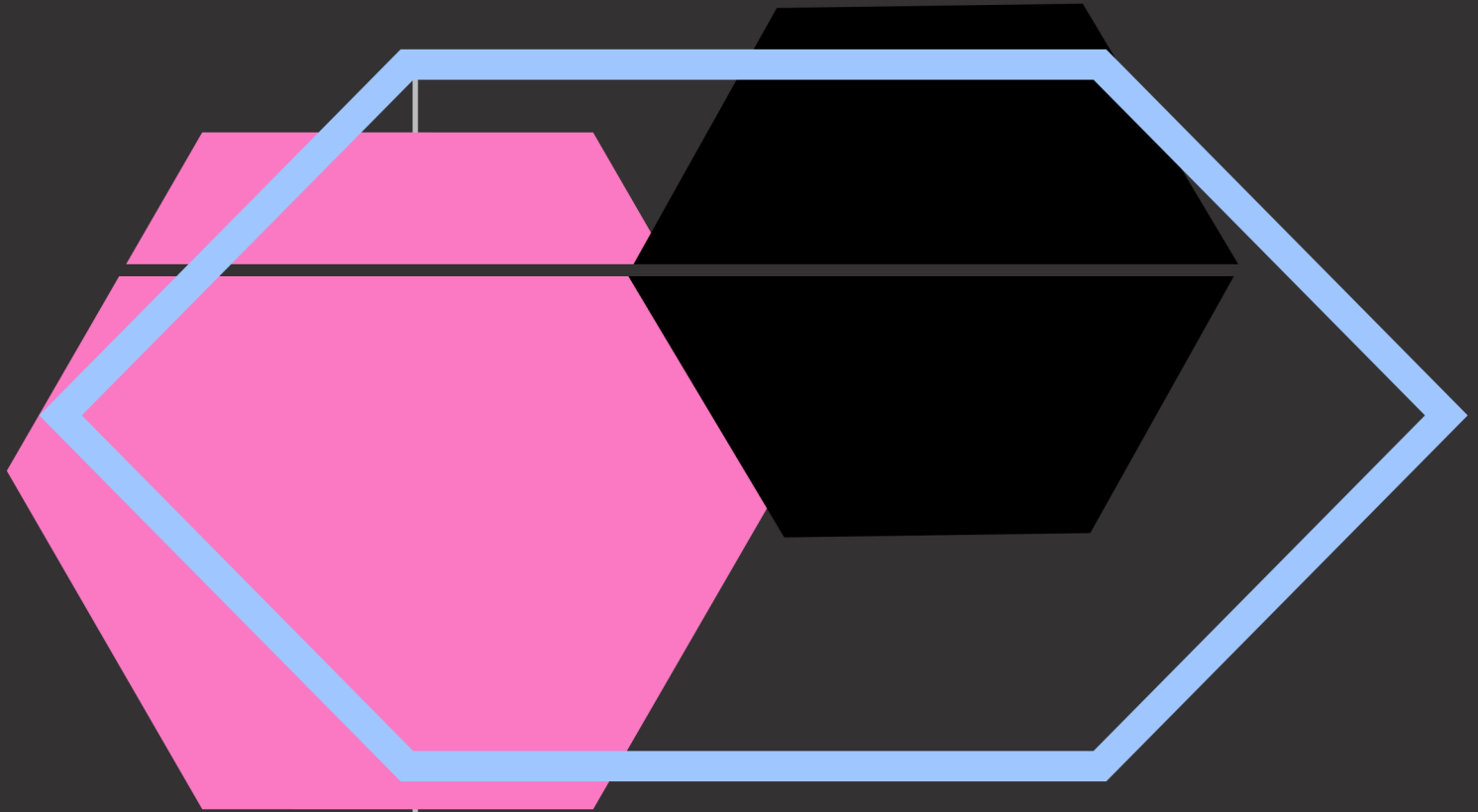


EYE ON THE PRIZE



**Bringing the Past and Future
into Racially Equitable
Community Development**

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“If we don’t understand and reckon with the history that shaped community development – really understand it and really reckon with it – we won’t be well-equipped to address the consequences of decades of intentional segregation. If we don’t give the sector the space to put aside at least some urgent needs and pressing deadlines, we’re not going to have the time to build a collective vision of what a better future can look like – and that severely limits our ability to chip away at wealth disparities, health disparities and disparities in how much voice and power there are between white people and people of color in the United States.”

- THE PEOPLE’S PRACTICE, ISSUE 01

As a sector, community development is often called on to focus on the present and the near future ... and honestly, that has some real benefits we shouldn’t overlook. That orientation enables practitioners to address real, pressing needs of residents that might otherwise not get addressed at all. By focusing on the near term, we’re able to pivot our work quickly, which leaves us well-positioned to consider shifting community priorities and capitalize on shifting community opportunities.

But that orientation toward the present also has some consequences. If we never take the time and space to consider history in our work, we can inadvertently airbrush over important context about why our communities function like they do. We can inadvertently fail to recognize *outside* factors in the past that led to the conditions *inside* our communities today. We can undermine residents’ emotional connections to places or minimize their struggles. We can fail to recognize why strategies might not have worked in the past, which can lead us to repeat avoidable mistakes. We can fail to lift up strategies that did work and, instead, be in a constant state of reinvention instead of building from the legacy of work done before.

Meanwhile, not considering the future can leave us in triage mode, without any opportunity to build something beyond the current moment. We can fail to recognize all the assets we have to build from – especially all of the incredible gifts that residents have to offer to the future of their communities. We can fail to safeguard against bad things on the horizon or to leverage future good things that could benefit communities. If practitioners and residents stay caught in a neverending cycle of just trying to put out fires, they may easily end up exhausted, jaded and feeling like they just don’t have any control.

The truth is that equitable community development work requires us – or at least the coalitions and ecosystems we work in – to hold multiple timelines at once. That’s not easy ... but it is necessary. It can open up new partnerships and new ways of working that can make community development more meaningful, impactful and rewarding. Even modest shifts in how we collectively think about time can have some big impacts on equitable development practices and policies. Some is more than none.

In this resource, we profile six practices that our stakeholder interviews and literature review highlighted as particularly promising. These are practices that can be applied in different geographies and by practitioners focusing on different elements of community development. They help us identify patterns that cut across time, demonstrate why the status quo is what it is and what’s required to change it. And importantly, they demonstrate how bringing the past and future into our work can be beneficial at different scales, whether developing ambitious, creative new frameworks or more incremental shifts that can be woven into the everyday, nitty gritty work of community development.

six PROMISING PRACTICES

PROMISING PRACTICE 1: CENTER ATTENTION TO HISTORY IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORKS.

When we delve into history in community development, all sorts of things surface that might be invisible in day-to-day work. We experienced that in our Brief History of Race and Place research, which revealed all kinds of ways that federal policy has intersected with communities' innovations for supporting themselves, and then how those practices informed policy to move in different, more equitable directions. That's a pattern we see over and over again when history gets centered in community development frameworks – past harms become more apparent, past successes become more visible and new understanding supports more sophisticated community development approaches.

That kind of exploration of history can reveal how large-scale events – like the Great Migration or Brown v. Board of Education or redlining or urban renewal – had concrete impacts on conditions at a grassroots community level. It can also reveal the less visible, smaller events, people and organizations that have shaped places. Putting neighborhood history at the center of our work might lead us to prioritize resident expertise in ways that are dramatically different from sector norms. It could lead us to visualize historic predatory practices to make it clearer why and how we should address disinvestment. It could lead us to better understand the origins of Latino-founded community development corporations and what that legacy means for the sector today. A history-centered approach to community development can also shift who leads work and how. Artists, culturebearers and humanities practitioners can contribute a lot of skills and concepts to these efforts, especially through practices like storytelling, oral histories, facilitating constructive dialogue and creating real-life and virtual memorials and archives. Community development practitioners and planners can employ different tactics to deeply engage communities around history, foregrounding why place-based investment matters. Community members and academic institutions can partner to expand dialogue about the destruction of Black wealth and culture and start to envision what repairing that harm could look like.

PROMISING PRACTICE 2: VALUE AND RESOURCE CULTURAL PRESERVATION AND SUSTAINABILITY WITHIN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT.

History is not just about recognizing what came before. It's also about cultural legacy – preserving it, resourcing it, sustaining it, leveraging it and honoring it in community development work. While preserving (or restoring) culturally significant physical spaces is critical, cultural preservation goes far beyond real estate. It's also about things like language, folkways, traditions and changemakers' legacies – the things, places and people that infuse our communities with meaning. The idea of cultural preservation as a community priority – including race-explicit cultural preservation – is not new. It has, however, been underresourced in communities of color, and in some cases, has created outright harms – through dominant narratives that undercut the culture of various groups or contributing to bureaucratic processes that make it difficult to address other pressing community priorities, such as affordable housing development.

Moreover, there's been a chronic underinvestment by philanthropy and government in grassroots cultural anchors. This is particularly true for rural and tribal anchors and for anchors that operate outside the typical nonprofit model – especially culturally significant businesses like gay bars and Black-owned bookstores, despite the important (if sometimes informal) roles these places play in supporting everything from community activism to public health outreach. Fortunately, over the past several years, a lot of work has been done to bring a more explicit equity frame into preservation work – in how cultural districts are designated and funded, in greater attention to preservation of Black cultural heritage sites and in explicit focus on affordability and anti-displacement strategy within historic preservation policy.

Emerging attention to equity in cultural heritage work presents new opportunities for community development practitioners to consider their own roles in preservation – from leading cultural equity planning processes to developing strategies for preserving cultural production to supporting community ownership of culturally important spaces.

PROMISING PRACTICE 3: REINVEST IN HISTORIC BUSINESS CORRIDORS IN COMMUNITIES OF COLOR.

Who owns community assets matters a lot – especially when it comes to grassroots anchors with historic resonance for our communities. While these kinds of anchors can show up virtually anywhere in any neighborhood, they tend to be especially densely clustered along business corridors, streets that support a lot of grassroots economic and social activity and often serve as the most obvious physical markers of communities' identities – namely, all the things that tend to make these specific streets historically significant to residents. Sadly, the news for these important hubs has not been great. Over the past several decades, main streets across the United States have struggled to compete with big box stores and online shopping, a trend that was exacerbated by the hollowing out of downtowns during and after the pandemic. It's a long-term trend that's been felt particularly acutely in Black communities, in rural communities of color and, nationwide, in the near disappearance of historic Japantowns and Chinatowns.

To address these disparities requires strong attention to equitable development and anti-displacement strategy at neighborhood and regional levels – but with explicit attention to communities' most important historic corridors. That can include efforts to capture and amplify the history of these streets and to reduce barriers to operating businesses along them. It can also be about long-term development strategies that connect community history to a vision for future investment in places like Philadelphia's 52nd Street corridor and Tulsa's Greenwood community. Such equitable development planning can benefit from integrating transportation planning (and financial resources), such as in efforts to leverage infrastructure and traffic improvements along Birmingham's 4th Avenue North in order to support revitalization of the historic Black business corridor. Planning and development initiatives like these benefit from access to dependable, dedicated funding like the Biden-Harris administration's Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program, which provided funding in dozens of communities across the country to address the community harms caused by highway construction.

PROMISING PRACTICE 4: INTEGRATE CULTURAL FUTURISM INTO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT WORK.

In almost all elements of equitable development work, elevating community history isn't about trying to hold things static or to return things to exactly how they were. It's about revealing the heritage and the culture and the significance of our communities – even communities facing extremely challenging conditions – in order to build from those legacies toward a more just future. That's where turning to Futures Studies – imagining and planning for different possible or preferable future events – can be helpful. In particular, equitable development work can benefit immensely from cultural futurism, a wide range of practices that pull from the history, artistic traditions and cultures of different communities in order to imagine distant futures. That kind of work has supported culturally relevant visioning for a variety of groups, including AAPI, Indigenous and LGBTQ communities. Afrofuturism, in particular, has been integrated into a lot of different kinds of community development efforts.

On the surface, cultural futurism may seem like an awkward fit for the community development sector. It relies heavily on the skills of artists as facilitators, emphasizes utopian and dystopian visions and frequently borrows from aspects of science fiction. That can feel foreign to work that's often fast-moving, incremental and responsive to real-life, on-the-ground conditions. Cultural futurism, though, can help us move the horizon of community development work from what we need to address now to what we're building toward 20 or 50 or 100 years from now. That can fundamentally shift our understanding of what's possible in communities, as well as our individual roles in the work.

Cultural futurism has been leveraged to develop long-term equity strategies on everything from community land trusts to Black maternal health. While still an emerging focus in community development, practitioners may benefit from new support infrastructure like learning resources and fellowships, online simulation tools and even frameworks for assessing the futurist orientations of candidates for office.

PROMISING PRACTICE 5: BRING A FUTURIST PERSPECTIVE TO ANTI-DISPLACEMENT STRATEGY.

There might not be any topic in community development that could benefit more from a futurist perspective than anti-displacement strategy. Fifty years ago, urban neighborhoods across the country faced huge population losses and mounting social and economic problems. The idea that residents might be displaced by market pressures was unimaginable. Fast forward, and that's the circumstance that communities across the country, especially communities of color, face. Operating on short timelines, the community development sector hasn't always been able to shift to address these changing dynamics. Incoming, large-scale community investment can look like real success, even if it might lead to future resident vulnerability. That's especially true when the sector fails to capture displacement pressure from much longer-term phenomena like climate change. Community development has had limited access to data that can identify or predict displacement pressure; residents are not adequately engaged as partners in development planning; and resident anxiety around displacement is often diminished or dismissed, until displacement pressure is so pronounced that it's almost impossible to address.

A futurist perspective can help practitioners avoid those pitfalls – envisioning a future where displacement pressures are high and safeguarding against it ... or envisioning a future where displacement was avoided and then taking steps toward that vision. That can open up a lot of space for imagination – identifying what an ideal Chinatown of the future might look like or a 100-year vision for regional land justice. Even with an emphasis on the future, though, community development practitioners can tie that kind of long-term visioning work to tangible, concrete and nearer term interventions through approaches like scenario planning. That could start with identifying and taking seriously indicators of future gentrification and engaging in substantive displacement avoidance planning. It could also involve connecting longer horizons to nearer term actions, like developing 5-year action plans as incremental steps in a 30-year vision of a community-serving Tax Increment Financing district or developing a series of resident anti-displacement supports well in advance of a massive infrastructure and greenspace project.

PROMISING PRACTICE 6: MEASURE AND CREATE ACCOUNTABILITY AROUND FUTURE POLICY EQUITY IMPACTS.

These examples of long-term anti-displacement strategy demonstrate the power of looking beyond grant periods and construction schedules. By regularly considering what communities might face 10, 20 or 50 years from now, the community development sector may be better equipped to anticipate both potential future opportunities and future harms. Shorter-term community development decision-making can obscure how the work we're doing today will impact conditions tomorrow. That's especially true in areas like community development policy, where there are relatively long timelines for implementation and, in general, relatively few opportunities to reevaluate and recalibrate laws already on the books. Researchers have pointed to numerous cases where community development policy has been slow to react to unfolding harms, from the decline of public housing, to anti-poverty programs not adequately responding to community context, to occupancy requirements' impacts on affordable housing access.

Identifying key racial equity indicators and routinely and rigorously assessing policy for future racial equity impact is one way that a futurist orientation can be applied concretely to community development work. Equity assessments can be used in considering the future impact of virtually any policy, practice or decision-making process. They can be integrated into public budgeting and grantmaking criteria, or they can be used in more discrete areas of community development work like CDFI decision-making or real estate development and land use. While explicitly considering future impact can have widespread impacts in public policy, like scoring federal legislation, that same kind of inquiry can be just as meaningful in *institutional* policy, such as assessing impact during community development organizations' strategic planning and visioning processes.

In the previous pages, we outlined practices with a lot of promise for bringing attention to the past and the future into equitable development work and some examples of the work happening around the United States advancing those approaches. However, there's no single way to implement these promising practices. Rather than standardize one type of action or program or intervention, the community development sector has a unique opportunity to borrow from work being done elsewhere, refine and test it to fit the contexts of their own communities and align new efforts with local residents' own priorities and solutions.

Below, we capture more examples of individuals, organizations and coalitions around the United States who are working to advance these promising practices in their own ways.

CENTER ATTENTION TO HISTORY IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORKS.

Alliance for Metropolitan Stability

Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco

National Association for Latino Community Asset Builders

Scribe Video Center

Soul Fire Farm

VALUE AND RESOURCE CULTURAL PRESERVATION AND SUSTAINABILITY WITHIN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT.

American Indian Cultural District

House of History

Indigenous Roots Cultural Arts Center

International Sonoran Desert Alliance

Pan Valley Institute

REINVEST IN HISTORIC BIPOC BUSINESS CORRIDORS.

Chocolate City Cleveland

Claiborne Corridor Cultural Innovation District

Destination Crenshaw

E.G. Woode

Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation

INTEGRATE CULTURAL FUTURISM INTO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT WORK.

Albina Vision Trust

East Oakland Black Cultural Zone Collaborative

Institute for the Future

M.O.V.E. Gulf Coast CDC

Oakland Avenue Urban Farm

BRING A FUTURIST PERSPECTIVE TO ANTI-DISPLACEMENT STRATEGY.

apexart

Community Futures Lab

Futuro Fugaces

Southern California Association of Governments

San Francisco Bay Area Planning and Urban Research Association

MEASURE AND CREATE ACCOUNTABILITY AROUND FUTURE POLICY EQUITY IMPACTS.

BlueHub Capital

Brookings Institution

CUNY Institute for State and Local Governance

King County Department of Public Health

New School Institute on Race, Power and Political Economy

The People's Practice

We hope you've found something promising in these practices!

Feeling inspired to keep going deep on anti-racist community development?

Visit us at www.thepeoplespractice.org for additional op-eds, Q+As, research, resources and more!

The Anti-Racist Community Development Research Project was produced with support from Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) to increase understanding of structural racism in community development and pathways to racially equitable outcomes that promote health equity. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of RWJF.

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