

# Changing the Conversation:

Philanthropic Funding and Community Organizing in Detroit



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# Executive Summary



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Detroit People's Platform  
members waiting to share public  
comments at a Detroit City  
Council meeting in April 2013.

# City at a Crossroads

This report represents the culmination of 12 months of work conducted by Allied Media Projects (AMP) and Detroit People's Platform (DPP). The partnership between AMP and DPP was established to convene community organizers and the philanthropic community in Detroit between April 2015 and March 2016. Their goal: Develop recommendations for how philanthropists might better serve their communities.

To that end, the partners convened dozens of Detroit's community organizers through 20 group interview sessions and four listening sessions. The result was "12 Recommendations for Detroit Funders," a document developed through a process of collaborative editing between the partners and community stakeholders. The recommendations have been endorsed by 27 organizations to date.

In the process of developing the 12 Recommendations, AMP and DPP also found a wealth of information about the current landscape of community organizing in Detroit and ideas for how that landscape could be healthier and more collaborative. In these pages you will find a variety of perspectives and ideas, not only for how philanthropy can better serve the grassroots community, but also for how community organizers can improve their work.

This work represents the start of what we hope will be a long-term dialogue between funders and organizers to bridge understanding and identify paths for us to better work together in building a just and equitable Detroit. The 12 Recommendations, which were published in late 2015 and presented at a funder briefing with representatives from five major Detroit foundations, have already been effective at sparking critical dialogue between organizers and funders.

In addition to fostering a rich dialogue around the ideas contained herein, the goal of this report is to lead to the creation of a new fund for community organizing in Detroit. This fund would specifically resource grassroots and people-of-color-led organizations that are working to address systemic racial inequality as it intersects with other systems of inequality. It would model more accountable and democratic practices for the distribution of foundation funding and a more collaborative relationship between funders and their grantees.

Detroit today stands at a crossroads. Down one path: A city of restored opportunity for everyone. Down the other path: A city that reserves opportunity for some at the expense of others. Even as redevelopment and reinvestment in the city pick up pace, racialized inequality and poverty in Detroit and the region remain entrenched.

**Witness:** Unprecedented numbers of Detroiters living without the human right to clean, affordable water. Thousands losing homes to tax foreclosure. Poor outcomes in job access, health, education and quality of life for African-Americans. Disproportionate consolidation of funding, power, and influence in private institutions whose staff and governing bodies have no direct accountability to Detroit residents. Systematic dismantling of public institutions that have been democratically controlled by Detroit's majority African-American population.

A just revitalization of Detroit requires holistic solutions that address these manifestations of racial and economic inequality at their roots. Such solutions address structural inequality head-on, foster wider access to resources and opportunity, and empower individuals and communities.

# The time and opportunity is now. We urge you to join us.

Unfortunately, the philanthropic sector in Detroit has largely not embraced this approach. An analysis by Detroit Ledger, an independent database of philanthropic spending, showed few dollars were spent on projects addressing community organizing, race, equity, and justice, and only 1.63 percent of funding went to organizations with budgets of \$100,000 or less between 2010 and 2015. At the same time, philanthropy has supported initiatives that perpetuate systems and structures of inequality such as support for M-1 Rail/QLine, the Detroit Land Bank Authority, The Downtown Development Authority and the Detroit Water Assistance Program (see page 25). These findings echo reports on similar national trends, such as “Pennies for Progress” a 2016 report by the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy about the severe underfunding of social justice work over the past decade.

To function effectively, Detroit’s community organizing ecosystem and philanthropists must work together to address structural racism and inequality, pursue holistic solutions that get at root causes, and trust the knowledge of the community to identify solutions. The organizing community must address its shared challenges—characterized by burnout and resource scarcity—collectively, while funders should be aware of these challenges and actively address them if they wish to truly make a difference in these communities.

In an effort to define how these goals can be achieved, we put forth the following twelve recommendations, described more fully on page 66.

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Pennies for  
Progress:

A decade of boom for philanthropy, a bust for social justice.  
National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, 2016.  
[ncrp.org/publication/pennies-for-progress](http://ncrp.org/publication/pennies-for-progress)

# 12 Recommendations for Detroit Funders

1. Develop mechanisms for authentic representation and participation from stakeholder communities in setting funding criteria and priorities.
2. Commit to understanding the full dimensions of, and actively work to dismantle, structural racism and economic inequality in Metro Detroit.
3. Create pathways for small, grassroots organizations to access funds.
4. Develop more nuanced ways of measuring success.
5. Prepare organizations to create deep, transformative change.
6. In addition to project funding, provide general operations support.
7. Nurture authentic collaboration across organizations.
8. Provide more capacity-building, resources, and training for grantees to develop non-grant revenue streams.
9. Provide funding for a more accessible city and region—one that is accessible for people with disabilities, seniors, parents and children, and non-English speakers.
10. Address concerns about the impacts of gentrification and displacement.
11. Invest in a healthy, participatory democracy and model democratic practices in your organizations.
12. Work to establish a culture of mutual respect and collaboration between funders and grantees.

We believe that if local foundations and community organizers agree to work towards these recommendations over the coming years, we will transform all of Detroit into a just, equitable, beautiful, and economically thriving city.

Such a city would be characterized by accountable, visionary economic development guided by democratic processes at all levels. It would be a community that values all of its members and pursues healing through truth and reconciliation. Such a city would build and maintain functional, equitable infrastructure, a just economy, and a thriving ecosystem of powerful community-based organizations that nurture and sustain beauty, culture, creativity, environmental justice and ecological health, and implement holistic approaches to public safety and health.

# Grassroots Solutions to Detroit's Most Pressing Problems



Detroit People's Platform annual meeting at the Samaritan Center, June 2015.

Grassroots community organizers are leading some of the most innovative and necessary solutions to Detroit's problems. They work on the ground, in neighborhoods. They know the problems and solutions best, because they are the people who are most affected by them.

Unfortunately, such groups are continually under-acknowledged and under-supported in many ways, particularly in the distribution of philanthropic funding. This situation creates a missed opportunity to empower those with the deepest understanding of local challenges and to craft the most authentic solutions.

Through a collaborative research process, Allied Media Projects and Detroit People's Platform convened representatives from 20 Detroit-based grassroots organizations for a series of focus group conversations to determine what effective community organizing in Detroit looks like, and the challenges and opportunities in funding their work.

## Grassroots Solutions

Detroit is at a turning point. We have the choice to become a city that works for everyone or a city that works for some at the expense of others. While national media often celebrates the comeback of Detroit, citing new developments in Downtown and Midtown as evidence, racialized inequality and poverty in Detroit and throughout Southeast Michigan spreads and deepens.

We see evidence of this in the unprecedented number of Detroiters living without the human right to clean, affordable water and losing homes to tax foreclosure, many of which have belonged to their families for multiple generations. We see it in the stark data\* that reveals the relative absence of opportunity (defined by job access, health outcomes, quality of education, etc.) in areas that are primarily African-American.

**\*see “Detroit at a Crossroads: Emerging from Crisis and Building Prosperity For All,” The Kirwan Institute**

We see it in the disproportionate consolidation of funding, power, and influence in private institutions whose staff and governing bodies have no direct accountability to Detroit residents – alongside the systematic dismantling of public institutions that have been democratically controlled by Detroit’s majority African-American population.

Discussions of revitalization are incomplete when political priorities and economic investments are largely limited to Downtown and Midtown, and neighborhood stabilization plans have targeted seven middle-class priority districts; one for each Council district.

**The revitalization of Detroit requires holistic solutions that address these manifestations of racial and economic inequality at their roots.**

We define holistic solutions as ones that:

- Address the ways in which structural racism has shaped the parameters of inequity in revitalization efforts and urban planning across our region – impacting everything from housing access, to education, to job access and training, to cultural power and visibility.

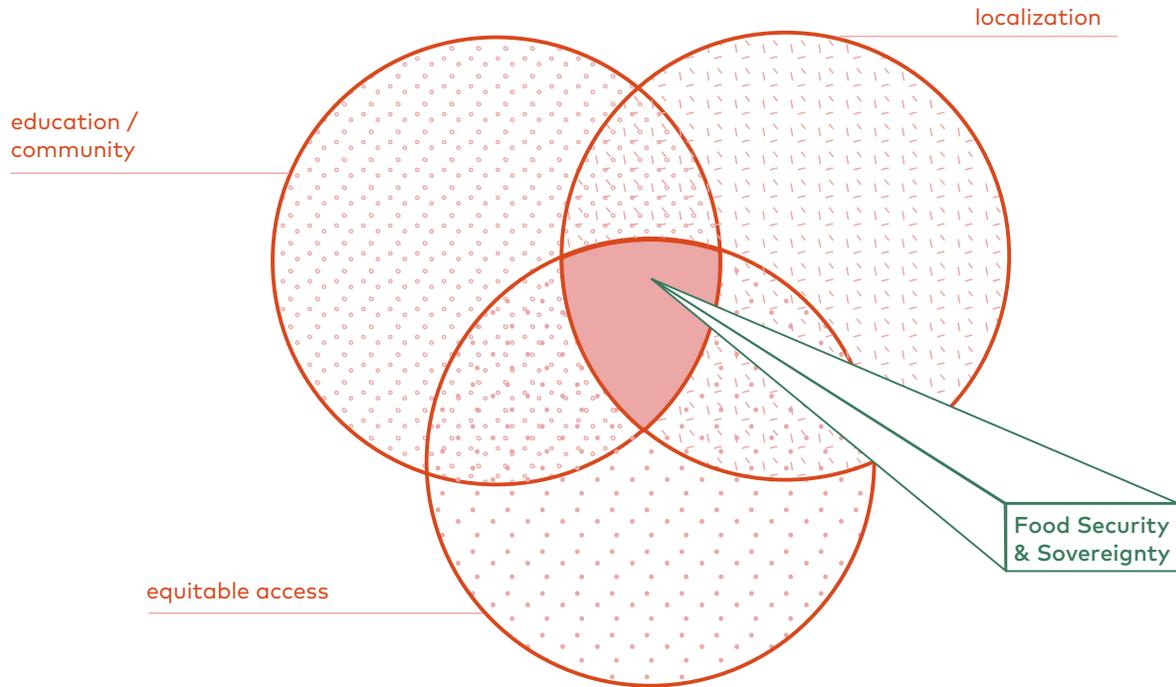
- Address the ways in which gender, poverty, sexual identity, ability, citizenship status and other factors compound experiences of inequity.
- Transform both private and public institutions to foster greater opportunity and equity in all of the dimensions described above, along with greater accountability, and democratic participation.
- Empower individuals and families to transform their own lives.
- Grow the power of communities to solve problems collaboratively and sustainably.

Fortunately, Detroit is rich with holistic solutions. In the midst of poverty, lack of institutional support and resources, Detroit’s grassroots communities have been developing innovative and comprehensive solutions to some of our most deeply-rooted problems. Among these grassroots communities are neighborhood-based associations, community-based nonprofit organizations, advocacy groups, cooperatives, start-up incubators, collectives and many more community-supporting and nurturing networks.

These solutions have grown and evolved over decades. They are multi-layered approaches that transform individuals, communities, and systems. Many of them are also rooted in life-or-death struggles of residents who had no choice but to develop alternative solutions from economic, social, and political marginalization.

Examples of this kind of work are too abundant to fully describe in this report. Here are three case studies including the food security movement, water rights movement, and movement for accountable development and community benefits.

# Food Security Movement



The USDA defines food insecurity as “limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.” In Southeast Michigan, more than 707,000 people (16.8 percent of the population) are food insecure, and more than 200,000 of those are children. In a nation and state with abundant food resources, this is unacceptable.

Despite federal and large-scale nonprofit programs to address hunger, the problem persists. One reason for this, according to a 2015 report by the Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society, is that the centralized, corporatized food production and distribution systems that have evolved in recent decades have created structural barriers to fair and equitable food access.

Grassroots groups are working to change that balance of power by developing innovative solutions to these problems that place the capacity to secure food in the hands of the people. Their goal, according to Detroit Food Policy Council Executive Director Winona Bynum, is “healthy, culturally appropriate food that is accessible both economically and logistically to all residents in our neighborhoods.”

These groups are working beyond food security, towards equitable food access and food sovereignty. They are finding ways to re-localize the production and distribution of food. They are re-creating a food system that is responsive to the needs of local residents, where people can shape and participate in the system. They do this work through a dizzying array of community-based programs. Here is a sampling of some key organizations and movements making a difference.

## Grassroots Solutions

### Food Policy and Programming

The Detroit Food Policy Council is “an education, advocacy and policy organization led by Detroiters committed to creating a sustainable, local food system that promotes food security, food justice and food sovereignty in the city of Detroit.”

The Detroit Food & Fitness Collaborative is “a group of 40 organizations developing ways to ensure that everyone in Detroit – especially the most vulnerable children – has access to affordable, healthy, locally grown food and opportunities to be physically active.”

### Food Entrepreneurship

FoodLab Detroit is “a community of food entrepreneurs committed to making the possibility of good food in Detroit a sustainable reality. We design, build, and maintain systems to grow a diverse ecosystem of triple-bottom-line food businesses as part of a good food movement that is accountable to all Detroiters.” Foodlab works with partners like Eastern Market Corporation on projects like Detroit Kitchen Connect to “provide a supportive, diverse, inclusive community along with access to commercial, licensed kitchen facilities and equipment in a reduced risk environment.”

### Food Justice

The Detroit Food Justice Task Force is “a consortium of People of Color-led organizations and allies that share a commitment to creating a food security plan for Detroit that is: sustainable; that provides healthy, affordable foods for all of the city’s people; that is based on best-practices and programs that work; and that is just and equitable in the distribution of food and jobs.” An example of this work is Just Creative, a “justice based media education and design company” that uses “media to raise awareness around social justice issues and challenge dominant narratives,” particularly around food issues.

### Food Sovereignty

The Detroit Black Food Security Network addresses “food insecurity in Detroit’s Black community” and organizes “members of that community to play a more active leadership role in the local food security movement.” The group operates an urban farm and a buying club, and is actively pursuing establishment of a cooperatively owned grocery store complex.

People’s Kitchen Detroit works directly in neighborhoods to build food sovereignty by “co-creating a safe, respectful and inclusive space where Detroiters can access affordable healthy local and bulk foods, learn and share empowering skills to plan and prepare healthy meals, holistically manage and prevent disease, and preserve local harvests while building community strength through food security, activism and a deeper connection to the Earth.”

American Indian Health and Family Services works to secure traditional, culturally appropriate foods for metro Detroit’s Native American population. They help people buy and grow culturally relevant foods that are hard to find at grocery stores, like heirloom beans, corn and squash.

Feed ‘em Freedom and Southwest Detroit Grows are neighborhood-based food justice projects that grow youth leadership, community power, and resilience in the process of growing food.

### Food Access

Perhaps no other group directly affects as many Detroiters as the Detroit Public Schools Office of School Nutrition, which “supports the educational development of our students by providing healthy breakfast and hot nutritional lunch to all students in grades K-12 at no charge.” The Detroit office of the Ecology Center works with local community health organizations to deliver the Fresh Prescriptions program that helps low-income individuals with health challenges eat more healthfully to manage their health conditions. The Black Mothers Breastfeeding Club-Detroit works to support new Black families to give their babies a healthy start in life through breastfeeding.

### Urban Farming

With the passage of Detroit’s Urban Agriculture Ordinance in 2014, the number of urban farms and gardens in the city has exploded, now estimated at more than 1,400 individual projects and growing. Keep Growing Detroit and its Garden Resource Program directly supports that work in Detroit, Highland Park, and Hamtramck by distributing “seeds and Detroit-grown transplants” and facilitating a “growing network of gardeners and advocates working to promote urban agriculture within a thriving local food system.” The Greening of Detroit and anchor farms like the Earthworks Urban Farm at the Capuchin Soup Kitchen are also very active in leading and supporting urban agriculture in the city.

At the same time, the urban agriculture movement in Detroit is increasingly polarized and racialized, with political support swaying towards large-scale commercial farming operations such as Hantz Farms and media attention favoring young, white-led organizations like the Recovery Park.

We need to work to establish—and fund—an urban agriculture sector in the city grounded in seeking equity and justice for residents before profits and led by people of color. Grassroots organizations leading in this area include the Detroit Black Food Security Network and the Oakland Avenue Urban Farm.

According to Winona Bynum, Executive Director of the Detroit Food Policy Council, philanthropy has a role to play in supporting and sustaining these grassroots efforts by supporting infrastructure and balancing giving between immediate needs and long-term solutions. “So many times, it’s easier to fund a program that actually hands out food,” she says. “Those are needed. But we also need to support work towards long-term change.”

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## The Farm Bill Report:

Power and Structural Racialization in the U.S. Food System  
[haasinstitute.berkeley.edu/farm-bill-report-corporate-power-and-structural-racialization-us-food-system](https://haasinstitute.berkeley.edu/farm-bill-report-corporate-power-and-structural-racialization-us-food-system)

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# Water Rights Movement

When Detroit began accelerating resident water shutoffs in 2013, an issue that had been building for decades reached a boiling point.

“It’s been almost a 40-year struggle around access to water,” says Monica Lewis-Patrick, co-founder of We The People of Detroit. The group works on community coalition-building and to “inform, train and mobilize the residents of Detroit to improve their quality of life,” particularly in the area of water as a human right.

“As Detroit began to have white flight in the late ‘60s, early ‘70s, and then black flight in the ‘70s and ‘80s, a system that was meant to service about 2 million people within the city of Detroit ended up providing services to 126 municipalities spanning seven southeast Michigan counties,” she says. “But all of the debt associated with that system stayed with the city of Detroit,” says Lewis-Patrick, “even though it was providing this massive infrastructure to almost half the state of Michigan.”

**The result:** the Detroit Water and Sewerage Board increased rates for the citizens of Detroit, many of whom could ill afford to pay.

The struggle began to gain steam in the 1990s, when Michigan Welfare Rights began advocating for families who were unable to pay their water bill during Clinton-era welfare cuts. The crisis continued to mount.

“By 2002, we became gravely aware of the deep water affordability crisis that was affecting Highland Park and Detroit residents,” says Sylvia Orduño of Michigan Welfare Rights. “We visited the homes of low income seniors, many poor families and even met a medically-retired police officer to learn that he and thousands of residents were suffering in silence with no running water at home.”

Then as the financial crisis hit Detroit, even more people found themselves unable to pay their water bills. But it wasn’t until Detroit filed for bankruptcy that water shutoffs began to pick up in earnest.

“That’s when you saw Emergency Management come in and be used as a tool to extract more assets from the people,” says Lewis-Patrick. “And so in 2013, when they were prepping for the bankruptcy, that’s when we saw the increase in water shutoffs.”

At that time, Detroit’s Emergency Manager ordered water shutoffs for residential customers more than two months behind or owing more than \$150.

Charity Hicks, who became a flashpoint for the water rights movement in 2014 when she was detained in jail after confronting a contractor sent to shut off her water, brought water advocates across the city together to unite behind the People’s Water Board. The goal of the organization is to “advocate for access, protection, and conservation of water,” in the belief that water is a human right and a “commons that should be held in the public trust free of privatization.”

## Grassroots Solutions

In June 2014, activists submitted a report to the United Nations detailing the shutoffs. The UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner decreed the shutoffs to be a violation of human rights without verifying ability to pay.

In the meantime, as the city ramped up shutoffs, We The People set up rapid response water delivery at local stations and a water rights hotline. Support came from across the nation. Other groups such as Food and Water Watch, the Sierra Club and Michigan Welfare Rights are working on shaping policy response.

A class-action lawsuit filed against the city in 2015, led by activist litigator Alice Jennings and supported by NAACP Legal Defense Fund and the ACLU of Michigan, was struck down by bankruptcy judge Steven Rhodes, who ruled that Detroit residents “do not have a right to water service, they do not have the right to water based on the ability to pay.”

“The movement’s main goal is to achieve water affordability, which means clean, safe, and accessible water for every resident in the city of Detroit,” says Lewis-Patrick.

**“The movement’s main goal is to achieve water affordability, which means clean, safe, and accessible water for every resident in the city of Detroit.”**

The Michigan Welfare Rights Organization led the development of an income-based water affordability plan which Detroit City Council adopted in 2005, but the plan was never implemented. Instead, the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department (DWSD) adopted assistance plans that did little to staunch the underlying problem of Detroiters being unable to pay their water bills. That plan was later replaced by a similar Water Rate Assistance Plan (WRAP) when the regional Great Lakes Water Authority replaced DWSD coming out of Detroit's bankruptcy in 2015. The People's Water Board and some officials are renewing calls for a water affordability plan, such as the income-based plan that the City of Philadelphia passed in 2015.

In the meantime, Detroit (and now Flint) has become a national and global symbol for water rights and environmental justice, and the faith-based community is developing education around the moral dimensions of water shutoffs. Public health advocates are also raising concerns about the impact of water shutoffs on the overall health of the population here in the city.

"What we know is that when one house is shut off from water on a block, it increases the probability of health contamination for that block by 100 percent," says Lewis-Patrick. "We also know that water shut offs have driven up foreclosures, which is counterproductive to what we say we want to see in the city of Detroit." This is due to a 2006 Detroit Water Department decision to roll unpaid water bills onto property taxes.

What's more, significant inequities in how shutoffs are administered have emerged, according to Lila Cabbil of People's Water Board, a grassroots coalition of three dozen Southeast Michigan organizations founded in 2008 that are "working together to protect public water systems from pollution, high water rates and privatization."

"Over the years, uncapped and running water has always been a problem in the system," says Cabbil. "Residents end up having to pay for losses in the system. We exposed flaws in notification and affordability. Collections have focused on residents, not corporations." As for Orduño, she never foresaw the problem spiraling so far out of control.

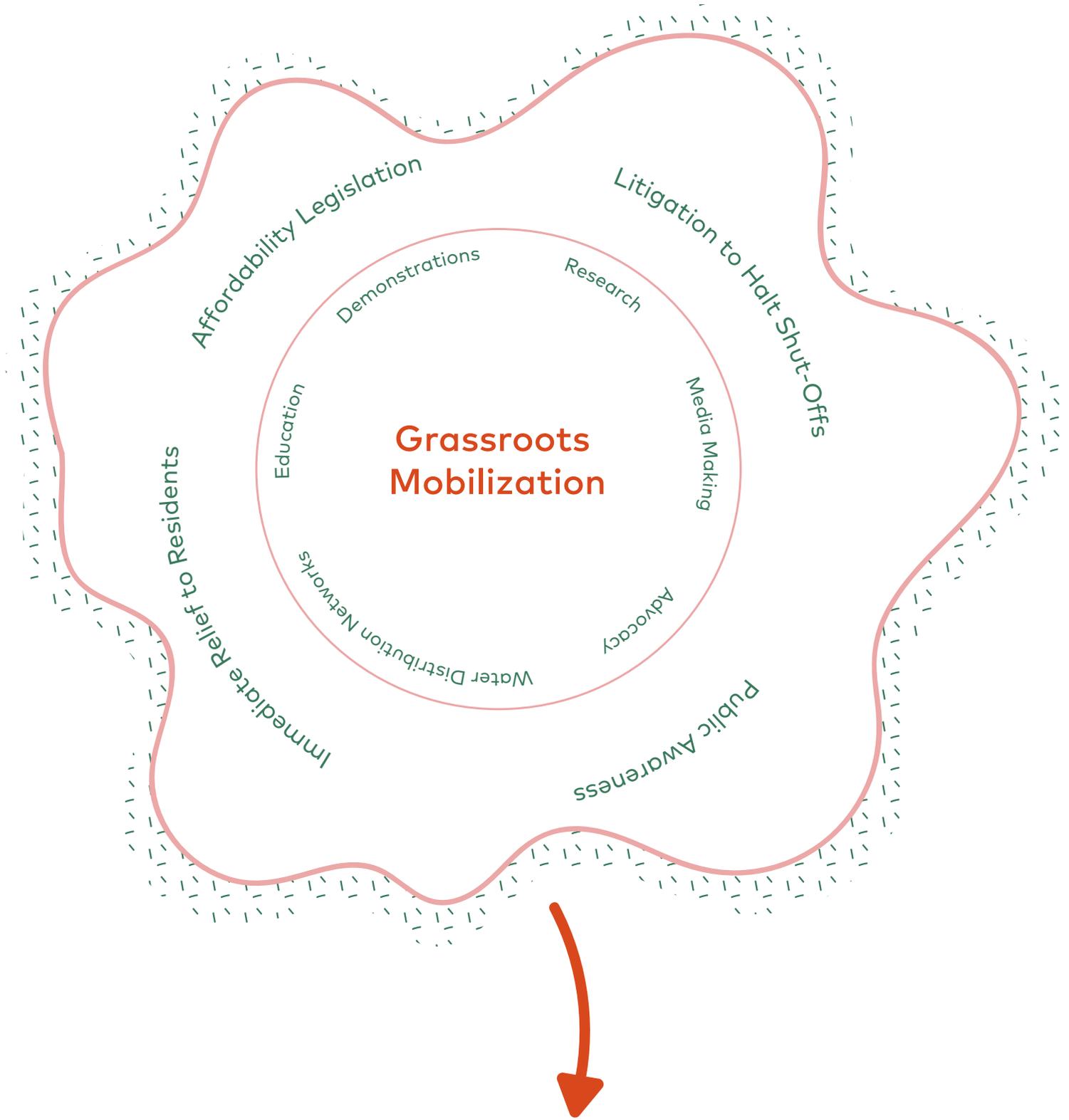
"We never imagined that we would see this crisis become worse and as widespread as it is today," she says. "Fourteen years later, over one quarter of Detroit households — or nearly 150,000 residents — have experienced water shutoffs by the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department because of their inability to afford the cost of service."

A comprehensive water affordability policy is necessary for Detroit to address this ongoing crisis. In the meantime, immediate action to provide relief to Detroiters without water is also necessary. To date, the grassroots organizations who have been developing and working to implement these solutions have received little to no support from major philanthropic institutions.

A recent study by Michigan State University projected that in five years, 35% of United States residents will be unable to afford water. Detroit has the opportunity to pioneer the holistic solutions to water affordability that the rest of the country will soon need.\*

**\* See: "A Burgeoning Crisis: A Nationwide Assessment of the Geography of Water Affordability in the United States," Mack, Elizabeth A.; Wrase, Sarah**

Grassroots Solutions



Clean, safe, affordable water for every resident of Detroit

# Movement for Accountable Development and Community Benefits

As targeted redevelopment in Midtown and Downtown Detroit moves ahead, grassroots organizations are working to ensure the benefits of that development are distributed equitably among residents of the city.

The movement to secure community benefits in Detroit began as plans for the international crossing between Detroit and Windsor began surfacing, and picked up steam as plans for the M-1 Rail (now QLine), Whole Foods Market and the new Red Wings hockey stadium were first announced.

According to Linda Campbell of Detroit People's Platform, the idea for the ordinance first emerged at the urging of families who attend the Storehouse of Hope Food Pantry, part of Detroit's North End Woodward Community Coalition.

"This is such an important example to validate that these are truly grassroots movements, when we acknowledge the role of folks who are most negatively impacted by inequitable development in shaping their own solutions," says Campbell.

The community benefits movement began in California in the 1990s. Its first major success was the landmark STAPLES Center Community Benefits Agreement in 2001, which established a private contract between the developers of the stadium and representatives of the host community. The agreement set standards for benefits to accrue to the community as a result of the development, including parks and recreation, prevailing wages, training and hiring of local residents and a parking program for residents among other terms. In return, the community agreed to support the project.

In 2013, residents from the North End, Detroit began working with Council Members Joanne Watson and Brenda Jones on a community benefits ordinance for the city. They worked in conjunction with city economic development staff and considered input from developers that would be impacted by it. In 2014, the Equitable Detroit Coalition was formed. The coalition represents more than 200 groups and organizations from across the city that are working together to fuel the CBA ordinance movement.

## Grassroots Solutions

Their proposed ordinance would require a developer who obtained a public subsidy of \$300,000 or more for a project valued at \$15 million dollars or more to create a legally binding Community Benefits Agreement between the host neighborhood and themselves. In response to prolonged city inaction on the ordinance, community organizers obtained more than 5,000 signatures to place the issue on the November, 8 2016 ballot.

“Developers got \$284 million to build a hockey stadium, and 75 percent of the cost to build this hockey stadium comes from public tax revenue, with \$18 million of that coming out of classrooms because we’re not collecting a tax that would’ve went towards Detroit Public Schools,” says Rashida Tlaib, former state representative and Community Partnerships & Development Director for the Sugar Law Center. “This is money that would go to our city services to support a number of issues that we all are facing right now as Detroit homeowners and families.”

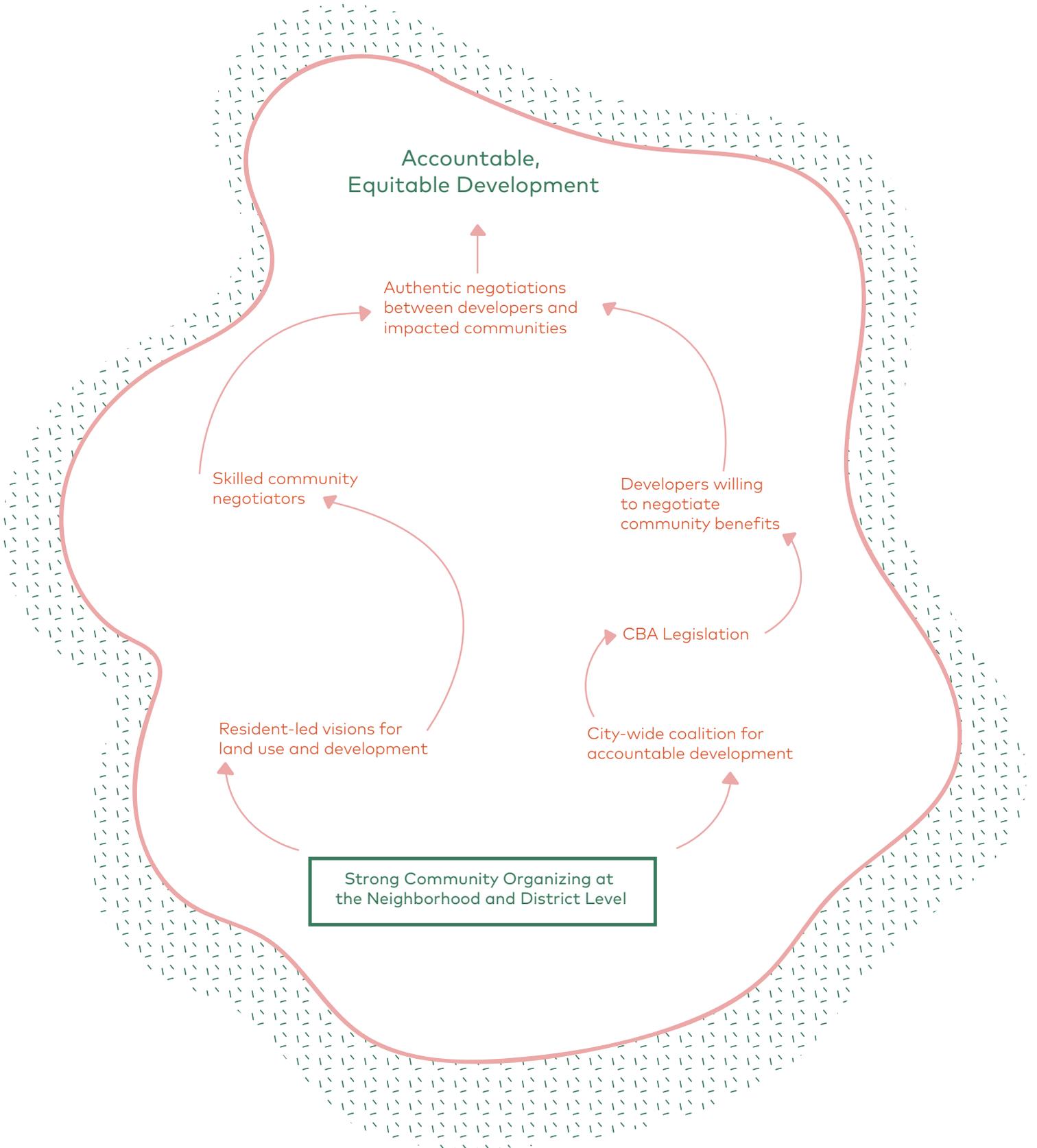
Tlaib notes that the legal enforcement mechanism and ability for residents to leverage concessions is inherent to the success of such an ordinance. She points to the failure of informal community benefits agreements made without community oversight, such as a \$175 million subsidy made to the Marathon Oil Refinery in exchange for 100 jobs.

“That’s \$11 million per job,” she says. “And we already have one of five children with asthma in that host neighborhood, high rates of cancer. In the end, we got 15 jobs. The city did not go back to Marathon, but if we had a Community Benefits Agreement we would’ve been able to take them to court and go through the process to actually get them to comply with what they agreed upon.”

On November 8, 2016, Detroiters voted against business as usual by casting nearly 100,000 votes for the community-led Proposal A Community Benefit Ordinance. This was despite a massive counter-campaign financed by corporate interests and a competing and confusing ordinance put forth by City Council, called Proposal B.

While Proposal A lost to Proposal B by roughly 15,000 votes, the broad-based coalition of groups working for community benefits continue to monitor development and public investment and organize residents to demand fair and equitable development that benefits all Detroiters.

# Accountable, Equitable Development



## Grassroots Solutions

Beyond the ordinance, community organizers are also working towards real community benefits in other ways. One example is Detroit People's Platform's work to create a community land trust that can hold land in the commons to ensure affordable housing in perpetuity. In late 2015, the group successfully crowdfunded to secure several homes to launch the Storehouse of Hope Community Land Trust and keep Detroiters facing tax foreclosure in their homes. The group has also convened a Detroit Community Land Trust Coalition and developed a set of land policy recommendations for the Detroit Land Bank Authority.

The Detroit People's Platform has put forth the following statement on displacement:

**Detroit People's Platform asserts that growth—inclusive or otherwise—is not an end in its own right and cannot include displacement. Instead, we suggest that growth, seemingly used as a synonym for development must focus on improving the quality of life in the city by stabilizing real estate in such a way that new and existing residents alike benefit from reinvestment. If the idea, as proposed by the author of a newly released report on displacement and development is that we “equitably” relocate folks to areas outside of the special tax districts where this improvement is happening, those residents don't really benefit at all. They're just being moved out of the way—out of the way of “progress” and growth. This seems like far too low of a bar to set, especially considering the historical debt that is owed to Black Detroiters, given the deliberate economic disinvestment and displacement from communities like Black Bottom and Paradise Valley. Therefore, we advocate for a policy of no displacement. We simply do not accept the notion that the rights of capital supersede the rights of people to remain in their homes.**

# A Philanthropic Disconnect in Detroit

Funders and community organizers read and discuss the 12 Recommendations at a funder briefing organized by AMP and DPP in November 2015



In large part, Detroit's philanthropic sector has not been aware of or supportive of these incredible grassroots movements over the past several decades. To the extent that local foundations have supported groups named in this report that support is rarely sizeable or consistent and, on the whole, accounts for a negligible percentage of total philanthropic spending.

# Philanthropy in Detroit 2010-2015

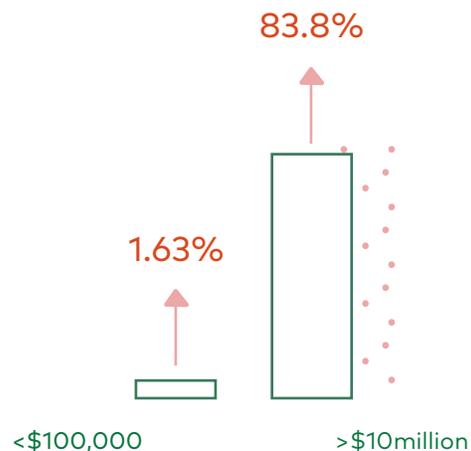
Allied Media Projects and Detroit People's Platform worked with the Detroit Ledger, an independent research organization that catalogues grant spending in the city, to determine how philanthropic resources are being spent in Detroit. The analysis shows a preference for large grants and a lack of funding for grassroots organizations working on social justice causes.

The findings here are based on an analysis of this data provided by the Detroit Ledger, which sources its data from publically reported IRS 990 forms, foundation websites, federal data portals, news articles, and press releases. While we acknowledge some limitations in the data and analysis described here, we believe the trends presented portray an accurate picture of Detroit philanthropy between 2010 and 2015.

In order from most giving to least, the 11 top-spending private foundations between 2010 and 2015 include:

- Kresge Foundation (**\$206,419,408**)
- Ford Foundation (**\$159,221,946**)
- W.K. Kellogg Foundation (**\$141,817,649**)
- John S. and James L. Knight Foundation (**\$83,264,384**)
- Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan (**\$82,812,473**)
- United Way for Southeastern Michigan (**\$73,528,440**)
- Skillman Foundation (**\$55,282,700**)
- William Davidson Foundation (**\$46,063,000**)
- General Motors Foundation, Inc (**\$39,435,931**)
- Hudson-Webber Foundation (**\$33,173,455**)
- New Economy Initiative (**\$32,853,262**)

## The analysis shows:

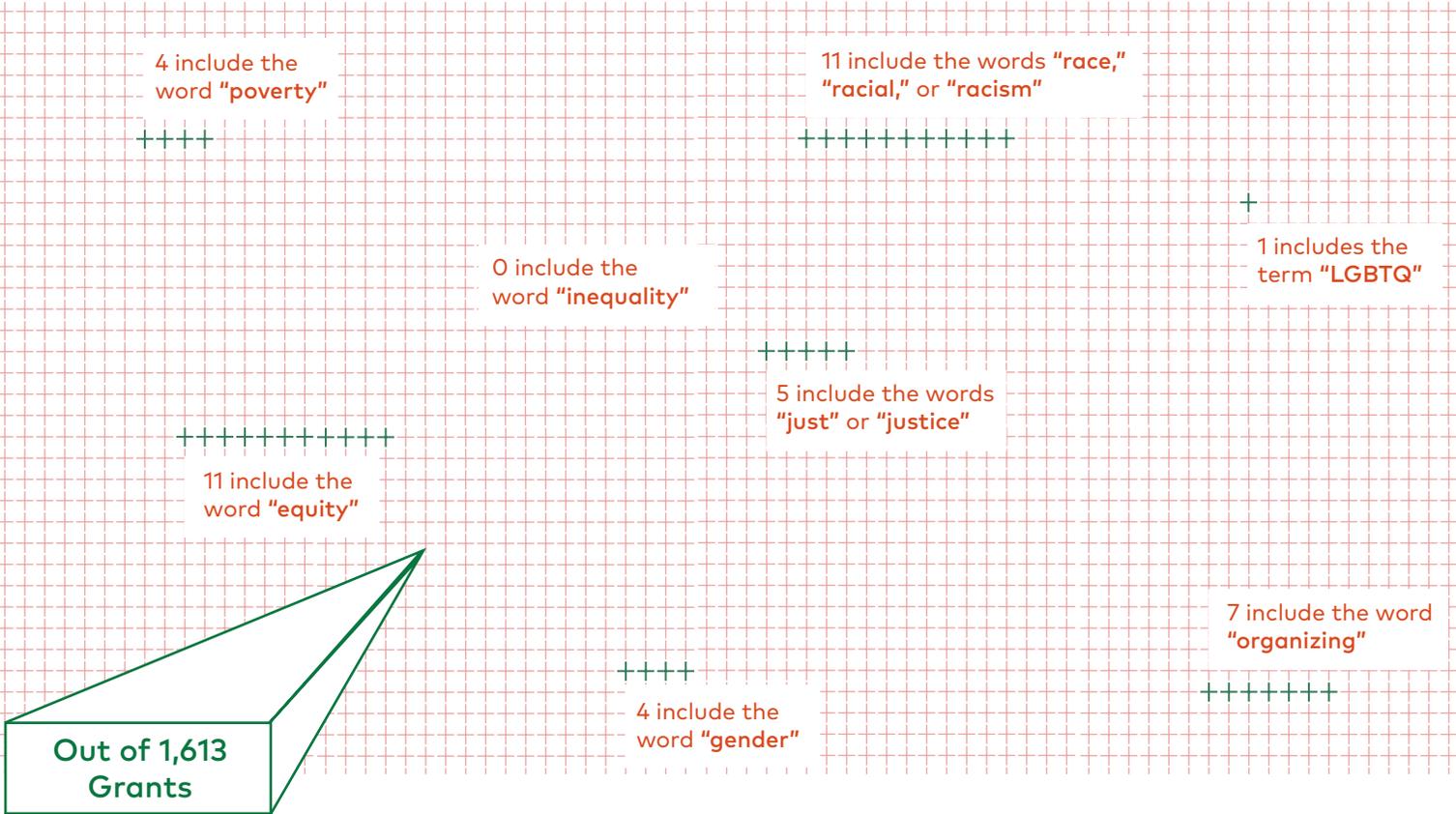


These **11** foundations made **3,671** grants to **680** recipients, amounting to a total of **\$953,872,648**. Of this, **\$345,000,000** went towards the Grand Bargain, an agreement between foundations, city officials, unions and retirees, and the state legislature to help resolve the city's bankruptcy.

Only **1.63** percent of funding went to organizations with budgets of **\$100,000** or less.

The majority of funding (**83.8 percent**) went to organizations with budgets of **\$10** million or more.

Forty-four percent of the grants catalogued by Detroit Ledger (1,613 grants) had a publicly accessible description. In searching for keywords important to the concerns of community organizers, we found that only:



While these numbers are not comprehensive, they reveal a clear pattern and offer quantitative evidence of a perception that is widely held by grassroots organizers in Detroit.

# Philanthropic Support Fueling Inequity in Detroit

At the same time the philanthropic community has missed opportunities to support grassroots organizations working on social justice in Detroit, it has actively supported projects that at best, offer incomplete solutions, and at worst, fuel inequity and undermine grassroots efforts. Notable examples include:

## M-1 Rail/QLine

The M-1 Rail/QLine project has absorbed massive philanthropic and public resources to gird the real estate development ambitions of a small minority of power brokers in the city, while threatening the solvency of small, local businesses. The social harm created by the Q Line further contributes to the notion of the “two Detroits” and illustrates the growing class and racial divide between Midtown/Downtown and other Detroit neighborhoods.

According to an analysis by Progress Michigan, only approximately five percent of the city’s population is within a 15-minute walking distance of the line, and eight percent within a 30-minute walking distance.

The project did not start out this way. Originally, it was conceived as a light rail system to function as a trunkline to bring people in and out of Downtown from surrounding neighborhoods and suburbs, which would have advanced metro Detroit’s inadequate public transit system overall.

Instead, corporate interests leveraged their goals, transforming that project into what is now viewed as essentially a trolley line which will travel in a 3.3 mile loop between Downtown and New Center. The project is designed to maximize real estate values held by a minority of investors while offering little practical assistance to those in need of public transportation.

## Detroit Land Bank Authority

The DLBA has yet to develop transparent pathways for Detroiters, particularly low-income residents, to purchase land. In the meantime, the DLBA has pursued an aggressive blight removal program absent of resident input or oversight that has proven devastating to neighborhoods.

According to WSU Law Professor Peter Hammer, the Detroit Blight Task Force Report’s agenda places demolition as the top and only priority, allocating \$850 million dollars to demolish 80,000 structures while creating only 430 jobs. The program, in conjunction with the Wayne County Tax Foreclosure Auction, establishes mechanisms to transfer private land to public ownership, from which point it can be reassembled and redistributed. This “exit financing,” coming out of Detroit’s bankruptcy, borrows new money to tear buildings down but does not invest in people and communities.

## Downtown Development Authority

As Detroit emerges from a bankruptcy that reduced the pensions of retired city workers, massive philanthropic and public resources are pouring into private development plans through the Downtown Development Authority, including a \$285 million tax subsidy for the Red Wings arena entertainment district. The result, absent a strong Community Benefits Agreement, is a severe reduction of low-income and subsidized rental unit housing in Downtown and Midtown.

Already, seniors have been forced out of affordable and subsidized senior housing as buildings are bought and repurposed as luxury housing. Without a plan for the equitable distribution of development benefits and affordable housing, philanthropic support for this development serves to further concentrate power and resources in the hands of the wealthy at the expense of Detroit’s most vulnerable populations.

### Detroit Water Assistance Program

The assistance program, both under the auspices of the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department and in its new incarnation under the Great Lakes Water Authority, is entirely divorced from the reality of the ability of low-income Detroit households to pay for unaffordable water bills, offers scant protection from water shutoffs, and ignores the broader public health and humanitarian impacts of shutoffs. Philanthropic support for this program underscores a lack of understanding of the structural inequities in this system and ongoing harm to vulnerable communities.

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### Summary

Philanthropic support for initiatives such as those described here not only fuels false or incomplete solutions, it can have harmful ripple effects within the nonprofit and community organizing ecosystem. For example, a grassroots group working against displacement may receive funding from the same foundation as a development group that is advancing displacement. This is self-defeating for the foundation, but furthermore, it creates the perception that the grassroots group is legitimizing or off-setting the more harmful activities of the foundation. Alternately, a foundation may decide to support a nonprofit to address a critical issue such as water shutoffs. But the constraints of the funding effectively prohibit that group from addressing the root causes of water shutoffs through advocacy and organizing. These groups are then viewed by community members as gatekeepers to scarce resources. Over time, these dynamics erode trust and goodwill within our communities.

# Towards Bridging Gaps Between Philanthropy and Community Organizing

Our purpose in pointing out these gaps is not to cast aspersions. Instead, we seek to build a process of mutual listening and learning to build an environment where philanthropy and transformative community organizing can work synergistically in Detroit for the betterment of the city. We will continue to invite Detroit funders to engage in dialogue and learn about the role of community organizing in Detroit's revitalization and how they can be a part of it.

Allied Media Projects and Detroit People's Platform sought responses to this information from representatives of the funder community. See below a sampling of the responses (edited for clarity).

## Edward Egnatios, W. K. Kellogg Foundation

- Grassroots organizations getting money from foundations is important. But how do we ensure that residents' voices are strengthened and supported, and are a part of this reshaping of Detroit's future? Grassroots organizations have a key role, but it's not the only role. The issue is resident voice, representation, co-ownership over their own destiny. It's not just about how you help small groups get money. Kellogg funds small organizations in Detroit through a Community Connections fund in seven targeted neighborhoods with a goal to extend city-wide. Applicants do not have to have a 501(c)(3) but must have a bank account. They can submit the application on paper, and technical assistance is available. Turnaround is fast; typically a decision is made in one month.

## Don Chen and Chris Cardona, Ford Foundation

- In the same way that it's important for foundations to understand the reality of groups on the ground, it's also important for them to understand foundations' realities. This discussion is an opportunity to get to a shared understanding of each other's reality and a shared set of goals and a path for getting there that builds on those realities. We advocate for more time spent sharing information and increasing transparency.

- Because we are a social justice foundation, we understand the importance of social movements and grassroots, community-based organizations, but one of the challenges for us is that we're a big foundation. The average size of our grants is somewhere in the \$300,000 range. It's hard to give bigish grants to small organizations, partly because of IRS rules, and also just because some of these organizations, if they're very small, it's hard for them to absorb and manage a large grant. One way that we get around our limitations is by giving a big grant to one organization and then there are a number of pass-throughs. If big foundations like ours are interested in doing this kind of work, to a degree we need to rely on intermediaries to do it.

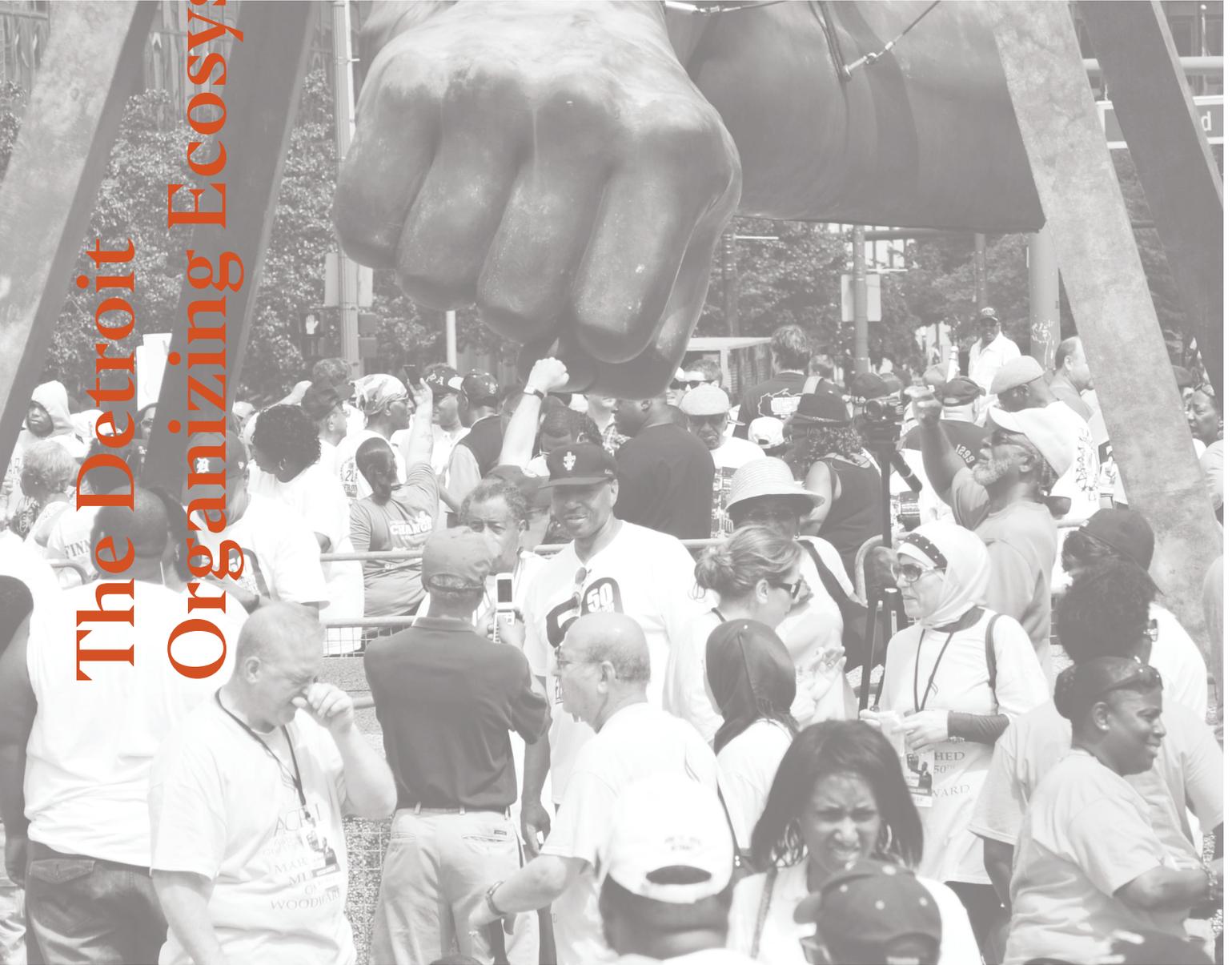
Following the initial publication of the 12 Recommendations for Detroit Funders, AMP and DPP convened a series of community-funder dialogue sessions which generated many other thoughtful responses from members of Detroit's philanthropic community. We believe that continuing this kind of frank, respectful dialogue is crucial to building new relationships of trust and collaboration between funders and community organizers in Detroit. We want to acknowledge the following foundations for their active engagement in those conversations throughout 2016:

**The Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan, The Erb Family Foundation, The Ford Foundation, The W. K. Kellogg Foundation, The Kresge Foundation, The New Economy Initiative, and The Ralph C. Wilson Foundation.**

We also appreciate feedback we received on the 12 Recommendations from the **John S. and James L. Knight Foundation** and the **Max M. and Marjorie S. Fisher Foundation.**

# The Detroit Organizing Ecosystem

Detroiters gathering Downtown to protest mass water shutoffs, June 2015.

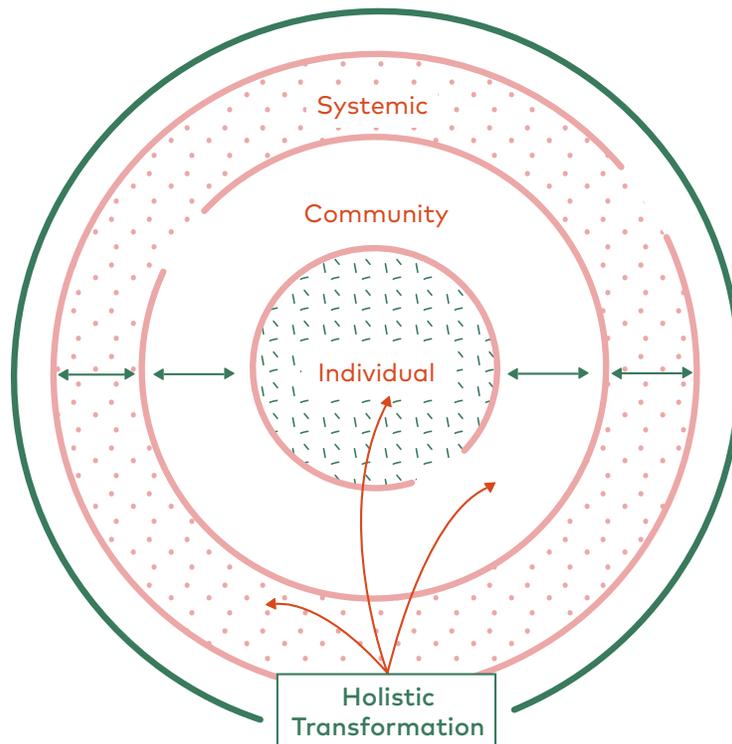


As part of this work, Allied Media Projects and Detroit People's Platform convened grassroots community leaders to help define the landscape for community organizing in Detroit. The following characteristics of effective community organizing emerged from that conversation.

# Values & Attributes of Effective Community Organizing in Detroit

## Effective organizing in Detroit...

- Understands how structural racism compounds all forms of inequality in our region and actively works to dismantle it.
- Identifies the causes and effects of Detroit's poverty levels and seeks short-term and long-term solutions to its eradication.
- Seeks out and implements holistic solutions, particularly ones that address the intersections of multiple experiences of oppression and marginalization, rather than single issues.
- Advocates for participatory and democratic governance of our city, while modeling participatory and democratic processes within the governance of our organizations.
- Ensures that the people who are most impacted by a problem are defining the solution.
- Builds long-term strategies for transforming individuals and systems of power.
- Values personal experiences alongside analysis of power structures.
- Is informed by deep knowledge of history.
- Embraces a diversity of tactics.
- Takes into consideration the barriers that may prevent residents from participating, such as low literacy, transportation, technology, English language proficiency, health and disability limitations, child care restrictions, etc., and designs engagement strategies accordingly.



# In the Words of Community Organizers: Illustrative Quotes

Community organizers were encouraged to speak freely, while we committed to presenting their comments anonymously.

## What organizing looks like in Detroit

**"Organizing is building community** capacity and community leadership for folks to have access, or to create their own access, to resources that allow them to sustain their lives wherever they are. It's teaching folks how to grow their own food, cook what they grow, and preserve what they grow."

**"People come first,** period. Agitation, litigation and education are the tenets that we try to use—building on all three in some form of the work, and then connectivity. Trying to connect with folks that are doing the same work or similar work."

**"Detroit is unlike many cities** in that individuals and communities spend so much time and effort building infrastructure around them that doesn't exist."

**"When our neighborhood watch goes around and talks to all the neighbors** and makes sure everybody is good. Once somebody is facing foreclosure, we go around and talk to all the neighbors about how we can support them."

**"The only way to engage people is to go where they are,** door to door. You just have to be mindful of who's around you. Are there block clubs that are already there? Are there other organizations that have a similar vision? We need to make sure that they're at the table. Are there churches there?"

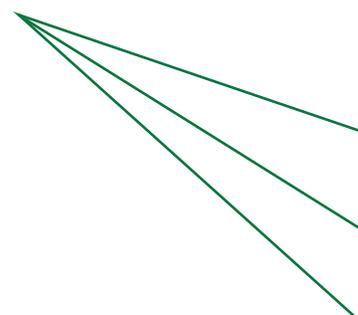
## Limitations in community organizing

**"We're still somewhat in the space of scarcity consciousness and competition** although I work between a lot of communities and I have a lot of people that I call friends, there are a lot of rifts between different people in these communities."

**"When people get used you get bitterness, you get anger, distrust builds up.** Being transparent and what it means to build powerful intentional relationships rather than transactional is important."

**"Because of the depth of the crisis, we're really forced to work at levels that are probably not healthy.** When we're constantly in this crisis mode, it's hard to do that kind of recruiting and spend that time developing people and their skills and their well-being in it."

**"You got to really commit some money to people that have been effective at doing community organizing,** and pay them a comparable salary, so that they are not getting swept away by the corporate enticements, because we need brilliance at this side of the table."



## Philanthropic Funding and Community Organizing in Detroit



Monica Lewis-Patrick of We the People of Detroit and Sylvia Orduño of the Michigan Welfare Rights Organization present about water shutoffs at the Allied Media Conference in 2015.

In the words of  
community organizers

**"The majority of our community still relates a lot by fliers,** where as we're in these conferences at an international level that are talking about technology and disseminating information by blasts and thunderclaps; when you're in a community where they're just struggling to get access to the internet to do their homework."

**"Increase the capacity of small, not coincidentally women-of-color-led organizations.** So where as any of them individually may have a harder time raising money, collectively we're a lot stronger and in some cases scarier in a good way, and so we really flex our muscle that way together."

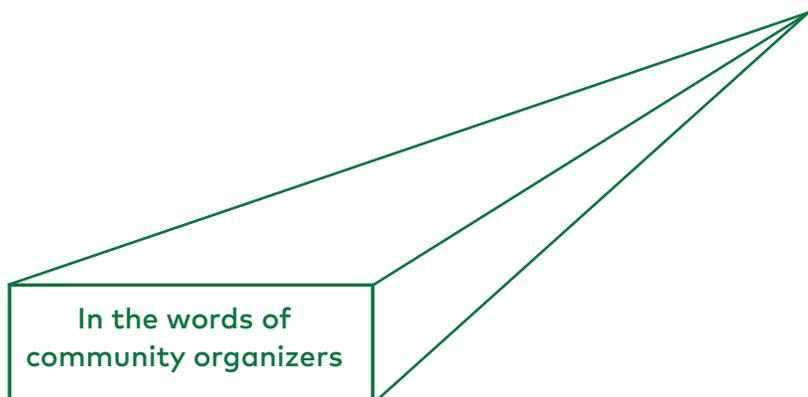
**"A lot of people in our community have this mentality that capital is bad.** It's been used as a weapon, of course, for several centuries against all native people of the world. How to transmute that and see it as a tool that's useful in building infrastructure and sustainability."

**"Check out and hang out and just be a part of neighborhoods** and connecting us to other neighborhoods across the country. I think that networking component is really key if the people do the work, the people who fund the work, I think it's good meeting all the actors."

### How community organizers can be stronger together

**"Being clear on who does what and then who does what well.** I know there are some things right now we're carrying so that there's not a gap in services or a gap in community connectedness, but it's not what we do best and we would really like to hand it off. "

**"Pay organizing collaboratives where we actually share costs for back of the house.** We can actually figure out how we can leverage funding resources together."



**“I would hope that what they would do is come to the table with an open mind and a clean slate, trusting that we are the experts and the people that we serve are the experts.”**

### Concerns about funding undermining organizing

**"What happens when you professionalize movement building** is you lose the passion and the vigor and the absolute recklessness for change. Foundations will often fund the professionalization of movement building."

**"Development dressed up as community organizing** is where citizen engagement gets reduced to answering a set of false questions. That was Detroit Future City."

**"Everyone thinks everything can happen overnight,** for a funder to invest in a group. Organizing takes incremental change. You are building and strengthening people and entities, investing and then expecting that in 6 months you're going to see some magical results is unrealistic."

### Changes community organizers want to see from foundations

**"It's not just the money.** The capitalization and the structure and the culture of those organizations have to change and I think that the change will reflect how the money is spent."

**"I would hope that what they would do is really come to the table with an open mind and a clean slate,** trusting that we are the experts and the people that we serve are the experts. We're not looking to be led. We are leaders, each individual within their own right."

**"It's not enough to just say they need to spend their money on some good things,** while they continue to support the things that are harmful. The best case scenario is that they will stop funding the things that harm our community."

**"Foundations seem to have taken the attitude that we don't know what's best for our communities.** That we're sort of ignorant, and that father knows best for us and they're not really listening to us on the ground. So I think that they have to change their philosophy, back to seeing grassroots as a solution in Detroit."

### Accountable governance

**"The smaller organizations, women and people of color-led organizations so often get looked over by funders** because they're not big enough and they don't demonstrate reach. Well, guess why we're small? We have very little to work with but we're also deep which is probably more valuable than wide."

**"I think we have to be really vigilant about our processes** being very collaborative and very democratic; demanding that of those that we work with and demanding that when we have the power to set up processes and those kinds of things that we live our values on that."

**"We need public accountability sessions,** I think this business of going and listening is a really serious thing... to talk to the long time residents, to have councils that you meet with of elder people and say, 'How's it going? What should we be doing? What are you thinking about?'"

# Philanthropic Funding and Community Organizing in Detroit

## What winning looks like in Detroit

**"Detroit would be a model of post-capitalist utopia** because we have everything we need, and it's all held by community land trust and they'll never take it away."

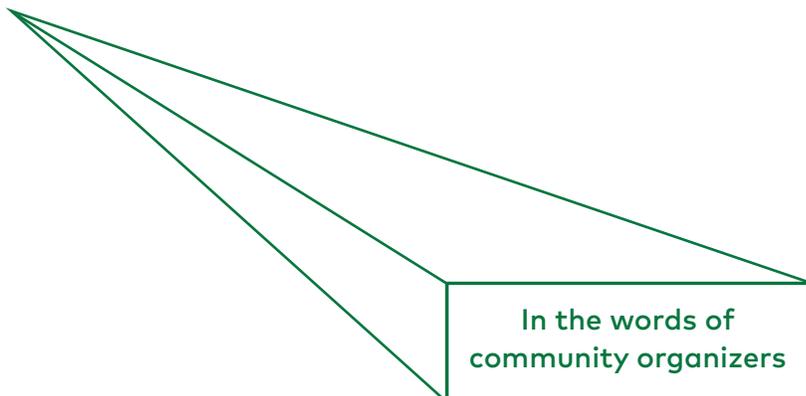
**"Democratic process for schools would be reinstated in our city.** Real ownership of our public schools again and structures put in place on the local level and city level where parents and residents and youth have a say in what's happening and real authority to make decisions."

**"Water would be a common, it would be respected,** it would be valued for the life source that it is. It would be accessible and available to all, it would be affordable."

**"Enactment of a state law that makes sure that every single worker in Michigan has access to paid sick days."**

**"Every voice in this city and every person would be taken seriously** and their lives would be considered valuable."

**"Longtime residents would feel that they had power in how this city was developing."**



# Community Organizing Tactics

The tactics described below, while not exhaustive, emerged as common themes in the interviews AMP and DPP conducted with community organizers.

## Self-determination

Community organizers build capacity in communities through tactics such as **leadership development** trainings and **skill-sharing** programs. They offer opportunities for speaking out through **creative expression**. They train people on how to raise funds and **facilitate** consensus and action. They build individual skills in technology, new economy employment, reading, writing, and language.

## Cultural Transformation

Community organizations work through culture via **street art**, music, poetry, **performance arts**, community arts **festivals** and community-based **public art** projects. They facilitate the development of galleries, performance venues and **cultural centers**, and **healing arts**.

## Grassroots Engagement

Community organizers engage their communities directly through **door-to-door** canvassing, community **meetings**, and **marches**. They use both **online and offline communications** strategies and deep listening sessions. They work with **faith communities** to engage with social justice issues and their surrounding neighborhoods. They offer **individual and group advocacy** efforts, form solutions to immediate crises, and can connect community, municipal, and private resources and services.

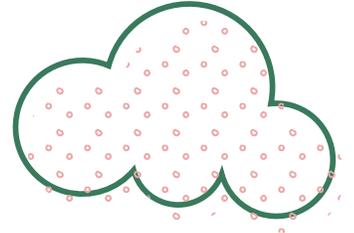
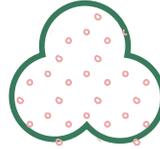
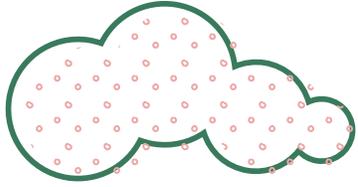
## Policy Campaigns

Community organizers develop community-driven policy solutions through careful analysis of **power structures** and **root causes**. To do this, they engage in **strategic planning**, **participatory research** and **data analysis and visualization** to inform policy development. They are expert **storytellers** with an eye for **challenging dominant narratives**. They are skilled in multi-media documentation and publicity campaigns. They bring resources for legal research, lawsuits and lobbying.

## Alternative Infrastructure & Institutions

Community organizers build systems that work when the dominant systems are failing. They create community-based **schools** and education programs. They build neighborhood **wireless** networks, neighborhood **safety** and support networks, community **radio** stations, **food** co-ops, community **farms and gardens**, community-supported agriculture programs, **maker spaces**, and fabrication labs.

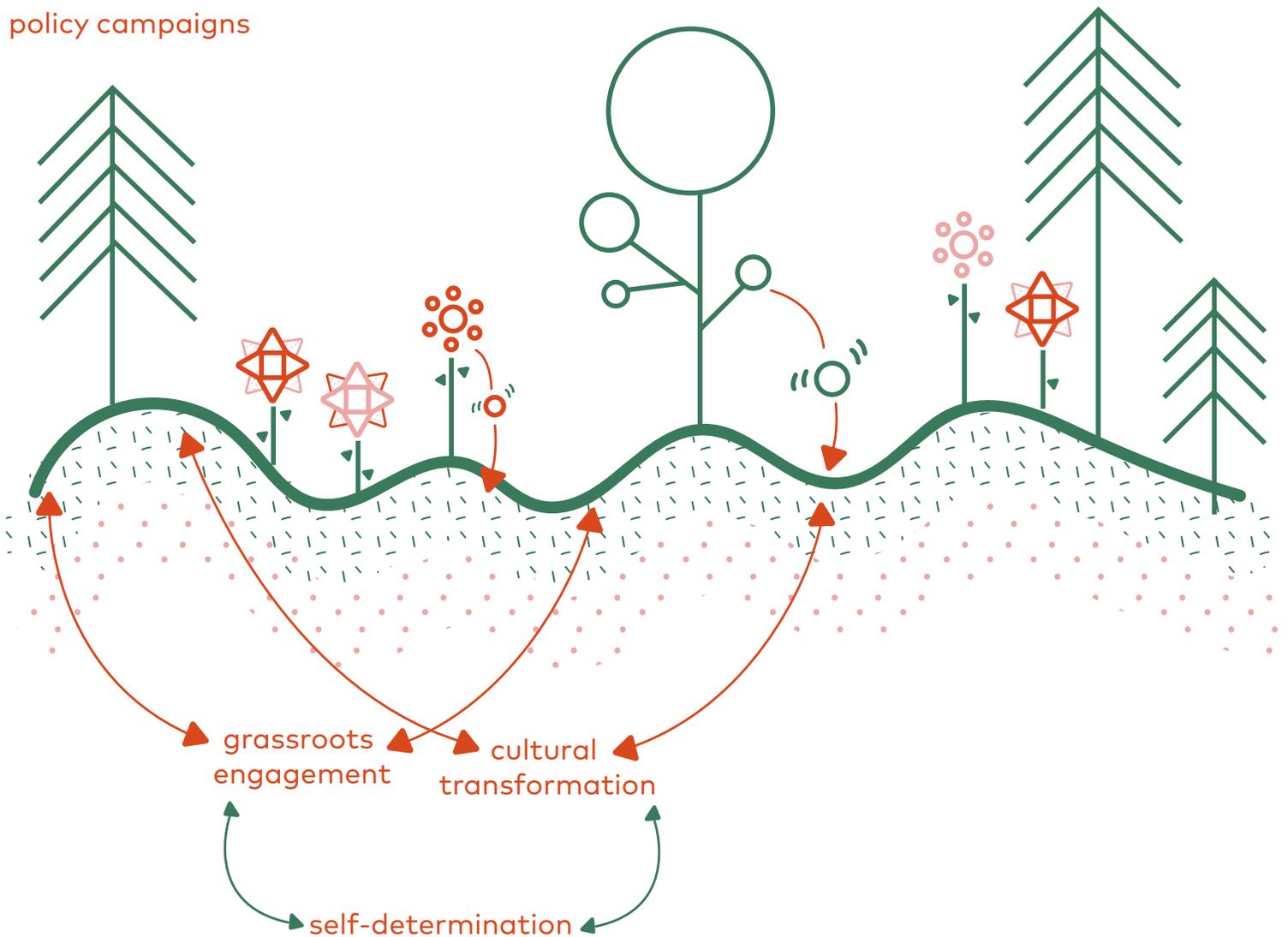
# The Detroit Organizing Ecosystem



## Ecosystem of Organizing Tactics

alternative infrastructure  
and institutions

policy campaigns



# Issues for Community Organizers in Detroit

Community organizers are working to secure the human rights of poor people to have access to basic needs like water and housing. Below are a range of issues, examples and case studies of organizations doing this work.

## Human Rights to Water, Utilities, and Housing

### Water

- Water affordability policy campaigns
- Water relief for people whose utilities have been shut off

### Utilities

- Utility shut-off moratoriums pending low income affordable rate policies
- Defense of public utility ownership
- Protection from public and private utility rate increases

### Housing

- Foreclosure relief policy campaigns
- Welfare rights advocacy against austerity
- Foreclosure eviction stoppages and reversals
- Foreclosure relief and resistance
- Homeless people's rights
- Direct support and advocacy organizing among homeless youth
- Defending unauthorized inhabitants (squatters) who need low-income affordable housing
- Redirection of blight removal funding to low income affordable housing
- Educating homeowners in jeopardy as a result of urban development plans
- Opposition to:
  - Forced removal of homeless people from certain areas of the city
  - Forced daily eviction of homeless people from shelters, especially during bad weather conditions
  - Arrest and harassment of homeless people in public areas
  - New homeowner training and support specifically for low-income residents

### Land Use

- Community land trusts
- Greenspace reclamation
- Resistance to harmful developments
- Opposition to sales of public land to private developers and enclosure/privatization of the commons i.e. parks, libraries, museums, etc.
- Community land stewardship through block clubs and associations
- Better utilization of federal HUD funding for low income affordable housing

**\*See case study on Community Development Advocates of Detroit p.42**

### Immigrant Rights

- Immigration policy reform
- Resisting deportations and racial profiling
- Creating support networks within immigrant communities
- Protection from neighborhood raids by U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement
- Workplace protections on pay, safety, and against harassment
- Non-separation of families with mixed-household U.S. citizenship

### Economic Justice

- Statewide policies such as paid sick days and \$15 minimum wage
- Cooperative business development
- Timebanking and alternative currencies
- Worker centers
- Financial management training
- Direct support and advocacy organizing among people working in sex trades and street economies
- Employment counseling, training, and placement that supports holistic needs for success

**\*See case study on Economic Justice Alliance of Michigan p.44**

### Democracy Defense and Advancement

- Resistance to emergency management
- Promotion of community advisory councils
- Advocacy for statewide redistricting to undo gerrymandering
- Elimination of quasi-authorities and public-private entities that are non-transparent, undemocratic, and unaccountable in their use of public resources

**\*See case study on Detroiters Resisting Emergency Management p.46**

### Just, Accountable Development

- City-wide Community Benefit Agreement ordinance
- Individual CBA campaigns throughout the city
- Creating networks of support for small, community-based businesses
- Small business training and development

### Anti-violence Organizing

- Resistance to police and State violence through protests and legal strategies
- Resistance to violence against women and LGBTQ communities, specifically women and LGBTQ communities of color
- Educational campaigns to raise awareness about physical and economic violence against LGBTQ communities of color
- Community-based strategies for de-escalation of violence and threats by city, county, state, and federal law enforcement authorities
- Restorative and transformative justice models
- Opposition to assaults on Detroit's transgender people
- Protesting harassment of peaceful activists in public spaces

**\*See case study on Detroit Area Restorative Justice Center p.48**

### Digital Justice

- Advocacy for national policies to ensure an open internet
- Advocacy for local policies to ensure telecommunications companies are serving marginalized communities
- Digital literacy training and access
- Community wireless networks
- Training in how to use digital technologies to support community organizing
- Identifying gaps in technological access and know-how for alternative solutions

**\*See case study on Detroit Digital Justice Coalition p.50**

### Environmental Justice

- Resistance to environmental racism
- Justice for communities impacted by polluting companies
- Policy advocacy for stronger regulation of polluting industries
- Participation in national and global climate justice advocacy
- Alternative energy and energy efficiency training and advocacy
- Green technologies and building strategies
- Health protections for families unable to leave homes in heavily polluted communities

**\*See case study on 48217 Community & Environmental Health p.52**

### Food Justice

- Advocacy for local and statewide food security policies
- Community agriculture and sharing
- Education programs in growing your own food
- Healthy food education programs
- School farming initiatives
- Food co-ops

# Philanthropic Funding and Community Organizing in Detroit

## Education Justice

- Campaigns for accountability and local control of school governance
- Teacher training in critical and liberatory pedagogy approaches
- Youth leadership development
- Parent organizing
- Resistance to emergency management and state control of schools
- Creation of community schools and advancement of place-based, liberatory education models
- Teacher workplace protections against harassment, injury, and pay and benefit cuts

## Youth Organizing

- Popular education methods to develop young people's understanding of the complex power structures that shape their lives
- Practices for growing youth leadership and engagement with social issues
- Identity-based programs that dismantle harmful stereotypes and affirm young people's rights to be proud of who they are
- Activities for growing supportive communities and networks that provide young people with access to resources, opportunities, mentorship, and exposure to new ideas
- Multi-generational problem-solving, strategizing, and engagement

**\*See case study on Detroit REPRESENT! p.54  
and Detroit Hispanic Development Corporation p.56**

## CASE STUDY:

**Community  
Development  
Advocates of Detroit**

Community Development Advocates of Detroit (CDAD) serves as “the Detroit trade association of community development organizations.” Its mission is to enhance “the capacity and effectiveness of Detroit’s CDOs, other community-based organizations and initiatives, and Detroit residents through advocacy, training, technical assistance, information sharing, education, expanding financial resources, and facilitating common action.”

CDAD is a member of the Detroit Community Land Trust Coalition, whose goal is to stabilize neighborhoods by securing land.

“Part of our work is to help in community and be the voice of community and residents,” says CDAD’s Public Policy Director LaToya Morgan. “When land is treated as a commodity that is bought and sold or moved for profit, it doesn’t help stabilize or keep communities and neighborhoods. As a voice of community and residents, we have to be able to work on things that help stabilize the community and help residents to have determination and willpower.”



The number one challenge CDAD faces is allowing residents to have first access to the properties available in their neighborhood.

“Often these properties are in tax foreclosure, which means they are either owned by the county or by the Land Bank, or they’re owned by a bank. Or they’ve been purchased by a speculator. And so it’s often not clear who’s going to manage it or take care of a property.”

While homes sit vacant without anyone taking care of them, they deteriorate.

“For one person, it took a year and a half to get a home in her neighborhood. And when she got it, it had been stripped. Then she was required to get it back up to code with windows and doors and get it livable within six months, when it had been sitting vacant for a year and a half, which is what allowed it to get stripped in the first place.”

Lack of transparent processes through the Wayne County Tax Foreclosure Auction and the Detroit Land Bank Authority make it exceedingly difficult for residents to secure title, according to Morgan.

“Processes are not clear and transparent. No one is actually held accountable for it, but in the end residents end up paying more, and speculators or developers get a different set of criteria. They are allowed quicker access.”

Morgan would like to see philanthropic organizations consider the impact these policies are having on communities.

“Philanthropy needs to not only assume that economic development is the key to bringing back community. If you are most focused on economic development, then you’re going to get outcomes centered just around that. But if you factor in people and impact on people, then you’re going to get more outcomes on that.

I think you have to not just assume there’s going to be a trickle-down to neighborhoods. High-level solutions aren’t going to benefit everybody.”

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Rebecca Bucky Willis. Rebecca is the founder of Bleeding Heart Design, the community organization that was one of CDAD’s 7 Placemaking grantees. She is helping transform the Lindale Gardens neighborhood in Northeast Detroit.

## CASE STUDY:

## Economic Justice Alliance of Michigan

The Economic Justice Alliance of Michigan (EJAM) is “a long-term collaboration of community organizations aiming to build the power and impact of low-income and working class communities across the state.”

The organization is comprised of five community organizations (MOSES, ROC-MI, Mothering Justice, Building Movement Project, and Detroit People’s Platform) and one leadership development institute, the Center for Progressive Leadership.

The organization launched in 2014 in response to a realization that “there wasn’t really enough statewide economic justice work happening that was led by non-labor organizations,” according to Dessa Cosma-King, co-founder and director of EJAM. “Millions of poor people in Michigan didn’t have anybody trying to advocate for economic policies that were beneficial to them.”

By forming an alliance of organizations doing this work in isolation around the state, EJAM hopes to take the work to scale and make statewide impact.

“We spend a large amount of our time and our resources ensuring that low-wage workers, particularly, are trained in how to organize, use the media, and understand the political

process, to change economic policies around wages and benefits and workers’ rights,” says Cosma-King.

One of the group’s main initiatives has been a ballot drive to secure paid sick leave for everyone in Michigan. But Cosma-King says the true value of the drive goes beyond securing much-needed relief for low-income workers.

“The real, longer-term goal is to communicate with hundreds of thousands of low-wage workers in Michigan, to start organizing them and training them to be advocates for their economic situations.”

EJAM’s work is currently funded largely through several foundation grants. As a new organization, Cosma-King sees a need for multi-year funding to allow organizations to have an impact.



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"Working families deserve opportunities  
not just to survive, but to thrive."

Dessa Cosma-King,  
Economic Justice Alliance of Michigan



## CASE STUDY:

# Detroiters Resisting Emergency Management

The fight against emergency management began in 2011 with opposition against Detroit's first Emergency Manager. Progress Michigan, led by longtime city activist Russ Bellant and assisted by the Sugar Law Center and the National Lawyers Guild, visited every county in Michigan to get signatures to place a referendum on the ballot to strike down the emergency management law signed by Governor Snyder in 2011.

The ballot initiative succeeded and the law was struck down. A new bill, PA436, was passed the day after Christmas about a month later. The law stipulated that it could not be repealed by the public. Since then, emergency management in low-income, predominantly African-American communities and school districts has been a fact of life in Michigan.

Detroiters Resisting Emergency Management NextGen Forum session to envision the city's future. Photo source: Detroiters Resisting Emergency Management

"That was the beginning of Detroiters Resisting Emergency Management (D-REM)," says activist Sharon Howell. "It was a fairly broad group, fairly grassroots. There was no funding, but we took on the No Consent stance, that no matter what Snyder did, we were not consenting to bankruptcy, that this was an illegal process."

It became apparent that multiple groups fighting emergency management, including Moratorium Now, National Action Network, No Consent, People's Water Board, Michigan Welfare Rights and others needed coordination, so D-REM was formed as an umbrella group to coordinate efforts. It is and always has been unfunded and completely supported by volunteers.

## The Detroit Organizing Ecosystem



During the city's bankruptcy, D-REM orchestrated a letter-writing campaign to Judge Steven Rhodes. The letters were entered into the case as comment by parties to the bankruptcy.

"We got hundreds of people to do this. The Judge commented on the consistency of the story that emerged. We created a counter-narrative inside the bankruptcy itself, questioning the legitimacy of the process," says Howell.

During bankruptcy, D-REM also created a People's Plan, which outlined alternatives to emergency management and bankruptcy that respect local democracy and maintain city assets.

Now that Detroit's bankruptcy is over, the group is continuing to support "We the People" in fighting water shutoffs, but has turned most of its attention to Detroit Public Schools (DPS), which are still under emergency management. The group is focusing on a "Freedom School Initiative" stemming from the People's Plan. The initiative calls for "a city-wide network of education hubs/freedom schools in numerous sites, all sharing support of various kinds, including volunteer tutors and teachers, teaching materials, and technology."

Freedom schools first emerged in the south during the civil rights era as temporary, free, volunteer-led educational resources for African-American children. The modern freedom school model is operated by the Children's Defense Fund and has impacted 125,000 children since 1995.

"The community must take the issue into its own hands," says Howell, "because it's obvious, as far as DPS is concerned, that the kids are disposable."

Howell believes foundations are unlikely to fund the efforts of D-REM as these efforts often conflict with "corporate and city agendas."

"By and large, people fund us out of their own credit cards and out of their own pockets," she says. "What I think we have achieved is the erosion of the legitimacy of those emergency management authorities. We are demonstrating that there is this other level of community leadership, which is a source of trusted information."

Detroit Area Restorative Justice Center open house. Photo courtesy of Detroit Area Restorative Justice Center



#### CASE STUDY:

## Detroit Area Restorative Justice Center

The Detroit Area Restorative Justice Center (DARJC) is “a network of individuals working collectively to encourage accountability and respect within ourselves, our neighborhoods, and our communities through building relationships, offering resources and training, and repairing harm that has occurred between people in order to promote peace, transformation, and healing.”

The group formed in response to a violent incident in Corktown in 2010, in which a patron of a local soup kitchen was assaulted by a member of a neighborhood watch.

“There has been and continues to be a lot of tension between people who are housed and people who are not in that neighborhood, and also issues with gentrification in that neighborhood,” says Marcia Lee. “But what came out of that was really beautiful. The people in the community said, ‘You know, we’ll face people who are outside of our community and we need to figure out what to do about it. We don’t want to just bring about punishment.’”

## The Detroit Organizing Ecosystem



Lee had recently moved to the neighborhood after doing Master's work in restorative justice, a philosophy that emphasizes healing and rehabilitation instead of retribution and punishment. She worked to incorporate restorative justice into the court case.

"The judge denied us that opportunity, but we were still able to do some work with the guy who was not housed, and also tried to involve the guy who was housed and part of the neighborhood watch in some of this process."

Lee realized there were many people working to implement restorative justice, but they lacked coordination, so she convened a meeting of activists to collaborate under the Detroit Area Restorative Justice Center.

The group works to educate the community about restorative justice concepts and techniques through a speaker series and one-on-one peace circle workshops.

Until 2016, the group operated on a fully volunteer basis, and recently took on two part-time Americorps volunteers to help develop strategy and fundraising. Funding thus far has come from the community, supplemented by a small grant from the UAW. The group pays rent for space at the Peace and Justice House at St. Peter's Episcopal Church.

Operational funding is currently the fledgling group's greatest hurdle.

"Money for buying envelopes and stamps, paying rent, paying staff. Paying to have training for our Steering Committee. Those types of things," says Lee. "Finding funding that complements our project needs and programming needs, but also our operating costs is something that's really important."

## CASE STUDY:



## Detroit Digital Justice Coalition

The Detroit Digital Justice Coalition (DDJC) originated out of a 2009 Allied Media Conference session on building a healthy digital ecology. A coalition was formed to figure out how to apply for and utilize federal economic stimulus funds for broadband development as a grassroots group.

“We realized that first people have to understand what the capabilities of media and technology are before they can critically think about it,” says DDJC co-founder Diana Nucera. “We had to both teach and learn from folks. Out of that came the DiscoTechs in 2011, which was an idea to create a space where different communities could come together and voice their opinion on what the role of media and technology can be in Detroit. The goal was to understand what the needs are to be able to utilize and harness these tools, and build up.”

The next step was the “Detroit Future” effort, which included Detroit Future Media, Detroit Future Schools, and Detroit Future Youth. The goal of the effort was to teach people to build businesses, community infrastructure, and storytelling capacity to counter “blank slate” narratives about Detroit emerging in the national media.

“We focused on organizers and neighborhood leaders, teaching them digital skills,” says Nucera. “I think that was the first time we really tried this idea of peer-to-peer learning at a large scale.” More than 3,000 Detroiters received training through the Detroit Future programs over a period of three years.

As stimulus and foundation funding came to an end, the effort was scaled back to focus on wireless connectivity, and was renamed “Digital Stewards.” To date, the group has built seven wireless networks in areas with low adoption rates. Sixty people have been trained in how to build, maintain, and design wireless networks.

“They were learning how to build computers from recycled parts and how to do community organizing,” says Nucera. “People would come out with either amazing organizing skills, or really advanced wireless skills. We realized that we are not just building wireless networks, we are doing tech education, we are facilitating groups in understanding community technology, and we are training techies in how to work with communities. So that’s when we shifted to calling ourselves the Detroit Community Technology Project.”

The Detroit Community Technology Project (DCTP) is a core member of the Detroit Digital Justice Coalition, working to expand digital resources at the neighborhood level across the city. In 2016 they launched the Equitable internet Initiative (EII) with support from local and national foundations. The EII is a notable example of the philanthropic community trusting the leadership of grassroots organizations to design holistic solutions and one that should be studied and replicated.

“There’s a privileged digital class emerging in Detroit, and the work of groups like DCTP and the Digital Justice Coalition is not just to build a bridge across the digital divide, but to build a healthy digital ecosystem. It can’t just be super fast internet and super slow internet. There needs to be a middle ground. There needs to be a culture where people think about how to use this super fast internet to solve their problems, and cultivate digital innovation from the ground up, not from having tech sector people come in and just be like, ‘Check out this app.’”

## The Detroit Organizing Ecosystem



A DiscoTech at the Kemeny Recreation Center in 2011.  
Photo by Nina Bianchi

## CASE STUDY:

## 48217 Community & Environmental Health

Southwest Detroit's 48217 zip code has the dubious distinction of being Michigan's most polluted zip code. Surrounded by a coal-fired power plant, petroleum refinery, steel production, salt mining, and bordered by the I-75 freeway, the residents of these neighborhoods bear more than their share of disease burden, with elevated rates of asthma and cancer, COPD, lupus and leukemia.

The residents here have been little more than an afterthought, says Theresa Landrum, co-founder of 48217 Community & Environmental Health. For example, one day in the late 1990s, the neighborhood started to shake; the ground began rumbling beneath homes and booming. People ran outside, convinced



## The Detroit Organizing Ecosystem

their chimneys were collapsing or their roofs were blowing up. “We tried to find out what it was,” Landrum recalls. “We called in the fire departments, the police departments, DTE Energy, contractors, and no one could tell us.”

Eventually, the residents figured it out: a long-dormant salt company had come back online and was blasting underneath people’s homes. The City of Detroit had given them permission, but no one had asked the residents for input, or even thought to warn them.

Later on, the residents discovered an accident at the Marathon Oil Refinery that released toxic air emissions but was never reported to the neighborhood or to the City.

“This was when we started to make our concerns and issues known to City Council as a grassroots community organization,” says Landrum. “Born out of that came the 48217 Community Environmental Health Committee. We started to fight for a better quality of life. All my life we’ve existed with these enormous, tremendous, stinky odors coming from the surrounding industry.”

Landrum is a cancer survivor. Her mother and father died from cancer. A lot of people on her block have died from cancer. She knows several people that have had three or four different cancers.

The committee’s goal is to reduce pollution in the community and improve quality of life for those residents. It’s been a tough slog. The legal bar to prove harm is high, and for the most part, each industry is within federal guidelines.

“The laws have not kept up with industry expansion,” says Landrum. “The laws need to be fluid to expand and change along with changes in the industries.”

The group celebrated a victory in 2016 when Marathon applied for an expansion permit, winning \$10 million in renovations and new equipment to lower pollution emissions of sulfur dioxide and other pollutants.

The group is entirely self-funded and grassroots-run. Landrum often sees foundation money going to support environmental justice groups in the city that have little to do with what is happening on the ground.

“The only group that has really been there for us has been the Sierra Club, through their Environmental Justice Program,” says Landrum. “They have come in and helped us with resources and networking and been down in the trenches.”

Landrum would like to see philanthropic organizations support grassroots groups like hers more directly.

“We, the community residents, do a pretty good job of organizing ourselves,” she says. “We don’t have money because everybody wants to put the money through a nonprofit. Then, the nonprofit becomes the fiduciary but they are not in your community. They don’t know your issues. We’re intelligent people. We can speak for ourselves.”

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Residents protest in Detroit's 48217 zip code.  
Photo source: Michigan Daily

## CASE STUDY:



## Detroit REPRESENT!

When Lance Hicks began wrestling with his identity as a trans, biracial youth, he was lucky in many ways. His mother drove him to a support group at Affirmations, where he found a strong, close-knit network of supportive friends. But even though he had found a safe place, he saw gaps, both in the available support for LGBTQ teens of color in Detroit, and in the predominant media narrative.

So together with a group of friends, Hicks launched Detroit REPRESENT! in 2011, when he was 21. His goal was to both engage Detroit LGBTQ youth of color and to empower them to organize their community and tell their own stories.

“All of us were LGBTQs of color who had been through a lot of social service programs in the area already. Those had been helpful, but what they didn’t offer us was a dedicated space to nurture our growth as community organizers, which was something we all really wanted to do,” says Hicks. “We wanted to be able to be creative and to feel like we were doing something that was fun and enjoyable for ourselves as well. That’s why we decided to make sure that Detroit REPRESENT! was media-based, because we felt like it would give us an opportunity to express ourselves.”

Taking control of the community’s narrative is the central, defining goal of Detroit REPRESENT!, says Hicks. “We felt like as LGBTQs of color, we either were not represented at all in the media, or when we were represented, it was always by people from outside the community, either LGBTQ folks who were white or straight gender folks who were talking in very sensationalistic ways about the struggles that we had, but didn’t really have an intimate understanding of our community,” says Hicks. “We felt like creating our own media would be a good way to create authentic portrayals of who we are, what our communities are like, what we’re going through, what our needs are, and to also create some of our own solutions.”

Since its inception, Detroit REPRESENT! has produced several media campaigns designed to bring awareness to those needs and solutions. With grant funding, Detroit REPRESENT! provided small stipends to four youth organizers, in return for them creating a media piece addressing a community issue they identified.

“For example, one youth went back to his school that he graduated from last year in southwest Detroit and took a video and interviewed students about stigma in Detroit high schools around LGBTQ issues,” says Hicks. Another project produces a photo-and-interview campaign to explore LGBTQ young people of color and issues of self-image, validation, and personal identity. The photos and information will be printed on cards with contact info for support resources. Yet another project addresses self-care and healthcare access for LGBTQ youth.

Hicks says the common thread in all of these projects is creating media that not only expresses the community’s issues in an authentic way, but building tools to support the community in meeting these needs.

“We’re making media as a way to strategically address issues that are impacting our community and to use that as a way to create solutions,” he says. “We try not to just create media that’s simply building awareness, like saying ‘this is a big problem, we all need to worry about it.’ We try to create media that actually is a usable tool.”

## The Detroit Organizing Ecosystem

Detroit REPRESENT! youth organizers meet with youth organizers from the Lussier Community Education Center of Madison, WI (Summer, 2015) in Clark Park, Detroit.



## CASE STUDY:

## Detroit Hispanic Development Corporation

Angela Reyes began working with youth in her community in 1986, when she was 17 years old. She started with the nonprofit Latino family services as a youth director, working directly with kids. By 1997, she decided she'd seen enough gang violence in her southwest Detroit neighborhood.

"I was tired of working with kids who ended up dead," she recalls. "I went to a lot of funerals and was tired of burying children."

So out of her living room, Reyes founded the Detroit Hispanic Development Corporation in an effort to address root causes of poverty and gang violence in her community.

"We were trying to develop a different approach to working with young people," she says. "This is my community. I lived here and raised my four children here. I have seven grandchildren and three great grandchildren, all of them in Southwest Detroit."

The group's first efforts focused on reaching kids in the grip of the gangs and showing them another path.

"We were able to negotiate a truce with the gangs, and get kids released from the gangs," she says. "We got them jobs, and then from there we developed a number of programs."

Those programs include a community re-entry program that includes tattoo removal, ESL and GED classes. The group also works to build the capacity of parents to reform the educational system and offers STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics) programs to area youth.

The nonprofit now operates out of a facility on Trumbull with an annual budget of around \$2 million.

Reyes sees funding as the number one challenge to her organization's sustainability, something she credits to it being founded by a Hispanic woman.

"One of the things that I've found is that organizations that are founded by people of color tend to have a whole different funding model than those founded by white folks for a couple of reasons," she says. "In the majority of cases, when a white person starts a nonprofit, they're usually starting it from a position of having resources and access to people with deep pockets."

In contrast, she says organizations founded by people of color tend to start out with government funding, much of which is cost reimbursable.

"So we have to do the work first, pay for it, and then get reimbursed," she says. "It's a horrible model for people without a lot of cash reserves."

## The Detroit Organizing Ecosystem



Visitors from Pakistan visit Detroit Hispanic Development Corporation to learn about best practices in their youth gang prevention program.

The long term consequence of this model? Organizations founded by people of color tend to have cash flow problems early on. Even after they are able to move on to foundation and grant funding, problems persist because those grants typically are restricted; they fund programs and projects and don't cover administrative costs.

"It's always a struggle to build your internal capacity without any unrestricted funds that allow you to experiment with new programs, test new ideas, train your staff and move into new directions," she says. "It perpetuates the perception that organizations run by people of color don't have the capacity to take things to scale or to do anything beyond the narrow things that they're already doing. Because you don't have the capacity, they don't give you more money, and because you don't have more money, you can't build your capacity. So, it creates this vicious cycle."

Reyes would like to see foundations take this disparity into account in their funding practices.

"If you want evaluation, if you want strong financial systems, if you want strong leadership, if you want staff who have developed a professional capacity, if you want them to have a strong IT infrastructure instead of computers that are ten to fifteen years old with outdated technology, you have to also give nonprofits funding for planning and development and infrastructure and overhead. And it has to be more than a token five percent."

She points to the Ford Foundation's new policy of providing 20 percent overhead to organizations to support the programs they fund. She'd like to see more in that direction.

"There's still not enough resources for youth development work in the city," she says. "We are looking at how we can take and scale some of our social entrepreneurial projects so that we can develop a workable funding model."

# The Detroit Organizing Ecosystem

# Shared Challenges and Needs Among Community Organizers



For community organizers, the needs are always greater than the available resources. By identifying challenges we face at multiple levels, we can identify solutions that address problems at the root.

These challenges listed here are drawn from conversations with community organizers and reflect the realities of this work. They exist within multiple levels: internal, interpersonal and organizational, neighborhood and community, and systemic. By being aware of these challenges and actively addressing them, funders have an opportunity to truly support those who carry out their work in the communities.

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Detroiters gathered outside State of Michigan offices in Detroit protesting emergency management, June 2013

# Internal

## Challenges

### How to...

- Overcome a scarcity mentality and burnout
- Avoid overwork at the expense of self-care
- Heal trauma and battle scars that make collaboration difficult and the work unattractive to new people

## Needs

Resources to take care of people who dedicate their lives to organizing work, both monetary and non-monetary, such as:

- Affordable, high-quality, and culturally relevant therapists and healers
- Retreats and retreat facilities
- Stronger practices for self-care
- Compensation that allows people to take time off

# Interpersonal and Organizational

## Challenges

### How to...

- Manage short-term funding cycles and demanding expectations for outcomes
- Overcome “us vs. them” attitudes
- Make the work less siloed
- Grow organizational capacity
- Create a leadership pipeline to pass on the work to others
- Engage in big picture, strategic thinking when in a constant state of “crisis-mode”
- Create an environment that promotes youth leadership
- Share knowledge on how to access resources and manage finances
- Make our “wins” sustainable
- Integrate a racial justice analysis
- Develop a comprehensive power analysis of systemic problems
- Make time for more reflection and evaluation
- Resolve internal conflicts over political differences
- Cultivate intergenerational communication
- See our work within a historical context
- Generate investment and support for African-American leadership
- Bring more people of color into leadership roles in philanthropy at the CEO and board level
- Create employment opportunities for community organizers and overcome obstacles to employment longevity and success

## Needs

- Multi-year funding with realistic deliverables
- Facilitation through times of tension
- Skills and methodology of conflict resolution, harm reduction, and mechanisms of accountability
- Access to research and data to support our organizing
- Capacity building for smaller people-of-color-led organizations
- The ability to identify and celebrate our wins and to embrace change and transformative growth
- The ability to be flexible and try new approaches
- Strategies for knowing when to evolve and when to wind down when your work is done
- Strategies for building organizations that don’t replicate oppression and proactively address power dynamics

# Neighborhood and Community

## Challenges

### How to...

- Bridge the disconnect that can grow between organizers and the communities they serve
- Make land and building ownership more accessible to community groups who are vulnerable to displacement
- Mitigate the harmful impacts of regressive housing and water policies on residents
- Dispel discriminatory attitudes that treat communities as the problem rather than as problem solvers
- Collect and preserve stories and histories of neighborhoods
- Counteract negative narratives about Detroit that cause people to move away
- Oppose policies that have a redlining impact and stop trends of economic disinvestment

## Needs

- Skill-sharing across organizations
- Training in traditional PR as well as social media
- Research skills
- Negotiation skills
- Systems for building and sharing non-monetary, in-kind resources through bartering, alternative currencies, etc.
- Ongoing analysis of Detroit's organizing ecosystem to know what exists, what's working, what we need, and the unique impacts of community-led solutions
- Create more entry points into community organizing for new people
- Alternative revenue models to support independence from grant funding
- Opportunities to share and build vision across organizations, and to analyze and challenge the power structures to be responsive to community needs
- Alternative communications and media infrastructure
- Long-term collaborative strategies that acknowledge the similarities and differences between communities
- Strategies that bring people together across class, race, and generational divides
- Land and buildings that we own, with capacity to equip them with energy efficient, green technologies

# Systemic

## Challenges

### How to...

- Expand access to funding and transform a funding system with racial disparities in who receives funding
- Shift the tendency for funders to renew support for larger, established organizations to the neglect of grassroots efforts which may ultimately be more effective
- Overcome the digital divide, as it impacts people, communities and organizations
- Confront the crisis created by the nexus of water shutoffs and foreclosures which has ripple-effects in public health, education, violence, and neighborhood stability
- Transcend the fear and disconnect between government and community
- Counteract mainstream media narratives that favor corporate agendas while ignoring the pressing issues facing our communities, and failing to provide substantive analysis of those issues
- Advocate against state and federal policies that work against Detroit
- Ensure that policy-making processes include opportunities for community groups to intervene and have a voice in what happens
- Conduct the advocacy for our communities that is needed while also operating within the limitations of the 501(c)(3) organizational structure
- Counterbalance the influence of think tanks whose interests are countervailing to that of communities and who exert an outsized influence over local politics

## Needs

- Understanding of state, national, and international policy context that impacts our work
- Inside and outside strategies that allow us to work towards the real systemic changes that we need
- Ways to provide support for elected officials who are prioritizing people and communities
- Ways to hold accountable or remove from office elected officials who are failing or harming our communities
- Participatory budgeting processes that include community stakeholders in budget planning for both the City of Detroit and the foundations operating here
- Long-term funding commitments to community organizations coupled with innovative, meaningful mechanisms of grantee accountability
- Intergenerational councils of advisers to oversee and evaluate funding allocations
- Funders who are willing to work closely and trustingly with community groups to develop alternative models and solutions, and who are willing to challenge or criticize power structures and institutions, as needed



# 12 Recommendations for Detroit Funders

Community mapping skillshare in  
Detroit's Islandview neighborhood,  
August 2012.



## 12 Recommendations for Detroit Funders

### 1...

#### **Develop mechanisms for authentic representation and participation from stakeholder communities in setting funding criteria and priorities**

- Regularly engage grantees and leaders from stakeholder communities to evaluate the effectiveness of funding programs, and to shape the design of funding programs.
- Utilize engagement methods such as:
  - Surveys
  - Listening sessions and focus groups
  - Participatory budgeting
  - Collaborative design
- Resist the impulse to fund in reaction to fads and trends. Work diligently to understand the solutions that are already underway and direct resources towards effective work that is emerging from grassroots communities.

### 2...

#### **Commit to understanding the full dimensions of, and actively work to dismantle, structural racism and economic inequality in Metro Detroit**

- Trustees, board members, executives, and staff members should participate in high-quality anti-oppression trainings to build understanding of how gender and sexual identity, disability, citizenship status, and other factors compound systems of racism and economic inequality.
  - Specifically study how systems of racism and economic inequality have been reinforced and/or resisted throughout the history of philanthropy in the U.S. and through the specific history of your foundation.
  - Ask: What role has philanthropy played in furthering inequality and the marginalization of communities of color?
  - Ask: When has philanthropy been most effective at creating social justice?
- Commit to more funding and better funding programs that specifically benefit marginalized communities. Prioritize funding to people-of-color-led organizations and to African-American and Latino-led organizations in particular.
- Commit to recruiting more people of color to the staff and board of your foundation. Build a staff and board that is representative of the diversity of our communities.

**3.****Create pathways for small, grassroots organizations to access funds**

- Design funding programs which specifically benefit smaller organizations.
- Encourage and support larger, established organizations to develop regranting programs in collaboration with grassroots organizations in order to support a more diverse ecosystem of large, medium, and small organizations working strategically together.
- Lower the financial barriers that prevent smaller organizations from participating in funding programs.
  - Understand that the “certified audit” process can be an expensive and cumbersome process for smaller organizations. Whenever possible, offer an alternative approach to measuring an organization’s fiscal readiness to receive funding.
  - Invest in organizations which provide high-quality fiscal sponsorship support so that they may serve as intermediaries in directing funding to smaller organizations.
  - Provide dedicated technical support funding for smaller organizations to build their financial management and fundraising capacities.
- Whenever grant applications require online submission forms, provide technical trainings for organizations with lower digital literacy.
- Invest in intentional outreach to smaller community groups to encourage and support their participation in funding programs.

**4.****Develop more nuanced ways of measuring success**

- Value the growth of relationships and the development of intangible skills, not just quantitatively measurable outcomes.
- Create mechanisms through which funders, grantees, and stakeholder communities collaboratively define indicators of “success.”
- Specially resource grantees to develop an evaluation practice and to dedicate time for authentic, in-depth evaluation.

**5.****Prepare organizations to create deep, transformative change**

- Support organizations to conduct root-cause analyses of the problems which they are trying to solve and provide resources for them to do the long-term work of deep learning and leadership development.
- Make grants with extended periods of 5 - 10 years which will allow organizations to develop and implement this holistic approach.
- Support “emergent strategy” as an alternative to “strategic planning.” The practice of “emergent strategy” encourages organizations to be more iterative, adaptive, and resilient in response to ever changing conditions.
- Support organizations to experiment with trial and error and to course-correct along the way.

**6.****In addition to project funding, provide general operations support**

- Dedicate funding for overhead costs and strong administrative functions. Such general operating funding will allow organizations to build the necessary infrastructure to implement high-quality programs and projects.
- Support grassroots organizations with sufficient funding so as to allow them to retain talented staff through competitive compensation and multi-year employment commitments.

## 12 Recommendations for Detroit Funders

**7.**

### **Nurture authentic collaboration across organizations**

- Take the time to understand where networks and relationships already exist. Instead of funding the launch of new coalitions, whenever possible direct funding towards organizations who already serve as network facilitators and coalition builders.
- In order to reduce redundancy and competition, support strategic coordination and collaborative vision-building between multiple organizations working in the same field.
- Provide resources in the form of funding and training to support conflict resolution between organizations who may have misunderstandings or disagreements which prevent them from working together towards common goals.

**8.**

### **Provide more capacity-building, resources, and training for grantees to develop non-grant revenue streams**

- Identify innovative organizations who model best practices in earned revenue and social enterprise. Facilitate learning exchanges that allow grantees to learn from these models.
- Provide dedicated funding and training for grassroots organizations to increase their financial independence. Trainings may include business planning, financial management, social enterprise and earned revenue.

**9.**

### **Provide funding for a more accessible city and region – one that is accessible for people with disabilities, seniors, parents and children, and non-English speakers**

- Dedicate resources for organizations to make their programs more accessible. Fund organizations who are working towards greater systemic accessibility in all aspects of life, including education, transportation, and housing.
- Provide trainings for grantees on best practices for accessibility.
- Develop metrics to ensure that organizations are working towards greater accessibility in the form of childcare, multilingual resources, ADA compliance, and in other areas.

**10.**

### **Address concerns about the impacts of gentrification and displacement**

- Recognize the importance of Detroit's long-time, majority African-American residents, its Latino residents, and other communities of color, in the city's stability and recovery. Do not fund economic development initiatives which will result in the displacement of these residents.
- When community groups raise concerns about potential displacement or marginalization of low-income communities of color, work proactively to understand and address these concerns.

**11.****Invest in a healthy, participatory democracy and model democratic practices in your organizations**

- Acknowledge the disproportionate influence that foundations have had over local politics in recent years. Work to *decrease* the political influence of foundations over the coming years, while *increasing* the influence of the general public through programs that build a civic community and civic engagement.
- Publish a statement describing your foundation's approach to transparency and openness. Specifically disclose any and all policy goals, and any political and corporate connections which may influence these goals.
- Support the development of strong community advisory councils in order to encourage greater accountability and neighborhood-based power in local government.
- Support participatory budgeting initiatives at the municipal level and model what these initiatives can accomplish by implementing participatory budgeting within your own organizations.

**12.****Work to establish a culture of mutual respect and collaboration between funders and grantees**

- Proactively work against the culture of elitism and separation that has historically defined many foundations' relationships to their grantees.
- Build co-learning and relationship-building opportunities between funders and grantees, for example: through joint research initiatives, experiential learning opportunities, or travel study delegations.
- Respect community expertise and actively listen when there is disagreement. When community members disagree with your approach, use this as an opportunity to learn from and do more effective work to serve grassroots communities. Organizations who disagree with a policy or priority of your funding programs should never be disqualified from funding opportunities as a result of such disagreement.

## Philanthropic Funding and Community Organizing in Detroit

### These recommendations are endorsed by the following organizations:

Allied Media Projects  
American Indian Health and Family Services  
Asian American Center for Justice  
Community Connections and Lower Eastside Community Grant program  
Detroit Equity Action Lab at the Damon J. Keith Center for Civil Rights  
Detroit Future Schools  
Detroit Future Youth  
Detroit Hispanic Development Corporation  
Detroit Jews for Justice  
Detroit People's Platform  
Detroit Represent!  
Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice  
Economic Justice Alliance of Michigan  
EcoWorks  
Emmanuel Community House  
Great Lakes Bioneers Detroit  
James and Grace Lee Boggs Center to Nurture Community Leadership  
Michigan Welfare Rights Organization  
MOSES  
Mothering Justice  
North End Woodward Community Coalition  
Nortown Community Development Corporation  
Oakland Avenue Artist Coalition  
Restaurant Opportunities Center  
Rosa Parks Institute  
Soulardarity  
Storehouse of Hope  
Street Democracy  
The Foundation of Women in Hip Hop  
The Greater Detroit Agency for the Blind and Visually Impaired  
We the People of Detroit  
WNUC FM Community Radio

# A Vision of Synergy: How Community Organizers and Philanthropy can Build a Better Detroit

Lila Cabbil of the People's Water Board calls for support in the fight against water shutoffs at the 2014 Allied Media Conference



If local foundations and community organizers work together towards actualizing the 12 Recommendations over the coming years, we believe that together we could make Detroit a just, equitable, beautiful, and economically thriving city. This vision of Detroit would consist of the following components...

# A Vision of Synergy

## Accountable, visionary economic development

Businesses that are embedded in and responsive to community needs, that are led by long-time community members and that allow wealth to circulate locally.

Businesses that bring new wealth and resources into the city that are committed to benefiting and being accountable to the communities in which they are located.

Long-term residents have the skills and resources to develop strong visions for the kinds of development they want to see in their neighborhoods.

Residents have the political power necessary to intervene in harmful developments and the ability to negotiate for their interests effectively with public and private interests.

A city-wide community benefit agreement ordinance ensures that developments receiving public subsidies must work with the residents in their surrounding neighborhood to ensure maximum benefit and minimum harm from the development; these CBAs are so successful and lead to such mutual benefit for community members and businesses that even developments not receiving public subsidies voluntarily participate in CBA processes.

Community land trusts exist in every neighborhood, protecting the most vulnerable residents from displacement and holding community-based developments, parks, and other land-uses in the commons.

## Democratic processes at all levels

Community organizations, public agencies, and elected officials recognize the value of authentic engagement and the skills required to do it well. They prioritize the time and resources it takes to make good decisions that consider the needs and interests of multiple stakeholders – in the planning of neighborhoods, the governance of schools, the allocation of resources, etc.

## A community that values all of its members

Infrastructure is in place to heal all members of the community. Re-entry support for people leaving prison is ready and waiting in communities. Rehabilitation for people struggling with addictions is readily available. Communities provide a welcoming place for immigrants. Holistic solutions address root causes, rather than single issue approaches. Violence against black and trans communities has ended.

## Healing through truth and reconciliation

A city-wide effort to examine the legacies of structural racism and racial violence in Metro Detroit begins a healing process and infuses racial justice priorities into all aspects of the city's revitalization.

## Functional, equitable infrastructure

A declaration of human rights and protection of the commons with respect to water. Ensure basic needs are met: adequate housing, transportation, and information technology infrastructures and transportation networks. All residents have access to digital resources.

## A just economy

Paid sick leave and living wages are law. The city embraces post-capitalist economic models. Reparations are part of healing racial injustice. Strong, democratic worker centers and unions are once again established with creative approaches to bridging workers' interests with the interests of the broader community. Detroiters have an abundance of high quality job opportunities through which they can: earn wages that can support their families, work with health and dignity, receive benefits, and advance their skills and leadership over time.

### **Beauty, culture, and creativity**

The city is aesthetically a beautiful place to be – in our neighborhoods and lives. Through community-driven media, arts, and culture we create new symbols and new narratives about who we are and what we are capable of. History is preserved, archived and accessible so that everyone in the community can know and learn from the past.

### **Holistic approaches to public safety and health**

All residents have access to and consume healthy food. City-wide peace zones address all forms of ‘public safety’ issues like water shutoffs as well as offering conflict resolution. Residents do not suffer from disproportionate environmental impacts.

### **Environmental justice and ecological health**

Strong policies are in place to protect low-income communities of color from toxic emissions and other environmental hazards. Air, water, and land, are valued as a “Commons,” to which everyone is entitled. These resources are governed strategically and equitably to ensure affordable access for all. Our education systems foster respect and care for other species and life forms and prepares all generations of Detroiters to create the conditions in which all life can thrive.

### **A thriving ecosystem of powerful community-based organizations**

Community-based organizations are strong, engaged and well-resourced. They facilitate personal transformation and compassion through bringing people together to build and exchange ideas and hands-on skills. Open frameworks for organizing and problem solving allow people to build where others left off. Groups are freed of the need to compete for funding and can freely share resources and ideas. Strong community advisory councils hold politicians accountable. Cross-generational alliances bring young people into the decision-making process and help develop leadership. People are empowered to take action.

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