

FOUNDER'S MESSAGE: DREAM CON 2026

JULY 22, 2026

Throughout much of my career in public policy, I have been driven by one enduring question:

What conditions help communities thrive?

Over the years, my work consistently pointed to the same conclusion: communities thrive when people have access to opportunity, meaningful relationships, education, creative expression, and economic mobility. Those observations ultimately led me to found **Black Houston Creatives Network (BHCN)** – a professional association dedicated to expanding access, visibility, and economic opportunity for Houston's creative community.

At BHCN, our work is guided by the **CREATIVES Framework**: Community, Resources, Economic opportunity, Access, Technology, community Impact, Visibility, Education, and Sustainability. These nine pillars shape how we strengthen Houston's creative ecosystem and how we show up in partnerships.

When BHCN was invited to serve as an official **Community and Press Partner for Dream Con 2026**, it felt like a natural extension of our mission. The partnership gave us the opportunity to demonstrate our CREATIVES Framework at scale. This report highlights the impact of those efforts and celebrates what we accomplished alongside Dream Con, Arts District Houston, our partners, volunteers, and Houston's creative community.

As an official Dream Con **Community Partner**, we spotlighted more than 100 local creatives, expanded access to the convention through two community ticket giveaways, and, in collaboration with Arts District Houston, curated Creative Flow: The Official Dream Con Welcome Experience, welcoming more than 230 attendees.

With **Creative Flow**, we expanded access through discounted ticket pricing and more than 24 community ticket giveaways, provided marketplace opportunities for 21 Black-owned businesses, elevated 8 Houston artists through exhibitions and media coverage, and intentionally convened over 30 Dream Con attendees, 3 creators, 2 exhibitors, and 32 Houston creatives in one shared space.

Serving as a **Press Partner** was equally impactful. Our media team set out to document the Dream Con experience. As the weekend unfolded, however, it became clear that our cameras were documenting more than a convention. We captured more than cosplay and panel speakers. We documented Black joy on a remarkable scale, the power of human connection, the reach of creative entrepreneurship, and the profound role creativity plays in strengthening both individual well-being and community life.

We also embraced our role as **ambassadors** for Houston's creative economy. Through conversations with special guests including JD Witherspoon, Roxxy Haze, MissJourdy, and many others, we asked a simple but meaningful question:

Why should Houston remain the home of Dream Con?

Their reflections on the city's culture, creativity, hospitality, and energy became some of the weekend's most memorable moments. More importantly, their perspectives reinforced that...

Houston is a cultural mecca, and the artists and cultural leaders who shape its creative identity deserve continued investment, visibility, and opportunity.

Every accomplishment highlighted in this report reflects the collective efforts of countless individuals and organizations. Above all, these accomplishments would not have been possible without Houston's creative community. Thank you for believing in the vision and helping us bring it to life.

Special thanks to the BHCN team — Kevin Rawls, Shellsy Malveaux, Arie Hayes, Patricia Bonner, Andrea Smith, and Akeisha Nabeta — as well as our valued partners: Arts District Houston, OZZYOZ DA VYRUS, Freddy Customz, and the many talented creatives throughout our network.

We are thankful to Dream Con for creating a platform that welcomed meaningful community partnership and expanded opportunities for Houston's creative community. This partnership affirmed our belief that **when people, organizations, and institutions invest collectively in Houston's creative ecosystem, the impact extends far beyond any single event.**

As BHCN continues to grow, we invite you to collaborate with us in shaping the future of Houston's creative ecosystem.

With gratitude,

Denise N. Upshaw

Denise N. Upshaw, MPA
Founder & CEO
Black Houston Creatives Network

For more information, please contact us:

hello@blackcreativesnetwork.com

@blackhoustoncreativesnetwork on Instagram