



ARTWORK BY JENI JENKINS

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WHAT IT TAKES
(AND COSTS) TO LEAD
TOWARD JUSTICE

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT LEADERS, WE HEAR YOU.

You are tired. Poorly compensated. Overworked. Heavily regulated. Emotionally exhausted. You have been stretched to fill urgent, time sensitive needs, from voter registration to vaccination, from responding to floods and severe storms to distributing food and meals. And that's on top of the long-term work of keeping residents in their homes, developing safe and vibrant places for people to gather, fostering vibrant small businesses and commercial corridors, and building resident power to advocate for their communities. You're addressing immediate resident needs, while also pushing for long-term, systems-level reforms through innovative approaches.

This is particularly true when pursuing race-conscious approaches to work in an ecosystem that does not always support such efforts (and sometimes actively penalizes them). This is truer when those anti-racist leaders are leaders of color and bear the brunt of emotional labor to endure microaggressions and support other leaders of color. This is even truer when considering the elevated expectations on community practitioners of color who, when placed into leadership positions, are expected to support the racial equity journeys of white staff, board members, and community members, push for reform, and solve decades of structural inequities in the system, without the necessary professional or financial support. This is truer when placing leaders into predominantly and historically white organizations, where they might be told to fit into a dominant culture and change who they truly are. In the words of one practitioner, being forced "to fit into a box that was never made for you." This is on top of imposter syndrome. Of fighting for spaces where you belong, while creating these spaces for your staff and your communities.

WHAT A DILEMMA WE'VE CREATED.

A false narrative that hiring a Black leader to run an organization will magically solve a lot of structural inequities in the system. A puzzling assumption that investments of leaders of color and communities of color are inherently risky. A focus on the most credentials, degrees, and certifications to work in our communities, yet lower compensations for our leaders who are Black women, despite being the most credentialed.

We hear you loud and clear. In community development, we need more attention to building up and supporting leaders. We need onboarding and retention supports, knowledge sharing, succession planning, personal and professional developments, healthier work-life balance, protections against microaggressions, and financial compensation. We need sustained and strategic investments in developing and amplifying the leadership of those most impacted by structural racism. We need to support the senior leaders of color who have paved the way for future generations, and we need to build a pipeline of future leaders of color in the field. We need healing. We need rest.

Community development leaders, we see you. This issue, we invite you to review a set of promising community development leadership practices we've gathered. Then join the discourse of the complexities around leadership, particularly the unique dynamics of leadership in community development and those facing leaders of color. Let's get proximate to the impacts of structural racism and how it shows up in the hierarchy of organizations, funding structures, and defining organizational success. One thing is clear in this performance review – an anti-racist approach to community development must include leadership development. Onward.

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ARTWORK BY Lo Harris

ARTIST'S STATEMENT: LO HARRIS

These three illustrations all use the color yellow and some imagery of the sun. I personally identify with what the sun represents, light, joy, energy, life, and I try to carry the spirit of the sun with me everywhere I go. This energy empowers me to lead with an open heart and try to meet people where they're at. This mentality has served me well, especially in my travels internationally, and has allowed me to make friends with people all around the world. The sun, its light, and its warmth is a unifying tool in antiracist community building for me. It reminds me that I've been gifted another day, and that I should use that day to spread joy and kindness the best I'm able.

Songs of Community (previous page)

Music will always connect us. And it's been a wonderful tool in cultivating unlikely friendships. This illustration is inspired by a visit I took to Massachusetts with my boyfriend to visit his best friend, a shy guy who is very much the opposite of me in many ways, culturally and personality-wise. In the first year of knowing him, I really struggled on how to engage, but I knew that he was an important friend to my partner, so I wanted to try and put my best foot forward. I quickly realized that a great way to get to know him was through music. And let me tell you, this guy has incredible taste in music and a record collection that makes you want to dance for hours. And just as I suspected, it was through engaging his music and sharing some of my own that I grew to understand him more and appreciate having him in my community as a friend and loved one.

The Potluck (this page)

So many of my friendships are generous, multicultural, and revolve around sharing food ... a LOT of food. At any potluck I host, you can always expect to see dishes from cultures all around – whether it's dumplings from Japan, Caribbean jerk chicken, or mac and cheese prepared like it's done down in Bessemer, Alabama. Food is an important conduit for culture sharing and one that fills us with life, energy, and appreciation for the lands and histories we come from.

Seeds of Kindness (next page)

When I first moved to Glendale, Queens, I was initially concerned. Being one of the few Black people in my area and seeing bumper stickers and flags that didn't comfortably reflect my politics, it made me worried that I wouldn't be able to connect and get to know my neighbors. For me as a Southerner, this is a necessity. It wasn't until I started asking my neighbors about their plants that I really started to break the ice and feel at home in my neighborhood. Through blackberry bushes, I connected with my Albanian landlord who stops by to admire my backyard garden and offer tips. Through geraniums, I connected with my old Italian neighbor who greets me on my way to work as he smokes a cigarette on his porch every morning. Through sunflowers, I found myself cracking jokes with the retired cop down the road. And through exchanges of spinach and cucumbers, I've traversed language barriers with my Chinese neighbor who grows all sorts of wonderful plants just across the fence. It is through these seeds of kindness that I've found comfort in the diversity and difference of my neighborhood and my place in it.





***Lo Harris** is a multidisciplinary artist known for her bold, colorful, and empowering work that celebrates confidence, authenticity, and the power within each of us. Her vibrant characters and affirming messages inspire self-love and community upliftment. Currently, she's illustrating her third picture book with Random House.*

PERSPECTIVES IN PLACE: CO-DESIGN AS THE HEART OF EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

DESIRÉ BENNETT

“LOVE IS A COMBINATION OF CARE, COMMITMENT, KNOWLEDGE, RESPONSIBILITY, RESPECT, AND TRUST.”

- bell hooks

This profound insight from author, educator, and social critic bell hooks, encapsulates the essence of what I believe effective leadership in equitable community development can look like.

“COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP DEMANDS A COMMITMENT TO BUILDING LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIPS FOUNDED ON TRUST AND MUTUAL RESPECT.”

Co-creation through co-design with communities – where leadership is not only about guiding but also about listening, engaging, and growing together – is a pivotal practice that harnesses these values to drive meaningful and sustainable change.

I work at Design Impact, a social innovation firm that uses co-design to address complex problems. We help partners solve problems and drive social change more inclusively and effectively by using co-design, which is an approach to solving problems that strive to actively and equitably involve all impacted communities in a design process.

In the ever-evolving landscape of community development, leadership shouldn't be about imposing top-down solutions but rather about fostering genuine partnerships with the community – in partnership with is at the heart of co-design.

To understand why co-design with community is crucial, we must first acknowledge the shift from traditional, hierarchical leadership models to more collaborative approaches. Historically, many community development projects have been designed and executed by external entities, often overlooking the invaluable input and expertise of the very communities they aim to build on. This disconnect not only often leads to ineffective solutions but also erodes trust and undermines the long-term impact of these initiatives.

Collaborative leadership demands a commitment to building long-term relationships founded on trust and mutual respect. Co-design embodies these principles by ensuring that community members are not merely recipients of something created without their input but active participants in the decision-making process. This approach can not only enhance the relevance and effectiveness of development initiatives but also acknowledge the power communities have to take ownership of their growth and progress.

Consider the concept of co-design as an ongoing dialogue rather than a one-time consultation. It involves collaborators in every stage – from identifying needs to designing solutions and creating change together. In addition, this participatory approach aims to ensure that initiatives are tailored to the unique needs and aspirations of the community, leading to more sustainable and impactful results. By engaging with communities in this way, I believe we can demonstrate care and respect, which are two essential components of the love-based leadership model proposed by hooks.

To cultivate and harness leadership effectively, it is essential to move beyond superficial engagement and embrace a model of true co-design. This requires a shift in mindset from viewing communities as passive beneficiaries to recognizing them as active contributors to the process. Leaders must be willing to relinquish some control and embrace the unpredictability that comes with genuine collaboration. They must also be prepared to invest time and resources in building and sustaining relationships with community members.

The following is a set of principles of co-design:

- + Co-design is a transformative process for the organizations and people involved.
- + Co-design changes mindsets and behaviors.
- + Co-design prioritizes what is just and feasible.
- + Co-design disrupts power over and builds power with.
- + Co-design builds on existing behaviors, actions, and history.
- + Co-design inspires joy and healing by building connection and repairing trust.

The benefits of co-design extend beyond the immediate impact of community development projects. By embedding these principles into the core of leadership practice, communities as a whole can become stronger and more resilient. Projects could become more aligned with community needs, trust between community collaborators could deepen, and the sector's capacity to fulfill its mission could be significantly enhanced.

Co-design with community is not merely a methodological shift but a fundamental rethinking of leadership in community development. By embracing the values of care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect, and trust, we can foster more effective and sustainable solutions. As we continue to navigate complex social challenges, let us remember that true leadership is about building bridges, not barriers. By working together, we can create a more equitable and just world.

Desiré Bennett is Director of Participatory Design, Connection + Culture Building at Design Impact. She is a community connector promoting racial, gender, and economic justice. Desiré co-authored "Madisonville Community Studio: Driving Change through Participatory Community-Centered Design" in the book anthology series "Working Together for Change." She is the proud mom of Xavier and Nakaelah.

CAPACITY BUILDING FROM THE GROUND UP AND TOP DOWN

IN(TER)VIEW WITH EMI WANG

We chatted with Emi Wang, Director of Capacity Building at The Greenlining Institute, to discuss community leadership and power building in policymaking.

Can you tell me more about yourself and the work that you do? How did you get into this space?



Emi: At The Greenlining Institute, we seek to address the economic losses for communities of color associated with practices of redlining. The work of our Capacity Building team is based around a concept of bridge building. We support communities with partnership development, vision development, bringing in financial resources, advancing policy campaigns, and building up community ownership and power over our own neighborhoods. We focus on how we can improve aspects of the built environment to improve environmental justice and public health outcomes. We are network weavers through our four locations in California, between the policy apparatus and community-based organizations. We connect the dots between what we hear as community priorities and visions to levers in funding or policy so that community leaders can advance a policy campaign or fund the thing that they want to do.

I always knew that I wanted to work with communities and in a justice-based framework, but I didn't know quite what that looked like or what that meant. In my early 20s, I knew temperamentally I wasn't going to be directly on the frontlines, but I wanted to work with communities and support community leadership in some way. I started working in Brooklyn, New York, offering \$5,000 microgrants and community organizing training to grassroots volunteer groups like community gardens, tenant associations, and block associations. We had a network approach, and that helped me realize the value in resource sharing, leadership development, and capacity building. I didn't call it that then, but that translated into the work that I do now, which is also supporting existing community leadership with the tools, resources, training, and money to take their own visions and run with it.

That's great. And you are the Director of Capacity Building now. What does capacity building mean to you?

Emi: We define capacity building as supporting community planning, community partnerships, community project readiness, with an eye towards power building. If you work with a community around partnerships or planning, you translate that into tangible projects, whether that's policy or a capital project, a discrete deliverable or outcome. But it also ladders up to wider-spread community power building and self-determination over neighborhoods. That's capacity building.

The Capacity Building team aims to better connect the community and the policy side, to create a genuine feedback loop between those two sides of the house. It's a work in progress to align those two pieces. We are trying to root our policymaking in the lived experiences of communities. But structurally, we are just starting to build the internal infrastructure to achieve that goal. We are a policy organization first, not a base-building organization. We have policy teams who do policy campaigns on short timelines that require insider information and technical expertise. We're now trying to build in more intentionality and more feedback loops to the communities we work with. The other thing is scale. Our work is California-wide, and many organizations are neighborhood-based. What does it mean for us to reflect community voices? What does it mean to work for communities of color in California?

Can you speak more to wrestling with this tension between being a policy organization and a power-building organization? What does it mean to be like building up leadership?

Emi: We're asking, what does it mean for us to support existing community leadership while also offering our recommendation and direction? What is the balance between following existing community priorities and vision, which is one of our values, but also when we see a set of conditions and opportunities, to propose something that the community may not be thinking of? We're often straddling between the two. It makes sense that community partners might be oriented to direct service, so they might not propose the policy. It is up to us to take what we hear of their challenges, their vision for their neighborhood, and extrapolate a little bit. We have to share from the policy side, we think this could be interesting and relevant for you. We negotiate with that tension, knowing when to lead and when to step back, and how to be respectful and in service of community, but also bring value add to our local partners.

So much of it is just so relational. Do you have any examples of strategies that you find are advancing racial equity through leadership or policy?

Emi: We're trying something new this year that we're calling the Community Policy Lab. It is an intentional effort to source and ground our policymaking in community. We have a broad list of challenges from our partners around community development. We know it is challenging to access resources to do neighborhood projects. Systems can be inaccessible, bureaucratic, time-consuming. What would it look like for us to take that list of community-identified challenges and propose policy ideas from it? We've narrowed it down to seven broad concepts. One includes reform of public funding. There simply isn't enough progressive financing and funding for all the things that we need. What local revenue generation models are out there, and how would you structure that to be internally progressive, sustainable, and long-term? Or looking at how money flows from the federal government to states, to local jurisdictions. What is the responsibility of a local jurisdiction to spend its maintenance budget equitably amongst redlined neighborhoods? We're embarking on this exploration process, asking what's the challenge? What's a potential policy solution? Has it been done before? Are we the right people to do it? How far can we take it? We're still early, in the challenge identification phase. But I'm excited to see where this goes. And I'm curious to see what other models are already out there.

In the research, we kept hearing that the work is so emotional and that can lead to burnout. Where do you go to get recharged?

Emi: I get recharged in community and with community. The set of conditions and the structural barriers and inequities that exist in our society are real. They're depressing. They can be hard to manage. And when I'm with people at the neighborhood level, how you think about macro systems around ending structural racism, ending economic inequality, are filtered by that neighborhood scale. You are in community with folks who are coming together and are making tangible changes in a process or outcomes. Taking a vacant lot and reclaiming it, or advancing more democratic processes. That helps me to refuel. I still get tired, but being in community and seeing those tangible changes make a difference in people's lives.

Is there anything else that you wanted to uplift regarding leadership in community development?

Emi: The system is not built for leaders of color and low-income leaders to thrive in the community development system as a whole. The groups that we are working with are interested in developing resiliency hubs and planting trees. They are thinking about solar and micromobility, and they are thrust into this position of constructing capital projects, which may not have been where they started. They may have started as a neighborhood organizing group, but they look around at their built environment, around their block, and they see the changes that need to be made. So they enter into the community development system, which is incredibly hard to navigate. There is a vanguard of really exciting community leadership. We need to figure out ways to dismantle the barriers that make it hard to access that system so that we can have more flourishing tapestries of community-owned infrastructure of all kinds.

Emi leads the Greenlining Institute's Capacity Building team, which supports under-resourced communities across California and nationally to gain equitable opportunity and access to tools to lead their own transformations. Working with local partners, she helped to catalyze a collaborative community-led process in South Stockton to secure \$35 million in green capital investments through the Transformative Climate Communities program.

PERSPECTIVES IN PLACE: THE LEADER WITHIN

CHASIDY HARRIS

Leadership (*noun*): a powerful and transformative force, one that on a day-to-day basis we often overlook because society has conditioned us to believe that “leadership” is something to be voted upon, not something found within.

For me, leadership transcends color, race, or origin. It is rooted in the desire to uplift others, create positive change, and build a better future for one’s community. Over the past year and a half, I’ve had the privilege of redefining leadership in my own neighborhood – a place rich in history but where many feel overlooked and forgotten. Becoming a leader in a community that has often felt silenced required me to embrace these challenges and dedicate myself fully to the work. I push hard to ensure that every voice is heard, regardless of age, and empower those around me to believe in their ability to make a lasting difference.

As a resident of this community, I saw the need to nurture leadership qualities in our younger generation. This led me to create [Five Senses Farming, Agriculture, and Culinary Arts](#) in 2023, an initiative designed to help children discover the leaders within themselves by simply growing food and preparing meals for their families. Five Senses has provided children in the Douglass Community with hands-on learning experiences, fostering both independence and leadership skills. Through this initiative, participants engage all five senses as they explore the essentials of farming, gardening, and culinary arts. This immersive approach encourages creativity, teamwork, and responsibility, as the children are tasked with growing, harvesting, and preparing their own food. Over the summer, we organized field trips to the Memphis Botanic Garden and Dixon Gallery and Gardens, where the youth experienced one-on-one guidance on garden layouts and plant care. These field trips deepened their understanding of agricultural practices and instilled a sense of ownership and pride in their work, enabling them to take leadership roles in both the garden and the kitchen. The program has been instrumental in teaching practical skills while also empowering youth to contribute to the community’s sustainable future.

“I’VE WITNESSED HOW ENGAGING IN ACTIVITIES LIKE FARMING AND COOKING CAN SPARK SELF-RELIANCE, TEAMWORK, AND CREATIVITY – ESSENTIAL QUALITIES THAT TRANSFORM YOUTH INTO LEADERS.”

I’ve witnessed how engaging in activities like farming and cooking can spark self-reliance, teamwork, and creativity – essential qualities that transform youth into leaders. The program gave me a unique opportunity to study and experience the core values of youth leadership and to prove that even in a community where many have been conditioned to say “I can’t,” we can inspire our young people to confidently stand up and say, “I will.”

One of the most important qualities of leadership is empathy. Understanding the experiences, struggles, and hopes of others is crucial, especially when guiding young people who face significant challenges. A leader who listens and genuinely cares can build trust and foster unity. In youth leadership, empathy is key to connecting with peers and inspiring them to be change agents in their communities.

Vision is another vital component. A leader must have a clear idea of what they want to achieve and how they plan to get there. For youth leaders, this vision could be focused on improving educational opportunities, addressing local needs, or creating spaces for growth. The ability to communicate this vision and inspire others to work toward it is what propels movements and builds collaborative energy.

Perseverance is also essential. Change does not happen overnight, and the journey is rarely easy. For young leaders, understanding the importance of perseverance teaches them that leadership means staying committed even when challenges arise. By cultivating resilience and determination, they learn to push through setbacks and continue making a positive impact.

Leadership thrives on collaboration. No one person can overcome challenges alone. By teaching youth the importance of teamwork, partnership, and collective success, we help them understand that leadership is about bringing people together and leveraging strengths. When young leaders learn the power of collaboration, they not only achieve more but also develop a deep sense of ownership and commitment to long-term goals.

Leadership doesn't have a specific color, race, or origin – only a desired heart and mind to see others do well. Leadership is not defined by external factors but by an unwavering commitment to make a positive impact. For youth leaders, embracing this mindset early on shapes them into empathetic, visionary, and resilient individuals who are ready to uplift their communities.

Effective youth leadership requires empathy, vision, perseverance, and collaboration. It's about stepping up to challenges and working tirelessly to create a better future for all. Leadership is not defined by race, color, or origin, but by the desire to see others succeed and the willingness to do what it takes to make that happen. At 5 Senses, we are preparing the next generation of leaders with these qualities for building stronger, more unified communities.

Chasidy Harris was born and raised in the heart of Douglass North Memphis. She is a proud 2013 graduate of the historic Douglass High School. She uplifts and empowers youth in the Douglass community through a love and passion for food and mother nature. She holds an associate's degree in culinary arts and hospitality management and is currently pursuing a degree in digital agronomy. Her commitment to her hometown fuels her efforts to create opportunities and foster growth for the next generations to come.





JENKINS

• WITH US FOR US •

ARTIST'S WORK: **JENI JENKINS**

More Than A Seat (*front cover*)

This artwork is about progress and taking it further than “a seat at the table”. The future is a rich tapestry where the direct material needs of residents and entrepreneurs are addressed as part of the process of shaping community priorities and solutions. In the future, investments in material needs, such as time, wealth, skills, and public policy, will directly benefit community members because, in addition to a seat at the table, they have a voice, agency, and they feel empowered because investments are made with them, for them.

Let 'Em Thrive (*back cover*)

This work speaks to the racist undertones that are often inscribed in community development policies. The policing of Black neighborhoods, and particularly of Black boys throughout US history, provoked me to imagine what anti-racist policies might look like. For me, the future is blossoming and looks like allowing all children the opportunity to grow up feeling safe, valued and seen. In the future we let little Black boys thrive.

With Us For Us (*previous page*)

This artwork imagines a world where a community's existing assets are recognized, appreciated, supported, and prioritized. Inspired by my son Caleb, a skateboarder, this is one possibility.

Jeni Jenkins (she/her) is an artist and designer whose art navigates the intersections of printmaking, feminism, storytelling, social practice, and critical pedagogy, often addressing identity-based marginalization. She founded Renegade Babe Studio, supporting mission-based organizations and initiating social change through collaborative art and design projects.

Jeni believes seeds planted by individuals across social movements can lead to large-scale collective impact. Her projects are aimed at cultivating empathy, driving positive change, and fostering inclusive, sustainable progress. At the essence of her work lies a dedication to confronting social injustice and reshaping systems of civic engagement and belonging.

PERSPECTIVES IN PLACE: THE RACE TO LEAD, EXPANDING SUPPORTS FOR LEADERS OF COLOR IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

TRISTEN HALL

Over the course of four months, I have talked with 40 practitioners about leaders of color in community development to better understand the current support system, what has been most impactful to leaders of color, and where there is room to grow. Every conversation was so rich and revealed many pathways to augment supports for leaders of color in community development.

“ALMOST EVERY LEADER MENTIONED THE SURGE OF FUNDING AND PROMISES FOR AROUND TWO YEARS UNTIL THE PENDULUM BEGAN TO SWING THE OTHER WAY AND THAT ATTENTION AND SUPPORT SLOWLY BEGAN TO DISAPPEAR. WE’VE SEEN THIS ACROSS BROAD SECTORS, AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IS NO STRANGER.”

Systemic Problems Require Radical Solutions

The key to supporting leaders of color in community development is being open and committed to change. We need creativity and innovation when creating supports because, in many ways, leaders of color are heavily tasked with solving issues steeped in structural inequality and the status quo. Leaders of color often face active resistance from both internal and external stakeholders.

A significant theme that was shared among leaders we spoke to was about the “pendulum effect” of initiatives, opportunities, and investments following the murder of George Floyd and the racial uprisings of 2020. Almost every leader mentioned the surge of funding and promises for around two years until the pendulum began to swing the other way and that attention and support slowly began to disappear. We’ve seen this across broad sectors, and community development is no stranger. I would argue this pendulum shift is actually a surge to push for the return to structural normalcy and the status quo to actively disrupt the equitable progress made in the last few years. Community development leaders of color need a strong group of comrades who are committed to collaborating to discover creative solutions to resistance and pushing forward the frontline work that is already underway.

Overworked and Underpaid

People of color who entered leadership positions during this time, and even now, are expected to not only continue the progress at the speed that it was coming four years ago but to prevail over persistent counterattacks. We are learning that there are unspoken but ever-present, unrealistic standards that leaders of color are held to in their positions. To even enter the field or ascend to top roles there is an overreliance on credentials, degrees, and certifications. Community development is becoming more and more professionalized, and leaders of color have a heightened awareness of how they need to measure up. For Black women in particular, this phenomenon becomes an interesting dichotomy because, generally, they have presented some of the highest growth in educational attainment, but continue to receive some of the lowest compensations for their work. However, this notion extends across racial groups, and leaders of color are noticing increased demands for credentials to open doors or lead them to opportunities.

“We Are Each Other’s Magnitude and Bond”

In addition to the professional roles and responsibilities, interviewees highlighted the added invisible responsibility to serve as a source of support for other community members of color. The importance of mentorship and social capital was a consistent theme. Currently, there are few outlets where leaders of color can turn to share their collective experiences and cultivate authentic collaboration. Interviewees highlighted the sentiment that if you build it, they will come. They emphasized the need to curate a space and allow for organic connections to form. There was value in more preconceived actions in the form of executive coaching rather than mentorship.

The Future is Well-Funded

Leaders need funding and capital investment. In [Issue 03](#), Dominique Miller highlighted some of the ways that organizations and initiatives led by people of color, especially those that are community-focused, are disproportionately underfunded. Conversations with practitioners illuminated their experiences of hurdles to the track record of their organization or the success of their initiatives. Leadership transitions can be seen as a risk in themselves, especially when a person of color is the first person with a marginalized identity to lead the organization. In other instances, practitioners shared that funders can prioritize a narrow set of metrics to exemplify impact or success, but the impact of the work of people of color can be expansive and is not always represented by narrow, quantitative metrics.

There are so many ways to enter this conversation and respond to the growing needs of community development leaders of color. I can imagine somewhat of a system overload trying to navigate and prioritize how leadership-centered supports can grow and shift in an ever-pressing time. However, with more clear information about future directions and increased resource sharing, we can create more streamlined and intentional approaches to supports for leaders of color. Above all else, creating resilient support systems that can transform with present shifts allows for adaptable and sustainable leadership development.

Tristen Hall is a Senior Consultant for Digital Media & Storytelling at [ThirdSpace Action Lab](#) where she supports narrative building and community engagement. Tristen specializes in equity-based qualitative research that centers racially marginalized communities, bringing this experience to client work to translate community needs into actionable solutions and practices.

“LEADERSHIP TRANSITIONS CAN BE SEEN AS A RISK IN THEMSELVES, ESPECIALLY WHEN A PERSON OF COLOR IS THE FIRST PERSON WITH A MARGINALIZED IDENTITY TO LEAD THE ORGANIZATION.”

UNBIASING THE SYSTEMS FOR REAL LEADERSHIP

IN(TER)VIEW WITH SHANTI ABEDIN

As part of our research dive into leadership in the community development sector, we talked with **Shanti Abedin** about how the *Risk and Risk Aversion* narrative shows up in Black-led organizations, and how we could mitigate these effects.



Can you start by telling us a little bit about yourself?

Shanti: I'm the Vice President of Housing and Community Development at the National Fair Housing Alliance, a national civil rights organization dedicated to eradicating housing discrimination and its lingering impact in communities in all of its forms. A large part of this work is remedying the impact of both historical and present day housing and lending discrimination. This includes allocating community relief funds from settlements to a national network of partners, who are often community development organizations and affordable housing providers. Our objective is to make communities whole after they've experienced decades of discrimination and disinvestment.

A growing area of focus for us has been to ensure that we can still use the full suite of tools made available to us through civil rights-era legislation, like the federal Fair Housing Act and Equal Credit Opportunity Act, that have provisions that not only make discrimination illegal but also aim to remedy the effects of long-standing discrimination that has locked people of color and other marginalized groups out of homeownership, access to credit, and full investment in their neighborhoods.

What are some major challenges you have observed for community development practitioners of color or their organizations?

Shanti: I've seen burnout and a need for rest, grounding, and sustaining oneself for the long haul. Leaders of color in this space in particular deal with extra challenges around systemic discrimination. And many small organizations have founders who have been there for 40 years. They might be the individual trusted in the community rather than the entire organization as a whole, and that not only places a lot on their backs but also inhibits the ability for the organization as a whole to have a wider impact – today or in the future.

We need to sustain leadership beyond one person. And we need to sustain individuals. One promising practice I have seen is using a sabbatical to start building that process of sharing institutional knowledge, handing off work, and letting other people at the organization elevate themselves. It also has the added effect of allowing long-time leaders to rest and come back to their work renewed.

In the community development field, accessing large amounts of capital is another major challenge, whether financing for an affordable housing development project or federal or private philanthropic grants for other types of activities and projects. There is often a focus on funding based on the track record of an organization's existing work. In other words, how many projects have they successfully completed to date? How large is their operating budget? These are seen as risk mitigating factors that determine whether an organization is going to be considered creditworthy and successful in a project.

As we fund settlement-related activities, we often want to see partners and grantees who are ready to hit the ground running, because we're not a long-term funder where we can build a relationship over time. We come in with funds from a one-time infusion of settlement funds, and we want it to be spent quickly. But there can be this tension – the majority of larger community development organizations with long track records of successful projects are often white-led, and not just the CEO but also sometimes the board of directors or the entire leadership team.

Because of structural inequities, there needs to be intentionality around building different ways to establish confidence in organizations with the right balance of experience, representation, and alignment with community plans. How can we peel back some of our expectations around track record, size, budget and development experience to place value around other types of experience, grounding in community, and track records of a different kind?

For example, I've worked with national organizations that look at the financial health of organizations and organizational sustainability. It can be the practice to rank groups on their confidence level to receive grants or investments. But the groups that are most often identified as lower on the confidence scale, with higher risk ratings, are often BIPOC-led. And sometimes that makes them ineligible for grant funding. We need to critically ask why that is. I don't believe those organizations actually bring more risk. It could be implicit bias in assessment processes. It could be that these organizations face more obstacles, and not all funders factor these aspects into their eligibility assessments. Governmental entities are so compliance-focused and risk-averse that it is a self-perpetuating cycle without intentionally disruptive processes.

It sounds like we need to balance this, especially from organizations that are likely under-resourced. Are there specific supports that could be offered either for leaders or organizations that could help mitigate their "risk" status or enhance their competitiveness?

Shanti: The more you automate something, remove the context from a decision, and make generalizations about what numbers indicate risk, the more likely you are to perpetuate bias that is built into those indicators. For example, requiring a certain budget line doesn't account for how difficult it is for a Black-led organization to raise funds compared to a white-led organization. In addition to those metrics, a funder needs to build familiarity with the organization, know their community context and strengths in a bigger picture. There could be organizations that fall under a particular budget requirement, but when you look at the way that they are embedded in a community, there's an additional confidence in their work. You can look at the longevity, effectiveness, or connectedness of an organization in a community or other aspects of success that are not easy to see on paper.

We see this especially during a crisis. Often the resources are made available on a very short timeframe, whether through a federal effort, national organizations, or philanthropy. Large national entities are responsible for deploying huge amounts of money quickly. But often with speed, you lose equity. You lose the ability to dive deeper and consider who is left out and why because of the competing priority around processing applications and deploying resources quickly. It happened during the foreclosure crisis and with COVID-19 relief funds. How do we build up a diverse range of people to be ready for those types of opportunities and ensure we can still deploy resources quickly to hardest hit communities without leaving anyone behind?

We need to design programs intentionally to account for discrimination in the community development field, and we need to ensure that those tools aren't abandoned because of challenges in the courts against diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. Because we do have real, legal mechanisms to counteract discrimination in housing and credit, for example, and we can't be afraid to use them.

There are roundtables and special purpose credit programs that are specifically designed for developers of color. We could enhance this by setting aside funds for a program specifically designed to remediate discrimination that can be more flexible. For example, maybe a federal program has a certain budget threshold that they build in, and then maybe they could have another pot of money that is deployed with a different set of criteria that allows a more diverse range of partners and grantees. With those funds could also include additional support, whether coaching, or more money to fill in a capital stack. We should design opportunities to deliberately counteract the fact that there is bias built into any system.

Shanti Abedin is the Vice President of Housing and Community Development at the National Fair Housing Alliance. She oversees NFHA's investments and work in communities throughout the nation to increase affordable housing, reduce barriers to equitable housing opportunities, increase quality amenities and services in communities of color, and broaden the network of organizations working to advance fair housing goals.

WHO GETS TO BE A COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT LEADER?

IN(TER)VIEW WITH JUSTIN GODARD

As part of our research dive into leadership in the community development sector, we spent some time with **Justin Godard** unpacking what it takes to effectively support community development leadership, especially for resident leaders of color.

How would you describe the current state of community development leaders of color?



Justin: My first question is: What do we mean by “community development leaders”? There are folks, like me, who have been able to get a formal education or credentials to be in a professional community development role. And there are resident leaders, who are pillars of their community. Sometimes these groups overlap and sometimes they don’t. I’ve been in both, but they’re different groups and require different support.

In the professional sphere, I’m seeing more people of color in leadership positions. But there are still limitations, based on whether folks have the right credentials or letters behind their names.

Meanwhile, grassroots leaders are doing excellent work on the ground. They may not have formal training, but they’re committed to their communities. But are they being supported, recognized, and resourced? That’s where I view my role: lending my platform to grassroots leaders who are doing that day-to-day work. We need to bring resident leaders into professional spaces and conversations. Beyond just having them on a board of directors, we need to provide guidance about what board governance means and how to run an organization. Those are skills that can help someone better serve their community or even start their own organization.

One program I helped develop was the Community Revitalization Fellowship, which supports residents who are leading community revitalization work—most of whom are people of color or who come from historically disadvantaged groups and neighborhoods. Each participating community hosts an exchange to offer conversations between leaders to share struggles and solutions. Community Progress provides practical information and training about what causes vacancy, terminology in community development, community organizing, and revitalization strategies residents can advocate for. We want to make sure that when these local leaders go into professional spaces and communicate with city departments, they’re not being talked around.

Community-based work may not always have those quantitative success measures, but that doesn’t mean that it’s not impactful. We’ve heard in the research that leaders of color who are passionate about the work can be over-tapped with obligations or pulled in many different ways. How can they be supported?

Justin: We need to continue to build people up and deepen the bench so that we don’t always go to just one person. We want the fellowship program to be a pipeline for growing resident leaders, which is why we are intentional about calling the participants back to speak on webinars and lead panels. They are the experts on resident-led community development, so we want to give them a platform that the entire field – including funders and other city departments – can see and can recognize their wisdom.

Have you experienced any challenges, political or social opposition to racially explicit language, programming or services?

Justin: You can't talk about vacant properties or community development generally without talking about race and racism, redlining, and strategic divestment from specific communities. While the Center for Community Progress' focus is addressing vacant properties, we also know it's not enough to just say we're addressing racism implicitly by working on vacancy. We need to be explicit and intentional about talking about how race and racism impacts our work.

Sometimes, in communities, folks don't want to talk about race. However, we don't shy away from that conversation because we believe this work can only be effective if we can talk about the experiences of Black and Brown people most impacted.

Are there systemic or structural challenges to providing effective leadership supports for leaders of color? How could those be addressed?

Justin: Ultimately, the field needs more flexible funding that supports community-based, resident leadership initiatives. Often, funders want to see success within a one- or two-year timeline, and that's not always possible when you're building trust and relationships. The field needs to support activities that reach towards a vision. And even if those activities ultimately didn't advance the vision, there's still value in knowing what didn't work, and why.

Another major challenge is that the community development field is very siloed. While each area of focus is important, if we can't come together to address all of the challenges happening in communities simultaneously, we're not going to reach our collective goal: communities with a high quality of life that allow for opportunity, joy, hope, and prosperity for the people living there. All the work we're doing is important. But how are we in conversation with one another? How are we addressing multiple issues at the same time? And how do we make sure the most impacted people are at the heart of that? Resident leaders and lived experience is critical to that work.

Justin Godard is the Vice President of Education, Leadership, and Engagement (ELE) at the Center for Community Progress. In this role, he leads strategies to produce publications, trainings, learning exchanges, and conferences that build awareness of tools to address vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated properties and foster community revitalization.

“WE ... KNOW IT'S NOT ENOUGH TO JUST SAY WE'RE ADDRESSING RACISM IMPLICITLY BY WORKING ON VACANCY. WE NEED TO BE EXPLICIT AND INTENTIONAL ABOUT TALKING ABOUT HOW RACE AND RACISM IMPACTS OUR WORK.”

ARCHITECT OF SYSTEMS CHANGE: A BLUEPRINT FOR COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION

IN(TE)RVIEW WITH CHRISTA STONEHAM



As part of our research dive into leadership in the community development sector, we talked to **Christa Stoneham** about how fear and conviction can impact what community development leadership can accomplish (or fail to accomplish).

Let's start with who you are and how you are connected to the work.

Christa: Growing up in California, I witnessed firsthand the rapid displacement and unaffordability that deeply impacted my family and other communities. Attending Prairie View A&M University, an HBCU built on a former slave plantation, profoundly opened my eyes to the power of leadership and the potential for transformative change. It helped me better understand the systems that have shaped where we are today. I remember being told I had to choose between being an architect or a planner, but I wanted to be both. I wanted to design not just the buildings but the communities they were part of.

Today, I believe I'm the fifth Black woman to lead a land bank in the entire country. What surprised me the most was how few land banks are led by people of color, particularly Black leaders, despite the fact that land banks are specifically created to revitalize vacant and underutilized properties into productive use, often in Black and brown neighborhoods. However, just because a property is being revitalized doesn't guarantee the process is equitable.

My mission is to bring hope and drive meaningful, lasting change. I chose to work in community development after meeting someone who looked like me. It made me realize I could do more than just design. I could make decisions that would sustain communities for generations. I no longer see myself solely as an architect; I now consider myself an architect of systems change.

What do you think would help increase that visibility of representation?

Christa: Creating spaces where we can connect and collaborate is essential. In January, we hosted a summit for diverse developers, and it was incredibly refreshing to see so many Black leaders from across the country, each making strides in their respective areas. They are building tiny homes, promoting historic preservation, and even launching new banks. However, when these efforts are siloed, you can feel as though you're the only one working toward change. You miss the bigger picture. That's why building a sense of community is so critical. It fosters collaboration, shared knowledge, and solidarity, which are vital to sustaining and growing this work.

Can you speak to some of the challenges related to political, social opposition to racially explicit programming in community development? How do you prepare to respond to some of these challenges?

Christa: We hold so much potential to effect change, yet some are afraid to act because they fear losing their seat. For example, we had a funder pull out, and I believe they used anti-affirmative action policies as an excuse. There are ways to work around these barriers, like focusing on zip codes instead of race, but not everyone is willing to take that stand. What's disheartening is that this particular funder is a person of color, yet they weren't willing to risk anything. And that's fine; it's their choice. But I won't dilute or sugarcoat my message to make anyone comfortable when I'm speaking for people who need my voice. Yes, it can feel scary, and the line between faith and fear is often razor-thin, but I refuse to let fear silence me when so much is at stake. We must be willing to confront the aftermath of the intentional barriers placed on people of color. These challenges aren't just about race; they affect the collective potential of communities to thrive. Accepting this reality and addressing it head-on is the only way we can create equitable, lasting change.

At the same time, it's important to speak to the power of possibility and the fundamental connection we all share as human beings. People may not fully grasp the specific challenges that come with being Black or brown, but we all have compassion, dreams, and aspirations for our families. We all want to create a better future. When I speak, I tap into that universal desire for a better tomorrow while still being clear about the deep, systemic issues that we need to address. I balance speaking truth to power and the shared humanity that binds us all.

What gaps are you seeing in the field offerings for community development leaders overall?

Christa: Houston has a strong presence of Black real estate professionals, but there is a notable lack of Black developers. Additionally, the environmental sector is largely dominated by white men. Environmental justice often discusses community engagement, but no one in the room reflects the communities they claim to serve. I actively navigate various fields, from architecture to planning and real estate, because there is a lack of integration among these industries. This disconnect extends among leaders of color within these fields, which is a missed opportunity for collaboration and impact.

In the past, my focus was solely on getting the work done, staying in the background. But over time, I realized that the people in leadership positions were just there for the optics. It made me angry. This is a real call to action for what can be achieved for our communities and future generations. The question is: what are you doing about it? That's when I decided I couldn't stay silent any longer. Now, I volunteer, I show up, and I'm unapologetically myself. When I speak, I'm intentional about advocating for solutions in historically redlined communities.

In this field, you can be trained on any technology or take public speaking classes to refine your skills, but real leadership comes from within. It's about your will, your mindset, and understanding your mission. What do you truly represent? At the end of the day, it's not about your background or the color of your skin. It's about what you do with your time, how you use your voice, and what's in your heart. How are you showing up? That's what defines you.

So what types of support do you feel like would be the most impactful for leaders of color?

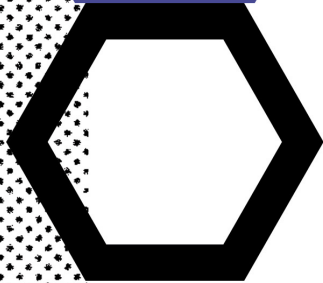
Christa: I would prioritize mental health, especially because I've endured attacks simply for being myself. Sometimes, having a bright light can make others feel as though their own light is dimmed. That's why I needed a safe space outside of work. I've found that space in a women's mentorship community, [Go Bravely](#), led by Dr. Shelly Ann Gajadhar, where we focus on speaking our truth, discovering who we are, and doing so boldly.

Mentorship is also critical. When the National Land Bank Network told me I was only the fifth Black woman in my position in the country, my immediate response was, "Who are the others?" We need a sense of community, especially as community development practitioners. Having a mentor who has navigated similar challenges and understands the unique hurdles we face is invaluable.

Finally, we need ongoing, dedicated training to stay aligned with the evolving trends in our field. How can we ensure we're speaking the same language when engaging with funders? The conversation may no longer center on George Floyd. Now issues like sustainability are at the forefront. The core issues remain the same, but the terminology shifts. Our training needs to evolve alongside these trends to ensure leaders are equipped to address both the current and future needs of the profession.

Christa Stoneham is the Chief Executive Officer of the [Houston Land Bank](#), where she leads innovative urban redevelopment initiatives focused on equity, environmental justice, and community empowerment. With over two decades of experience in community development, Christa is a champion for affordable housing and the transformation of contaminated brownfield sites into thriving community assets. Christa holds bachelor's and master's degrees in architecture, as well as a master's degree in community development from Prairie View A&M University.

Who leads in community development, how they lead, and how well supported along the way has a profound impact on whether the sector moves in equitable ways or not. Interviewees offer their thoughts on what leadership development looks like ... and what it should look like.




“Who you are as a person **IMPACTS THE ROLES YOU TAKE UP** in the systems that you participate in ... That’s all ... connected to leadership development ... We take people through a very **RIGOROUS CAPACITY BUILDING SESSION** to understand [that] frame and then deploy that into ... communities [and we] also do a lot of self-care regimen ... Giving them ... another level of understanding and connection can ... hopefully help them think about ... their **SELF-CARE REGIMENS**, and other ways that they want to support place ... And then we encourage them to ... **DELIVER THAT TO THE PLACES** in which we [are] in partnership with.”

- ANTI-RACIST COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT INTERVIEWEE



“What do I look for in leadership development opportunities? I think just **A SAFE SPACE FOR FOLKS**, a safe space to feel like **WE CAN EXPRESS OURSELVES THE WAY WE WANT TO**, Meaning ... **NOT HAVING TO ADAPT** to ... whatever is normalized in ... the world that we didn't create.”

- **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT LEADERSHIP SCAN INTERVIEWEE**



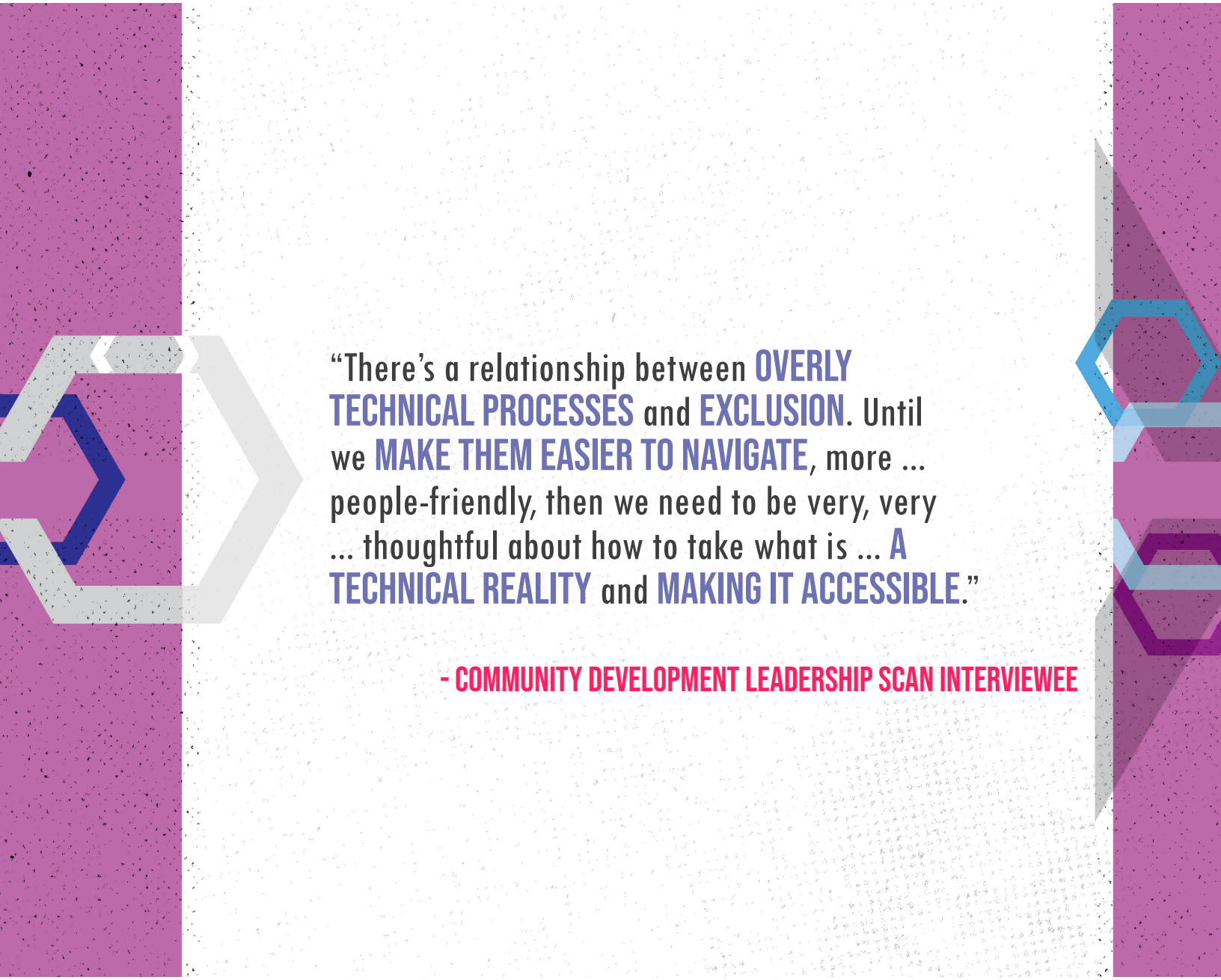
“I think what I have heard and found is that there is **SUFFICIENT REPRESENTATION**, but there isn't **SUFFICIENT AMPLIFICATION**. I feel like the people in power, the people with money, oftentimes developers, **GET THE MOST ATTENTION** ... But from what we found ... there are a lot of community leaders who are working ... morning, noon, and night, whether they're even called that or not ... It's almost like a **TERMINOLOGY CHALLENGE** in some ways, because, I think there's **SO MANY FACETS TO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT** that aren't ... distinctly called 'community development'.”

- **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT LEADERSHIP SCAN INTERVIEWEE**

“To build the leadership bench ... requires **INVESTMENT IN PEOPLE’S PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT** and requires **INVESTMENT IN ... LEARNING SPACES AND SUPPORT** ... As a Black and Latina woman who is an advocate in my community, I experienced a lot of hate ... This is a **DAILY TOLL** it takes on a person that is speaking up, and we don’t have any support ... We’re going to stop showing up, we’re going to stop speaking up ... The **LEADERSHIP BENCH DRIES UP REALLY QUICKLY**, when you realize that being a person of color, trying to lead in a white and often hostile space, means that **YOU LOSE PEOPLE**, and **YOU LOSE THOSE CRITICAL VOICES.**”

- **ANTI-RACIST COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT INTERVIEWEE**





“There’s a relationship between **OVERLY TECHNICAL PROCESSES** and **EXCLUSION**. Until we **MAKE THEM EASIER TO NAVIGATE**, more ... people-friendly, then we need to be very, very ... thoughtful about how to take what is ... **A TECHNICAL REALITY** and **MAKING IT ACCESSIBLE**.”

- **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT LEADERSHIP SCAN INTERVIEWEE**

PERSPECTIVES IN PLACE

THE ASSETS OF COMMUNITY-BASED LEADERSHIP, HOW BEING PROXIMATE TO COMMUNITIES FOSTERS EQUITY

BIANCA ANDERSON

Community development is typically defined as efforts aimed at improving the quality of life in underserved communities. It often focuses on communities that have been historically disenfranchised, denied access to essential needs like health care, food, education, and safe environments. But in wealthier communities, these same actions – access to healthy food, nurturing relationships, and safety – are simply part of daily life, not considered “community development.” When people’s well-being is valued and prioritized, the activities that foster thriving become routine expectations.

In a recent [Prolnspire](#) team meeting, we asked, “What is one wish you have for families of color to thrive?” Our responses were revealing: time to enjoy life, connection, healthy mental and physical health, freedom from generational oppression, and simply being able to exist without fear or under the white gaze. These desires for self-determination reflect fundamental needs for well-being – needs often denied to Black and Brown communities due to systemic inequities.

However, the nonprofit sector has historically operated in ways that are disconnected from the real needs of under-resourced communities. Many nonprofits, led by leadership standards that are not community-centered, often have a charity mindset – focused on scaling up for broader impact rather than deep, meaningful change. This approach fails to account for the unique needs of different communities, ignoring one of the core tenets of equity, that everyone needs something different based on their environment and lived experiences. True equity requires context-specific solutions that honor the histories and realities of the people in those communities.

Even well-meaning organizations often fall short of their stated values. Many nonprofits excel at “talking the talk” of equity but struggle to align their actions with their messages. Centering whiteness and dominant cultural norms as the standard to which all should aspire perpetuates deficit-based thinking about communities of color. This approach rewards proximity to whiteness while diminishing the wisdom, assets, and brilliance within historically disenfranchised communities.

Equitable leadership is not race-neutral; it is rooted in identity, culture, and history. Leaders who are disconnected from the communities they serve often make decisions for short-term gains, unintentionally causing harm in the long run. The dynamics within many traditional nonprofits mirror the broader societal systems of oppression and hierarchy. If we want to achieve lasting, equitable change, we must shift toward a model of leadership that reflects the values and needs of the communities we serve.

“MANY NONPROFITS, LED BY LEADERSHIP STANDARDS THAT ARE NOT COMMUNITY-CENTERED, OFTEN HAVE A CHARITY MINDSET – FOCUSED ON SCALING UP FOR BROADER IMPACT RATHER THAN DEEP, MEANINGFUL CHANGE.”

“TO SUSTAIN AND FOSTER LASTING CHANGE, LEADERS OF COLOR NEED SPACES WHERE THEY CAN BE THEIR AUTHENTIC SELVES, WHERE THEY DON’T HAVE TO EXPLAIN THEIR LIVED EXPERIENCES, AND WHERE THEY ARE FREE FROM THE PRESSURES OF CONFORMING TO DOMINANT CULTURE NORMS.”

A critical aspect of community-based leadership is recognizing our interconnectedness. The African philosophy of Ubuntu, which means “I am because we are,” embodies this idea. Leaders who are connected to their communities see themselves within those communities. They feel accountable for creating lasting change, not because it’s part of their job, but because it’s a calling. This type of leadership requires a deep understanding of one’s identity and how it has been shaped generationally. It also calls for space – space for leaders to show up authentically and reflect on how their values guide decision making and align with their communities’ needs.

At ProInspire, we believe that leadership capable of creating lasting change must be racially equitable leadership. These two are inextricably linked. Our leadership model emphasizes the importance of leading both oneself and the systems in which we operate. By exploring identity and reimagining societal outcomes together, we can create a more equitable future.

In our latest [report](#), funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, we define thriving communities as “the ability to access and share resources to create conditions that support equitable living and outcomes for all.” This research highlights the importance of community-based leadership – leadership that is people-centered, invests in individuals, and aligns with the values of the community. When leaders are connected to their communities, trust and reciprocity flourish, enabling decisions that reflect the collective values of the people they serve.

To sustain and foster lasting change, leaders of color need spaces where they can be their authentic selves, where they don’t have to explain their lived experiences, and where they are free from the pressures of conforming to dominant culture norms. These spaces are essential for fostering the kind of leadership that can create lasting, meaningful change.

Building nonprofit organizations where workers are conscious of their mindsets, behaviors, and beliefs creates rich opportunities for learning. Together, we can build a more beautiful democracy – one that is equitable, interconnected, and founded in love.

Bianca Casanova Anderson is a nonprofit leader, educator, and social justice practitioner with expertise in racial equity facilitation and human development. As Co-CEO of ProInspire, she champions efforts to support BIPOC workers and communities, drawing on a decade of experience creating inclusive, relationship-centered environments that disrupt systemic racism.

LEAD BY LEADING: WHAT DO I DO NOW?

Leadership matters ... just maybe not in the ways we've been taught to think about it. If we're thinking about it in the context of combatting structural racism, if we're thinking about it in a way that's deeply rooted in place and community ... it's probably not going to be aggressive, rigid, or hierarchical. Instead, we can all begin to model a different approach.

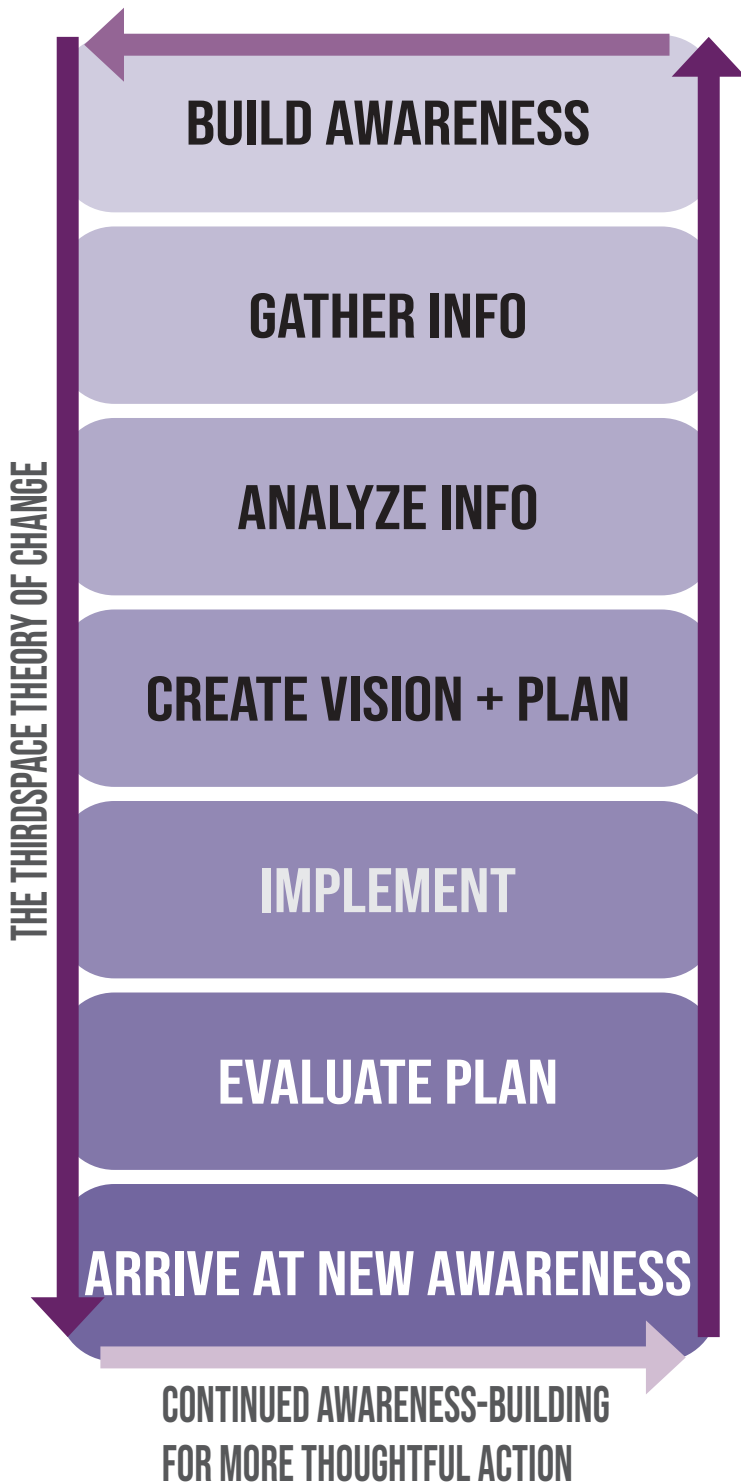
We can start doing that today ... even if we have a role that doesn't look like it's about leadership development. At ThirdSpace, we recognize that building and sustaining anti-racist work is something that we all need to contribute to, and it's something we need to do in cycle after cycle of personal and collective awareness-building. We think our recently released [Promising Practices for Building Equitable Community Development Leadership Supports](#) gives us a great frame for evaluating how we're currently approaching leadership and arriving at some new awareness.

OFFERING 1: REVISIT THE RESEARCH.

It's important to prioritize learning when we're early in our work, but it's also critical when we're evaluating what we've already done. Things we've previously examined might take on new meaning now that we have more concrete experience. Take a look at the findings related to leadership development and support (p. 2). What stands out as particularly relevant in your own leadership-related work? Where do you think your work has been most successful in moving in an equitable direction? Where has your work maybe fallen short of your aspirations?

OFFERING 2: FIND SOME INSPIRATION.

Because community development is so decentralized, there are lots of different ways the sector moves, including around leadership development and support. Take some time to review some of the concrete examples of promising leadership practices (pps. 5-7). Consider where those examples might inform your own leadership work; where they might be more difficult to implement (and why); and what additional support you would need to take on the practices that most align with your mission.



OFFERING 3: DO SOME CANDID SELF-ASSESSMENT.

Once you've spent some time gathering some general thoughts around the findings and promising practices, it's time to do a more nuanced self-assessment of your leadership work. Use the consideration prompts (pps. 3 - 4) to take more detailed notes about your current approaches to leadership development and support. Keep in mind, perfection isn't the goal here. Being overly critical of your own work to the point where you feel defeated or paralyzed probably isn't going to be productive. Neither is getting overly defensive or self-congratulatory. The goal here is to get comfortable and competent with regularly assessing our work so we can push it in more equitable directions for the long haul.

OFFERING 4: NAME THE CHANGE YOU'LL LEAD.

When we do this kind of thoughtful evaluation work, ideally, that helps us arrive at some new awareness that we may have not seen, known, or acknowledged before. Once we have that new awareness, it's helpful to be explicit about what we're going to do with it. Identify a minimum of three concrete actions you want to take to advance your leadership work. If you answered "no" to most of the prompts, it might be worth engaging the people you serve in identifying those priorities. If you find yourself answering "yes" a lot, it may be worth focusing in on the rare "no" to see how you could make your approach even stronger ... or how you can sustain those "yes" answers for the long haul. Make sure to name when and how you'll reassess.

THAT'S A GREAT START, AND IF IT'S ALL YOU HAVE TIME, SPACE, AND ENERGY FOR, IT'S MORE THAN ENOUGH. YOU'RE DOING THE HARD WORK, THE IMPORTANT WORK, AND THE WORK THAT'S GOING TO MAKE A REAL DIFFERENCE.

BUT IF YOU'RE WANTING TO KEEP DEEPENING YOUR PRACTICE, OR IF YOU'RE WANTING TO EXPLORE OTHER THEMES OF ANTI-RACIST COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, THERE'S LOTS MORE WAYS TO ENGAGE.

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