



A CREATIVE PLACEMAKING FIELD SCAN

Building Community Wealth: The Role of Arts and Culture in Equitable Economic Development

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DECEMBER 2020



ABOUT ARTPLACE AMERICA

ArtPlace America (ArtPlace) is a ten-year collaboration among a number of foundations, federal agencies, and financial institutions that supports and strengthens the field of creative placemaking – the intentional integration of arts, culture, and community-engaged design strategies into the process of equitable community planning and development. We work to enlist artists as allies in creating equitable, healthy, and sustainable communities in which everyone has a voice and agency. To this end, we've invested over \$100 million to grow the field of creative placemaking through demonstration projects, in-depth investments in organizational change, research, and convenings – embedding knowledge and resources within existing networks and supporting local ecosystems to own and evolve the practice.

COMMONFUTURE.

ABOUT COMMON FUTURE

Common Future equips local economy leaders, funders, investors, and policymakers with the relationships, knowledge, and resources needed to build economically empowered communities through equitable business and economic development. Over 20 years (previously as BALLE), we have supported a growing network of leaders supporting social entrepreneurs and community wealth-building enterprises in rural communities and communities of color. We invest in their work by deploying capital in ways that challenge conventional thinking, practice, and systems. And by working with philanthropy, business, and investors, we influence shifts in resources and power toward racial equity. To date, we have advised the move of \$250M+ of philanthropic investment capital out of Wall Street and into community wealth-building projects. In 2020, we deployed more than \$3.7M directly into grants for community-driven economy solutions.

Cover image: Little Mekong Night Market, Courtesy Asian Economic Development Association (AEDA)
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FOREWORD

ArtPlace America (ArtPlace) is a ten-year collaboration among a number of foundations, federal agencies, and financial institutions that supports and strengthens the field of creative placemaking – the intentional integration of arts, culture, and community-engaged design strategies into the process of equitable community planning and development. We work to enlist artists as allies in creating equitable, healthy, and sustainable communities in which everyone has a voice and agency.

In looking, systemically, at who does community planning and development work in America’s communities, we have found that our colleagues may generally be organized into ten sectors: Agriculture & Food, Economic Development, Environment & Energy, Health, Housing, Immigration, Public Safety, Transportation, Workforce Development, and Youth Development. As a core part of ArtPlace’s research agenda, we are exploring how arts and cultural practitioners have long been and may increasingly be partners in helping to achieve each of these sector’s goals.

The document that follows is one of ten “field scans” that we have commissioned as a part of this work. In each of the ten sectors we produce such a report to illuminate key priorities in that sector, and to offer a framework for understanding the ways that arts and culture contribute to local, place-based outcomes in that sector. Each field scan serves as the starting point for a working group tasked with taking the analysis and findings one step further, helping ArtPlace identify the best practices that warrant formal case studies, key methods for evaluating success, and strategic framing of the material in a way that resonates with people most likely to take up creative placemaking practice in a given sector.

Our initial research into the Economic Development sector began in 2019, long before the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Our plans to convene a working group in Spring 2020, however, were impacted, and we pivoted instead to convene a group of external reviewers virtually, and to cultivate a partnership with community wealth building intermediary Common Future to carry this work beyond ArtPlace’s tenure.

More importantly, the layered crises of 2020 brought to the forefront a set of social, racial, and economic disparities that underscore just how critical and timely a new approach to economic development is. The financial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is still evolving in the U.S. and worldwide, and many of the dynamics described in this report are now even more dire for the countless individuals and communities navigating a loss of livelihood. It is our hope, then, that this research helps to develop a shared language and mutual set of goals for arts and economic development stakeholders, so that communities across the country will ultimately benefit from these powerful, cross-sector collaborations and synergies.

Jamie Hand
Director of Research Strategies
ARTPLACE AMERICA

Courtesy AEDA

INVITATION TO ACTION

As a community wealth building intermediary, Common Future works at the intersection of racial equity and economic justice. The work of ArtPlace and this body of field-building research authored by Danya Sherman sits at the intersection of arts and culture and community wealth building. Her findings already are beginning to inform and influence our practice going forward. We are honored to help share this work, intend to build on it with both substance and humility, and invite the reader to join us.

This scan reflects what we see in our network of leaders working locally to address generational economic challenges. When their solutions are at the intersection of arts, community building, and economic development, they too often operate in relative isolation with insufficient resources.

To follow the release of this report, Common Future will deploy dedicated program funds from ArtPlace into a small number of community wealth-building efforts that deliberately engage arts and culture as integral to the strategy. We know that what's needed, however, is extended commitment and widespread investment beyond these one-time community advised grants. We would like to continue support to those same efforts and more, over the long term, and will consult with cultural and community leaders to refine how we embrace the connections of arts, culture, equity, and economic justice.

We invite and encourage our colleagues in philanthropy and economic change to consider community-led, arts-integrated solutions to generational economic challenges. Where are the opportunities to invest in the innovations, experiments, and existing work happening now in underinvested communities? How can more of us make research & development capital available to practicing leaders who are prototyping an equitable economy and dynamic culture?

We invite you to join us, as we join those who have pursued the inquiry and organizing agenda of ArtPlace alongside the many arts and cultural organizers and efforts boosting this work. Together, we can drive investment to creatives and community builders in Black/Brown, rural, and other underinvested communities and move forward an equitable economy.

COMMON FUTURE

www.commonfuture.co

Courtesy AEDA

INTRODUCTION

Since time immemorial, communities have been developing creative practices and culturally-specific traditions that are deeply intertwined with the way they produce, manage, exchange, and steward resources. What a society values, how it creates those valuable objects or practices, and who has access to them is indicative of a culture's core beliefs. While it may be tempting to think of 'the economy' as a thing operating outside of anyone's control, with its own rules and behaviors, we can look no further than our definitions of wealth, who has access to it, and how it is produced to understand who we are. Culture - and the creative practices that make it up, including the arts - has and will always be a critical way to understand an economy and work to shift it.

The word 'wealth' comes from the old english word "weal" which means "well-being."¹

When ArtPlace began its sector-based research and field building initiative to support integration of arts and culture into the field of economic development in 2019, we sought to investigate the values and assumptions undergirding the way creative placemaking and its many cousins (creative placekeeping, the community arts movement, etc.) are being practiced.² There is a growing consensus that none of the practices discussed here - economic development, arts, culture, community development - are neutral. All have the capacity to be oppressive as much as they have the capacity to move communities closer to liberation. Over its ten years, ArtPlace has evolved along with the field our collaborators. We have increasingly tailored support to focus on issues of racial, economic, and geographic justice. As part of our evolution, it is also important to acknowledge that we have, intentionally or not, contributed to inequitable and harmful economic development strategies.³

Many rural regions and municipalities, outside of the hotspot markets of downtowns in major metropolitan areas, are working to provide services with lower and lower budgets. This vulnerability positions them to search for ways to attract businesses that will employ their residents, increase tax revenue to pay for basic services, and make their region more desirable to visit or live in. In the past few decades, arts and culture, creative placemaking, creative economy, and related initiatives have demonstrated how and why they help improve a place's economic viability.⁴

THERE IS AN INHERENT ISSUE WITH THE COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FIELD AS A WHOLE: WE ARE ORGANIZED AROUND THE INSTRUMENT OF CHANGE, AND NOT TO WHAT END OR FOR WHOM.⁵

ASCALA SISK, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CONSULTANT

These efforts have helped raise the profile and understanding of why arts and culture are vital aspects of human society. There are many creative placemaking initiatives that are led by and primarily support communities of color, Native nations, and rural regions, or that are designed specifically to address the inequitable distribution of resources.⁶ However, other creative placemaking efforts have increased economic inequality, sometimes contributing to displacement of already economically vulnerable communities.⁷

Our research early on to map the powerful but often fuzzily defined and fragmented field of community economic development showcased **a deep need to be proactive about supporting arts and culture-integrated economic strategies that are clear about who they will benefit and to what end.** One-size-fits-all approaches to community economic development strategies that are not explicitly supportive of working people, communities of color, Native nations, and other oppressed groups risk harming them. Our research uncovered a values-explicit economic development framework that is more in line with our mission to support artists as allies in equitable community development. That framework is 'community wealth building,' a way of building local economies from the ground-up, governed by local grassroots efforts, that prioritizes justice, democratic ownership, and naturally integrates creative and culturally-explicit ways of working.

Community Wealth Building: a system-changing approach to community economic development that works to produce broadly shared economic prosperity, racial equity, and ecological sustainability through the reconfiguration of institutions and local economies on the basis of greater democratic ownership, participation, and control.⁸

This paper is intended to describe how creative practitioners around the country are using arts and culture to strengthen community economic development rooted in anti-racist practices. We hope that it helps make the case for funders, municipal agencies, intermediaries, and others who seek to develop a more just economy to develop infrastructure for cultural self-determination.

METHODS

Research for this paper drew from a literature review; attendance at several conferences; an analysis of over 200 placed-based, arts-integrated community economic development projects and organizations; and over 35 semi-structured interviews with practitioners working in the community economic and/or arts and culture sectors. Community-wide conversations and feedback guided research at key points throughout the process, most notably a roundtable of 25 practitioners at ArtPlace's 2019 Summit and a comprehensive review and group discussion by 15 subject-matter experts in November 2020. A complete list of roundtable participants, external reviewers, and interviewees can be found in the Credits on page 30. Quotes and case studies throughout the paper have been drawn from interviews and research, and have been approved by interviewees and organizational leaders.

For the purposes of this paper, we will be focusing on the side of economic development dealing directly with individuals' wealth building, access to capital, and small enterprise development. However, we recognize that this is an artificially narrow focus. Housing policy and finance has perhaps been one of the most determinative factors in Americans' ability to amass wealth, and a significant cause for rising inequality in recent years. The field of workforce development, which focuses on access to jobs and job-training, is also a critical piece of economic development, and we have devoted a separate field of study and partnership with the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) to focus on that aspect of the work.¹⁰ Just transition frameworks call our attention to the need to consider ecological sustainability alongside economic strategies for comprehensive approaches to resource management and climate justice.¹¹ For the purposes of this research, we are focusing on the portion of the community economic development field addressing individuals' financial positions, business enterprises, and community-wide access to capital. The community economic development field has professionalized with specific language and funding streams that need to be addressed on their own.



KEY TRENDS IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

We began our inquiry into the role of arts and culture in economic development with a review of prominent organizational stakeholders and their research in the economic development sector overall. We then looked specifically within the community economic development field, which is sometimes referred to as community development in general (ArtPlace considers community development to include the sectors of transportation, housing, public health, environmental work, and more). While strategies overlap within community economic development and economic development, community economic development is generally considered to focus primarily on alleviating poverty and on economic inequality at the neighborhood or community scale. Economic development can focus on any region, city, state, or other place seeking to grow its financial position. Below we describe key trends that emerged.

INEQUALITY IN THE UNITED STATES

While the United States is one of the richest countries in the world, the majority of its residents are struggling to make ends meet.¹² Rates of inequality continue to grow as the cost of living increases while working peoples' wages stagnate. Disproportionate impacts fall along familiar lines of class, gender identity, geography, race, sexuality, and nationality¹³ - and show the interrelatedness of various forms of structural inequity based on identity.¹⁴ Despite rising awareness regarding racial injustice, the racial wealth gap has persisted.¹⁵ On the whole, African American, Latinx, and Indigenous communities are paid lower wages and prevented from moving into higher-paying jobs, receiving other wealth-building opportunities like homeownership and small business financing, and more.¹⁶

COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The systems in place to address poverty and income inequality are struggling, too. The professionalized 'field' of community economic development developed in the late 20th century to address poverty as declining public funding left communities vulnerable. The field is composed of hardworking public and private federal, state, and local actors working to build financial resources by and for those whom the broader economic infrastructure has left out or is treating unfairly. Despite these efforts, public funding for community economic development has been declining steadily for several decades,¹⁷ bargaining power for workers has declined with union-busting efforts,¹⁸ and a patchwork system of private funds and policy measures have been put in place to plug the gaps.

Community Economic Development: efforts to improve economic conditions of a community through stimulating business activity, expanding access to capital and asset accumulation, growing local business opportunities and entrepreneurial activity, and connecting residents to the regional, national and global economy.¹⁹

Our research showed that the community economic development field is highly fragmented and decentralized. This sector, unlike transportation, for example, has neither a strongly organized, coordinated, nor consistently funded system across federal, state, and regional geographies. This fragmentation creates deep divergences in regions' and communities' ability to access funding for small business development, individual wealth accumulation, and community-wide economic infrastructure. It also creates challenges in accessing coherent and consistent information about what kinds of investments, grants, loans, financing, and more are available to individuals, communities, and businesses in a particular region, city, town, or rural area. Even at local levels, the various sources of financing and community development intermediaries are usually not operating in any sort of coordinated fashion.²⁰ Additionally, community economic development can suffer from the same issues of bias, inertia, and lack of focus on prioritizing justice as many other industries. In a recent report based on fifteen interviews with heads of top community development financial institutions around the country, the Urban Institute noted a lack of focus on structural racism in the field as it exists today.²¹

POWER, MONEY, AND MARKET FUNDAMENTALISM

The current American economic system is a form of capitalism, which is defined by five interrelated characteristics: private ownership of the means of production, wage labor, profit maximization, production for sale, and market exchange.²² By tax law, private corporations must own the means of production - meaning the equipment, financial capital, and political power that facilitates access to natural materials - and seek to maximize profits for owners or shareholders. This allows owners to reinvest in themselves and their companies, and means that lower labor costs will usually be preferred in order to maximize profit. Corporate decision-making is predominantly hierarchical, and decisions that benefit workers are often only made as a result of worker solidarity and advocacy. On a larger scale, this means that those who make less money are structurally positioned to have less time, less influence over political decision-making, and fewer forms of institutional power. Social movements generate their own forms of power through collective action - through protests, strikes, and other tactics - but this kind of power is disincentivized by our economic and political system. There has, over the past decades, been a growing faith in the market to solve problems on its own. There has also been a growing but contested tendency to consider this amorphous 'economy' above considerations for social welfare. This tendency to try to define everything in economic terms misses, for example, the costs of pollution on the environment over time,

the cost to society and families of poor health of laborers over time, and the cost of the loss of cultural and spiritual traditions that carry intergenerational wisdom. Some community development efforts have endeavored to include non-financial forms of capital in their definitions of wealth, but the implication often remains that those resources are being described so that they can be monetized.²³

COMPETING THEORIES OF CHANGE

We learned that there are very deep divergences across approaches to community economic development, whether working at the local, regional, or national scales. Interviewees gave wide-ranging answers to basic questions about what the economy is and what and who it is built for. Broadly speaking, two overarching theories of change emerged:

Modify the existing system: This theory holds that the current economic structure can or (for expediency's sake) may need to remain for the time being, but needs to be tweaked in order to better benefit communities that have been left out. Organizing and policy efforts at local, regional, or national scales in this camp include efforts to raise wages, direct and equitable small-business financing, creation and retention of well-paying and high quality jobs, employee and public-private ownership of firms through stock options or profit-sharing systems, and individual financial literacy programs directed towards Black, Latinx, Native Nations, rural, and other underinvested communities. Community economic development programs at local, regional, or national scale in this arena may use terminology such as “closing the racial wealth gap,” “asset-building,” or “increasing upward mobility.”

Change the system: This theory holds that American capitalism has always been reliant on exploitation of workers and wealth accumulation for top earners, and needs to be fundamentally restructured. Organizing and policy efforts in this camp at local, regional, or national scales include efforts to form consumer and worker cooperatives; taking land out of the market through efforts like community land trusts; sharing resources through efforts like time banks, buying clubs, and mutual aid networks; and the enabling legislation that supports these efforts to grow at scale and in all locales.²⁴ Community economic development programs at local, regional, or national scale in this arena may use terminology such as “economic democracy,” “restorative economics,” “just transition,” and “solidarity economics.”

COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING

The findings above indicate a need to be proactive about supporting and building forms of community economic development that prioritize fighting inequity and reconfiguring the connection between money and power. They also reveal the need to take a broader view of wealth than financial, and utilize the best of community economic development strategies that modify the system in the short term but work to change it structurally in the long term.

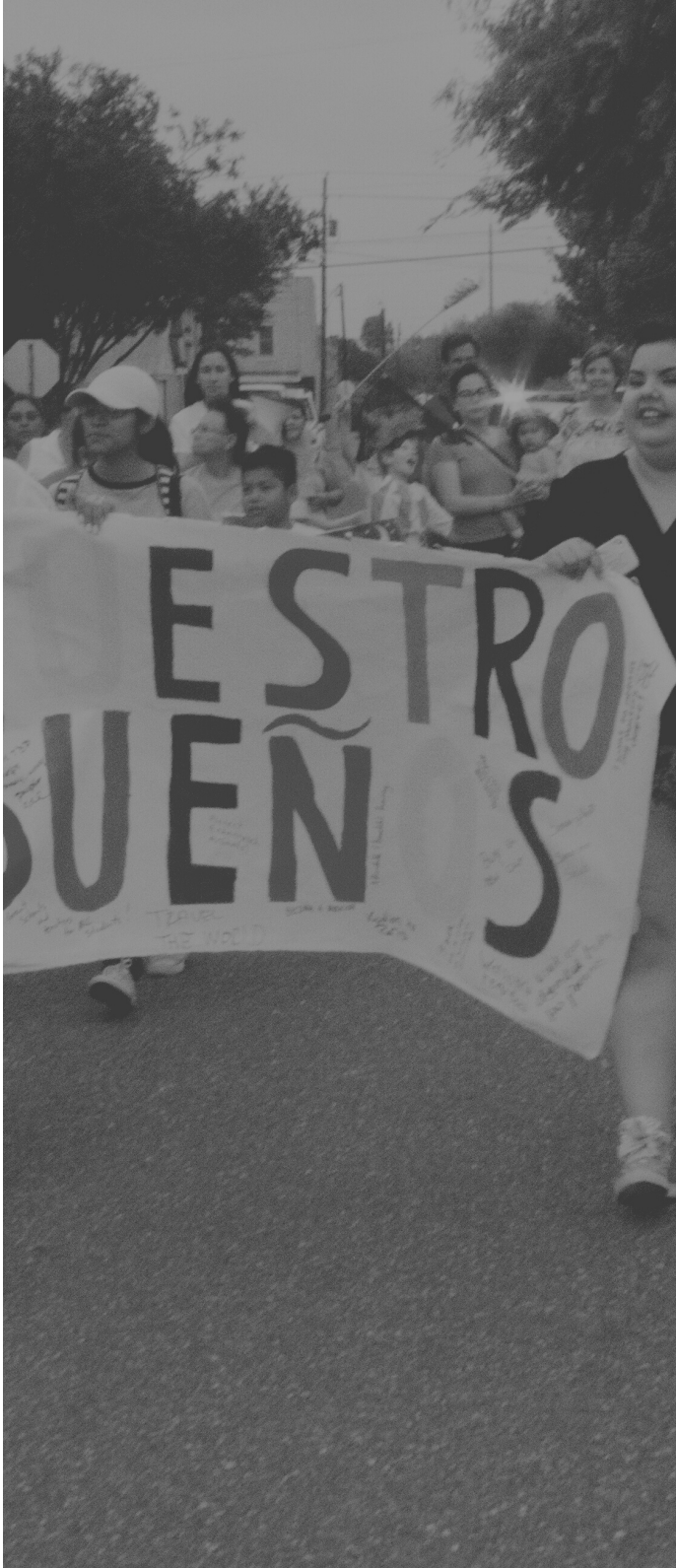
'Community wealth building' describes local grassroots efforts to build racially and economically just, mutually supportive, democratically controlled, and collectively owned economic institutions.²⁵ The term itself has been popularized by the Democracy Collaborative over the past few decades, and is used by many other entities and communities across the country and world. How it manifests varies from place to place since it prioritizes democratic ownership and grassroots self-determination. An analysis of related strategies such as 'just transition', 'economic democracy', 'solidarity economy', and 'empowerment economics' reveals that community wealth building strategies - regardless of what they are called - have several characteristics in common. In the next section, we define these principles in detail, and describe how practitioners across the country are using arts and culture to help enact and shape these principles. Each principle, and the way arts and culture bolster it, is illustrated with an inspiring real-world model - though many of these examples employ multiple strategies discussed below.

WE NEED TO MOVE BEYOND OUR OBSESSION WITH ROI'S (RETURN ON INVESTMENTS).

EXTERNAL REVIEW FORUM PARTICIPANT



HOW CULTURE AND THE ARTS BUILD COMMUNITY WEALTH



Arts and cultural strategies have significant roles to play in advancing community wealth building work. While it may have been called many other names, we can see roots of community wealth building in many cultures, from *susus* (informal loan circles) in West Africa and the Caribbean, to family associations in Chinatowns across the U.S., to African American mutual aid societies, the famous Combahee River Colony, and more.²⁶

Based on a scan of over 200 of initiatives around the country, below we describe six key principles of community wealth building and how practitioners are using arts and culture to advance them. While it is useful to articulate them independently, effective community wealth building employs all six strategies and more. This analysis is not intended to be prescriptive, but rather descriptive of how practitioners are working. It is intended to showcase the valuable role creative practitioners play in this work, and to support the leadership of and trust for these creative practitioners.²⁷

SUMMARY

COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING PRIORITIZES...

- Democratic decision-making
- Collective ownership
- Reparations and justice
- Workers' wellbeing
- Non-extractive financing
- Sustaining valuable resources

ARTS AND CULTURE ADVANCES THIS BY...

- Facilitating collaboration
- Accessing imagination to bring new economic structures into being
- Building power to strengthen movements
- Healing individuals and communities
- Making the case for holistic, people-centered financing
- Creating new and sustaining existing forms of resource generation

WE OFTEN MEASURE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BY THE AMOUNT OF CAPITAL WE CAN ATTRACT. WE SHOULD BEGIN TO MEASURE IT BY THE CAPITAL WE CAN RETAIN IN THE COMMUNITY.²⁸

ED WHITFIELD, FUND FOR DEMOCRATIC COMMUNITIES

Community wealth building prioritizes

DEMOCRATIC DECISION-MAKING

Entities created in community wealth building efforts or governments managing funds can maximize community benefit by being democratically governed. This ensures that local communities are in the driver's seat with regards to key decisions, rather than guided solely by politicians, stockholders, or business owners who may not care or know much about what the local community needs.

Examples of local economic development strategies that are democratically governed include: consumer-owned cooperatives, employee-owned cooperatives, community-based financial institutions, participatory budgeting, community-governed land trusts.

ARTISTS AND CULTURAL PRACTITIONERS CAN ADVANCE DEMOCRATIC DECISION-MAKING BY FACILITATING COLLABORATION.

Working collaboratively can be challenging – arts and cultural activities provide experiences for positive, shared relationship-building and sophisticated, creative communication strategies. Sharing assets or making decisions in large groups require processes that may be different or more complex than those many have been taught or become accustomed to in hierarchical organizations and schools. The process of easing tension through creative exercises, providing opportunities to experience collective joy, and helping community members imagine non-traditional alternatives can all help groups move through complex decision-making efforts.

Case Study: Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation

Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation (TVCDC) is a Lakota-led organization that envisions a liberated Lakota nation through their language, culture, and spirituality. TVCDC works to empower Lakota youth and families on the Pine Ridge Reservation to improve the health, culture, and environment of their communities through the healing and strengthening of their cultural identity. Their work takes aim at colonization; for liberation to be realized, TVCDC focuses on *Lakol iyukcan* (Lakota thought) – individual and collective shifts in mindsets and worldview to once again think and act like a Lakota. The type of change they envision for their nation begins with the individual; each individual must be sovereign, self-determined, and liberated. Sovereignty does not lie with an entity or a government; it takes shape in each person and then extends to the family unit, extended

family, and eventually the entire nation. TVCDC's Lifeways and Wellness Equity Unification is their intentional effort to pragmatically and systemically provide healing pathways to their people, and particularly, to their most vulnerable populations – those on the periphery. These pathways guide community members in making that mindset shift, this mindset shift then creates a culture shift in their families and communities, and that creates a movement of liberation.

TVCDC provides a whole community approach through eight initiatives: Regenerative Community Development, Workforce Development, Youth Leadership Development, Social Enterprise, Housing and Homeownership, Regional Equity, Lakota Language Revitalization & Education, and Food Sovereignty. As part of their community-governed master plan, TVCDC completed and sold seven single-family homes, opened a Community Center and Bunkhouse, and completed and rented a 12-unit apartment building right in the heart of the Pine Ridge Reservation. Among other community wealth building initiatives, their social enterprise incubated the Owíŋža Quilters Cooperative, and a worker-owned cooperative called Thikáŋa Construction Company, which is now constructing the remaining homes.

Additional examples: PUSH Buffalo (Buffalo, NY), Appalachian Puppet Pageant (Knoxville, TN), Dream of Wild Health (Minneapolis, MN), La Mujer Obrero (El Paso, TX), HANA Center (Chicago, IL)



Community wealth building prioritizes

COLLECTIVE OWNERSHIP

Collective ownership is when a piece of land, building, utility, business entity, piece of intellectual property, or another entity is owned by a particular group of individuals. Cooperatively owned markets, businesses, or buildings can be owned by those occupying or employed in them, or by their customers. Entities can also be owned commonly or publicly, rather than by a specific group of people, and thus available by use for all.

Examples of local economic development strategies centered around collective ownership include: consumer-owned cooperatives; employee-owned cooperatives; mutual housing associations; public banking; community development credit unions; employee stock option programs; enabling legislation easing the incorporation and taxation of cooperative enterprises; start-up funding, field building, and technical assistance for collectively owned enterprises and institutions; mutualization of broadband, energy providers, or other infrastructure utilities.

ARTS AND CULTURE HELP PEOPLE ACCESS THE IMAGINATION REQUIRED TO BRING ALTERNATIVE ECONOMIC SYSTEMS INTO BEING.

In order to shift attitudes towards a belief that different ways of sharing resources are possible, the power of the imagination and connection on emotional levels are often beneficial. Arts and culture can support communities' and advocates' ability to imagine and share that vision with each other, policymakers, investors, and others in creative, holistic, and powerful ways.

Case Study: Las Imaginistas

Las Imaginistas are a socially engaged art collective from Brownsville, Texas. Founded in 2016 by artist-activists Celeste De Luna, Nansi Guevara and Christina Patiño Houle, the collective has since expanded to include more than 15 artists and makers who all work in close collaboration with low-income and immigrant communities along the Rio Grande Delta to advance justice and equity. Through one of their signature ongoing projects, *Taller de Permiso* (Permission Workshop), Las Imaginistas collaborated with community members to take an active role in envisioning and advocating for more democratic, sustainable economic opportunities in Brownsville. While the project's workshops empowered local entrepreneurs with tools to navigate the complex existing permitting process for street

vending, the concurrent community-led media and art campaign is focused on questioning the status quo in economic development and celebrating residents' ability to imagine a future city that is shaped by their dreams for sustainable futures. Through performance and art interventions – such as using *eloteros* (grilled-corn food carts) to conduct community listening sessions, or animating interviews with city officials about public discussions about policy change – Las Imaginistas support community members in using activist strategies that celebrate regional cultural wealth and promote egalitarian government processes.

Additional examples: Montebello Organizing Committee (Denver, CO), Southside Rising (Asheville, NC), Claiborne Corridor Cultural Innovation District (New Orleans, LA), Reimagine Flint (Flint, MI), Hawaiian Community Assets Foundation of Wealth/Kahua Waiwai program (HI)

ART HAS HELPED US TO ELIMINATE HIERARCHIES IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SYSTEMS. PEOPLE HAVE PERFORMED AND MADE VISIBLE WHAT THEY IMAGINE COULD BE POSSIBLE IN THE FUTURE.²⁹

CHRISTINA PATIÑO HOULE, LAS IMAGINISTAS



Community wealth building prioritizes

REPARATIONS AND JUSTICE

Reparations and justice are critical elements of ensuring that community wealth building is centered in communities that have been most harmed by current and past U.S. economic systems. Actions taken by power-holders have consistently disadvantaged black, rural, native, queer and trans, immigrant, working class, and disabled Americans from earning and accumulating wealth at the same rate of whiter, wealthier communities. Without explicitly centering those who are most harmed, even community wealth building strategies risk deepening that harm.

Examples of local economic development strategies centered around reparations and justice include: cash transfers, grants, and financing for Native American and African American individuals, enterprises, and communities; “buy black” or “buy Native” purchasing campaigns; infrastructure investments that directly benefit rural, working class, Native, and other underinvested communities; divest / invest campaigns and policies; policies mandating community benefits agreements and jobs guarantees for new construction; anti-displacement policies such as mandatory affordable housing and commercial space minimums for new development; and property tax abatement for low-income, long-term residents and businesses.

ARTISTS AND CULTURAL PRACTICES CAN HELP BUILD POWER.

Creating new, less extractive economies not only requires changes in the way we communicate – it requires power shifts. Organizing community members through joyful, creative, and culturally rich practices helps strengthen bonds, builds collective capacity for self-governance, and creates powerful movements that when mobilized can create large-scale demands, changes, and new economic ecosystems. In the words of professor, author, and activist Toni Cade Bambara, “As a culture worker who belongs to an oppressed people my job is to make revolution irresistible.”

Case Study: Asian Economic Development Association

Little Mekong is a business and cultural district in St. Paul, Minnesota that spotlights and works to preserve the surrounding communities’ Southeast Asian cultures. In early 2012, the Asian Economic Development Association (AEDA) formed Little Mekong to support the historically disinvested neighborhood and many Asian-owned businesses facing the threat

of displacement from the nearby construction of a new light rail transit system. From the very beginning, AEDA centered local artists and makers in their economic development strategy for Little Mekong, recognizing that artist and community-led creative placemaking would attract a wider swath of customers and investments to the area while empowering residents to continue to fight gentrification. One of their first initiatives was to pair local artists with under-resourced businesses to help keep the businesses afloat and increase community bonding. AEDA also provided artists with community engagement training and included them in physical revitalization projects across the corridor. Now, the district consists of over 100 small local businesses, the majority of which are immigrant- or minority-owned, and includes a weekly night market that doubles as a creative platform for local artists and musicians. Little Mekong has become one of the city's top destinations, attracting hundreds of thousands of visitors and millions of dollars in business income per year. Residents consistently engage with the City's planning efforts, continuing to advocate for their vision of a vibrant, livable community, and AEDA engages in ongoing policy, advocacy, and coalition-building work to build racial equity.

BY CONNECTING BUSINESS OWNERS WITH ARTISTS, WE HELPED THEM SEE THAT THERE WERE MORE RESOURCES OUT THERE. IT HELPED US BUILD COMMUNITY, AND HELPED THE BUSINESSES CAPITALIZE ON THE CULTURAL AND SOCIAL ASSETS OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD.³⁰

VA-MEKN THOJ, AEDA



Community wealth building prioritizes

WORKERS' WELLBEING

Current economic systems incentivize companies and policymakers to prioritize profit for shareholders and executives, which often comes at the expense of low-wage workers and natural resources that support healthy communities. Community wealth building prioritizes human health and well-being by creating and advocating for the conditions that create physical, mental, and emotional health of workers.

Examples of local economic development strategies that prioritize workers' wellbeing include: policies and employment opportunities that create high quality, living wage jobs; standards around compensation ratios between highest and lowest paid workers; pipelines helping to ensure that community members have access to skills and connections to local, well-paying jobs; incubators and accelerators to help local working class and entrepreneurs of color; paid family leave and comprehensive health benefits policies and practices; and fair pay and worker protection for contract workers.

ARTS AND CULTURE CAN HELP FACILITATE THE HEALING NEEDED TO RECOVER FROM EXTRACTIVE LABOR PRACTICES.

In order to begin to undo the psychological, social, and scientific harm done by centuries of this kind of growth and to build a more sustainable and therefore economically beneficial future, communities and our natural living systems must be given the resources, time, and space needed to heal. Integrating time for rest, nurturing traditions, and creative practices into staff culture, employment and retention policies, and regular organizational practices can reinforce a culture of valuing the human beings at the center of an enterprise.³¹

Case Study: The Boston Ujima Project

The Boston Ujima Project is a democratically governed multi-stakeholder organization that is building a community-controlled economy with working class communities of color in Boston. Taking its name from the Swahili word for “collective work and responsibility,” the Ujima Project organizes neighbors, workers, business owners, artists, activists, and investors to challenge poverty and build collective power by finding new ways to manage and grow local wealth in a just and sustainable manner. Founded in 2017, the Ujima Project began with an ambition to create a public bank. Compelled by the promise of systemic

rather than singular address, Ujima adopted an ecosystem approach comprising a democratic investment fund designed to support local small businesses and community real estate projects, a community timebank that facilitates the exchange of services on a barter system, a Good Business Certification process and related local business association, and in the wake of the Coronavirus pandemic, the Boston Resident and Worker Care Fund. The Ujima Project also provides educational resources about how to build a more just society and supports creative storytelling and advocacy efforts that help to expand its reach. An organizational pillar, Ujima's Arts and Cultural Organizing program recognizes cultural workers as economy-builders and provides artists with a space to organize.

Additional examples: Coalfield Development (Wayne, WV), Grace in Action Collectives (Detroit, MI), Rolling Rez Arts (Pine Ridge, SD)

ECONOMICS SURROUNDS US, HOW WE MOVE, LIVE, EAT... IF WE'RE ASKING PEOPLE TO RE-EXAMINE SUCH CENTRAL ASPECTS OF LIFE, THIS IS CULTURAL WORK. WE NEED NEW CULTURAL AFFIRMATIONS FOR OUR WORK TO FOLLOW.³²

NIA EVANS, BOSTON UJIMA PROJECT



Solidarity Economy Initiative Event, 2018
Courtesy Boston Ujima Project

Community wealth building prioritizes

NON-EXTRACTIVE INVESTING

Non-extractive finance is defined as investments that enrich borrowers financially and socially.³³ Put most simply, non-extractive investing seeks to ensure that funds benefit those who participate in creating the value in the first place. These forms of financing are critical to providing local community wealth building activities with the funds and capital needed to not only develop and grow wealth but ensure that it is just and democratically shared. Non-extractive financing is usually based around knowledgeable, values-driven lenders and funders who consider more than just financial returns developing trusting and long-term relationships with place-based community wealth building leaders. These relationships can then lead to funders sharing or ceding decision-making power to the community leaders. It's worth noting that these relationships, and an ecosystems approach to financing community wealth building overall, can help to reduce the perception of risk for more traditional lenders.

Examples of non-extractive local economic development investment strategies include: democratizing investment decisions through a community-led fund; development of lending and grant-making tools specifically focused on cooperatives; direct public offerings; "patient" capital (low or no-interest loans); funding that layers and blends private and public forms of grant-making, financing, mutual aid, earned income, lending, and crowdfunding over long periods of time; SBA (small business association) guarantees for loans; anchor institutions (community foundations, museums, hospitals, local government funds) investing endowment or stock market funds locally; regional coordination focused on disinvested regions to ensure long-term financing and funding is directed where it is most needed.³⁴

ARTS AND CULTURE HELP TO MAKE THE CASE FOR HOLISTIC, PEOPLE-CENTERED FINANCING.

Non-extractive investing requires coordination among multi-sector actors and a long-term vision for why to invest in an initiative, community, or region. Arts and culture-based strategies can elevate alternative narratives, build empathy, and draw attention to compelling cases for non-extractive investment that considers more than financial returns. They can also be key partners in making the case for creative financing methods (like stacking multiple forms of capital over the long term) that can help mitigate risk and support the holistic development of a community's environment, cultures, residents, and more.

Case Study: Higher Purpose Co.

Higher Purpose Co. is an economic justice 501c3 nonprofit organization focused on community wealth building with Black residents across the Mississippi. Through an integrated model that combines business ownership, narrative change through storytelling, and advocacy campaigns, Higher Purpose Co. supports local Black entrepreneurs, farmers, and artists in the fight to tackle intergenerational poverty and institutional racism in Mississippi. As Higher Purpose Co.'s CEO and Co-Founder Tim Lampkin once told ArtPlace, the organization focuses on reclaiming and recirculating community wealth "through the ownership of financial, political, and cultural power," which includes helping artists-entrepreneurs make a living by teaching them business skills. Towards this end, Higher Purpose Co. has operated a statewide funding network since 2019 with community development financial institutions (CDFI's), Kiva, and foundations, which has provided \$750,000 to Black entrepreneurs, artists, and farmers in Mississippi using a capital matchmaking non-extractive model, application packaging, and business advising. Furthermore, the organization offers a six-month statewide business fellowship, yearly membership, a film initiative, and an institute focused entrepreneurship education, research, and advocacy.

Additional examples: The Central Appalachian Network, Letcher County Culture Hub (Eastern KY), Opportunity Southwest Virginia Festival (Southwest VA), 4-Directions Development (Red Lake, MN), All-in Cities Pittsburgh (Pittsburgh, PA), and the Belonging in Oakland Cultural Plan (Oakland, CA).



Higher Purpose Co. Fellows
Photo by Amanda Paige, Courtesy Higher Purpose Co.

Community wealth building prioritizes

SUSTAINING VALUABLE RESOURCES

The long-term ability of a community to sustain itself and its financial, ecological, cultural, and other resources requires strategies that recirculate and regenerate those resources.³⁵ Life and value-sustaining strategies nourish rather than extract resources from living systems, and redirect resources that may otherwise leave the community or cause inequitable growth. These approaches prevent capital leakage (funds generated in a place leaving and benefiting others), create multiplier effects (where an investment can create benefits not only for those directly engaged, but for the entire community), and over time help to ensure the sustainability of a community and its environment. Anti-displacement and just transition policies and practices can help to capture or re-build intellectual, human, ecological, and other forms of value that have been extracted.

Examples of local economic development strategies that sustain valuable resources include: land value taxes; anchor procurement strategies, which are policies or commitments through which local governments, hospitals, schools, museums, and other large entities contract with, hire, and/or direct endowment investments towards local residents and locally owned and operated businesses, with a certain percentage focused on black, Native, women, queer, etc. owned; mutual aid systems (such as gift economy or shared resource libraries) that reduce capital leakage; property tax abatements for undercapitalized long-term residents and businesses; assessment districts that create funds for long-term affordable housing and commercial tenure; just transition policies that divest from harmful industries and rebuild ecologically sustaining ones.

ARTS AND CULTURE CAN HELP TO CREATE NEW AND SUPPORT EXISTING FORMS OF RESOURCE GENERATION.

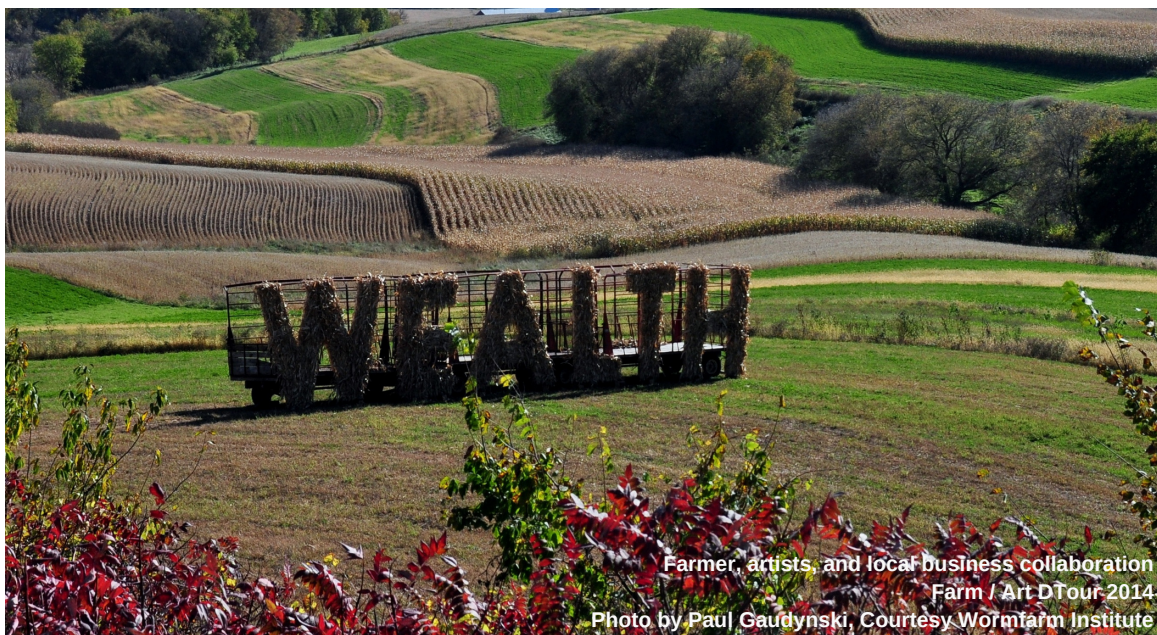
Arts and cultural traditions and practices have sustained communities for generations through inherited wisdom, spiritual development, and creative expression. Communities with strong traditions, such as rural communities, communities of color, and immigrant communities, have survived despite oppression and disinvestment, in part because of these traditions. Investing and sustaining in arts and culture can thus help to sustain a community in material and non-material ways. Arts and culture can be sources of financial development through food-based cooperatives and locally owned creative businesses,³⁶ small and mid-size arts institutions that anchor the development of a cultural community,³⁷ and events or festivals that help draw attention to what makes a culture or community unique and distinctive. If communities decide that they want to create community wealth building opportunities around these traditions and

practices, they can continue to be sources of pride and cultural preservation, as well as vehicles through which to help sustain the community's resources. Of course, not all culturally-specific economic development initiatives build community wealth, so when developing tourism, real estate investment, marketing, or other opportunities, communities must take care to incorporate the other aspects of local ownership, community control, and regenerative investing to ensure they will be the ones to benefit.

Case Study: Wormfarm Institute

The Wormfarm Institute is a non-profit organization dedicated to “building a sustainable future for agriculture and the arts by fostering vital links between people and the land.” Based in Wisconsin, the organization has been working for 20 years to create new economic opportunities in the region and support a flourishing cultural ecology by bringing rural and urban communities together around farming, land conservation, and the arts. Wormfarm's initiatives include an artist residency program, the management of “roadside culture stands” across the state, an annual fermentation festival, and more. As part of the annual Fermentation Fest, the organization launched the biennial Farm/Art DTour in 2011 as a way to make the connections between the land and art more legible and to stimulate the local economy. Farm/Art DTour is a free, self-guided drive through Wisconsin's working farmland that features large-scale public artworks, local food markets, roadside poetry, and educational field notes. Since 2011, the event's attendance has grown from 3,000 to over 22,000 people, helping to unlock investments in local cultural assets and resources that were previously undervalued.

Other examples: Mission Economic Development Agency (San Francisco, CA), Black Soil (Lexington, KY), Athens Land Trust (Athens, GA), Cooperative Community of New West Jackson (Jackson, MS), MASS MoCA's Assets for Artists program (North Adams, MA), Sprouts Market (Little Falls, MN), Zuni Pueblo Arts initiatives (Zuni Pueblo, NM), Ashe Cultural Arts Center (New Orleans, LA), Minnesota Indigenous Business Alliance (St. Paul, MN).



CONCLUSION

We hope this paper has helped to articulate some of the ways that arts and culture work can help to advance community wealth building.

While practitioners can help to strengthen community wealth building and cultural strategies by working together, interviewees noted the need for local, regional, and federal infrastructure to help build a more equitable and democratic economy. Research indicated a dearth of intermediaries serving community wealth building entities, and the need for enabling legislation at local, state, and federal levels. Community-based cooperatives, start-up enterprises in disinvested communities, and Native nations seeking to reclaim stolen land are in need of financial support to continue and build on this work.


ArtPlace is encouraged to see Common Future, Seed Commons, AmbitioUS, CultureBank, and other entities working to fill these gaps, along with organizations mobilizing to change legislation like the U.S. Federation of Worker Cooperatives, the New Economy Coalition, and more. Many public sector entities – among them City of Rochester, the City of New York, and the State of Illinois – are working to support community wealth building through start-up grants, technical assistance, policy change, and more.

In our forum with external reviewers for this paper, our colleagues called for changes in the field that could help work at this intersection. These included:

- Creating a more expansive definition within communities of 'artist,' 'culture bearers' and 'community wealth'
- Changing economic development metrics to include community wealth building measures
- Integrating arts and culture into economic development systems such as small business services and more
- Integrating pleasure activism, joy, etc. into movements for economic justice
- Building relational organizing and storytelling practices in the social service sector
- Funding 'community centers of power,' black entrepreneurs, and Native businesses and cooperatives
- Putting artists to work

- Protecting Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) cultural institutions, and making assets at other institutions more democratically controlled
- Investing long term
- Taking a broader view of ‘asset building’ to include community wealth, not just individual
- Expanding access to existing sources of financing and grants so that people of color and artists of color can benefit from them – through grant writing workshops, fiscal agents, etc.

As our partners at Common Future and the many practitioners across the country continue to innovate and respond to these calls, we look forward to seeing how economic development institutions and systems continue to advance a more holistic approach to creativity, justice, and democratic wealth building efforts.



WHEN YOU’RE TRYING TO CHANGE A SYSTEM, IF THE ROOT VALUES HAVEN’T CHANGED, THE NEW SYSTEM MAY GROW UP TO LOOK LIKE THE OLD SYSTEM. TODAY, WE NEED AN ECONOMICS OF RELATIONSHIP – ONE THAT PRIORITIZES INTERDEPENDENCE, COOPERATION, OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL, AND LEARNING FROM NATURE INSTEAD OF DOMINATING HER.³⁸

DEBORAH FRIEZE, BOSTON IMPACT INITIATIVE

CREDITS

This paper is possible thanks to the generous contributions of interviewees, writers, practitioners, and colleagues, and builds on centuries of work by justice-oriented organizers and artists who have been innovating and building community wealth in creative ways.

Chelsea Bruck wrote the case studies, conducted several of the interviews, and contributed initial research. Jamie Hand guided the effort throughout, contributed research and writing, and edited the paper. ArtPlace colleagues Jamie Bennett, Lyz Crane, Sarah Calderon, Maura Cuffie, Adam Erickson, Sarah Westlake, Marirosa Garcia, Erik Takeshita, and Leila Tamari advised and facilitated several efforts, and provided invaluable feedback throughout the process. Colleagues at Common Future, including Amy Kincaid, Olayinka Credle, and Lauren Paul, contributed edits, ideas, and poetry throughout the process.

We are grateful to the organizations and individuals who agreed to let us include their words and stories for the quotes, case studies, and concepts shared throughout the paper, including Va-Megn Thoj, Joyce Pisanont, Donna Neuwirth, Christina Patiño Houle, Nia Evans, Cierra Peters, Kyle White, and Tim Lampkin.

Thank you to those who serve as external reviewers and provided invaluable feedback, edits and ideas:

Oscar Perry Abello, Next City

Olayinka Credle, Common Future

Lomax Campbell, MBA, DMgt, Mayor's Office of Community Wealth Building (City of Rochester, NY) and Niche Market Insights Foundation

Laura Christopher, MassDevelopment

Ben Fink, Founding Organizer, Performing Our Future

Alexis Frasz, Helicon Collaborative

Stephanie Gutierrez, Hope Nation Consulting

Margaret Hunt, Colorado Creative Industries, Governor's Office of Economic Development & International Trade

Emily Kawano, US Solidarity Economy Network and Wellspring Cooperatives

Amy Kincaid, Common Future

Tim Lampkin, Higher Purpose Co.

Giles Li, The Barr Foundation

Joyce Pisanont, National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development (National CAPACD)

Pamela Standing, Minnesota Indigenous Business Alliance

Jess Solomon, Art in Praxis

Thomas Watson, Rural Support Partners

We are grateful to the participants of the ArtPlace Economic Development Roundtable, which took place during the 2019 Summit in Jackson, Mississippi, in the early stages of research (affiliation is included at time of roundtable):

Dave Conine, Utah Diné Bikéyah
Annie Jane Cotten, Letcher County Culture Hub
Susan DuPlessis, South Carolina Arts Commission
Ben Fink, Performing Our Future
Alexis Frasz, Helicon Collaborative
Dana Hantel, Coalfield Development Corporation
Cheryal Hills, Region Five Development Commission
Tim Lampkin, Higher Purpose Co.
Jeremy Liu, PolicyLink
Donna Neuwirth, The Wormfarm Institute
Robert Reeder, Rural LISC
Ada Smith, Appalshop
Janera Soloman, Kelly Strayhorn Theatre
Ani Rivera, Galería de la Raza
Aaron Landsman, Lewis Center for the Arts
Robert Resnick, Bennington College
Nikisha Williams, Opa Locka CDC

Thank you to all our colleagues who participated in an interview to inform our research (affiliation is included at time of interview):

Nwamaka Agbo, Restorative Economics / Nwamaka Agbo Consulting
Kelly Baker, New Economy Coalition
Margaret Bodell, CreateHereNowCT
Katherine Bray-Simons, National Endowment for the Arts
Laura Callanan, Upstart Co-Lab
JoAnna Cintron, Re:Vision
Annie Jane Cotton, Letcher County Culture Hub
John Davis, Lanesboro Arts
Mekaelia Davis, The Surdna Foundation
Steve Dubb, Nonprofit Quarterly
Nia Evans, Boston Ujima Project
Ben Fink, Performing Our Future
Alexis Frasz, Helicon Collaborative
Deborah Frieze, Boston Impact Initiative
Cheryal Hills, Dawn Espe, and Arlene Jones, Region Five Development Commission
Christina Patiño Houle, Las Imaginistas
Nancy Ibrahim, Esperanza Community Housing

Emily Kawano, US Solidarity Economy Network and Wellspring Cooperatives
Marjorie Kelly, The Democracy Collaborative
Tim Lampkin, Higher Purpose Co.
Leslie Lindo and **Jocelyn Wong**, Business Alliance for a Local Living Economy (BALLE)
Jeremy Liu, PolicyLink
Abdiel López, Center for Cultural Innovation / AmbitioUS
Daniel Park and **Esteban Kelley**, US Federation of Worker Cooperatives
Joyce Pisanant and **Erika Gee**, National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development (National CAPACD)
Michaela Shirley and **Ted Jojola**, Indigenous Design and Planning Institute
Ascala Sisk, Center for Community Investment
Meghan Sobocienski, Grace in Action
Katy Stanton and **Lee Wellington**, Urban Manufacturing Alliance
Ben Stone, Smart Growth America
Bill Taft, Local Initiatives Support Corporation
Aaron Tanaka, Center for Economic Democracy
Brett Theodos, Urban Institute
Va-Megn Thoj, Asian Economic Development Association (AEDA)
Janet Topolsky and **Clifford Deaton**, Aspen Institute Community Strategies
Jennifer Vey, The Brookings Institute
Jesse Van Tol and **Sabrina Terry**, National Community Reinvestment Coalition
Thomas Watson, Rural Support Partners
Marlon Williams, Living Cities

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