

Regional Black Leadership Roundtable Celebrates One Year of Progress

Convened by the Monterey Bay Economic Partnership, the RBLR is focused on developing economic and social infrastructures that help the Black community thrive

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*Tahra Goraya, Monterey Bay Economic Partnership
President & CEO*

Black Leadership Roundtable (RBLR) gathered on Thursday, Feb. 27 to mark its first anniversary at a luncheon that’s equal parts celebration and strategy session. Leaders across Monterey, San Benito and Santa Cruz counties celebrated the organization’s progress and outlined the path forward to address economic challenges unique to Black communities in the Monterey Bay region.

As Black History Month reminds us to celebrate successes while continuing to confront long-standing challenges, the work of the Regional Black Leadership Roundtable holds particular significance as the group outlines a strategic action map to close the gaps and inequities for Black communities in the region.

In the past year, the Regional Black Leadership Roundtable — a coalition organized last year by the [Monterey Bay Economic Partnership](#) (MBEP) — has laid the groundwork to establish baselines for economic health, opportunity, mobility, and prosperity for Black communities. That framework will help advance research, policy, and practice in housing, power-building, and community leadership, economic opportunity expansion, mental health, childcare, and related priority areas. The work has also focused on the future growth of the Regional Black Leadership Roundtable as a network of tri-county leaders, including mentorship and internship opportunities for Black youth to create a pipeline of young leaders.

“The Regional Black Leadership Roundtable gives tri-county leaders a place to focus on solutions that can lead to economic health and prosperity through the unique lens of the Black community,” said Monterey Bay Economic Partnership (MBEP) President & CEO Tahra Goraya.

The Black community in the Monterey Bay region has a rich history, from its engagement with the civil rights movement during the 1950s and 1960s to active engagement with broader social

movements advocating for equality. Fort Ord was the nation's first integrated military base, employing many African American men in both active military and civilian roles.

Currently the region's Black community constitutes approximately 19,001 residents, or 2.5% of the total population across Santa Cruz, San Benito, and Monterey counties, as reported by the U.S. Census.

But the numbers also illustrate the gaps:

Since the closure of Fort Ord, the Black community in the Monterey Bay Region has faced significant challenges. Access to resources, affordable housing, and stable employment opportunities has decreased for many Black residents. This closure led to rising unemployment rates and a considerable drop in household incomes among Black families, resulting in precarious living conditions and a noticeable migration out of the area. Poverty rates have changed only slightly for most racial groups, but there has been a substantial increase in poverty within the Black community. According to Building an Inclusive Economy in the Monterey Bay Region, Black households living in poverty have increased by 3.4% in recent years, rising from 13.3% in 2010 to 16.7% in 2023, the steepest increase of any population group in the tri-county region.

Dramatic racial disparities in educational attainment persist, reflecting substantial barriers to access for communities of color in the region: Just 23.3% of black males and 27.7% of black females age 25+ have a Bachelor's degree or higher, compared to nearly 50% for the non-Hispanic White and Asian/ Pacific Islander population in the tri-county region. In the tri-county region, 10.7% of black males and 24% of black females age 25+ lack a high school degree, compared to 4.1% of non-Hispanic white males and 3% of non-Hispanic females.

The Regional Black Leadership Roundtable is an outgrowth of MBEP's work on the Regions Rise Together and Uplift Central Coast inclusive economic development initiatives, which revealed early on that the Black community was under-represented in economic development initiatives across the region. Since its initial meeting on Feb. 22, 2024, MBEP has convened monthly meetings with Black leaders from organizations in Monterey, Santa Cruz, and San Benito counties to share their perspectives and coalesce economic development efforts.

"So much work is already being done by dedicated Black leaders, Black-led organizations and Black communities. The Regional Black Leadership Roundtable brings them together to harness their collective energy and commitment. By uplifting our community, we uplift our region for economic success," said Monterey Bay Economic Partnership (MBEP) President & CEO Tahra Goraya.

A new website for the Regional Black Leadership Roundtable also launches this week, boosting visibility for the organization and allowing for greater community collaboration.

About Monterey Bay Economic Partnership (MBEP): Monterey Bay Economic Partnership (MBEP) is a regional member-supported nonprofit organization consisting of public, private, and civic entities located throughout the counties of Monterey, San Benito, and Santa Cruz. Founded in 2015, our mission is to improve the economic health and quality of life in the region.

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