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## **ADN partners with Santa Clara U. and BILL to host Pitch Day for Black Entrepreneurs from Silicon Valley Accelerator Program**

*Hybrid event on January 19 to spotlight Black entrepreneurs of impact-oriented businesses*

SILICON VALLEY, CA – Locally-based nonprofit African Diaspora Network (ADN) will partner with the Silicon Valley Executive Center at Santa Clara University and lead funder BILL to host a “Pitch Day” and graduation for the second cohort of their Accelerating Black Leadership and Entrepreneurship (ABLE) program on Thursday, January 19, 2023 at Santa Clara University and online via Zoom.

Venture capitalists, angel and impact investors, foundations, philanthropists, and financial institutions are invited to meet 12 Black entrepreneurs leading impact-oriented businesses across the United States, learn about their work, and identify opportunities to support their ventures. Details and registration information can be found at [bit.ly/ablepitch2023](https://bit.ly/ablepitch2023).

“We are committed to working with partners who share our commitment to social justice. That’s why we are proud to partner on the ABLE program to help accelerate Black entrepreneurship,” said **Dennis Lanham**, Senior Assistant Dean and Executive Director of the Silicon Valley Executive Center at Santa Clara University. “We believe that this program is critical to address the underrepresentation of capital flow to Black entrepreneurial communities.”

Research shows that Black startups receive only 1% of venture capital funding, at least in part because of systemic inequities and unconscious bias. Yet despite historic disadvantages in building wealth and incomes, Black entrepreneurs have created [4.7 million jobs](#) in the last decade alone.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, between February 2020 and August 2021, Black Americans became the fastest-rising group of entrepreneurs in the United States, increasing by 38% according to Bloomberg and Business Insider.

Recognizing a unique opportunity to match this potential with Silicon Valley’s spirit of diversity and innovation, ADN convened a cadre of major stakeholders in 2021 to launch ABLE, an enterprise accelerator designed to strengthen, energize, and support small businesses led by Black entrepreneurs. ABLE uses an executive education, mentorship, and networking program to expand economic pathways and advance Black entrepreneurial efforts.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sbc.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/minorityentrepreneurs>

“Small and midsize businesses are the heart of our communities, and this group of Black entrepreneurs are a great example of this,” said **René Lacerte**, CEO and founder of BILL. “These entrepreneurs are harnessing their innovation to solve real problems, grow impactful businesses, serve customers, and support their communities. Their stories are inspiring, and at BILL, we’re very happy and energized to play a small part in helping them grow their businesses.”

In its second year, the ABLE program has been focused on supporting Black entrepreneurs leading impact-oriented, for-profit organizations. These private sector leaders work across a variety of industries, including fintech, education, healthcare, health and wellness, media production, employment for the justice-impacted, technology platforms for events and rental spaces, DEI, and data analysis (see below for a complete list). The cohort includes educator-turned-entrepreneur **Dr. KiMi Wilson**, CEO of Equation 2 Success, based in Los Angeles, CA.

“The ABLE Program has afforded me the opportunity to become a stronger founder, with keen vision in growing and scaling my business,” said Dr. Wilson. “From learning alongside amazing fellow Black entrepreneurs, top-notch programming, supportive faculty and mentors, and the encouraging ADN staff, I am confident I will succeed in my venture.”

In addition to BILL, the ABLE program is backed by a cadre of local, regional, and national funding partners, including the Makahakama Foundation and KLA Foundation.

“We are excited to help Black entrepreneurs get their enterprises off the ground and realize their vision,” said **Joyce Chung**, President of Makahakama Foundation. “The ABLE program provides great value through access to resources and a platform to pitch for funding. We are thrilled to be a part of this, as we support Black founders along their journeys of entrepreneurship.”

“KLA Foundation is committed to supporting nonprofits in Silicon Valley that advance social equity and justice in underserved communities,” added **Jen Shea**, Executive Director of the KLA Foundation. “We are delighted to work with the African Diaspora Network to support Black entrepreneurs for the second year through the ABLE program.”

For more information about the ABLE program, please contact [info@africandiasporanetwork.org](mailto:info@africandiasporanetwork.org) or visit the African Diaspora Network [website](#).

“Our heartfelt congratulations go out to the entrepreneurs for completing the ABLE program,” said **Almaz Negash**, Founder and Executive Director of ADN. “We look forward to matching their vision with funders to help grow our collective impact in the U.S. and around the globe.”

*Meet the 2nd Annual ABLE cohort...*

- Chukwunonso (Chooki) Arinze, Founder, [Kaoshi Inc.](#) (Chicago, IL)
- Emmanuel Brown, Co-Founder, [ChurchSpace](#) (Houston, TX)
- Toby Egbuna, CEO & Co-Founder, [Chezie](#) (Atlanta, GA)
- Tae Lee, Founder, [Never Go Broke](#) (Birmingham, AL)

- Jody T. Mitchell, Founder & CEO, [Directed Analytics](#) (Baton Rouge, LA)
- Michael Olorunninwo, CEO, [GradientFI](#) (Fremont, CA)
- Andre Peart, CEO, [ConConnect](#) (New York, NY)
- Carolyn Pitt, Founder & CEO, [Productions.com](#) (Atlanta, GA)
- Victoria Prince, MPA, LE, LI, CEO & Creative Founder, [Tori Prince Beauty, LLC](#) & Chicago Skin Lab (Chicago, IL)
- Marvin Walker, Founder & CEO, [Day Kare Health & Transport](#) (Charlotte, NC)
- Lori White, Founder & CEO, [Vitavate](#) (Diamond Bar, CA)
- Dr. KiMi Wilson, CEO, [Equation 2 Success](#) (Los Angeles, CA)

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### **About African Diaspora Network (ADN)**

Founded in 2010, African Diaspora Network promotes entrepreneurship and economic development on the African continent and in the communities in which we live. ADN brings together Africans on the continent, in the diaspora, and friends of Africa to actualize their full potential, activate their entrepreneurial spirit, and strategically mobilize financial and intellectual resources to ensure a brighter future for the African continent. Learn more at [www.africandiasporanetwork.org](http://www.africandiasporanetwork.org)

### **About the Silicon Valley Executive Center at the SCU Levey School of Business**

The Silicon Valley Executive Center partners with a number of companies and universities to create custom learning experiences. Their high-impact programs help business leaders, managers, and professionals become better equipped to tackle the speed and complexity of growth in today's business environment. Learn more at [www.scu.edu/execed](http://www.scu.edu/execed)