

# Charlotte philanthropists campaign for Black Philanthropy Month

By Michael J. Solender

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Shortly after Meka Sales moved from the Washington, D.C., area to Charlotte she found herself taking stock of her life and what she had accomplished.

As a young professional enjoying success in her career, she wanted to give back to the community and wondered how to best go about it. She had extensive discussions with a number of girlfriends about contributing and ways to strengthen their giving power.

Six years later, Sales, 41, a program officer with the Duke Endowment, is part of a growing movement in Charlotte and across the country in reframing traditional notions of philanthropy and helping dispel myths that meaningful giving is reserved for corporate boardrooms or the wealthy. Sales is a member of a Charlotte-based giving circle of “youngish” black professionals known as the NGAAP.

NGAAP – New Generation of African American Philanthropists – is showcasing a number of activities during August, established as Black Philanthropy Month in 2011 by the international African Women’s Development Fund. Their goals are to raise awareness about the power of charitable giving, celebrate the tradition of giving in the African-American community and inspire energy around projects of concern in the black community.

The group, founded in 2006, has more than two dozen active members. They pool resources and look to contribute to causes that might not be on the radar of mainstream donors.

Grant recipients include The Males Place, a Mecklenburg

- Black Philanthropy Month in Charlotte

New Generation of African American Philanthropists was created in Charlotte in 2006 to raise awareness and increase African-American leadership in philanthropy.

[new-philanthropists.org](http://new-philanthropists.org);  
[blackphilanthropymonth.com](http://blackphilanthropymonth.com).

### Highlights

- Gathering, Growing and Gleaning Vital Resources for Our African American Museum Spaces. Aug. 7, Harvey B. Gantt Center for African-American Arts + Culture.

**Information:**

[www.blackmuseums.org/conference](http://www.blackmuseums.org/conference).

- We’re Bringing Giving Back. Aug. 13, West Charlotte Recreation Center.

**Information:** [www.tueforumclt.org](http://www.tueforumclt.org).

- Panel discussion: Black philanthropy, 50 years after “I Have a Dream” speech. 7 p.m. Aug. 23, Gantt Center.

**Information:** [www.ganttcenter.org](http://www.ganttcenter.org).

- 2013 N.C. Statewide Conference for the Nonprofit Sector. Valaida Fullwood keynote speech: “Philanthropy for and by the People.” Sept. 19, Concord Convention Center.

County organization that provides life skills to males ages 12-18 and First Purse, a nonprofit organization that empowers girls ages 8-10 to be financially literate, invest in their communities and own their “first purse” of financial independence.

Sales joined forces with the founders of NGAAP after attending a conference in Charlotte. There she heard Valaida Fullwood and Charles W. Thomas Jr. speak about their book, “Giving Back: A Tribute to Generations of African American Philanthropists.”

The coffee-table book is a black-and-white photo essay that assembled more than 60 stories of area residents. Fullwood, along with Thomas, executive director of Queen City Forward, launched the book as a way to build awareness of self-help and black giving.

### **Anyone can participate**

Since the book release 18 months ago, Fullwood and Thomas have toured the country on more than 50 speaking engagements, promoting the idea that anyone can be a philanthropist and small efforts can make big changes.

“My concept of philanthropy has changed since working on the project,” said Thomas, 40. “I used to think it was a very big word that only applied to the very wealthy and individuals or organizations with great means. I have come to realize that the true meaning is ‘to give’ and the ways many who support others give, be it in soup kitchens, or in helping neighbors with their rent, or in ways both large and small, is truly a core value in the African-American community.”

Fullwood, 48, noted that NGAAP was interested in making 2013 a defining year for Black Philanthropy Month as it marks the 50th anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech.

Activities include a morning breakfast forum and an event at the Gantt Center featuring a panel discussion on philanthropy and the arts. In September, Fullwood will be keynote speaker for a statewide conference on nonprofits. Her address will focus on “inclusive philanthropy.”

### **Broader movement**

“What we’re doing in Charlotte is part of a broader national movement,” said Fullwood.

The Pan-African Women’s Action Summit in Minneapolis Aug. 11-13 will bring together African-descent women from more than 20 countries to re-energize black philanthropy.

“It is exciting to be part of something bigger and see how this message resonates across the country, particularly with millennials,” said Fullwood, who recently spoke at a conference in New York City sponsored by J. P. Morgan and MTV. “These stories have much wider appeal beyond the black community. Frequently

**Information:** [www.ncnonprofits.org](http://www.ncnonprofits.org)

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people come up to us and tell us they see people they know in our stories. Today's economic situation makes the message even more relevant. I love that our stories are a template for other groups and gives to the community."

Ed Franklin, 41, a project manager for Bank of America, sought out NGAAP after moving to Charlotte in 2008.

"I come from a family where giving is part of our tradition," said Franklin. "As a member of the National Society of Black Engineers, I mentored and tutored kids in math and science in Los Angeles, where I used to live. I know first-hand the difference this can make. ... What I want others to know is this: We're here; we're doing good things; we have a long way to go. People can make a difference one commitment at a time; they just have to take the first step."

Sales grew up in a household where giving was the norm. Her parents started a nonprofit organization in Alabama focused on education and closing the achievement gap for disadvantaged youth.

"For me," said Sales, "It was important to take the first step and begin by giving of myself and giving what I could. People may be hesitant because they think one person's efforts won't make a difference. Nothing could be further from the truth."



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