



DESTA Black Community Network



2024 ANNUAL REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

Breaking Barriers: A Year of Growth, Empowerment and Transformation

In 2024, DESTA deepened its role as a catalyst for change within Montreal's Black Anglophone community. Through bold initiatives in food security, justice reform, workforce development, and entrepreneurship, we created meaningful pathways for individuals to not only overcome barriers, but to thrive, lead, and build generational resilience.

This year, we continued to see the impact of our work across communities. From supporting formerly incarcerated individuals in securing meaningful employment, to training the next generation of broadcasters, to guiding entrepreneurs as they developed and launched their own businesses, we witnessed lives changing in real time. Our food security program nourished bodies. Our wellness program nourished spirits, while our incubator and skill-building workshops cultivated confidence, connection, and capacity.

Each initiative reaffirmed a core truth: when Black communities are given access, resources, and the space to lead, the results are transformative.

With every milestone reached, DESTA is rewriting the narrative around Black economic and social equity in Montreal, centering dignity, creativity, and community empowerment at the heart of everything we do.

MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIR

In 2024, DESTA made meaningful progress—even as we continue to navigate real and persistent challenges. Through direct investments in Black-owned businesses, expanded food security programming, and restorative justice initiatives supporting re-entry and reintegration, we've helped community members access resources, build skills, and create new opportunities.

This work was made possible through the leadership of Kassandra, the commitment of our resilient team, and the active engagement of our board.

On behalf of DESTA, we sincerely thank our funders, donors, and partners for your continued trust and support. Your commitment makes this important work possible—and we look forward to building on this momentum together in 2025 and beyond. Now more than ever, we need your support to strengthen our community.

Dexter Peart, Chairman of the Board

OUR MISSION

Based in Little Burgundy and serving participants across Greater Montreal, DESTA offers access to a hub of services and partnerships that empower the Black, anglophone community in Montreal through programs rooted in social and economic justice. We offer holistic, individualized and collective services and advocacy to break down barriers and promote well-being and opportunity.

We offer programs and services in:

- Work
- Social Justice
- Food security
- Wellness



OUR VISION

We envision a society where members of the Black community are represented, valued and their contributions celebrated in all spheres of life; a society; where Black community members can reach their full potential and thrive.

OUR IMPACT

420 PARTICIPANTS SERVED ACROSS OUR PROGRAMMING

100% PAROLE SUCCESS RATE

2100 DRY MEALS SERVED THROUGH OUR COMMUNITY PANTRY

\$13K INVESTED IN BLACK-OWNED BUSINESSES

\$17.5K IN SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDED TO BLACK STUDENTS

\$893K FUNDS RAISED FOR THE BLACK COMMUNITY

CREATING PATHWAYS TO ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE

For many in Montreal's Black Anglophone community, systemic barriers and lack of access to network have made career advancement difficult. DESTA continues to work to level the playing field by providing high-impact, skills-based training programs that position participants for success in industries where Black professionals have been historically underrepresented.

271 PARTICIPANTS
REGISTERED ON
OUR ONLINE JOB
BOARD

123 PARTICIPANTS
ATTENDED OUR
SKILLS TRAINING
COURSES

34 PARTICIPANTS
RECEIVED INDIVIDUAL
COACHING FOR JOB
SEARCH AND CV PREP

24 ENTREPRENEURS
SUPPORTED

14 DEAL PROGRAM
PARTICIPANTS
(PROGRAM FOR
ADULTS TO
COMPLETE THEIR
SECONDARY
EDUCATION)

5 SCHOLARSHIP
RECIPIENTS



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT & EMPLOYABILITY

We launched Montreal's first-ever DJ Workshop for Black Women in collaboration with the Misa Negra music collective, with a 100% completion rate and a growing waitlist.

Our Pathways to Broadcasting program, in partnership with CBC, led to internship offers for two participants.

DESTA's Job Board grew to 271 registrants, with multiple successful job placements, including three re-entry participants securing employment.



DESTA remains committed to breaking cycles of systemic exclusion and creating long-term opportunities. With your support, we can expand our programs, reach more individuals, and continue building a future of equity, empowerment, and Black excellence.



ENTREPRENEURSHIP & BUSINESS GROWTH

In partnership with Ujamaa Initiative for Black Entrepreneurship (UIBE) and Concordia University's Community Service Initiative (CSI), DESTA continued our 12-week Business Readiness Bootcamp and continued to offer individualized GrowthWheel Coaching to 24 entrepreneurs.

We also co-developed a Customized Scale-Up Training Program to help Black entrepreneurs scale their businesses. This initiative will provide coaching, funding access, and mentorship, further strengthening Montreal's Black business ecosystem.

With funding from the Government of Canada's Community Support, Multiculturalism and Anti-Racism Initiative (CSMARI) we introduced 'Rooted in Success', a 12-month calendar featuring entrepreneurs from Montreal's Black English-speaking community. 4,000 calendars were printed and distributed across the island of Montreal. We also developed a Black Business Directory App - The Business Reference which officially launched in May 2025.



WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT OUR WORK PROGRAM

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*This was my introduction to Desta programming. Our visit to CBC was one of the most informative and honest meetings I ever attended. The choice of CBC employees was brilliant as all of them represent Black excellence in work ethics. They gave us a balanced view of the challenges you can face in a career in broadcasting at CBC. All of the employees were very generous with their time and answered deep questions about their respective paths and how they achieved their current position. That is the first time ever that I've encountered such transparency. I would like for Desta and CBC to create a mentorship program, because that would be a concrete way to actualize what we've learned and get a real sense of the work, and figure out if we have what it takes to get into broadcasting and if so, get a real work opportunity. ~ **Nelly Esméralda Zarfi***

*Thank you for this amazing opportunity you've given us through this amazing project you've built to bring change. Talk about changemakers! I have been sharing my experience with anyone who could benefit from this inspiring activity catered for our community. The CBC team was and is so positive, motivated and motivating, encouraging, inviting, knowledgeable, opened, bold and inspiring. It was definitely great meeting them. Thank you for taking your time to put this together and follow through as promised with the contact list and pitch guide (which is really appreciated). I would definitely keep you posted on any updates related to how impactful this opportunity has been. ~ **Rita Tshikudi***

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*I am currently pursuing a degree in Social Work at McGill University, with the goal of continuing my work in Little Burgundy after graduation. My focus is on supporting families and at-risk youth to prevent violence and crime. Through my studies, I aim to build a strong network and develop the skills and resources needed to make a lasting impact in my community, helping to create a safer and more supportive environment for those I serve. Once again, thank you so much to the DESTA team for your support. I am excited to continue my journey and share my progress. ~ **Anyssa Ranetkins***

*I am currently pursuing the BCL/JD Law degree at McGill University. As I enter my second year of study, I am eager to delve deeper into the specific areas of Canada's dual legal system. After completing my studies, I intend to leverage my education to enhance the economic well-being of my communities and to support the next generation of entrepreneurs. I am motivated to pursue an LLM in the United States, where I aim to learn strategies for generating investment and fostering competitive industry in Canada. ~ **Jaiden Medford***

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DESTA SOCIAL JUSTICE & RE-ENTRY SUPPORT

RESTORING DIGNITY, REBUILDING FUTURES

The journey from incarceration to reintegration is rarely straightforward. It is marked by systemic barriers, stigma, and a lack of access to the very resources needed to rebuild one's life. Every person deserves the opportunity to start over, with dignity, support, and the tools to thrive.

In 2024, DESTA's Justice & Re-Entry Program provided a lifeline to dozens of participants navigating parole, transition, and the complexities of re-entry into society. Our multidisciplinary approach includes legal advocacy, trauma-informed mental health counseling, and employment readiness services, all rooted in cultural relevance and compassion.

Building on our commitment to human rights and restorative justice, DESTA offered support services to 60 participants in obtaining parole, employment, housing and legal support.

100 PERCENT PAROLE
APPROVAL RATE

60 ACTIVE
PARTICIPANTS

40 LEGAL CASES
SUPPORTED

23 SUPPORT LETTERS
PROVIDED

18 PARTICIPANTS
RECEIVED PAROLE
SUPPORT

13 PARTICIPANTS
RECEIVED TRAUMA
COUNSELLING



Parole Success

In 2024, DESTA's legal team achieved a 100% parole approval rate, a groundbreaking accomplishment that highlights our strategic and compassionate approach.

Challenging Systemic Bias

Trauma Counselor, Rosetta Sowkey, developed an effective assessment model to counteract the racially biased parole assessments conducted by Correctional Services Canada (CSC). These reports humanize our participants' experiences, providing parole boards with a more accurate, trauma-informed understanding of their rehabilitation.

Workforce Reintegration

Through partnerships with organizations like the Viola Desmond Justice Institute, we secured employment opportunities for re-entry participants, with one individual landing a full-time job in construction.

Each of these victories represents more than just numbers, they are stories of resilience, determination, and the power of community support.



FEEDING RESILIENCE, GROWING OPPORTUNITY

Food is about sovereignty, cultural identity, and the power to create a better future. At DESTA, we approach food security as both a basic human right and a launchpad for economic empowerment. For too many in our community, accessing fresh, affordable, and culturally relevant food remains a daily challenge. We respond not only by addressing immediate needs, but by nurturing long-term solutions rooted in self-sustainability, entrepreneurship, education, and community engagement.

In 2024, DESTA's Food Security program continued to provide innovative solutions that addressed immediate hunger while building community resilience.

We're planting seeds of change one garden, one plate, one workshop, and one entrepreneur at a time.

\$13K INVESTED IN
BLACK-OWNED
BUSINESSES

2,100 DRY MEALS
SERVED

225 KILOGRAMS OF
PRODUCE
DISTRIBUTED

43 PEOPLE SUPPORTED
THROUGH
GARDENSHARE

40 PARTICIPANTS
ENGAGED IN OUR
RECIPE DEVELOPMENT
WORKSHOPS

10 BUSINESSES
SUPPORTED
THROUGH OUR CHEF
INCUBATOR



Food Security & Culinary Entrepreneurship

In 2024, our food programming grew to include a range of interwoven initiatives. The Community Pantry pilot project distributed over 2,100 dry meal servings and 225 kg of produce, ensuring access to nourishing meals during a time of rising food costs. But our impact didn't stop at distribution. Through sold-out recipe development workshops led by vegan chef and incubator participant Jamal Spence, we turned nutrition into an entry point for culinary skill-building, community gathering, and cultural connection.

Our Black Horticulture & Urban Agriculture (BHUA) participants grew food and businesses simultaneously, learning to design gardens, harvesting produce for the pantry, and presenting fully developed business plans. One participant even began prototyping a pickled okra product that was taste-tested by peers.



Growing More Than Food: Empowering Entrepreneurs and Cultivating Community

Through the Chef Incubator, we provided 10 aspiring culinary entrepreneurs with coaching, branding support, and access to fresh ingredients via the Nutritower system. These participants are not only building sustainable businesses, they're becoming anchors of food sovereignty and cultural pride within the Black community.

Our GardenShare program expanded to include 18 new garden installations, serving 43 people and bringing the total to 63 gardens since the program's inception. These gardens not only increased access to fresh produce for families but also served as hands-on training spaces where participants developed food growing skills and supported others as peer mentors, strengthening both food literacy and community bonds.



WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT OUR FOOD PROGRAM

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We have proudly been a part of the DESTA Food Incubator since March 2023. Over the last year and a half, we have witnessed firsthand the incredible impact DESTA has had in empowering Black chefs, food entrepreneurs, and creatives. Our agency has had the privilege of collaborating with several members of the incubator on content creation, social strategy, branding campaigns, and various other projects. The incubator provides not only us but countless others with valuable tools, resources, and opportunities while fostering a tight-knit community of support and shared growth. ~ **Guava Group**

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Since launching, we have proudly worked with DESTA in Montreal, where we are based. DESTA has provided invaluable resources, support, and networking opportunities to help us grow as a business, build relationships, and expand our reach within the community. As a Black entrepreneur, the opportunity to connect with other Black chefs and food entrepreneurs through DESTA has been transformative. These connections have fostered a unique sense of belonging and support that is essential for emerging businesses like mine. ~ **Cindy Matsi, Founder SINEHA Spices**

“

Much can be said about the value DESTA provides to the community. Not only have entrepreneurs been able to network, but we have also been able to start numerous community projects under their guidance. I am incredibly grateful and fortunate to be a leading part of the newly established community pantry project headed by DESTA. Through the collaborative efforts of past and current participants of the incubator programs, we are able to feed over 25 families on a weekly basis. Our goal is to support even more families as the cost of living continues to rise, with Montrealers struggling to meet basic needs such as housing and access to food. ~ **Chef Jamal Spence, Xspensive Cuisine**



RECLAIMING REST, CONNECTION, AND COLLECTIVE HEALING

In Q4 2024, DESTA proudly relaunched our Wellness Program with the highly anticipated return of Black Joy Sundays in collaboration with BMHC Montreal. This time in the form of Mini-Retreats, designed to offer participants intentional space for rest, movement, healing, and reconnection.

The inaugural Black Joy Sundays Mini-Retreat was held at Centre Culturel Georges-Vanier and 50 tickets sold within days, demonstrating the deep community need for culturally grounded wellness spaces. Nearly 40 participants gathered for a powerful afternoon that included guided movement, wellness workshops, peer dialogue, and moments of reflection all designed to affirm the importance of Black healing and joy in the face of daily pressures.

As we move through 2025, DESTA is committed to expanding this programming, offering more frequent and accessible opportunities for participants to recharge, reflect, and reconnect with community and self with the introduction of more immersive programming as well as monthly healing and discussion circles for women and men

| 40

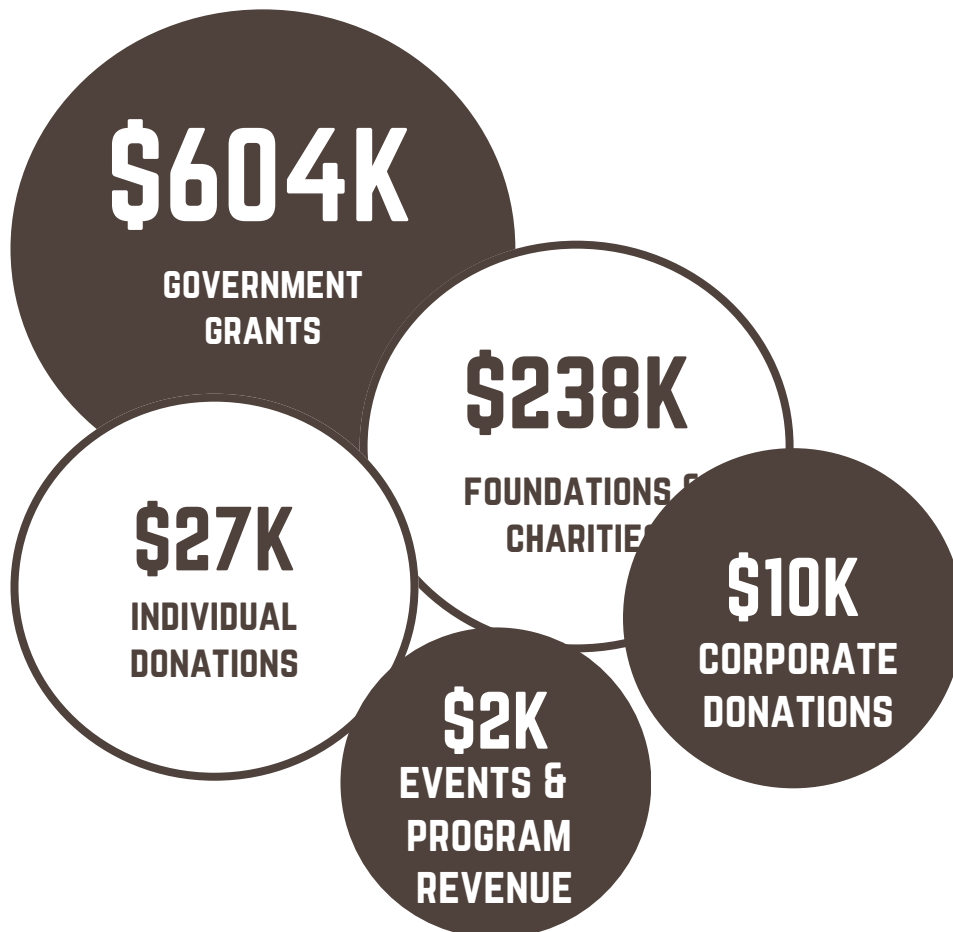
PARTICIPANTS AT
OUR 1ST MINI-
RETREAT
EXPERIENCE



FUNDING LANDSCAPE

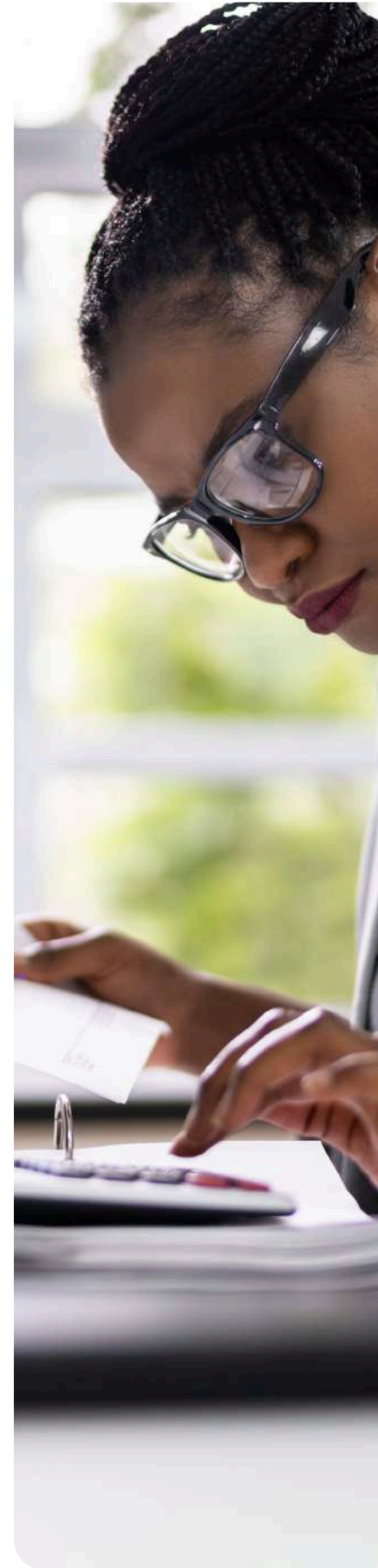
In 2024, DESTA raised \$893,000 to support our programs and operations, with the majority of funding coming from government grants. This strong public investment reflects growing recognition of DESTA's impact and the need for culturally relevant, community-based services for Montreal's Black Anglophone population.

While government support remains a critical foundation that allows us to deliver consistent, high-quality programming, we continue to pursue funding diversification through private foundations, donations, sponsorships, and earned revenue models, and are looking to plan for more long-term sustainability.



FINANCIAL SNAPSHOT

REVENUES	2024	2023
Fondations & Charities	\$238,481	\$139,908
Government Grants	\$604,123	\$495,392
Individual Donations	\$26,949	\$36,727
Corporate Donations	\$10,000	\$11,480
Contracts		\$9,075
Other Revenue	\$13,548	\$21,539
TOTAL REVENUES	\$893,101	\$714,121
EXPENSES	2024	2023
Salaries & Benefits	\$493,127	\$518,420
Contract Services		\$14,397
Office Expenses	\$12,552	\$18,553
Accounting Fees	\$33,453	\$34,042
Justice Program	\$52,907	\$89,726
Food Program	\$54,373	\$66,245
Work Program	\$18,641	\$9,700
Wellness Program	\$6,064	\$14,804
Special Events	\$3,657	\$6,595
Insurance	\$2,315	\$2,330
Telecommunication	\$7,668	\$7,784
Rent	\$24,000	\$24,000
Other	\$84,183	\$28,751
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$845,901	\$846,937
NET INCOME	\$47,200	\$(132,816)



OUR TEAM

Behind every milestone we reached in 2024, stands a team of dedicated, compassionate, and visionary individuals. Community builders, advocates, and changemakers, whose deep commitment to equity, empowerment, and impact is what fuels every initiative, every workshop, every act of support.

This year, we navigated challenges with resilience, showed up with intention, and consistently went above and beyond to meet the needs of our participants. It is their drive, creativity, and connection to the community that makes DESTA's work not only possible, but powerful.

We are deeply grateful for everyone's contributions and proud to stand alongside such passionate contributors in this shared mission to help create a more just, inclusive, and thriving future for our community.

DESTA STAFF

As at December 31, 2024

KASSANDRA KERNISAN

Executive Director

ADAM BRIMACOMBE

Programs Director

WANDA HUSKINSON

Office Manager

SCOTT CLYKE

Education & Employability Counsellor

AMANDA MAXWELL

Support Services Coordinator

MILO JOHNSON

Project Coordinator & Operations Lead

BERLIN REED

Food Program Manager

ASHLEY MONTGOMERY

Legal Administrator

KYRISTAL ANDREWS

Graphic Designer

NEELAM PATEL

Marketing Coordinator

GYTANA THEOBRUN

Social Media Coordinator



DESTA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

As at December 31, 2024

DEXTER PEART

Chairman

EVAN PITCHIE

Vice-chairman

BOLIKO EDJIDJIMO

Director

MARIA VARVARIKOS

Director

RUTH KNOX

Director

OLIVIER NIGNON

Director

SAMM REID

Director

DAVID SIMONS

Honorary Secretary

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We extend our deepest gratitude to our generous donors and partners. Your unwavering support and contributions are the lifeblood of DESTA's mission. Thanks to you, we are able to make a significant impact on the lives of many, fostering growth, resilience, and empowerment within our community. Together, we are building a brighter future. Thank you for believing in DESTA and standing with us every step of the way.

Black Ecosystem Fund	Black Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub (BEKH)
Justice Partnership and Innovation Program (JPIP)	Concordia SHIFT
Community, Support, Multiculturalism and Anti-Racism Initiative (CSMARI)	McGill Arts Internship Office
Supporting Black Canadian Communities Initiative (SBCCI)	Deloitte Canada
Ville de Montreal	Morgan Stanley
Food Banks Canada	Accenture
Community Empowerment Literacy Initiative (CELI)	Tank Agency
T.R.E.E. Foundation	CIELE
Adair Family Foundation	Smartegy
Infilise Family Foundation	La Rue Inspire
Marchab Foundation	CBC Montreal
Zeller Foundation	Restaurant Candide
Webster Foundation	Commetta Communications
Birks Family Foundation	Probity Marketing
Jarislowsky Foundation	Ujamaa Initiative for Black Entrepreneurship (UIBE)
Fondation du Grand Montreal (FGM)	Concordia JMSB, Community Service Initiative
Jewish Community Foundation	Black Community Resource Center (BCRC)
Holt Foundation	Black Mental Health Connections Montreal (BMHC)
RBC Foundation	Unitarian Church of Montreal
	Nutritower