JULY 2020

PATHWAYS TO THE FUTURE

FINDING OPPORTUNITIES AT THE INTERSECTION OF COVID-19 AND RACIAL EQUITY
How is our future changing at the intersection of COVID-19 and racial equity?

In this report, Design Impact lifts up six shifts that are emerging at this time of unprecedented change. As organizations, communities, and leaders look to navigate this dual pandemic, we offer a nuanced view of these shifts alongside prompts for reflection and action that can pave the way for change.

OPPORTUNITY FOR CHANGE
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INTRODUCTION
LOOKING FORWARD IN 2020

“There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about.”

- Margaret Wheatley

As we enter the second half of 2020, Design Impact has been reflecting on the year. The global pandemic, combined with a national movement for racial justice, is reshaping our nation’s very fabric. The slowdown has put long-standing inequities on display, prompting many in our society to reconsider our values, who’s valued, and why our systems are so fragile during crisis. This time of rapid change calls us all to tune into what’s emerging, discover what we care about, and rebuild for a better future.

This report highlights a vision for what’s possible, particularly if we embrace the emerging “shifts” starting to take place across our sector and our society.

This report on process highlights a vision for what's possible, particularly if we embrace the emerging "shifts" starting to take place across our sector and our society.

In Emergent Strategy, adrienne maree brown challenges us to "intentionally change in ways that grow our capacity to embody the just and liberated worlds we long for." Consider this report an invitation to lean into what's unfolding, move from incrementalism to visionary solution-building, and shape a more equitable future.

A NOTE ON PROCESS

This work reflects the compilation of many efforts:

- Conversations with community members
- A survey of partners at community-based and social sector organizations
- Learnings from years of social change work
- An equity-informed analysis of current events, news coverage, and public dialogue from March through June 2020

Refer to the appendix on page 24 to learn more about our research approach, and see detailed learnings from community members and partners.
IMAGINING THE FUTURE
AN INVITATION TO DREAM

In a culture that has traumatized many and limited our capacity to envision a more equitable future, we recognize that dreams can be a privilege. And yet, joy is resistance, and vision is essential to liberation. Together, they can give us room to embrace creativity, conceive something impossible, and will it into existence.

Hold fast to dreams
For if dreams die
Life is a broken-winged bird
That cannot fly.”

- Langston Hughes,
Dreams

A VISION FOR WHAT COULD BE

Imagine a world where we’ve chosen the path of justice. Our response to the 2020 global pandemic and nationwide protests for racial justice leads to dramatic shifts in national values, policies, and leaders. We move toward a more humane form of capitalism and economic structures that favor inclusion and collaboration. And as a result, we see steady declines in racial and economic inequities.

While we haven’t emerged unscathed, 2020 fosters empathy and an urgency to rebuild for resilience. A commitment to self-enforced social distancing evolves into a sense of interconnectedness and broader solidarity with whom we share the world. With it comes the commitment to undo and unlearn the harms that we’ve been socialized to normalize.

The nation declares racism a national threat to public health.
The declaration prompts a federal racial equity audit and anti-racist policy reforms around social inclusion, taxation, reparations, and poverty alleviation. Transformative justice and community-based healing replace policing and imprisonment. Funding is reallocated into education, health care, affordable housing, job creation, and basic income for everyday citizens. Our government’s bipartisan commitment to a holistic “well-being threshold” helps aid a strong and inclusive economy.

Society embraces humane capitalism, in which humanity is valued more than profit. Progressive businesses invest in fair, living wages for employees and are rewarded with consumer loyalty. Tech giants give increasing attention to equitable design and universal access. Nonprofit models evolve to prioritize community-led organizing as an essential tool for changing outcomes. Community members, especially those closest to inequity, have a hand in influencing policy and changing systems. The ability to connect on a grassroots level is essential to sustainability and impact for governments, businesses, and nonprofits alike.

Imagine the joy we all feel in our wholeness, our connectedness, and our shared prosperity. Imagine the power in our collective liberation as we build the path toward justice.
People are aware that they cannot continue in the same old way, but are immobilized because they cannot imagine an alternative. We need a vision that recognizes that we are at one of the great turning points in human history when the survival of our planet and the restoration of our humanity require a great sea change in our ecological, economic, political, and spiritual values.”

- Grace Lee Boggs

How can we intentionally grow in ways that move us closer to the future we desire? During significant change, social changemakers must navigate turbulent waters to identify the emerging patterns—or shifts—that can lead us to the greatest equity and fullest humanity. We consider a shift to be a social, cultural, economic, technological, or political transformation that broadly impacts societal values and behaviors. Through our work, we’ve identified six key shifts that we believe can guide us.

- INEQUITY AWAKENED
- FROM SERVICE TO POWER-BUILDING
- EQUITY-DRIVEN DIGITAL
- THE RISE OF REST AND HEALING
- INTERCONNECTED COLLECTIVE
- HUMANE CAPITALISM

In many cases, these shifts have long been underway. However, they have been accelerated by the shared experiences of our current societal context. While we can’t claim to predict the future, when we are attentive to the patterns unfolding around us, we can access the paths toward a better future.
Everyone has become keenly aware that there is more than one pandemic affecting U.S. lives and local economies. As the American Psychological Association has declared, ‘we are living in a racism pandemic,’ too.”

- Laura Morgan Roberts and Ella F. Washington, as quoted in the Harvard Business Review

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**INEQUITY AWAKENED**

From: Passive Awareness | To: Active Resistance

Inequities have always been present in our systems. Still, between the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on communities of color and a string of blatant, violent injustices against Black people, America is finally reckoning with racism. The murder of George Floyd and the resulting uprising have propelled many from consciousness to action. People are taking to the streets, demanding to upend racist systems, and committing to dismantle their own biases. Leaders are putting their reputations on the line as companies and municipalities respond with solidarity, vulnerability, and reforms.

And yet, as America breaks its deadly silence on racism, people of color are witnessing the mass “waking up” to systems of oppression they have faced their whole lives. A parallel rise in counterprotests, anti-Asian xenophobia reminds us this work is far from over. Our challenge is to move beyond rhetoric and do the long-term work of anti-racism, individually and institutionally.

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- Laura Morgan Roberts and Ella F. Washington, as quoted in the Harvard Business Review

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**SIGNALS**

- Cities and counties declare racism a public health crisis
- An “Overdue Awakening” on the cover of Time
- LeBron James launches a voting rights group with other basketball stars
- 76% of Americans call racism and discrimination a “big problem”
- Racial justice groups flooded with donations
- Apple creates $100 million racial equity and justice initiative

**THOUGHT STARTERS**

- How might we explore and embody racial justice within our own lives and work?
- How might we understand and dismantle our own entanglements with racist systems?
- How might we move beyond rhetoric to action?
- How might we work to be actively anti-racist?
THE RISE OF REST AND HEALING
The Rise of Rest and Healing

As the outside world shuts down and inequity, racism, and injustice dominate public discourse, our collective grief pushes us to name past harms and shift our attention towards healing and repair. The pandemic is revealing to those in power that our capitalist system, in its current form, has overworked us and left many—especially people of color—out entirely. The sense of urgency that accompanies white supremacy is being questioned, and with space to slow down and unlearn destructive practices, grind culture is giving way. A rise in mindfulness practices invites reflection, growth, and learning, while also unveiling the inequity in who actually has access to rest and healing. A connection is made between the need for restoration and its relationship to community power building. Discomfort is celebrated over “being right.” Restoration and racial healing drive creativity, innovation, and the reclamation of our wholeness, manifesting benefits in individual lives and the world.

“We have to be realistic: people of color already have PTSD. We’re all going to have another dose, especially our children, of some level of PTSD. We’ll need space to say, what were your fears, a space to process that.”

- Community member

Signs

- *Harvard Business Review* points to America’s collective grief
- Ethel’s Club, a social club for people of color, is offering free healing sessions online
- Congresswoman Barbara Lee proposes racial healing and truth commission
- The Nap Ministry preaches rest as reparations
- Schools explore trauma-informed reopening practices

Thought Starters

- How might we shift cultural values to embrace rest and reflection as a core part of any sustainable system?
- How might we acknowledge trauma and address its root causes?
- How might we prioritize healing as we rebuild our communities?
- How might we reclaim our wholeness in the name of liberation?
- How might we deepen our understanding of the connection between the health of our inner selves and the health of our country?
FROM SERVICE TO POWER-BUILDING
As demand for social services skyrockets and budgets shrink, we’ve watched many grassroots and community-based initiatives adapt. Those that thrive are anchored by deep relationships and a pulse on the real needs. More nonprofits are pushing beyond service delivery to support community-led structures for empowerment and action, prioritize resident leadership, and build community power to change systems. Narratives are changing from “someone needs my help” to “this is how we change.” Critically, this means people in positions of power working together in proximity with those on the margins, leading to mindset shifts and shared decision-making. Looking forward, building power among communities becomes essential to the social sector’s sustainability and impact. New funding models break down barriers to access and support unrestricted funds needed to support community-led processes and sustained systems change.

What does the future hold for our community? More investment in community organizing and community leadership at the ground level, and more space and investment in creative community-building ideas.”

- Local nonprofit leader

**Signals**

- [Minneapolis votes to replace police department with community-led model](#)
- [Beloved Community Church hosts activist training for 1,000+ attendees](#)
- [Cincinnati church creates bail fund for arrested protesters](#)
- [Grassroots organizations pivot to address impact of COVID-19 in their communities](#)
- [“Get Frank” launches to give workers a platform to organize for change](#)
- [Justice Funders reimagine philanthropy practices to redistribute wealth and democratize power](#)

**Thought Starters**

- How might we center decision-making by those most impacted by inequity?
- How might we lift up and extend grassroots efforts?
- How might we ensure communities are proximate not only to power, but to those who have the power to make change?
- How might we rebuild in a way that empowers community leaders as experts and goes beyond engagement toward community ownership?
- How might we use programs as a tool to transfer power?
INTERCONNECTED COLLECTIVE
As the world slowed down overnight, we reflected: Do we want to go back to the way we were? How do we hold onto the spirit of togetherness we have right now? Our commitment to our most vulnerable neighbors’ health is evolving into a deeper reverence for our interdependence: We are only as healthy and safe as our most marginalized communities.

We’re seeing this shift take hold. Organizations are pooling resources and favoring collaboration over competition in unprecedented ways. Neighbors are forming mutual aid networks built on the principle that everyone has something to give, and everyone needs something. Nonprofits are deepening their reliance on new partnerships to extend their reach and impact—such as the pairing of emergency services and mental health. These collaborations reflect a growing recognition that, when the “we” is thriving, “I” am better off. Looking past self-interest to communal gain is emerging as an essential survival skill. When we celebrate our interconnectedness, we strengthen our social ecosystems.

“Are you ready to give up your comfort and privilege for the safety of Black, brown, and indigenous people of color?”

- Tabitha St. Bernard-Jacobs, as quoted on Romper

**INTERCONNECTED COLLECTIVE**

**From: Individualistic Self-Preservation | To: Connected Solidarity**

**SIGNS**

- Cincinnati community organizations and business leaders collaborate to raise funds for minority-owned businesses
- Corporate and nonprofit partners support the Restaurant Workers Relief Program’s efforts to feed out-of-work service industry workers
- *The New Yorker* explores what mutual aid can do during a pandemic
- DearFrontline.com calls for gratitude mixed with activism

**THOUGHT STARTERS**

- How might we leverage collaboration to extend our impact and reach?
- How might we continue to foster collectivism in our culture and work?
- How might we consider impact to the greater good over our personal gain?
EQUITY-DRIVEN DIGITAL
Overwhelmingly, we see the role that data, digital access, artificial intelligence, and social media have in exacerbating inequities. Physical human connection has rapidly declined due to the pandemic and increased reliance on technology. COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted communities of color, leading to a new wave of data-led activism and urgent calls for consistent, transparent data, disaggregated by race. The digital divide—referring to the chasm between those who have access to devices and internet, and those who don’t—and an overnight reliance on remote learning is exacerbating the achievement gap between students of color, low-income students, and their white peers. Public debates simmer over facial recognition at Amazon as well as Facebook’s treatment of hate speech. Meanwhile, misinformation and the proliferation of xenophobic and white supremacist content continue to rise.

Looking forward, we see an increasingly complex web of challenges. Data transparency offers accountability, representation, and community-level insight, but questions swirl around privacy, free speech, and surveillance. Tech companies are not only forced to avoid harm but are pressured to take on a leadership role in actively promoting good. Scrutiny increases around tech regulation, access, and algorithm design—for who, by whom? As our reliance on tech grows while we navigate largely unchartered territory, digital domains remain a critical battleground for equity.

What algorithms are doing is giving you a look in the mirror. They reflect the inequalities of our society.”

- Sandra Wachter
  
  *Associate Professor in law and A.I. ethics at Oxford University, as quoted in Vox*
HUMANE CAPITALISM
The economic fallout of COVID-19 is decimating the small business sector, concentrating even more power in the hands of big corporations, and dramatically increasing the racial wealth gap. Reopening the economy during a pandemic raises questions about what’s more valued: our economy or our lives?

Younger generations increasingly demand a more inclusive, humane form of capitalism that prioritizes a social safety net. The corporate sector, after an outpouring of COVID-related support, must now look at deeper efforts to address underlying structural inequities. Indeed, employers remain critical front lines for equity as progressive leaders set policies like living wages, paid sick leave, inclusive recruitment and hiring, and sustainable supply chain reform.

Examples from progressive leaders across the globe—from New Zealand to South Korea—inspire economic systems that answer the call of people and planet over profit. As societal attitudes shift, more laws and policies designed to promote equity may follow.

Crises like worldwide wars, massive bank failures, and the current one triggered by coronavirus reveal and remake societies’ understanding of private versus public enterprises.”

- M. Amedeo Tumolillo, Deputy Editor, Digital of the Stanford Social Innovation Review

HUMANE CAPITALISM
From: Maximizing Economic Capital  |  To: Maximizing Human Capital

SIGNALS
- Gen Z “blown away” by the inequity built into our social and economic systems
- A growing majority of young Americans support universal basic income
- Davos leaders and the World Economic Forum will organize next year around “The Great Reset” and more inclusive, sustainable economies
- 71 percent of consumers agree that if they perceive that a brand is putting profit over people, they will lose trust in that brand forever
- Civic innovation thinkers and doers collaborate in Dayton, Ohio, to “Re-imagine America”

THOUGHT STARTERS
- How might we create the conditions for generosity and empathy over fear and uncertainty?
- How might we embody and encourage an ethos of people over profit?
- How might we reimagine what and who a “thriving” economy requires?
- How might we shift our economic work model to create the necessary time and space that humans need to thrive?
CALL TO ACTION
All that you touch You Change.
All that you Change Changes you.
The only lasting truth Is Change.
God Is Change.”

- Octavia E. Butler,
The Parable of the Sower

We share these shifts to invite dialogue, introspection, and action as we respond to our changing world. We hope this report helps you build a bridge between the current reality and a new ideal to start creating the world you want to see today.

At Design Impact, we believe that we are the work. Because we have to start with ourselves, we have already begun to respond to some of these shifts. We’ve taken steps to **reduce funding disparity among Black grassroots leaders** through Black-Led Social Change. We’ve explored our role and effectiveness in facilitating **community power-building** through community-based resident advocacy. We’re working with residents to make room for healing as we **co-create a more inclusive neighborhood**. And we’ve built our organization differently to model the kind of workplace we want to see in the world.

The call to create equity is an urgent one, and no one can do this work alone. We invite you to add to, share, and apply this work. We believe that a better world is possible when we deeply listen to and honor each other’s lived experiences, when we share power, and allow ourselves to imagine better futures.

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Over and over again it becomes known that the peace we seek is seeking us”

- adrienne maree brown,
A Complex Movement

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**RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS**

Below are some immediate steps you can take to commit to action in pursuit of a more equitable future:

- Engage your colleague, peers, and friends in conversations around this report
- Use these shifts as a lens or checklist to inform action
- Take time to heal, restore, and repair
- Do the internal work of anti-racism (**Anti-racism resources for white people**, **Scaffolded Anti-Racist Resources**, and **Anti-Racism Daily** offer abundant ways to get started)
- Immerse in the literature on implicit bias, equity, and intersectionality
- Support organizations and leaders committed to racial justice and social change
- Brainstorm ideas to incorporate one or more shifts into a current project or initiative
- Engage leadership in dialogue and action-planning around these shifts

Lastly, it is important to remember that leaders must do this work with people who are traditionally excluded from these conversations and be willing to share power. If we work together to bring about meaningful social change in our communities, we’ll all grow toward the future we desperately want to see.
APPENDIX

METHODOLOGY | COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUPS | PARTNER SURVEY
METHODOLOGY

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, DI has been reflecting on how best to support our partners and communities right now. We spent Spring 2020 listening, sensing, and lifting up learnings. The following inputs informed our findings:

- Focus groups with Cincinnati residents impacted by COVID-19 and inequity
- A survey of partners at community-based and social sector organizations
- Reflections on learnings from years of social change work

The following sections detail fundamental themes that emerged from focus groups and survey results, which ultimately informed the vision and shifts detailed in this report.

COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUPS

Design Impact conducted two, sixty-minute focus groups with a total of seven participants—Greater Cincinnati community members who are primarily people of color and have been heavily impacted by COVID-19 and inequity. Community participants shared challenges, learnings, and wishes for how we can emerge stronger. These focus groups took place in May 2020.

HEIGHTENED NEED AND A LONG ECONOMIC TAIL

“If you were housing vulnerable before, you’re definitely now. If you’ve been laid off, furloughed...”

“A lot of people need support, jobs are shutting down. Hard to get an appointment. It’s like what am I supposed to do, I got bills, I got kids, I got to survive. Now it’s a lot worse because people aren’t getting the things they really need. People who’ve been on assistance need it now and it’s harder to get it.”

Community members are feeling the immediate effects of a contracting economy and anticipate lasting impacts to jobs, housing, and food insecurity. Even as recovery teeters on the horizon, they fear that communities hardest hit will be the last to get back on their feet.

A COMMUNITY IN SURVIVAL MODE

“People need to believe that this will get over more so than just living through it. People need to have more hope.”

“We need more resources, to know it’s okay to grieve”

The impact of trauma—from COVID-19, from racism, from poverty—weighs heavily on our community. With their immediate needs, safety, and survival in question, people feel too exhausted to dream. And yet, as one community member stated, “We can’t go back to where we were, where we were wasn’t working.”

A trauma-informed approach to recovery may help address the emotional toll of COVID-19 and sustained structural barriers for communities of color and communities of need. Organizational leaders should consider what is needed to move from safety and survival to thriving and imagination.

ACKNOWLEDGING THE IMPACT ON YOUTH

“When we do go back to school, I know our kids will be behind. For people of color, I’m worried they’ll be labeled as behavior problems instead of giving them what they need, and that’s scary for our kids.”

“I’m honestly worried about the summer. Kids are bored, all their summer jobs shut down. They aren’t going to have anything for the summer, it will get hot and they’ll get into trouble and it will mean lives lost in our community.”

“Kids aren’t getting what they need. Parents don’t have time or know how to help their kids with homework or kids don’t have a safe place to focus. [They need] access to tutors or mentors to help them learn what they need and make sure kids don’t fall behind.”

Residents consistently expressed concern for the lasting impact to kids. They fear marginalized youth will end up even further behind and worry about what that means for their safety. They stressed the impact on parents without childcare and the need to directly support remote learning of students with low resources. Community members were
hungry for creative solutions and expressed a desire to be a part of their design, stating they know best what their communities need.

PARTNER SURVEY

Design Impact conducted a survey of social sector organizations with a total of 21 participants. We asked respondents to reflect on the impact of COVID-19, challenges, barriers, and learnings, and dreams for a more equitable future. This survey took place in late May 2020.

DEMAND IS RISING IN THE FACE OF FALLING BUDGETS

Many organizations are seeing a growing need for support and services alongside mandatory program shutdowns, gaps in revenue streams, furloughed staff, and ongoing struggles with low or no funding. The pandemic has laid bare and accelerated existing inequities. The attention to disparities is heartening and frustrating at the same time.

“We serve the nonprofit community and many are scrambling to provide more services as the needs are greater. Others cannot appropriately serve their traditional clients due to some not having internet access to be contacted virtually; others just can’t do programming. So it’s hard for nonprofits to invest in their team development at this time.”

“It has certainly been very challenging. Mandates from the State of Ohio required that the vast majority of our programs be shut down in mid-March. This led to the furloughing of the majority of our staff. It has been difficult for families and caregivers because they haven’t had anywhere to send their loved ones and no opportunities for respite.”

“We have seen unprecedented support from the local community during this time; however, it is somewhat disheartening that it has taken a pandemic for some people to ‘see’ our neighbors experiencing poverty and that emergency services alone are where some prefer to give.”

“The greatest barriers to equity was always present, it has just laid bare for many more to see. So it hasn’t really shifted as much as it’s been more exposed. That is, the disparity between Black Americans. Barriers in economic equity, housing, employment, and healthcare are chief among them. But more so, a generalized societal disparity exists that needs addressing in the most citizen-based, empowering way.”

DIGITAL . . . DIVIDED

Not surprisingly, many partners report relying on digital touchpoints with staff and clients. Many are surprised by how effective the switch to digital has been. Still, not all services work remotely, and organizations and clients are scrambling to adapt. The “digital divide” worsens access issues for residents with low resources. Some agencies report “losing track” of longstanding clients or not being able to serve them in critical ways such as benefits or job application support. Others mourn the loss of connection they feel with communities and wonder how they might create a safe space, virtually.

“Relationships are the foundation of our work, and it’s just not the same by phone, mail, or e-mail. Our clients are anxious and scared, they’re losing income, they can’t access public transportation or food distribution without risking contracting the virus: they’re in crisis.”

“Our community does not have equitable access to technology and internet. Our normal work involves a lot of face to face contact and community building. Post-COVID, we have not been able to connect with as many of our community members. This has stalled some projects and slowed down others.”

“It has caused our team to think about new ways to serve our community. It has required us to become familiar with new technologies and ideas very quickly, shifting our methods of working and the type of work that takes up our time. Challenges include being unable to directly serve our community face to face, which is how our work was previously defined.”

“The digital divide as been illuminated and has risen to the number one barrier to employment. On the other hand, we have been able to continue serving our clients, although not as efficiently.”
RESILIENCE, COLLABORATION, AND INNOVATION

For some nonprofits, jumping headlong into digital transformation shows their resilience and even presents an opportunity to rethink what’s possible. Partners appreciate an outpouring of support and flexibility on funding structures and requirements. Both service providers and funders hope we hold onto these lessons for the long-term.

“We’ve had to reimagine how we deliver our critical services. If you would have asked us a year ago whether we could offer our services remotely, we would have said ‘no way.’ Now, we’ve done it successfully, with little impact on some of our outcomes . . . Being able to still meet their needs and protect them while doing so has been an eye-opener.”

“We have been surprised to find that we can still create community through virtual means.”

“We have had to figure out how to present traditional programs on a virtual platform . . . Access and equity have certainly factored into our decision-making as we determine the ‘what, where, and hows’ of providing limited service again.”

“Crisis forces us to loosen regulations and try things we wouldn’t otherwise. It moves us from making everyone demonstrate their worthiness for assistance to giving assistance freely because we recognize we’ve all been knocked down by the crisis. I hope we can preserve these shifts.”

ADVOCATING FOR ADDRESSING THE ROOT CAUSES OF INEQUITY

Respondents see a need to advocate for sustained change that addresses root causes. Their observations also point to opportunities to build capacity, remove structural barriers, and embrace new approaches to long-standing social challenges. Finally, organizations recognize the need to center trauma as we plan for recovery.

“We are forgetting a lesson that was learned: emergency assistance without workforce development services equals greater instability.”

“Minimum wages simply have to change. The pandemic has shown what many of us knew all along, that frontline work is critical in our society. Making $8 an hour while risking your life is unacceptable. Now is the time to push for changes to minimum wages.”

“Increasing access to capital and technical assistance for founders of color and social impact businesses removes barriers to entry to early-stage startups. The innovation found in these startups is critical to reshaping an equitable community.”

“There has to be some form of collective reckoning where actual, formal, structural, and systemic change can occur around Black Americans. This is not only good for Black Americans inherently but also for the community to move forward.”

CELEBRATING AND GROWING COMMUNITY POWER

To increase our resilience, partners see a need to invest in place-based and grassroots efforts. They point to the need for community power-building and a growing sense of shared responsibility for creating a better world. Some note that achieving a shared prosperity will require shedding organizational egos and taking a longer view with equity in mind.

“While this is not a new lesson, the pandemic is a good reminder of the strengths of our neighbors and the resiliency of the community overall. Among neighbors, we are seeing continued enthusiasm for community projects and the desire to connect with each other and the organization despite challenges in doing so.”

“The importance of place-based work has always been important but even more so now. We need to support neighborhood organizations and neighborhood changemakers now more than ever.”

“Community-level work is critically important. We have to invest in ground-level relationships. We knew this before the pandemic, and now it is more evident.”

“I’m starting to see grassroots-level empowerment actions from organizations. These innovative organizations are equipping citizens, families, and individuals to effect positive change in surprising ways that large, clunky organizations are not able to do.”
“The future is bright; some organizations may fail, but others will become stronger and take on the work of the ones that weren’t built to sustain. Our community responsiveness is increased, collaboration has increased, philanthropy will be more responsive, less restrictive.”

BUILDING ANEW

Partners dream of a world starkly different than our current reality: shared prosperity, interconnectedness, inclusive social and economic systems. Many invite a “reckoning” to reinvent our structures and systems in a more equitable way, knowing that incremental change will not get us there. In order to bring a more equitable future to life, partners recognize the need to build political will for real change and support rhetoric with action.

“I envision more community-mindedness; greater appreciation of togetherness; fewer siloed entities; perhaps even more valuing of human life.”

“As long as we’re dreaming, we envision a community that places less emphasis on individual rights and more on our right and responsibility to care for ourselves while caring for others in the community.”

“The answer to any pandemic or crisis is to take care of each other. This time has shown us once again that we cannot make it through the crisis unless we all do things to protect each other.”

“People have a shared sense of responsibility toward each other. Corporations have less control, while communities have more control . . . Access to social, educational, and economic systems is increased for people with disabilities and marginalized groups. Political leadership needs a complete revamping on so many levels, and this crisis has exposed many of those, so maybe a 180 for that whole system.”

“[We have] the opportunity to exchange the rhetoric for action.”

“We don’t have to do things the way we have always done them. We can make extreme changes to our lifestyles and ways of life. My hope is that we apply this adaptability to issues of equity, and consider ways that we can make large and small changes to our way of life that produces more equitable outcomes for all.”
A NOTE OF GRATITUDE

This report was built collaboratively with input from many contributors. Seven community members, over 20 partners, and over 50 Design Impact “Breakfast Club” participants provided inspiration, insight, and feedback. This report would not be possible or complete without their perspectives.

Thank you!
ABOUT DESIGN IMPACT

Design Impact is a social innovation nonprofit that designs inclusive and creative approaches to complicated social problems.

We combine design, social justice, and leadership practice to address pressing issues, equip communities, and inspire social change.

d-impact.org

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