FY2026

IMPACT REPORT

DECADE OF DISCOVERY: HONORING THE JOURNEY. BUILDING THE FUTURE



KARAMU HOUSE HISTORY

On June 15, 1915, two Oberlin College graduates, Russell and Rowena Jelliffe founded the Playhouse Settlement at the corner of East 38th Street and Central Avenue. With a vision that was revolutionary at the time, the couple set out to create a gathering place where people of different racial, ethnic, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds could meet and bond. The early years of the twentieth century witnessed a large influx of African-Americans from the South. Resisting pressure to exclude their new neighbors, the Jelliffes insisted that all races were welcome at the Playhouse Settlement and they soon discovered that the arts provided the perfect common ground. The institution quickly became a magnet for many of the best African-American artists of the day. Dancers, printmakers, actors and writers all found a place where they could hone their crafts. The first theatrical productions at the Playhouse Settlement were staged in 1917.

In 1920 the Jelliffes sponsored the Dumas Dramatic Club, later renamed the Gilpin Players in 1922 after the noted Black actor Charles Gilpin. A theatre was acquired adjacent to the settlement house in 1927. In the 1930s the Gilpin Players began to collaborate with Karamu alum, Langston Hughes. In 1940 a modern dance troupe trained by Marjorie Witt Johnson, won the praise of Life magazine for its appearance at the New York World's Fair.

Following a fire which destroyed the theatre in 1939, the entire Playhouse Settlement was renamed Karamu House in 1941. Karamu's Early Childhood Development Center was built in 1945 at East 89th Street and Quincy Avenue. In 1949 through the aid of Leonard Hanna, Jr. and the Rockefeller Foundation, Karamu boasted two theatres: the 200-seat Jelliffe Theatre and the 100-seat Arena Theatre at the same location.



ABOUT KARAMU HOUSE

A JOYFUL GATHERING PLACE

Since 1915, Karamu House has educated and cultivated generations of aspiring youth in all professions. It has developed a national reputation for nurturing African-American actors, artists and dancers. Among the many notable artists who honed and refined their crafts at Karamu House before achieving success in their respective fields are visual artists Charles Sallée and Elmer Brown; literary giant Langston Hughes; and acclaimed stage and film performers Robert Guillaume, Bill Cobbs, Ron O'Neal, Vanessa Bell Calloway, Richard Brooks, Debra Byrd, James Pickens Jr., Imani Hakim, Durant Bernarr, and Onya Nurve.

Today, Karamu is being reborn as a beating heart for the entire community, regardless of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identification, or age, and retains its Historic identity as "a place of joyful gathering." Core programs include a socially-relevant and professional quality theatre season; arts education in drama, music and dance for all ages; and community programming, such as a lecture series, and spoken word and music performances, that invite participation, engagement, reflection, and a re-commitment to cultural values. Karamu House also enjoys national prominence, being recognized as the oldest Black performing arts institution in the nation and is on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places.

OUR VALUES

VISION

To be a premier professional theatre producing socially relevant entertainment, while delivering innovative, culturally responsive arts education programs and experiences for life-long learners.

MISSION

To produce professional theatre, provide arts education and present community programs for all people while honoring the Black experience.



INCLUSION
Valuing diversity within and outside Karamu House.



COLLABORATION
Partnering to achieve winning outcomes.



INTEGRITY
Demonstrating high moral principles.



JOY
Celebrating our work with community, partners, & each other.



EXCELLENCE
Achieving the highest quality in all we do.



IMPACT
Making positive contributions in lives and community.

NOTE FROM LEADERSHIP



As we reflect on FY2025–2026, one word continues to come to mind: momentum.

This was a year of both change and possibility at Karamu House. Through it all, our stages remained alive with powerful stories, our classrooms and programs created opportunities for learning and discovery, and our campus continued to be a place where people came together to experience the extraordinary power of the arts.

What you'll see in the pages of this report is the impact of that work and, more importantly, the people behind it - artists who brought unforgettable stories to life, young people who discovered new talents and possibilities, audiences who laughed, reflected, celebrated, and saw themselves represented on our stages, and community members who gathered at Karamu for experiences that connected us to one another and to our shared history and culture.

You will also see an organization growing stronger. This year, we welcomed more people into the Karamu community, deepened relationships with donors and partners, and continued building the financial and organizational foundation necessary to sustain this remarkable institution well into the future.

None of that happens without you.

For more than a century, Karamu has thrived because generations of people have believed that this place matters. That belief continues today in every ticket purchased, every class taken, every partnership formed, every hour volunteered, and every gift made.

As we look ahead, we are energized by what is possible. We have an extraordinary legacy to preserve, but we also have new stories to tell, new artists to nurture, new audiences to welcome, and new opportunities to create. Our responsibility is not simply to carry Karamu's history forward; it is to build upon it.

Thank you for being part of this community, for believing in our mission, and for helping us create what comes next.

ASEELAH SHAREEF
INTERIM PRESIDENT + CEO

TONY F. SIAS
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CO-CHAIR



There are very few organizations that can say they have been part of a community for more than a century. Even fewer can say that, after all that time, their work remains as relevant and necessary as ever.

For me, Karamu House has always been more than an institution. My own connection began here as a child, when I attended pre-school at Karamu. Today, serving as Co-Chair of the Board of Directors, I have the privilege and responsibility of helping steward a place that has shaped generations of artists, families, and community members, including my own.

As you read this Impact Report, you will see many examples of what Karamu accomplished during FY2025–26. Behind those accomplishments is something equally important: an organization that continues to grow stronger and a community that continues to believe deeply in its future.

That strength matters. The Board's responsibility is not only to support the extraordinary work happening at Karamu today, but also to ensure that this institution has the leadership, resources, and foundation necessary to thrive for generations to come. Over the past year, we have remained focused on that responsibility: supporting our leadership, strengthening Karamu's financial and organizational position, and looking thoughtfully at the opportunities ahead.

We are fortunate to do that work alongside an extraordinary community of people.

Our donors invest because they believe Karamu matters. Our audiences return because they find something here that they cannot find anywhere else. Our artists bring their talent and creativity to these stages. Our partners extend our reach. And our staff brings Karamu's mission to life every day.

That collective belief is what has sustained Karamu for more than a century, and it is what will carry us into our next chapter.

As Board Co-Chair, I am incredibly proud of what we accomplished together this year. But I am even more excited about what lies ahead. We have an opportunity to honor the remarkable legacy entrusted to us while ensuring that Karamu continues to evolve, create, welcome, and lead.

Thank you for believing in Karamu, for investing in its future, and for being part of the community that will carry this extraordinary institution forward.

With gratitude,

TAMARA HORNE
CO-CHAIR, BOARD OF DIRECTORS

FY2026
IMPACT + RESULTS

FY26 IMPACT

THEATRE

14,933
PATRONS SERVED

102
PAID ARTISTS

87%
SEATING CAPACITY

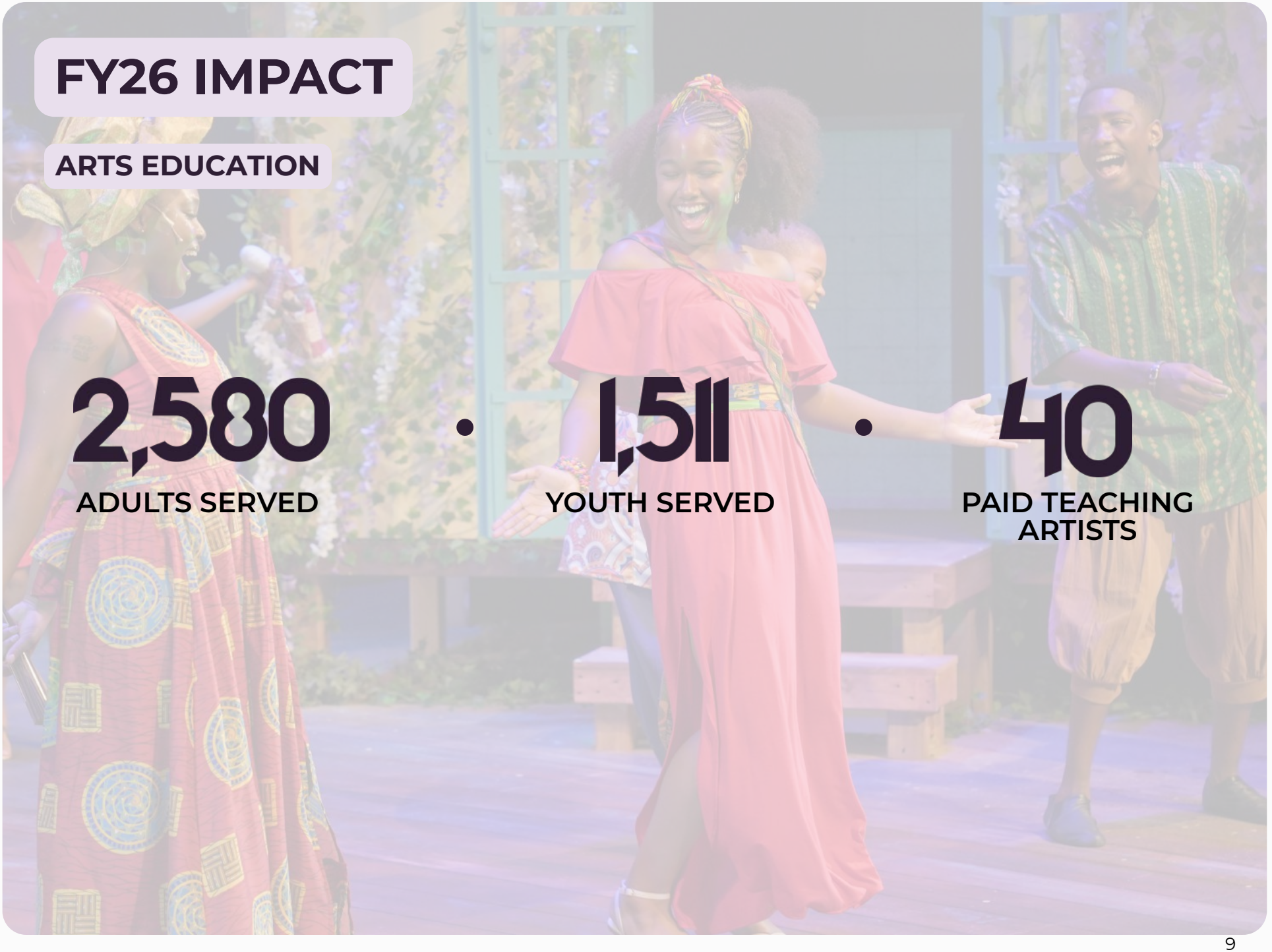
106%
REVENUE ACTUAL OF GOAL

BASED OFF 70% BASELINE GOAL

KARAMU
A JOYFUL GATHERING PLACE

FY26 IMPACT

ARTS EDUCATION



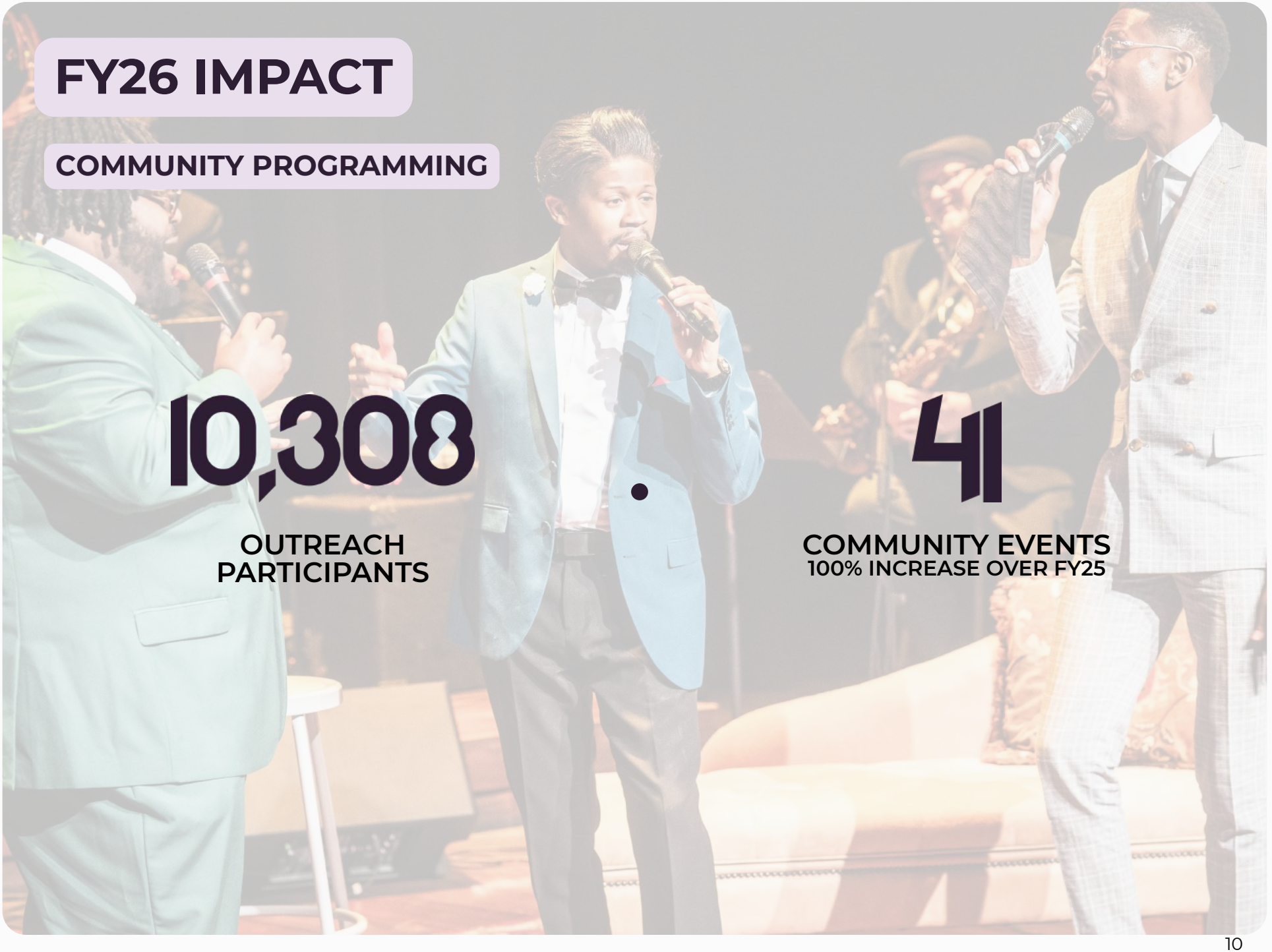
2,580
ADULTS SERVED

1,511
YOUTH SERVED

40
PAID TEACHING ARTISTS

FY26 IMPACT

COMMUNITY PROGRAMMING



10,308

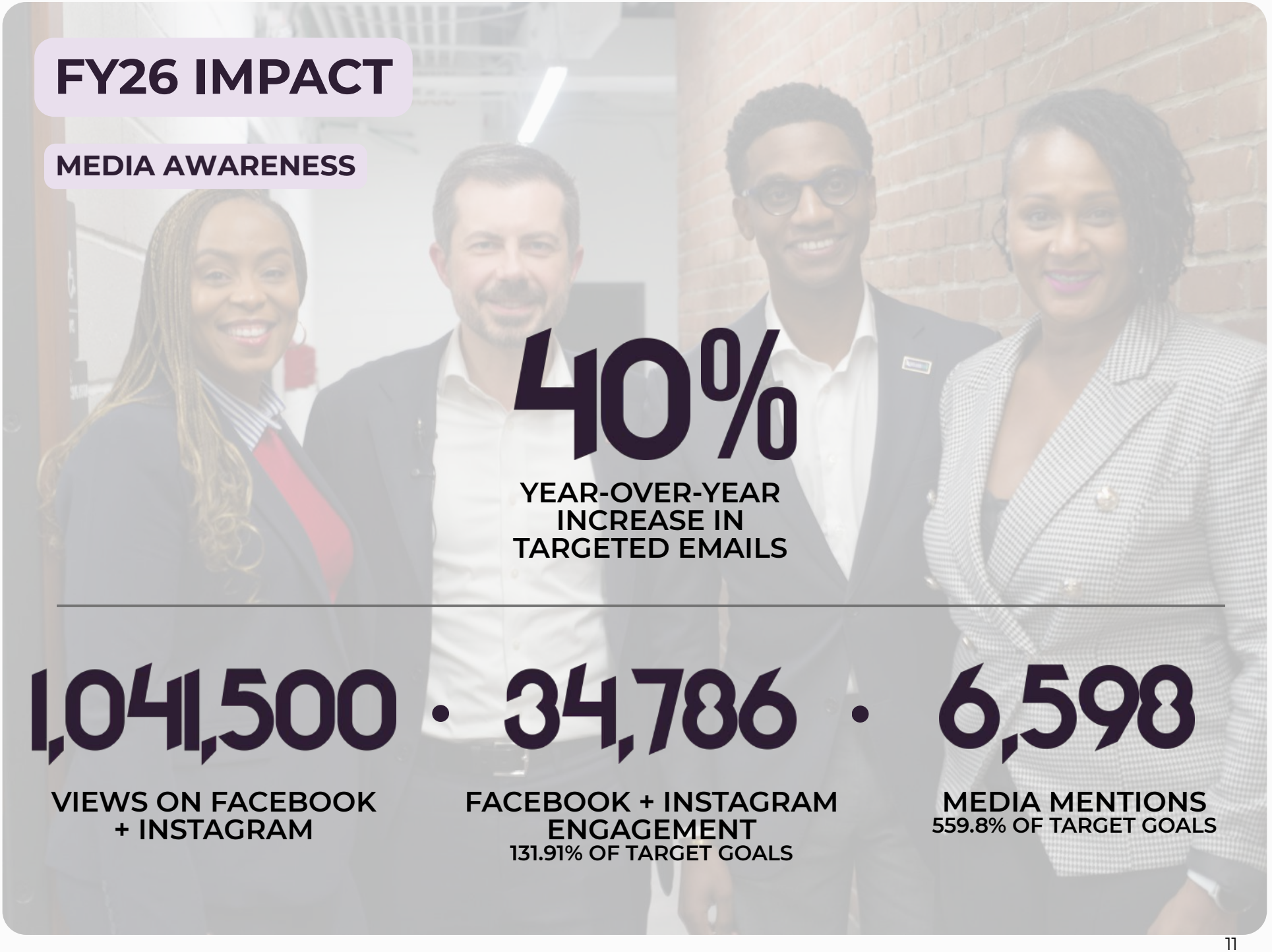
OUTREACH PARTICIPANTS

41

COMMUNITY EVENTS
100% INCREASE OVER FY25

FY26 IMPACT

MEDIA AWARENESS



40%

YEAR-OVER-YEAR INCREASE IN TARGETED EMAILS

1,041,500

VIEWS ON FACEBOOK + INSTAGRAM

34,786

FACEBOOK + INSTAGRAM ENGAGEMENT
131.91% OF TARGET GOALS

6,598

MEDIA MENTIONS
559.8% OF TARGET GOALS

KARAMU
A JOYFUL GATHERING PLACE

FY26 IMPACT

PHILANTHROPY

30%
INCREASE IN INVESTMENTS

9%
INCREASE IN AVERAGE GIFT VALUE

10%
GIVING INCREASE YEAR-OVER-YEAR

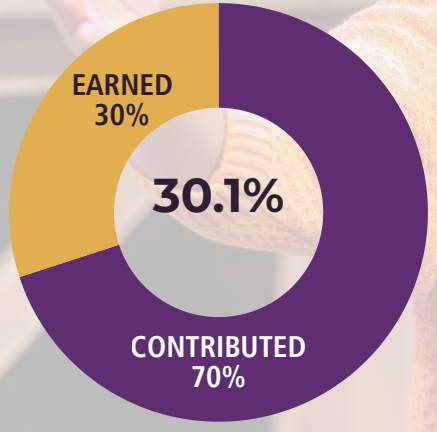
33%
DONOR RETENTION RATE
UP FROM 21% IN FY25

KARAMU
A JOYFUL GATHERING PLACE

FINANCIALS

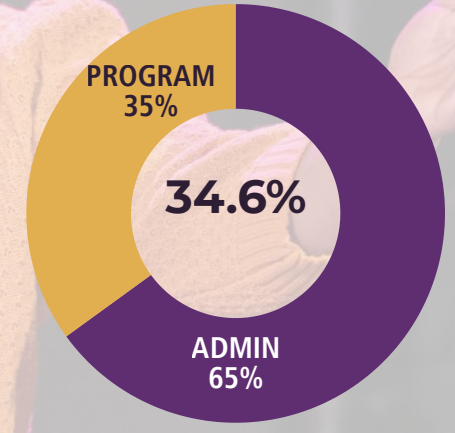
REVENUE: EARNED VS. CONTRIBUTED

FY26 ACTUAL



EXPENSES: PROGRAM VS. ADMIN

FY26 ACTUAL



23%

$680K RAISED

OF $3M 110 CAMPAIGN GOAL

KARAMU
A JOYFUL GATHERING PLACE

LEADERSHIP



ASEELAH SHAREEF
INTERIM PRESIDENT + CEO



TONY F. SIAS
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



MIKE OWENS
CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER



ROCKELL CHURBY LLANOS
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF
PATRON + DONOR ENGAGEMENT



VONETTA FLOWERS
DIRECTOR OF PRODUCTION

STAFF + FRONT OF HOUSE

SHANNON MCMANUS
PRODUCTION MANAGER

MAYA ISRAEL
ARTS EDUCATION MANAGER

PROPHET SEAY
TECHNICAL DIRECTOR

VINCE TOSE
ASSISTANT TECHNICAL DIRECTOR

BRIELLE MCGREW
COSTUME SHOP MANAGER /
WARDROBE COORDINATOR

RAMONA GIVNER
ACCOUNTANT / BOOKKEEPER

NORRIS BROWN, SR.
VENUES II

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ARCHIVIST

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GRANTS MANAGEMENT

MAUREEN ISCHAY
DEVELOPMENT CONSULTANT

JOSHUA MCELROY
MARKETING CONSULTANT

BARBARA COOPER
HOUSE MANAGER +
VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR

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MAJOR HUDSON

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ROSHONDA B. SMITH
TIFFANI SUTTON-TAYLOR

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With gratitude, we recognize the individuals, corporations, and foundations whose generosity strengthens Karamu House and makes our work possible. The following reflects gifts received during our 2025–2026 fiscal year, from July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2026.

$500,000-$999,999

State of Ohio, *Ohio Facilities Construction Commission**

U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *Historic Preservation Fund**

$100,000-$249,999

Paul M. Angell Family Foundation
Anonymous˜ (1)
The Cleveland Foundation
Cuyahoga Arts and Culture
The George Gund Foundation^˜
Leonard C. Hanna Trust#
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Ohio Arts Council
Whiting-Smith Family Fund˜

$50,000-$99,999

City of Cleveland, *Mayor's Office of Youth Prevention*
The George W. Codrington Charitable Foundation˜
Louise H. and David S. Ingalls Foundation*
Melody Stewart*

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Kulas Foundation˜
The Reinberger Foundation
The Shubert Foundation˜
Lorna Wisham˜

LEGEND

*	CAPITAL RENOVATIONS	~	110 YEAR ANNIVERSARY SPONSOR
+	1915 SOCIETY	#	FUND OF THE CLEVELAND FOUNDATION
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^	KARAMU MEMBER		

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FY 2025-2026

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$10,000-$24,999

The Callahan Foundation
City of Warrensville Heights~
Theater League of Kansas City/Theatre Communications Group (TCG)
The Char and Chuck Fowler Family Foundation
The Peggy and John Garson Family Foundation<
The McGregor Foundation
John P. Murphy Foundation
Robert H. Reakirt Fund Equities of the PNC Charitable Trusts Grant Review Committee~
Starting Point
Timothy L. Stephens III Memorial Fund#~

$5,000-$9,999

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W. Byron & Alison Calhoun+~
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Susan & Jeff Lucier~
Judy Montfort++~
Parker Foundation~
Ann & Lawrence Simpson~
Robyn Minter Smyers~

$2,500-$4,999

Anonymous (1)
Anonymous++~ (1)
Michael & Sherri Beedles~
Jon & Laura Bloomberg~
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India & Peter Lee^~
Sandra Madison+^~
Roberto Powers~
Elaine Price & Gordon Landefeld^~
Marques Hillman Richeson^~
Dr. Daniel Sanders & Liz McElroy^~

$1,000-$2,499

Joann and Thomas Adler Family Foundation<~
Thomas and Joann Adler Family Fund<~
In Honor of Tony Sias
Lewis and Ruth Affelder Fund#
Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., Alpha Omega Chapter and Alpha Omega Foundation, Inc.
The Barksdale Family Fund
Terri Hamilton Brown & Darnell Brown~

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$1,000-$2,499 (Continued)

Dr. Sheila Becking & Carlos Fuentes+~
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Marcia Bryant+~
Janet E. Burney~
The Church of the Covenant~
Cleveland Landmark Press Foundation~
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Lynnette Crenshaw+~
Adrienne Crisp+~
Anne Demanelis~
Carol Dolan
Diane Downing
Scott & Anne Flamm~
Scott & Ann Garson~
Sarah Grabinski~
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Melvin & Deborah Pye~
Patricia Ramsey~
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via National Philanthropic Trust
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Randy Ruttenberg+~
ShibuiDesigns.com+~
Tony F. Sias+~
Joyce Thornton+~
Kelli P. Washington~
Chris Warren~
Jessica Whitley+~
Johnny Williams, Jr. & Chariss Williams^
Linda Wilson
Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley & Gerard Winstanley^

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$500-$999

Actors' Equity Foundation˜
Annette Pryor Anderson+˜
James Anderson & David Wittkowsky#
Anonymous+˜ (1)
Rev. Heidi & Ron Barham+˜
Cynthia Calhoun˜
Jennifer Coleman˜
Marcella Boyd Cox˜
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Keith & Nancy Libman
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Betty Milum˜
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Katie Owens˜
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Doretha Pendleton˜
Betty T. Pinkney˜
Gretchen Snediker˜
Tiffani A. Sutton-Taylor
Lynda Herman Thomas#˜
Michael Watson˜
Jackson T. Wright, Jr.˜

$250-$499

Artis Arnold
On Behalf of Thurgood Marshall Oratorical Debate Education Project
Cynthia Bumbry˜
Richard Chester+˜
Jim & Berni Cockey˜
Gina Harp-King˜
Marvin Hayes+˜
Maureen Ischay+˜
Peter Lawson Jones & Lisa Payne Jones˜
Tim LaRiche˜

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$250-$499 (Continued)

Nicole Lynch~
Daniel Medalie & Diana Prufer~
Charlie & Angela Miller~
The A. M. Motta Fund#~
Sabira Mustaquim+~
Sandra Noble~
Sheffia Randall-Nickerson~
Tawny Ratner Philanthropic Fund<
Jan Ridgeway+~
Joy Roller~
Renee Ross+~
Susan Spector~
James Stone~
Jack & Blanche Valancy~
Barbara Vickers
Beverly Warfield+~

$100-$249

Margaret Adams*
John Addison~
Dolores Adler~
Anonymous (3)
Anonymous~ (1)
Anonymous+~ (1)
Eugenia Atkinson~
Linda Bedner
Patricia Blackmon~
Jackie Bowman~
Eileen Burkhart~
Matthew Carroll~
Michael Cleveland~
Deborah Coleman~
Michele J. Crawford~
Deborah Cummings~
Ronda Curtis~
Sharon Dumas~
Gayle Edwards~
Darryl Forest~
Mary Foti~
Ann Freimuth~
Cathy Gaw~
Jacqueline Gholson~
Deborah Glosserman~
Susan Greene~
Mary Frances Haerr & Kal Zucker~
Marcia I. Haire-Ellis~
Tony Harris+~

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$100-$249 (Continued)

Anita & Leigh Herington~
Kathy & Jaime Hogg~
Paulette Smith Holliday~
David Holmes~
Patricia Jackson~
Aaron Jeter+~
Wayne Johnson+~
Susan Kenney+~
Teresa Law~
Laura & Richard Little
Terrance Little~
Jazmin Long~
Raymond Marone+~
Elaine Mason~
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In honor of the Karaul Family
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Caroline Jackson Smith~
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Myron Stern
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In honor of The Clifford Family
Alex Thompson+~
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Greg & Roxanne Ziernicki~
Barbara Zoss~

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^	KARAMU MEMBER		

IN MEMORY OF CORTEZ SMITH

Anonymous (3)
Tammy Coney
Rena Darling
Duane Dunn
Hope Evans
Shaneal Gaither-Smith
Marlene Harris
Vanessa Iosue
Monique James
Iman Joshua
Carl Kirkland
Janice Mike
Janet Minor
Kodi Pride

IN HONOR OF MARQUES RICHESON

Colleen Connor
Miriam Franklin
Kathleen Geither
Thomas Goots
Herdman Hijar Team H Family Fund Grant
Kara Jakubec
Erica Miller
Adrienne Mueller
Kimberly Pustulka
Sarah Suma

Thank you to everyone who gave during our 110 Year Anniversary Celebration.

This listing reflects gifts received during the 2025–2026 fiscal year. Gifts received from July 1, 2026-June 30, 2027 will be recognized in the 2027–2028 Theatre Season playbills. Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this listing. If your name has been misspelled or inadvertently omitted, please accept our apologies and contact the Main Office at 216-875-0266 ext. 226 or ctix@karamuhouse.org so we may correct our records.

Thank you to everyone who gave in the previous year!

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DON'T MISS OUT ON ALL THE EXCITING PROGRAMS, CLASSES, AND EVENTS.



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Sistas
The Musical

A MOTOWN CHRISTMAS













QUEENS GIRL

Black in the Green Mountains







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ANNIVERSARY
NABJ
RESILIENCE, ADVOCACY, EXCELLENCE:
EVOLUTION OF OUR VOICES






50
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