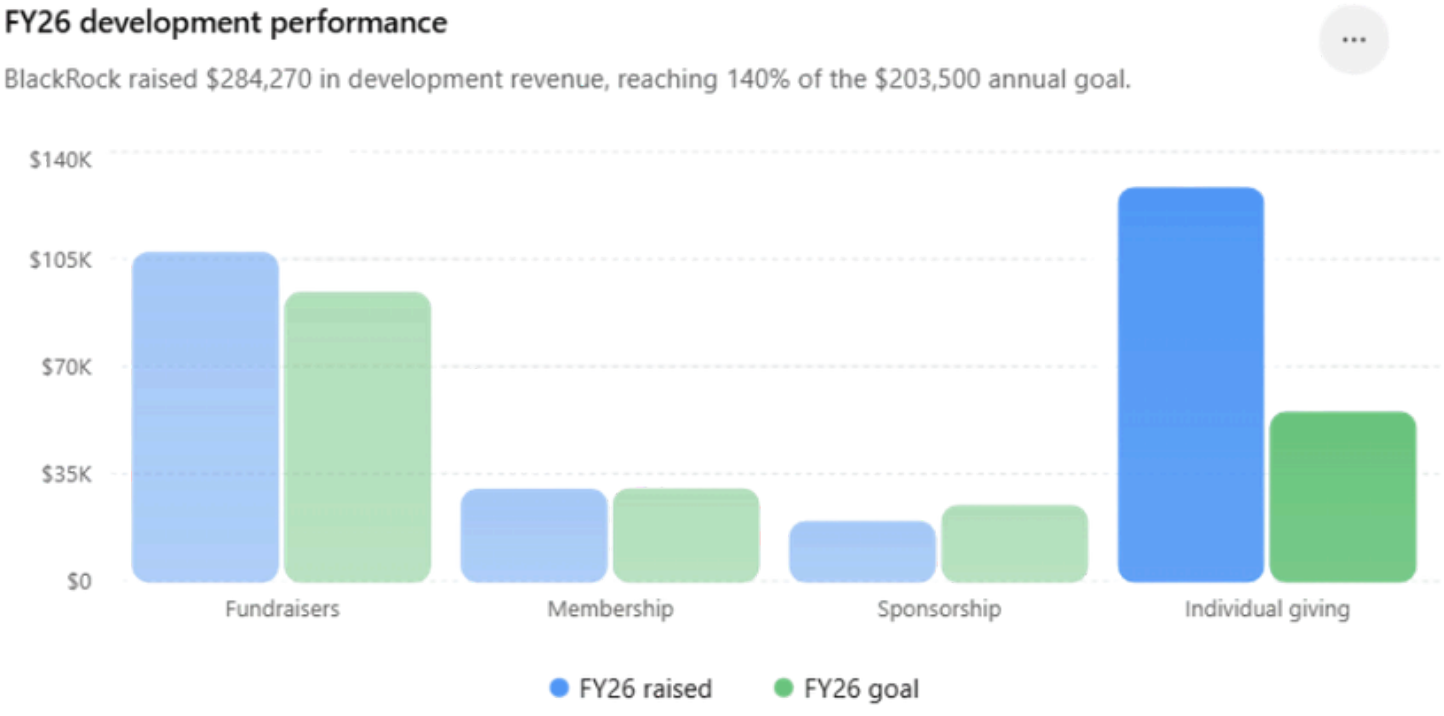
Our three signature fundraising events—Local Spirits, Art Enlightens, and Drag Bingo—generated more than $107,000, while membership generated nearly $30,000.

BLACKROCK SOCIETY

The BlackRock Society recognizes individuals and families whose annual support of $10,000 or more provides essential investment in BlackRock's mission and future.

Vicki & Skip Crawford
Melane & Tom Hoffman
David & Lee Langstaff
Jennifer Russell & Joel Michaels

To every donor, member, sponsor, funder, partner, and friend who invested in BlackRock during FY26: thank you.



MEET THE TEAM

THE PEOPLE BEHIND BLACKROCK

Every performance, class, exhibition, camp, and community event begins with the people who bring our mission to life.

Our staff, teaching artists, seasonal employees, volunteers, and Board are united by a commitment to creativity, community, and belonging. Guided by our values of **Trust, Equity, Curiosity, and Community,** they welcome audiences, mentor young artists, support partnerships, and create meaningful experiences for thousands of people each year.

OUR STAFF

Katie Hecklinger
Linda Bloom
Kelly Chauncey
Pamela Garrido
Joshua Gamma
Torland Greene
Jordan Hersh
Jen Katz
Sam Linc
Natalie Mansfield
Maria-Elena Montero
Ebonee Price
Michael Sickles
Myiah Miller
Reva Thompson
Ting Wu

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Ruben Rosario
Shannon Braine
Wendie Veloz
Zeina Davis

OUR TEACHING & CREATIVE COMMUNITY

Throughout FY26, teaching artists, performers, technicians, seasonal employees, interns, and volunteers brought their talents and expertise to BlackRock.

Together, they make it possible for our community to Come Together Here.



