



**bcwAAER**

# BLACK HISTORY MONTH

**2022 CLIENT GUIDE**

# OVERVIEW

A **history** that should be celebrated all year round gets a special highlight this month.

February is Black History Month – an opportunity to celebrate, recognize and elevate the contributions that Black people have made and continue to make across the world. While Black history is central to American history, it is often siloed and erased from the stories we tell and the lessons we learn in school.

As we celebrate Black history this month, we must also commit to honoring it year-round with accuracy, intention and inclusivity. Attention to the Black community's complex history is essential to understanding the present moment and creating new opportunities for an equitable future. For organizations and brands, this means developing a deeper understanding of the Black experience in America to strengthen their connections with Black consumers, stakeholders and the wider community at large. This will result in more genuine engagement, as well as increased trust and purchase consideration from Black consumers who are evaluating where to spend their dollars and which brands to support in 2022.

In fact, [Nielsen's Diverse Intelligence Series](#) found that two out of three Black viewers are more likely to watch representative content and buy from brands that advertise in representative content. This further reinforces how Black America is leveraging the economic and media influence they hold, and they are using it to invest in Black experiences, Black communities and Black content. Now is the time for organizations and brands to continue their commitment to this demographic and further ensure they are seen, heard and valued – not just during Black History Month but all year long.





# RECOGNIZING THE **BLACK HISTORY** MONTH 2022 THEME

The Black community has had to navigate numerous challenges throughout history, with the COVID-19 pandemic simultaneously exacerbating and spotlighting many. It should come as no surprise that the national theme for this year's Black History Month is "Black Health and Wellness."

This is a critical moment to acknowledge the state of health in the community, as Black Americans have been infected with COVID-19 at nearly three times the rate of white Americans, according to the [National Urban League](#). In addition to examining and elevating the work of Black medical professionals and practitioners, we must understand what has been done and what is currently being done to counter the health disparities in this community.



# ACKNOWLEDGING BLACK EMPLOYEE WELLBEING

The events of the past year have [added emotional strain](#) for Black and minority employees, leading to increased instances of anxiety and depression. Half of Black employees said they have struggled with their mental health during the pandemic, according to the [Kaiser Family Foundation](#), yet less than five percent have sought care.

Unfortunately, Black employees feel silenced because of fear and stigma around discussing their mental health. One study found that 63 percent of Black people think poor mental health is a sign of weakness. This cloak of silence can have serious implications on Black professionals who aspire to advance to in an organization but remain silent to avoid being seen as weak or burdening their teams.

As organizations and brands activate around Black History Month, it is imperative to integrate this national theme in programming and events. This will further reassure Black employees of your commitment to their professional and personal wellbeing in today's hybrid workplace. Whether leveraging Black health experts to engage your employees or providing resources that they can leverage year round, "Black Health and Wellness" should be addressed.

# DRIVING LONG-TERM SUCCESS IN THE YEAR AHEAD

In the months to come, successful organizations and brands will be the ones that commit to a long-term strategy for establishing stakeholder trust, brand loyalty and employee engagement from Black communities. While building a diverse and inclusive workforce is core to most business strategies, demonstrating action to create more equitable opportunities for Black people year-round will be critical.

This is especially true today, when global brands and corporations play an essential role in consumers' eyes and overall experience. Black people will need to understand how the brands they choose and the companies they work for will support the community for the long-term, beyond black squares of solidarity on Instagram and using #BlackLivesMatter hashtags externally. This requires your organization to go beyond Black History Month and to understand that solidarity is not a trend but a 365-day commitment to its Black consumers and stakeholders.



# KEY MISSTEPS

As Black History Month recognition takes place across your organization, it's critical to approach internal and external communications through the lens of the Black stakeholder.

Beyond using the right language and culturally relevant hashtags, it's important to be aware of the following potential missteps that can happen as part of Black History Month efforts. Recognizing these early on will help prevent your organization from appearing culturally insensitive and ensure your diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) commitments feel authentic to Black people and all stakeholders.



## INCLUDE BLACK VOICES AT THE TABLE, ALWAYS.

Make sure you have Black employees and stakeholders on your team(s) when crafting your Black History Month strategy, message and communications programming. If there is a lack of diversity at your organization, you can convene external experts such as BCW's Polycultural Consulting Unit for audience immersions, message testing and other core services.

## INCREASE BLACK REPRESENTATION IN CONTENT.

The urgency to get representation right is real—it's a primary factor for the massive viewing levels Black audiences deliver and the shift in Black viewing power to platforms most representative of their community and identity group, according to [Nielsen's Diverse Intelligence Series](#).

As a result, it's imperative for your organization to increase Black representation in content, communications and creative to reach Black audiences.

## ACKNOWLEDGE WHERE YOUR ORGANIZATION IS IN ITS DEI JOURNEY.

An audit of your existing internal commitments and external programs from a DEI perspective is essential to guide what additional action needs to be taken to support the Black community. Failure to perform a rigorous assessment can leave your organization open to exposure on social media platforms, with current (and former) employees raising awareness of your conflicting internal practices and procedures.

## UNDERSTAND SOLIDARITY IS NOT A TREND.

Companies must be committed to internal and external efforts that will resonate with the Black community and take actions that can be measured so your stakeholders can track your progress along the way.

## COMMIT BEYOND BLACK HISTORY MONTH.

While immediate action is required, both mid- and long-term "beyond Black History Month," strategies should be established now as further incidents of racial injustice are likely, and stakeholders will be holding companies accountable throughout 2022 and beyond.



# A ROAD MAP FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

It is important to understand that the right approach to Black History Month is to celebrate the many contributions, diverse cultures and experiences within the Black community.

Yet, it is far more critical to ensure your organization has a long-term strategy to reach, engage and connect with Black consumers and stakeholders throughout the year. Championing the Black community doesn't stop when Black History Month is over, and the below moments in time will serve as a road map for you to drive engagement in the year ahead.

## **JUNETEENTH**

(June 19, 2022)

Juneteenth was first celebrated in Texas to commemorate the emancipation of enslaved people, and today is celebrated with family, friends and freedom. Juneteenth is an opportunity to recognize where we were as a country and where we are today in the Black community. When done right, Juneteenth can help to drive educational dialogue with employees and leaders across the organization.

## **BLACK WOMEN'S EQUAL PAY DAY**

(August 3, 2022)

[Black Women's Equal Pay Day](#) is an annual recognition that acknowledges the growing racial and gender pay disparity affecting Black women nationwide. Across industries, Black women are paid only 63 cents for every dollar made by white men, according to the National Women's Law Center. In 2022, increased conversations around pay equity, salary negotiation and career development should be anticipated as the workplace continues to navigate the Great Resignation. Organizations and brands should continue to diversify the perks, benefits and salary packages geared toward members of this audience to ensure their workplace satisfaction.

## **KWANZAA**

(December 26, 2022 - January 1, 2023)

Kwanzaa is the annual seven-night celebration of African American and Pan-African culture. First celebrated in 1966, the holiday has grown to be celebrated by millions across the world, strengthening roots to both African heritage and the African community as a whole. Kwanzaa is a key cultural celebration for those in the Black community and recognition of this holiday within your workplace could help foster greater cultural competency among your employees.

# HOW BCW CAN HELP

As organizations and brands recognize Black History Month 2022, it is imperative that they address the significant issues affecting Black Americans today while celebrating achievements from the community's past. While Black people see messages of brand solidarity as important, they are more receptive to brands that operate with genuine intention and measurable action to impact the wider Black community.

Communication with intent, originating from purposeful action, is fundamental to showing support, and those who do this right will be able to develop genuine and long-lasting relationships. [BCW recommends a year round approach](#) based on four pillars:

## RECOGNIZE AMERICA IS NOW MAJORITY MINORITY.

[The U.S. 2020 Census demographics](#) demographics show that we are shifting to an entirely new America, an entirely new General Market, one that isn't accounted for in current approaches to multicultural marketing and one that is inherently culturally diverse and now considered [Polycultural](#). To navigate this landscape, companies must make a renewed, continuous effort to understand culture and how it impacts everything from your frontline employees to your board of directors in the C-suite.

## CONDUCT 3-6-5 ENGAGEMENT WITH THE BLACK COMMUNITY.

Showing a commitment to the community should start with a stronger stance around how your organization's business strategy is directly tied to diversity and inclusion. The most impactful campaigns are those rooted in long-term allyship. If your commitments are meaningful and real, it will be easy to show your accomplishments

## AMPLIFY INTERSECTIONAL BLACK VOICES.

Diverse voices are integral to any engagement. By championing those who live at the intersections of overlapping systems of privilege and oppression, companies and brands can ensure they are advocating for Black voices that are often disproportionately impacted by societal inequalities. Go beyond Black History Month and tell Black stories throughout the year, from intersectional LGBTQ+ stories during Pride Month to Afro-Latina stories in Hispanic Heritage Month.

## BUILD THIRD-PARTY CREDIBILITY THROUGH STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS.

Companies taking steps to engage the Black community long-term should consider partnering with groups that are driving change, such as the following:

[Color of Change](#)

[Equal Justice Initiative](#)

[NAACP Legal Defense Fund](#)

[The National Urban League](#)

[Thurgood Marshall College Fund](#)

For more information and best practices to engage today's Black consumers and stakeholders, please reach out to BCW's African American Employee Resource Group at

[BCW-AAERLeads@bcw-global.com](mailto:BCW-AAERLeads@bcw-global.com)

