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The African American Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey (AACCNJ) hosts the State of Black NJ 2026 Economic Summit, Reverend Al Sharpton delivers rousing remarks as the Keynote Speaker.

Trenton, NJ — April 17, 2026, The African American Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey (AACCNJ) hosted **the State of Black NJ 2026 Economic Summit on April 16th from 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.**, at the Princeton Marriott at Forrestal, in Princeton, NJ.

The highlight of the afternoon was the distinguished keynote speaker, Reverend Al Sharpton, Founder of the National Action Network. As a nationally recognized civil rights leader and advocate for social justice, Reverend Sharpton shared powerful perspectives on his history with New Jersey's political and business communities, the progress made, and the path forward. He provided decades of insight into utilizing economic and political power to attain justice and improve outcomes for Black residents in New Jersey. The capacity crowd showed their appreciation with a thunderous standing ovation.

Regarding the significance of the summit, **Dr. John E. Harmon, Sr., IOM**, Founder, President & CEO of the African American Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey (AACCNJ), stated:

"This event is designed to highlight the economic standing of New Jersey's 1.2 million Black residents and over 124,000 Black-owned businesses. While data highlights significant disparities—such as a median net worth of approximately $20,000 for Black households versus $660,000 for white households, this summit convenes professionals from all sectors to foster intentional relationships and address systemic challenges. Our goal is not to assign blame, but to share vital information and align strategically with best practices. By connecting resources and opportunities, we aim to improve the overall competitiveness of our state and build a stronger future together."

"Today's event was both phenomenal and timely for businesses across New Jersey, especially Black owned businesses navigating growth and opportunity in an evolving economic landscape. The panel discussions, combined with the keynote from Al Sharpton, delivered a true masterclass in strategy and execution. The insights shared here provide a clear roadmap for how Black businesses can scale, compete, and move forward with intention and impact, said **Gary Mann, Chairman of the Board, AACCNJ, and CEO, Jasfel Analytics**.

Panel I
Black Businesses - Success Models & the Value Proposition
The panel discussion explored what drives sustainable success for Black-owned businesses in today's competitive marketplace. Speakers shared proven business models, growth strategies, and the unique value Black enterprises

bring to local and regional economies. Attendees gained insight into innovation, branding, access to capital, scaling operations, and learned how to position their businesses for long-term resilience and impact.
Moderator: Dr. John E. Harmon, Sr., IOM
William Bowie, President & CEO, Empower Construction
Della Clark, President of The Enterprise Center & Partner, Innovate Capital Growth Fund LP
Monique Nelson, Executive Chair, UWG, Inc.
Brian K. Oglesby, President & CEO, The Eastern Minority Supplier Development Council (EMSDC)

Panel II
Procurement Opportunities & Corporate Partnerships
The panel discussion focused on how Black-owned businesses can successfully engage with major corporations, supplier diversity programs, and institutional buyers. Panelists outlined how to navigate procurement pipelines, build strong partnership relationships, meet compliance standards, and position their companies as competitive and reliable vendors in both private and public sectors.
Moderator: Dr. John E. Harmon, Sr., IOM
Mark McDonough, President, American Water
Doug MoKoid, President, Jersey Central Power & Light
Jermaine Pharmes, Director, Business Development & Engagement, NJ Economic Devel. Authority (NJEDA)
Bianca Reyes, Supplier Diversity Manager, PSEG

Panel III
Best Practices in Public Contracting
The panelists provided a practical roadmap for navigating government contracting processes at the local, state, and federal levels. They discussed certification pathways, bidding strategies, compliance requirements, risk management, and how to build the capacity needed to secure and successfully execute public contracts.
Moderator: Denise Anderson, Ph.D. MPH, CEO, Denise Anderson & Associates
Michael Garner, MBA, CCA, Chief Business Diversity Officer, City-Wide Mayor's Office of M/WBEs
Carra Wallace, Founder & President, Optimized Diversity Solutions, Senior Advisor to Rev. Al Sharpton, NAN
Keith Wright, PH.D., Spiritual Leader & Author & Former Director, PANYNJ

The Gold Sponsor for the 2026 Summit was CURE. Patron Sponsors were PSEG, Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield, ReWorld and American Water. The Digital Program Book Sponsors were The College of New Jersey and NJ Transit.

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About The African American Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey
The AACCNJ performs an essential role in the economic viability of New Jersey. While providing a platform for New Jersey's African American business leaders to speak with a collective voice, the AACCNJ advocates and promotes economic diversity fostering a climate of business growth through major initiatives centering on education and public policy. The Chamber serves as a proactive advocacy group with a 501(c) 3 tax exemption, which is shared by the National Black Chamber of Commerce.