THE PEOPLE'S PRACTICE NATIONAL CONVENING



DETROIT 2026



ACTIVATING WHAT'S NEXT

The People's Practice thirdspace ACTION LAB

WELCOME TO WHAT'S NEXT

AN OPENING LETTER FROM THE PEOPLE'S PRACTICE TEAM



Welcome, Comrade!

We won't pretend the ground beneath this work feels steady right now. Funding is more uncertain. The politics are more openly hostile. The neighborhoods we serve are absorbing pressure most of the country isn't naming out loud. If you've felt that weight lately, you're not imagining it — and you're not carrying it alone. We're not waiting for steadier ground to start building — we never have.

That's exactly why we're gathering. Not despite the hard truth — because of it. This is a moment to dream, scheme, and dance together, with Our People: the ones who already know, in their bodies, what this work costs and what it's worth.

This work is not new, either. Long before "anti-racist community development" had a name, people were already living it — turning blight into a village, a garage into a sanctuary, a grocery store into something owned by the people who shop there. You'll meet some of them this week. You're already part of their lineage, whether you know their names yet or not.

We chose Detroit on purpose. Not as a backdrop — as a teacher. This is the city where James + Grace Lee Boggs taught us that transformation happens block by block, neighbor by neighbor, not from the outside in. Written off and extracted from more times than any city should have to be, and still building on its own terms. You won't find this work more lived-in, less theorized, anywhere else—except in the places that YOU are transforming through your radical imagination and soul work.

So, what are WE doing here? We're spending three days together exploring Detroit, and each other's work. Visiting historic neighborhoods and the people infusing these places with renewed energy. Reflecting + connecting over meals, during working sessions, and with space to imagine out loud, together. By Friday, we hope you leave inspired, grounded, and a little less alone — carrying a few new names, a few new possibilities, and people in your corner who already understand what you're building.

Consider this a celebration of the work you've already done. And consider it an invitation to stay close, stay connected, and help us build the next chapter of The People's Practice, together.

Scan to visit our website:
thepeoplespractice.org

WHAT IS THE PEOPLE'S PRACTICE /ARCD?



WHAT IS ANTI-RACIST COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT?

Anti-racist Community Development (ARCD) is holistic, equitable, race-conscious, bottom-up, inside-out, adaptive, contextualized in place and culture, and prioritizes the needs of those who have been made the most vulnerable and marginalized. We believe this work is essential to our country's future, both in remedying past mistakes and in building a better future for all American communities.

That's what The People's Practice is all about. Anti-Racist Community Development names it plainly and builds toward this vision of the best version of our collective work, on purpose. ARCD is not a new field bolted onto community development, but *a return to what community development was always supposed to be*. For us, that's non-negotiable, not aspirational.

THE PEOPLE'S PRACTICE

The People's Practice exists to make visible and support the practitioners already doing this work, across sectors + disciplinary practices—community organizers, artists, developers, CDFI leaders, funders, and everyone in between—and connect them to each other as a community of praxis, not just colleagues in the same field. For at least four years, we've been in rooms across the country, naming how structural racism shows up in this field and building the language, tools, and relationships for an anti-racist way forward. Now it's time to activate what's next.

WHO IS THIRDSPACE ACTION LAB?

The People's Practice is powered by ThirdSpace Action Lab (TSAL), which was created to disrupt the vicious cycle of disinvestment + displacement that negatively impacts the vitality of low-income communities of color. We are a grassroots solutions studio dedicated to prototyping creative, place-based solutions to complex socio-economic problems — institutional and community organizers, turning multidisciplinary research into evidence-based strategies, and activating "third places" to co-create more liberated spaces for people of color.

ARCD isn't a framework we adopted. It's one we helped name and build — in Jackson, Mississippi, where a Regional Action Planning cohort we helped stand up grew into the JXN FWD Collective, now attracting its own investment; in Cleveland, our own backyard, where the Freedom Dreams Coalition is putting ARCD into practice as a decision about who owns land, not just a philosophy about who should. For years, our work has been building the case that this practice matters — naming it, researching it, gathering proof of it. Now it's time to build what makes it stick: the tools, the coaching, and the relationships that help this network move from conviction to practice, together.

Just like the digital platform and the ways we've been coming together virtually and in person over the past few years, this Convening is a place for continued conversation and reflection. We believe we can find joy and purpose in naming both racism and anti-racism explicitly, then working collectively to move things forward. Together, we can shape the communities we all deserve. It just takes practice.

The People's Practice, and this gathering, are made possible through the generous support of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.



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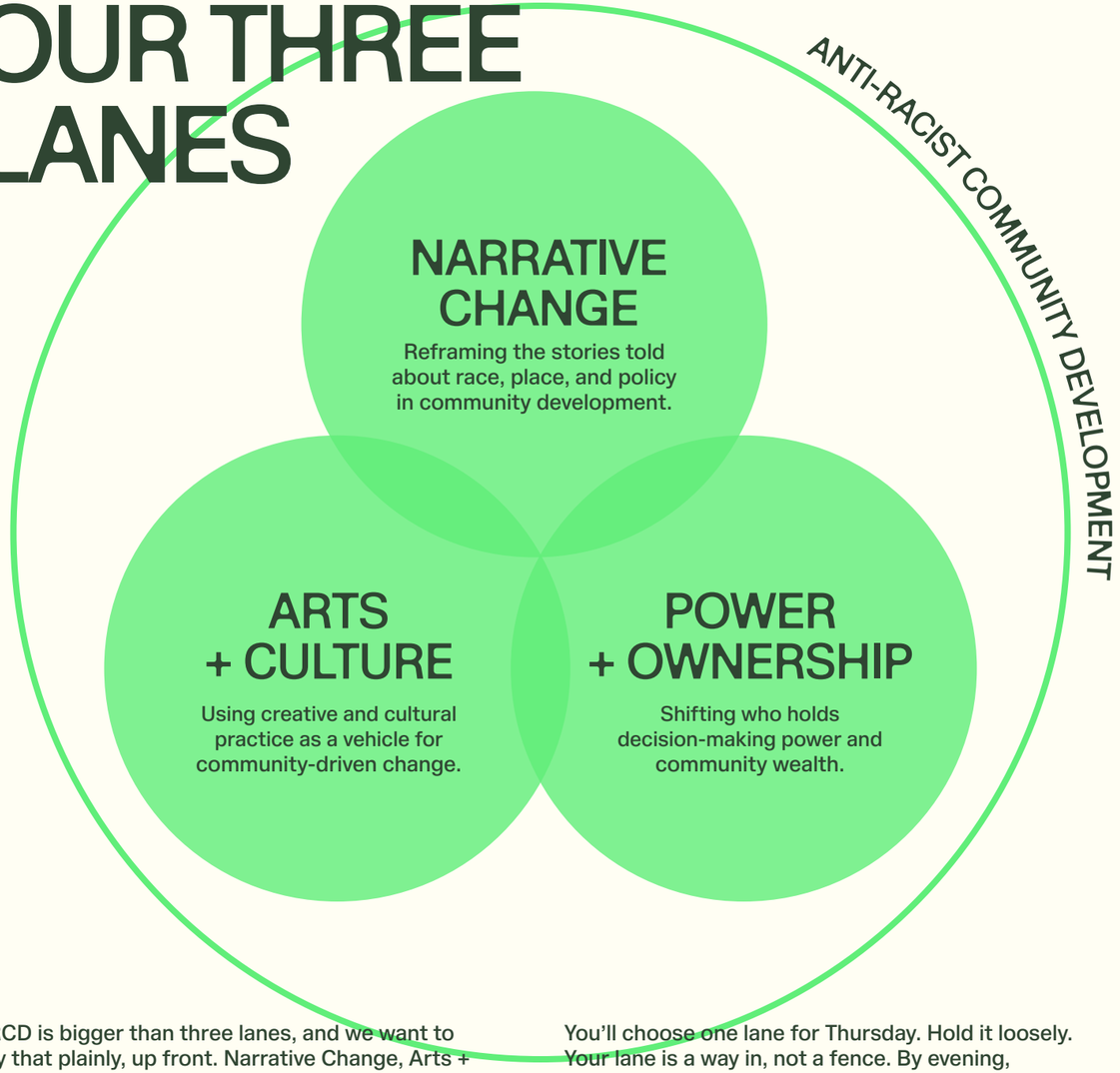
OUR THREE LANES



ARCD is bigger than three lanes, and we want to say that plainly, up front. Narrative Change, Arts + Culture, and Power + Ownership are not the whole shape of ARCD — they're where this network's energy is, right now, together.

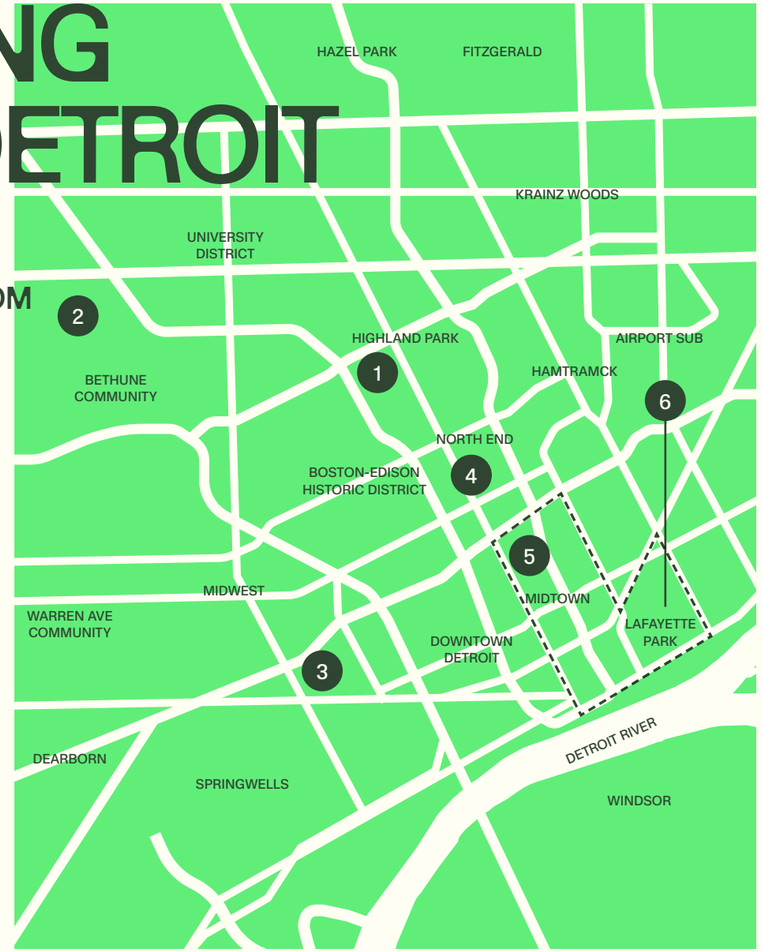
We didn't choose them from a boardroom. They rose up out of four years in rooms with you — in Jackson, the Twin Cities, Central Appalachia, and in every issue we've published, every emerging practice you've brought back to us as proof that another way of working is possible.

Look around the room on Thursday, and you'll see the same three lanes cutting through every discipline at once — organizers, artists, real estate developers, CDFI leaders, philanthropy professionals, all of Our People, working toward the same horizon from different corners of the field. That's not a coincidence. It's the whole point.

You'll choose one lane for Thursday. Hold it loosely. Your lane is a way in, not a fence. By evening, you'll be sitting across from people who spent the day somewhere else entirely — and the real work of this convening happens in what you carry back to each other.

Scan QR code for full event schedule

LEARNING FROM DETROIT



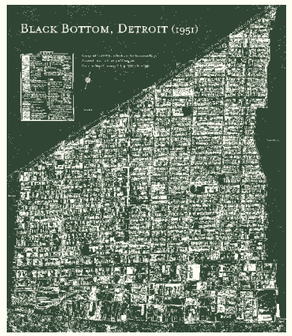
Wednesday PRE-CONFERENCE, RAP + CLEVELAND FREEDOM DREAMS COALITION

Every practitioner walks into Wednesday evening's welcome reception, but two groups arrive a half day earlier, and on purpose. The Regional Action Planning cohorts — practitioner-led coalitions ThirdSpace has helped build in Jackson, Mississippi; the Twin Cities; and Central Appalachia — and the Cleveland Freedom Dreams Coalition, a group of Cleveland-based ARCD practitioners convened directly by ThirdSpace in our own backyard, share something the rest of the room doesn't: years of close, direct relationship with this work. Wednesday is theirs first. Before the doors open wide, there's time to level-set, to hear what's happening in each other's cities, and to arrive Thursday already knowing a few faces in the crowd — a few more of Our People.

It's not a smaller convening. It's a different kind of room — and it starts in two Detroit neighborhoods that are already living the answer to the question everyone else is about to spend three days asking.

1 Avalon Village, Highland Park
After losing her two-year-old son Jakobi to a hit-and-run driver in 2007, Shamayim "Mama Shu" Harris bought a blighted house on Avalon Street for $1,000 and refused to leave. Two decades later, that block is Avalon Village — a homework house, marketplace, gardens, and Highland Park's first solar light. Power & Ownership, starting with one person's refusal to wait.

2 Howard Family Bookstore, Puritan & Schaefer
Jerjuan Howard grew up walking past a boarded-up building on his way to school. In 2024, he bought it. Howard Family Bookstore — books, coffee, murals — continues work that began with the Umoja Debate League (25+ Detroit schools) and Umoja Village, a garden answering a neighborhood "nutrition desert." One person, one block, three levers pulled at once.



↑ A map of Black Bottom in 1951, compiled from Sanborn fire insurance maps.

Thursday THREE LANES, ALL ATTENDEES

3 Garage Cultural, Southwest Detroit (Arts + Culture)
Garage Cultural calls itself a tool for "exploration, expression, and disruption." Founded in 2012 as a Southwest Detroit arts hub, it's grown into a home for muralists, musicians, and makers. When gentrification hit, the response was a purchase — its own building, so no one could price the art out. Arts and Culture, doing Power and Ownership's job.

4 Detroit Black Community Food Sovereignty Network (DBCFSN) & Detroit People's Food Co-op, North End (Power + Ownership)
For 20 years, DBCFSN has advanced food sovereignty, environmental justice, and Black liberation in Detroit. In 2024, that work became the $22M Detroit Food Commons — anchored by Detroit People's Food Co-op, a Black-led, community-owned grocery store on the first floor, with DBCFSN's offices, kitchens, and event hall upstairs. "For us, by us" as a business model, not a slogan.

5 Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, Midtown Detroit (Narrative Change)
Dr. Charles H. Wright, a Detroit obstetrician, visited a war memorial in Denmark and asked why Detroit couldn't tell its own story with the same care. In 1965, he opened a museum in his own house. Six decades later, that house is the largest institution of its kind in the country — Narrative Change, at the scale of a building.

Three lanes, three neighborhoods, one evening at Garden Theater to bring it all back together — dinner, music, and each other's stories, before Friday asks you to help write down what comes next.

6 Black Bottom was a predominantly Black neighborhood in Detroit demolished for redevelopment in the late 1950s to early 1960s and replaced with the Lafayette Park residential district and a freeway. It was located on Detroit's near east side, bounded by Gratiot Avenue, Brush Street, the Detroit River, and the Grand Trunk railroad tracks.

MANIFESTING THE ARCD FUTURE



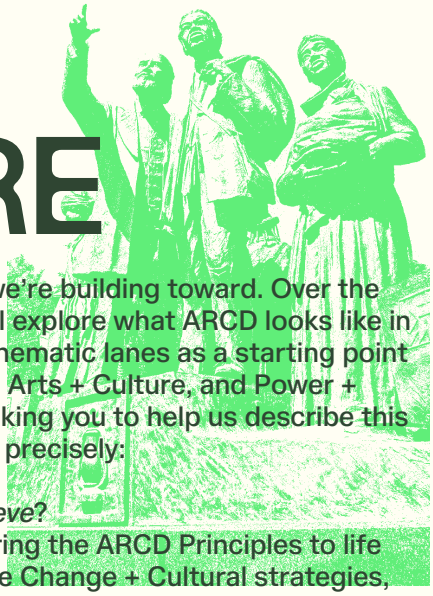
Let's name where we are.

The environment for this work has only gotten harder since The People's Practice began. Funders are growing cautious. Language is being softened or scrubbed. The policy climate is openly hostile to race-explicit community development. If you're doing this work in 2026, you already know that in your body. And you're building anyway.

Here's what we won't do: we won't pretend these issues don't exist, nor will we face them alone. We are coming together to dream, strategize, and celebrate with our community. We're not here to be convinced ARCD works. You already believe that, or you wouldn't have made the trip. We're here to get sharper, together, about what it looks like.

At its best, community development can:

- Facilitate change in place, driven by and responsive to residents
- Center the needs and wisdom of those who are most oppressed or excluded
- Hold structural problems that cross borders, without losing sight of what's specific to one block
- Build the shared governance that makes collective action last
- Move capital into communities that have been starved of it, without repeating the harms investment has caused before
- Improve how people actually live — their health, their stability, their sense of what's possible



That's the practice we're building toward. Over the next three days, we'll explore what ARCD looks like in action, using three thematic lanes as a starting point — Narrative Change, Arts + Culture, and Power + Ownership. We're asking you to help us describe this paradigm shift more precisely:

- What do we *believe*?
- How might we bring the ARCD Principles to life through Narrative Change + Cultural strategies, and innovative approaches to building Collective Power + Community Ownership?
- What are we willing to advocate for, together, once we leave Detroit?

We're not asking how to get back to normal. Normal was never good enough — not for the neighborhoods we serve, not for the practitioners who've been doing this work with too little support for too long. We're asking a bigger question: once the current chaos settles, once we've won, what do we rebuild? What would it look like if Anti-Racist Community Development wasn't the exception — but the primary approach to community building throughout the country?

Detroit-based writer and movement facilitator adrienne maree brown put it plainly: "It's not the end of the world, it's the beginning of something else." What will the other side of freedom look like? This is the question we're asking you to sit with this week — alongside naming the hard truth.

This is the start of our ARCD manifesto. Not the end of the conversation.

