

EXCERPTS SELECTED FOR  
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# THRIVING TOGETHER

A SPRINGBOARD FOR EQUITABLE RECOVERY & RESILIENCE  
IN COMMUNITIES ACROSS AMERICA

JULY 4, 2020

## AN EVOLVING WORK

**Thriving Together: A Springboard for Equitable Recovery and Resilience in Communities Across America** is a joint project of the CDC Foundation and Well Being Trust, coordinated with Community Initiatives and ReThink Health. This project, conducted between May and June, 2020 is an evolving work. So far, it includes the views and opinions of more than 100 contributors, which do not necessarily reflect the official position of any individual or organization. It is now ready to evolve with your input. For more information or to provide input, connect with us at [input@thriving.us](mailto:input@thriving.us).

## EDITORS

**Bobby Milstein**, ReThink Health

**Monte Roulier, Elizabeth Hartig, & Stacy Wegley**  
Community Initiatives

**Christopher Kelleher**, Better Focus

## GRAPHIC DESIGN

**Samantha Slaughter-Mason**

## SUGGESTED CITATION

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## DEEP DIVE CONTRIBUTORS

**Kelly Anchrum**, StriveTogether • **John Auerbach**, Trust for America's Health • **Mary Ayala**, Enterprise Community Partners • **Rayla Bellis**, Transportation for America • **Laura Blanke**, Well Being Trust • **Jennifer Blatz**, StriveTogether • **Brian Dabson**, Univ of North Carolina/Aspen Institute • **Velvet Bryant**, Annie E. Casey Foundation • **Jonah C Cunningham**, Trust for America's Health • **Amanda Cavanagh**, Data Across Sectors for Health (DASH), Illinois Public Health Institute (PHI) • **David Chrislip**, Skillful Means • **Jennifer Cleghorn**, Growth Philanthropy Network/Social Impact Exchange (SIE) • **Parker Cohen**, Prosperity Now • **Cherie Collins Sims**, Prosperity Now • **Catherine Cox-Blair**, Natural Resource Defense Council (NRDC) • **Gary Cunningham**, Prosperity Now • **Teresa Cutts**, Stakeholder Health, Wake Forest School of Medicine • **Paula Daniels**, Center for Good Food Purchasing • **Jennifer Davis**, Education Redesign Lab, Harvard Graduate School of Education • **Joslyn Davis**, StriveTogether • **Eleni Delimpaltadaki**, National Community Reinvestment Coalition • **Peter Eckart**, DASH, Illinois PHI • **Jenna Fortunati**, Transportation for America • **Bob Giloth**, Annie E. Casey Foundation • **Sara Goldrick-Rab**, Hope Center at Temple Univ • **Melissa Grober-Morrow**, Prosperity Now • **Colin Groth**, StriveTogether • **Gary Gunderson**, Stakeholder Health, Wake Forest • **Rosanne Haggerty**, Community Solutions • **Janet Heinrich**, Funders Forum on Accountable Health • **Lisa Herron**, Well Being Trust • **Paul Howard**, Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) • **Dora Hughes**, Funders Forum on Accountable Health • **Bridget Jancarz**, StriveTogether • **Patrick Jordan**, Enterprise Community Partners • **Richard Laine**, DFI Consulting • **Irene Lee**, Annie E. Casey Foundation • **Andrea Levere**, Yale School of Management • **Jeff Levi**, Funders Forum on Accountable Health • **Ninon Lewis**, IHI • **Susan Martinez**, DASH, Illinois PHI • **Marianne McPherson**, IHI • **Benjamin F Miller**, Well Being Trust • **Sarah Milligan-Toffler**, Children & Nature Network • **Helen Mittmann**, Funders Forum on Accountable Health • **Tyler Norris**, Well Being Trust • **Beth Osborne**, Transportation for America • **David Persky**, Growth Philanthropy Network/SEI • **Shelley Poticha**, NRDC • **Brian Rahmer**, Enterprise Community Partners • **Amy Reid**, IHI • **Paul Reville**, Education Redesign Lab, Harvard • **Carley Riley**, Cincinnati Children's Hospital, Univ of Cincinnati College of Medicine, 100 Million Healthier Lives, WIN Network • **Jim Ritchie Dunham**, Vibrancy • **Alexander Rossides**, Growth Philanthropy Network/SEI • **Brita Roy**, Yale Schools of Medicine and Public Health, 100 Million, WIN Network • **Somava Saha**, Well-Being and Equity (WE) in the World, Harvard Medical School, WIN Network • **Parvathi Santhosh-Kumar**, StriveTogether • **Sarah Seegal**, Affect Mental Health • **Anne Sherman**, Growth Philanthropy Network/SEI • **Lebaron Sims**, Prosperity Now • **Clare Tanner**, DASH, Michigan PHI • **Trissa Torres**, IHI • **Holden Weisman**, Prosperity Now

## CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES

**Imran Andrabi**, ThedaCare • **Liz Baxter**, North Sound Accountable Community of Health • **Dayna Bowen Matthew**, Univ of Virginia School of Law and Medical School • **Harry Boyte**, Institute for Public Life and Work • **Rayon Brown**, Fox Valley Technical College • **Michael Brumage**, West Virginia Univ • **Nick Cochart**, Algoma School District • **Pearce Godwin**, Listen First Project • **Darrell Hillaire**, Children of the Setting Sun Productions • **Dalila Madison Almquist**, PolicyLink • **Louisa Mancey**, WE in the World • **Michael McAfee**, PolicyLink • **Katie McCormack**, WE in the World • **Paula Morgen**, ThedaCare • **Zayd Muhammad**, Proviso Partners for Health • **Sue Polis**, National League of Cities • **Jason Schulist**, Boldt • **Marie Strom**, Institute for Public Life and Work • **Trygve Throntveit**, Institute for Public Life and Work • **Nick Tilsen**, NDN Collective • **Teal VanLanen**, Algoma School District • **Mary Wilson**, South Fulton People Centered Economic Development Collaborative

## PRODUCTION PARTNERS

**Ella Auchincloss**, ReThink Health • **Erin Barbaro**, Institute for People, Place, and Possibility (IP3) + Community Commons • **Nina Burke**, ReThink Health • **Colleen Butler**, Local Voices Network • **Anna Creegan**, ReThink Health • **Anne Ekedahl De Biasi**, WE in the World • **Jane Erickson**, ReThink Health • **Roxanne Medina Fulcher**, IP3 + Community Commons • **David Gibbs**, Community Initiatives • **Sloan Gingg**, IP3 + Community Commons • **Jennifer Graves**, Wellbeing Trust • **Jack Homer**, ReThink Health • **Sara Ivey**, IP3 + Community Commons • **Laura Landy**, ReThink Health • **Albert Lang**, Well Being Trust • **Mathias Lemos Castillo**, Local Voices Network • **Tiffany Manuel**, The CaseMade • **Grainger Marburg**, Well Being Trust • **Sona Pai**, SP Editorial • **Parisa Parsa**, Cortico • **Pedja Stojicic**, ReThink Health • **Michelle Windmoeller**, IP3 + Community Commons



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## A LARGER STORY & A LONGER MOVEMENT

**America is a land of innovators and hard workers.** Today, our lives and livelihoods are being destabilized and, tragically, destroyed on a massive scale. As we rush to recover, there is a danger of stopping short, of missing the big picture, and fooling ourselves that getting back to normal is good enough. This is a legacy moment, when the full force of our values and all of our assets are needed to escape the trouble we are in. We created this Springboard for action to leverage the immense resilience in America's communities. It describes how we see the current situation and what we could do, together, to organize local and nationwide action around a single, unifying—and measurable—expectation: All people and places thriving—no exceptions.

Over the past eight weeks (May through June 2020), amidst unprecedented upheavals across the country and around the world, more than 100 people and organizations diverted their daily work to help craft this Springboard for equitable recovery and resilience in communities across America. We drafted this document for ourselves, and for everyone who wants to help America to emerge from the compounding crises of 2020 with greater resilience, humanity, and direction.

This document is an imperfect work-in-progress, written for today, yet part of a larger story in a long, evolving movement. We share it with humility, in hopes of joining with others as we search for better ways to thrive together.

Stewards of well-being and justice are people and organizations who share responsibility for working across differences to expand the vital conditions all people and places need to thrive.

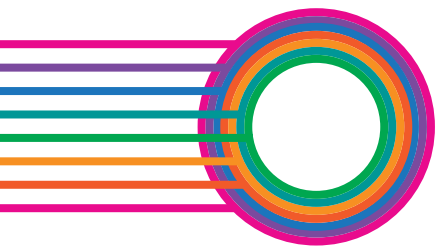
## WE THE AUTHORS

We are part of a growing network of people and organizations who see ourselves—and each other—as shared stewards of well-being and justice.

We do not represent any single organization, sector, or issue area. We are not lobbyists, partisan operatives, or profiteers. We defy narrow categories of red and blue, left and right, women and men, rural and urban, Native and newcomer, youth and elder, White people and People of Color.

We believe that each generation has a sacred obligation to fulfill America's founding commitments, which have never been fully honored or realized: to create a more perfect union, establish justice, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity.

We take these five commitments at face value, as written, with no exceptions. Yet, in practice, life in America becomes defined by unjust exclusion when we treat some people as more worthy than others. This ever-present legacy shapes how Americans live and, too often, how we die. The renewal that our communities need now will be impossible to achieve as long as structural racism and social exclusion persist. They are toxic forces that destroy lives and dehumanize us all. We believe that the path to true prosperity in America is inextricably tied to racial justice and full inclusion, not only in principle, but as a daily, living reality. America is built to be better—and needs to become so.



# LEGACY MOMENT 2020

## A LARGER STORY & A LONGER MOVEMENT

**Across America and beyond, we aspire to become thriving people in a thriving world.** In 2020, that quest grew much more difficult. Right now, amidst profound losses, we are scrambling to stem the tide of mounting affliction. We are also questioning what it takes to renew our lives together.

Throughout history, communities across the country have endured many forms of sweeping adversity: war, economic collapse, enslavement, terrorism, trails of tears, climate catastrophes, rising chronic disease, gun violence, drunk driving, diseases of despair, even pandemics. Time and again, through tragedy after tragedy, we have found resilience. And in a few historic moments, we have even transformed adversity into advantage, taking dramatic strides toward wider well-being and justice.

American innovators expanded people's freedoms to thrive through impressive efforts to secure some of the vital conditions that make prosperity possible. Thanks to successes such as sanitation, smallpox eradication, stronger starts for kids, smoking cessation, Social Security, and scores of other achievements, our predecessors helped people live longer, better lives. They also expanded the circle of America's caring and concern to protect children, once forced to work in sweatshops; to recognize women, once denied the right to vote; and to dignify previously enslaved people, once legally devalued as less than fully human.

While the road to inclusion has not been straight or steady, we have sometimes managed to find the strength in our nation to move toward justice—even if slowly.

**In 2020, our resilience and humanity are once again being tested.**

In a year unlike any our nation has previously faced, 2020 began by taking us at whiplash speed through a series of connected, compounding crises—any one of which could take years to recover from. And while no single measure can possibly capture how we are experiencing these crises, one reliable indicator begins to tell the story.

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I draw hope from knowing that in my DNA, **I was built to survive.** ...People of Color were built to endure in this nation...I came into this world having to learn how to adapt to an environment that was hostile. ...**I draw hope from knowing that my people are strong people.**

MICHAEL MCAFEE, POLICYLINK

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In April, Gallup recorded a startling drop in the percentage of Americans who feel that they are thriving, along with a corresponding surge of people struggling and suffering. There is no mystery about the cause: Weeks before, the novel coronavirus pandemic had forced nearly everyone on Earth to experience what life is like under assault from an invisible threat.

## Overall Life Evaluation of US Adults, Adapted From Gallup



### MEASURING WELL-BEING

Our single best measure of well-being is Cantril's Ladder. This simple two question scale asks people to rate their well-being on a ladder from 0 (worst possible life) to 10 (best possible life), both now and in five years. When combined, those ratings reveal who feels they are **thriving, struggling, or suffering**. This measure is routinely tracked both across the US and around the world by groups such as Gallup, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and the World Happiness Report, which enables standardized comparisons over time and geography. Gallup alone has polled more than 3 million people over the last decade.

Living through a pandemic and its sweeping consequences delivers endless lessons in fragility and loss. We have seen familiar patterns and treasured rhythms obliterated with dizzying speed, from sports, worship, and work, to graduations, weddings, and travel. Almost overnight, careers have ended and paychecks have disappeared. Schools have closed. Items and pleasures once taken for granted have become scarce. Individuals have been forced to isolate from their own families. Once-healthy people have gasped for air and died alone.

Even if you have weathered the pandemic in relative safety and comfort, your life's vulnerabilities and the world's fault lines have been exposed. And if you entered the pandemic on the bottom of America's hierarchy of dignity and opportunity, COVID-19 has greatly amplified your all-too-familiar experience of constant adversity and injustice.

**Much of the anxiety in this moment can be traced to the sense that we are not experiencing a crisis event but a crisis trend:** a steadily worsening series of threats and disasters. The last decade alone has brought a spectacular series of fires, heat waves, mass shootings, government shutdowns, and other kinds of calamity. COVID-19 is not merely another bad storm we need to put up with until the sun comes out again—it is the most extreme example yet of the multiplying dangers that threaten our lives and livelihoods. Moreover, we are not only ill-equipped to avert and manage these largely preventable phenomena, it seems many of our own actions are making matters worse. That is why, even before the pandemic, Americans' confidence in the future was in decline.

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While the US has a guide known as the National Disaster Recovery Framework for dealing with the aftermath of disasters, the coronavirus pandemic overwhelms its scope. Currently, there is no national plan for recovery from this pandemic.

SAMANTHA MONTANO, 2020

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## A Projected 75,000 'Deaths Of Despair' Could Result From Coronavirus Pandemic Impact

### *Two Crises Convulse a Nation: A Pandemic and Police Violence*

Emotions were already raw over the toll of a pandemic that has killed more than 100,000 people across the country and cost millions of jobs.

## State of Emergency: End the War on Black people!

UP FRONT

**Housing hardships reach unprecedented heights during the COVID-19 pandemic**

## Americans Say COVID-19 Hurting Mental Health Most

**Coronavirus school closures could cause epic slide in math and literacy skills**

**Opioid Crisis Is Engulfed By Pandemic, Leaving Many Vulnerable To Overdose, Relapse**

RACE

### **COVID-19 and the Color Line**

Black Americans are dying of COVID-19 at much higher rates than whites, and nowhere more so than in St. Louis. This is the result of racist policies which collapsed the social safety net while setting blacks in the path of danger.

IN BRIEF

**A Double Pandemic: Domestic Violence in the Age of COVID-19**

**Food insecurity set to become the bigger pandemic**

Over 40 million Americans have filed for unemployment during the pandemic—real jobless rate over 23.9%

## TANGLED THREATS

There is more to the story of 2020 than one pandemic. Look no further than the headlines to appreciate the sheer size and scope of the tangled threats that are spreading across the country.

Our challenge now is to heed the lessons from this wakeup call about our fragility and fragmentation. The escalating crises we face are not confined to a single sector, place, or class; nor do they stem from the failures of a single group or belief system. What we face now is an intergenerational, multifaceted spiral of adversity—sweeping through not only communities that have been historically designed to concentrate affliction, but every place and social stratum.

Vital conditions for well-being are eroding, raising the odds that there will be darker days ahead. It is easy to see a gloomy future of disappearing or dead-end jobs, dwindling wages and escalating debt, insidious addiction and spiraling deaths of despair, deepening sexism and racism, increasing health care costs and worsening health, disinformation and demagogues undermining democracy—all on top of looming environmental catastrophes that none of us will escape.

In this toxic situation, the hopes we have for ourselves and for our children are fragile and fading. We must act now to change course and renew the system that imperils us. Fortunately, there is reason for hope and even optimism.

**Our country still has an immense reservoir of energy, courage, and imagination.** Health care workers are risking their lives to care for fellow Americans, often to the point of exhaustion. Millions of people are filling streets in nonviolent calls for equal justice. When damage follows, ordinary people are showing up with brooms, buckets, and the will to help neighbors recover economically and emotionally. Mayors and governors, both red and blue, are rebuilding trust through honest, empathic leadership. Corporate CEOs are speaking out, guided by newfound connections between purpose and profit. Nonprofit organizations are reshaping themselves on the fly. Philanthropies and faith organizations are shifting from generosity to justice. Journalists are telling stories about solutions rather than scandals. Tribal Nations are defending, developing, and decolonizing cherished traditions. And families are creatively finding new ways to function and support one another.

These promising trends are not mature enough to make a systemic difference unto themselves. Most are quietly gathering momentum on the margins and have yet to reach the mainstream. However, they are all hopeful, adaptive responses to a world out of balance.

### AS SYSTEMS COLLAPSE, PEOPLE RISE

Otto Scharmer famously observed that, “as systems collapse, people rise.” This single dynamic explains how people with a just cause, animated by a new mindset, can transform failing systems for the better. Our conventional categories and rehearsed routines are not built to handle compounding crises simultaneously. Nor are those crises truly separate. They are symptoms of a system designed long ago that we must now leave in the past. To thrive in today’s interconnected world, we must operate, not as narrowly focused problem fixers, but as system-focused stewards and multisolvers.

Our best hope for escaping the adversity spiral and changing course is to organize local and nationwide action around a single unifying and measurable expectation: **All people and places thriving—no exceptions.**

This is our north star. It conveys our commitment to create communities where all people have a fair chance to participate, prosper, and reach their full potential. It also raises many questions.

- *How can we change course to rapidly increase the number of thriving people and places?*
- *Which pivotal moves must we make right now?*
- *What can we do to bend the big trends that shape our lives?*
- *Which measures matter most as we learn together?*

As this movement continues, 2020 will be remembered as the year when an invisible virus, an inequitable economy, an ailing democracy, and indelible images of police brutality exposed America’s staggering contradictions: our fates are intertwined, yet we continue to inflict inhumane, self-defeating harm on each other, and on the environment. For those who care about well-being and justice, this is a legacy moment. **With 20/20 vision, we see a way forward toward wider well-being, and we are eager to join with others in the work ahead.**



### BECOMING MULTISOLVERS

System stewards increasingly recognize that it is not possible to counter systemic threats by delivering more and more services to growing groups of people in need. In fact, our tendency to over-rely on expert-led, technocratic responses often disempowers people, squanders resources, and is itself part of the problem.

Instead, we must become multisolvers: more likely to look through a macroscope than a microscope, to connect rather than go solo, and to solve for many goals at once rather than switch from one crisis to another. When stewards move beyond the limits of a service marketplace, they often find new ways to work across differences, expanding the belonging and civic muscle we need to shape a more vibrant, thriving commonwealth.



## VITAL CONDITIONS & LEGACIES FOR LIVING TOGETHER

To find a way forward, we need more than hope. We need a plan and a framework for decisive action. That plan starts with understanding, at a practical level, how we can assess and evaluate where we are as a nation.

It helps to distinguish two related ways of viewing well-being:

### Personal Experiences

Individual perspectives and experiences that affect how we think, feel, and function, as well as how we evaluate our lives as a whole.

### Vital Conditions

Properties of places and institutions that we all depend on to reach our potential.

Our freedom to thrive depends on having a consistent set of vital conditions, such as clean air, fair pay, humane housing, early education, routine health care, and other pragmatic necessities. Personal experiences may rise and fall from birth to death. However, vital conditions persist over generations. They shape the exposures, choices, opportunities, and adversities that we each encounter throughout our lives.

Each vital condition is distinct and indispensable. Together, they form an interdependent system that shapes opportunities for people and places to thrive.

If any vital condition is denied or otherwise unfulfilled—or if there is a sudden shock, such as the emergence of a novel pathogen—serious adversity can accumulate, revealing itself in excess rates of illness, unemployment, housing distress, food insecurity, loneliness, and more. Mounting adversity, in turn, drives the demand for urgent services, such as acute care for illness or injury, addiction treatment, crime response, environmental cleanup, homeless services, unemployment support, and food assistance.

Urgent services are necessary for alleviating short-term suffering. But temporary efforts to help people in crisis cannot increase the experience of thriving. Nor could those services counter an entrenched adversity spiral that is fueled by inadequate vital conditions and ongoing legacies of trauma and exclusion. To change course toward the goal of thriving people and places, we

must first step back and see the system that shapes our ability to move in a new direction. It is a system designed long ago, with ever-present effects that can support or diminish our freedom to thrive. Those are what we call our legacies for living together.

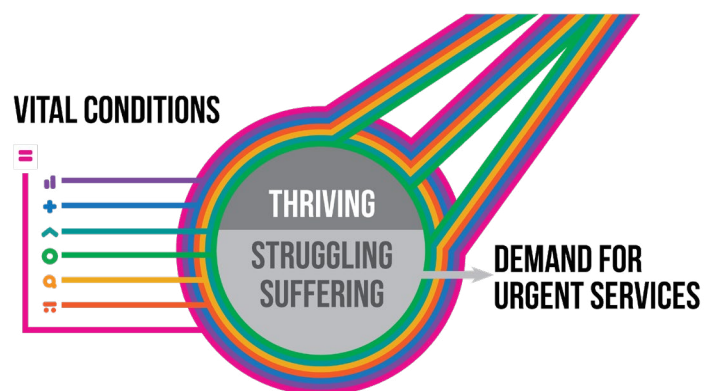
Many of those legacies confer extraordinary benefits. They must be celebrated and sustained. But not all legacies are like that. Some are rooted in unjust, unwise, unsustainable, or racist ideas that are manifestly harmful. Those legacies, which greatly hinder our ability to thrive, can't be erased. But they can be reckoned with and replaced. Not in some distant future but now. The work at hand is to define the imperatives that will shape legacies for the next generation—the legacies that will prepare us for future crises and determine our identity as a people.

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We really need to have this concept of children in all policies. What do you see the future like for your children? When we have housing policies we need to consider children. When we talk about education policy, transportation policy, economic policies—all of these things have to include our children.

**MICHAEL BRUMAGE**  
WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY

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## Vital Conditions

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### THRIVING NATURAL WORLD

#### *Sustainable resources, contact with nature, freedom from hazards*

Clean air, water, soil; healthy ecosystems able to sustainably provide necessary resources; accessible natural spaces; freedom from extreme heat, flooding, wind, radiation, earthquakes, pathogens

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### BASIC NEEDS FOR HEALTH & SAFETY

#### *Basic requirements for health and safety*

Nutritious food, safe drinking water; fresh air; sufficient sleep; routine physical activity; safe, satisfying sexuality and reproduction; freedom from trauma, violence, addiction, and crime; routine care for physical and mental health

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### HUMANE HOUSING

#### *Humane, consistent housing*

Adequate space per person; safe structures; affordable costs; diverse neighborhoods (without gentrification, segregation, concentrated poverty); close to work, school, food, recreation and nature

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### MEANINGFUL WORK & WEALTH

#### *Rewarding work, careers, and standards of living*

Job training/retraining; good-paying and fulfilling jobs; family and community wealth; savings and limited debt

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### LIFELONG LEARNING

#### *Continuous learning, education, and literacy*

Continuous development of cognitive, social, emotional abilities; early childhood experiences; elementary, high school, and higher education; career and adult education

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### RELIABLE TRANSPORTATION

#### *Reliable, safe, and accessible transportation*

Close to work, school, food, leisure; safe transport; active transport; efficient energy use; few environmental hazards

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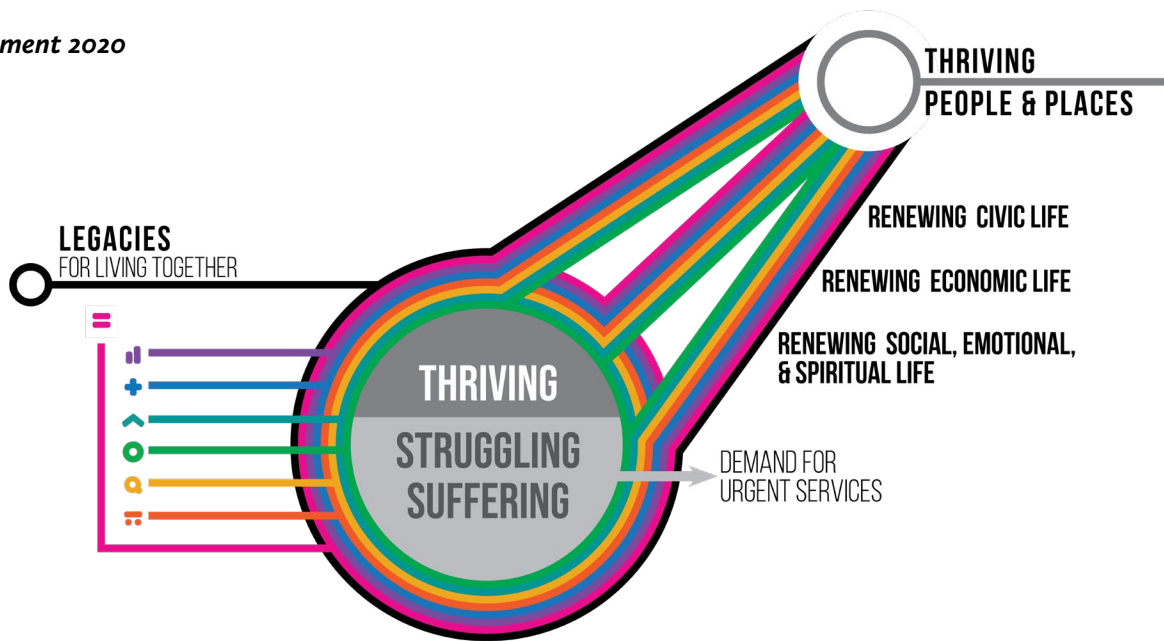
### BELONGING & CIVIC MUSCLE

#### *Sense of belonging and power to shape a common world*

Social support; civic associations; freedom from stigma, discrimination, oppression; support for civil rights, human rights; civic agency; collective efficacy; vibrant arts, culture, and spiritual life; equitable access to information; many opportunities for civic engagement (voting, volunteer, public work)

# LEGACY MOMENT 2020

Legacy Moment 2020



## RENEWING LEGACIES FOR LIVING TOGETHER

We inherit vital conditions from our predecessors—their legacies are the starting points for our lives. However, we possess enormous capacities to transform current and future conditions, for better or for worse. When deciding which policies, practices, services, and investments to continue and which to leave in the past, a basic question for every person and organization is whether our own legacies will affirm dignity and inclusion for all people or inflict trauma and exclusion.

Legacies that honor everyone's human dignity strengthen a mutual sense of belonging and civic muscle. In the accompanying image, *Belonging and Civic Muscle* (≡) wraps around the other vital conditions because it is both a vital condition unto itself and a pragmatic necessity for success in almost any endeavor to expand well-being.

Each step toward full and fair inclusion expands the circle of those who feel that they belong and can contribute to shape our common world. Legacies that favor some while inflicting trauma and exclusion on others do the opposite. They increase the number of people and places that are struggling and suffering, and intensify the adversity spiral that harms us all.

The good news is that even in the midst of a crisis, every person and organization can help to make a difference. Together, we have the power to counter this corrosive dynamic. It begins by joining to embrace new priorities for equitable recovery and resilience. Consider zoning policies that stand in the way of affordable housing. Or

the way we finance public schools—privileging families in higher-income neighborhoods while increasing obstacles for others. In almost every sector of our society, we can identify policies, programs, services, or investments that advantage some at the expense of others. These policies are not forces of nature: They were created by Americans and can be changed by Americans who combine their ideas and energy.

In general, four strategic imperatives, in this order, offer the highest leverage:

### Strategic Imperatives

1. **Affirm human dignity by establishing racial justice and full inclusion for all people** as a daily, living reality
2. **Strengthen Belonging and Civic Muscle** by working across differences for the well-being of people and places, which in turn, unlocks abundant assets of those same people and places
3. **Expand the other vital conditions** with local stewards in the lead, beginning with people and places that are struggling and suffering
4. **Solidify new legacies for living together** by renewing civic life; economic life; as well as social, emotional, and spiritual life.

## THE ART & SCIENCE OF THRIVING

Over the past several decades, the art and science of designing systems for thriving has matured into a vibrant frontier of knowledge, policy, and practice. Other countries, as well as a growing group of cities and major institutions, have embraced equitable well-being as their chief concern, backed by budget authority and transparent dashboards to chart progress. More remains to be discovered, but the work of advancing well-being for people and places is becoming increasingly practical.

Nevertheless, some will surely dismiss this course of action as overly ambitious under current circumstances. To them, we say: Look around. Things that were widely dismissed as impossible in February became worldwide realities two months later. Given the scale and cost of other systemwide changes that have already been implemented, is it really so unlikely that we might also be poised to convert our immense loss into long-overdue renewal?

We hold this contradiction with confidence and clarity. Especially now, as we pull together by staying apart.

## SPRINGBOARD FOR A THRIVING MOVEMENT

This Springboard is designed to help us open a new chapter in America's quest for well-being and justice—to propel a movement that will match the high stakes of this legacy moment.

The guiding framework used in this Springboard does not tell us what to do or how to act. It simply organizes the things that all people and places need in order to thrive. This same framework has been incorporated into the Healthy People 2030 Objectives for the nation, as well as the forthcoming Surgeon General's Report on Community Health and Economic Prosperity. And it fits seamlessly with a uniform set of Well-Being in the Nation (WIN) Measures that are freely available to communities across the country. Most importantly, it is being embraced by a growing network of fellow system stewards.

In less than eight weeks, amidst intense competing priorities, nearly 100 people and organizations made substantive contributions to this Springboard. That fact alone suggests that the movement for well-being may already be more expansive than any of us know. There are, of course, countless other movements gaining strength in 2020 to advance human dignity and justice, such as Black Lives Matter, the Poor People's Campaign, the National Domestic Workers Alliance, and too many others to list here. We did not try to enumerate or examine their intersecting agendas. This document is a quick synthesis of our perspectives, infused with guiding wisdom and stories throughout. It is divided into the following sections:

**CHANGING COURSE SUMMARIES** are brief chapters focused on a particular vital condition or selected topic. There are 15 here, and each links to a longer *Deep Dive* document that was contributed by one or more well-established organizations. Each adapted summary features working definitions, recent facts, key issues, and a short list of pivotal moves that stand out as high priorities for quick action.

**PATHS TO RENEWAL** point to larger and longer-term ways of renewing Civic Life, Economic Life, and Social, Economic, and Spiritual Life. These brief 5-page profiles pose questions rather than provide answers. Each centers on a few crux legacy questions, framed by a quick sketch of current conditions, troubling trends, signs of momentum, and then leading to a short list of trend benders that could play out over a decade. Each section ends with a curated list of the measures that matter for learning together. These three renewals are distinct but synergistically connected. No single renewal could fully succeed alone, but together they could be truly transformational.

**DEEP DIVES** are the full source documents contributed by colleagues on the various topics selected in the *Changing Course* section. Other than having been formatted for consistency, these papers reflect the original work of each author group.

## RELATED EFFORTS

A growing catalogue of related plans and blueprints is beginning to emerge, including:

### **E PLURIBUS UNUM INSTITUTE**

[Roadmap to an  
Equitable Response,  
Recovery & Resilience](#)

### **FULL FRAME INITIATIVE**

[Wellbeing Blueprint](#)

### **HARVARD**

[Roadmap to Pandemic  
Resilience](#)

### **HEALTH IMPACT**

#### **PARTNERS**

[Health Equity Policy  
Platform for COVID-19  
Response and  
Recovery](#)

### **NEW YORK TIMES**

[The America We Need](#)

### **POLICYLINK**

[Federal Policy  
Priorities for an  
Equitable COVID-19  
Relief and Recovery](#)

[Principles for a  
Common-Sense,  
Street-Smart Recovery](#)

### **WELLBEING ECONOMY ALLIANCE**

[Wellbeing Economics  
for the COVID-19  
Recovery](#)

All parts of this Springboard remain open to further evolution through ongoing discussion and debate. No one person or organization is likely to endorse every idea in this document. That is as it should be. At this stage, we are surfacing a diverse range of ideas and proposals designed to prompt creative thinking and swift action. In the work ahead, coalitions will form and new ideas will emerge.

This is a messy, far-reaching, rapidly changing movement, as all serious system change endeavors must be. Over time, new pivotal moves may arise. New measures may be devised. Stronger civic muscle might be necessary to bring trend benders to life. Along the way, this Springboard can evolve to help system stewards stay on course to thrive together.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

When making choices or weighing trade-offs, let these be our guiding principles:

### **LONG, THRIVING LIVES**

Fully value long thriving lives, in aspiration and in calculations. Balance attention to physical health and wealth with equal concern for other states of being (mental, emotional, social, spiritual). Always begin with those who are struggling and suffering.

### **DIGNITY & JUSTICE**

Fulfill America's overdue promise of justice for people of color, Tribal Nations, people who experience gender inequality, and all others who endure unjust adversity; reject hierarchies of human value and tell a new story in which human differences are a strength, not a reason to destroy each other.

### **PEOPLE & PLACE**

Let local wisdom shape solutions that are fit for each place and its people; look for existing assets and enrich them; remove constraints that impose segregation; pay attention to the interdependence of all things within whole living systems.

### **SHARED STEWARDSHIP**

See ourselves—and one another—as interdependent stewards of well-being for people and places; negotiate vested interests, but do not lead only on behalf of your own issue or organization; work across differences with curiosity, grace, and humility.

### **PAST & FUTURE LEGACIES**

Look back and reckon with legacies that inflict harm; look ahead to sustain past achievements while solidifying new legacies that expand opportunities for well-being and justice.

# BELONGING & CIVIC MUSCLE

People need fulfilling relationships and social supports to thrive. They need to feel part of a community, contributing to its vibrancy, and developing the power to co-create a common world. Social support from friends, family, and other networks helps us navigate challenges and reinforces healthy behaviors. People who feel connected tend to live healthier, happier lives.

At the community level, feeling like an important part of a larger community strengthens social ties, increasing trust and cooperation—making it easier to work together. This connection builds a virtuous cycle: When people feel valued and cared for within the community, they are more likely to contribute and participate in creating healthy, equitable places.







# BELONGING & CIVIC MUSCLE

## POWER TO SHAPE A COMMON WORLD

**< 1/3** of people in America believe that “most people can be trusted,” down from 50% in the 1970s

**2X** as many people report feeling lonely today as in the 1980s—and the number of people who say they have no one to turn to during difficult times has tripled

**62.5M** adults volunteer, however, membership in civic groups has decreased by more than 13% since 1974.

**4.6M** youth are not in school or working, and rates of disconnection are significantly higher for Native American (26%), Black (17%), and Latino (14%) youth.

**47%** of eligible voters cast a ballot in the 2018 midterm elections—a 50-year high.

**AMERICA ITSELF IS A GRAND—AND STILL-EVOLVING—EXPERIMENT** based on the idea that all people belong and have the power, or civic muscle, to govern our lives together. The great social movements of the past half-century profoundly changed America’s civic landscape in ways that carry deep implications for who feels they belong and how we work together to shape a common world.

The ideas of belonging and civic muscle bring together a long history of related concepts, such as such as, civic agency, civic capacity, deliberative democracy, public participation, public work, constructive nonviolence, and collaborative problem solving. All of these traditions strive to make democracy come alive, not only on election day but every day, as a way of life where we work across our differences in pursuit of the things we value.

The novel coronavirus and other crises in 2020 revealed, once again, many staggering contradictions of interdependence and injustice across our country. It will take an even more decisive movement to fulfill America’s promise of dignity and justice. Rather than focusing on any single issue, this movement must further expand the boundaries of who belongs and strengthen our civic muscle to build the resilience we all need to survive and thrive together through whatever crises may come our way.

### KEY ISSUES

- **Communities with an inclusive sense of belonging and strong civic muscle may be better able to:**
  - Design their own pathways to resilience
  - Gather assets to respond effectively and equitably in a crisis
  - Persistently expand vital conditions, while alleviating urgent needs
  - Use their power to assure mutual accountability
- **Community-driven change**, which strengthens people’s resilience and responsiveness, is more likely to make lasting progress, while also being more fair and democratic.
- **Community-driven change is characterized by:**
  - Shared power between organizational decision makers and community residents
  - Multiple perspectives on issues
  - Meaningful participation from diverse people and organizations
  - A commitment to equitable processes and outcomes
  - Decisions that are transparent and widely supported

*Facts adapted from the  
Belonging & Civic Muscle  
Deep Dive*

# PIVOTAL MOVES

A SELECTION OF IDEAS FOR CHANGING COURSE

## ORGANIZE RECOVERY & RESILIENCE ACCOUNTABILITY COUNCILS

Recovery and Resilience Accountability Councils would assure local control and coordination over the direction, actions, and accountabilities of residents, as well as federal, state, philanthropy, and business partners. These Councils would incorporate insights from similar, successful efforts, like Accountable Communities for Health and Ryan White Planning Councils.

## ESTABLISH A COMMUNITY COMMONWEALTH CORPS

A nationwide Community Commonwealth Corps would build on America's long history of public work, repairing the lives, businesses, community organizations, places of worship, infrastructures, and other common goods decimated by the COVID-19 pandemic and by the decades of neglect, civic erosion, and racial injustice the pandemic has revealed so starkly.



The daily drumbeat of the disproportionate deaths of Black people from the novel coronavirus and police killings serves as a stark reminder of the pernicious persistence of systemic racism. As a counter to Mississippi's long history of racism, former Governor William Winter founded the **William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation** in 1999 on the belief that "honest, purposeful talk (about race) works." Over the years, it has helped bring perpetrators of racial violence to trial, taught police officers how to avoid racial profiling, exposed the symbolic racism of Confederate monuments, altered the public narrative about race by creating school curricula that tell the truth about the state's history, orchestrated rituals of atonement, and advocated for institutional reforms to replace systems of oppression with equitable ones.

### EMBRACE TARGETED UNIVERSALISM FOR FAIRNESS & EFFECTIVENESS

Targeted universalism is a framework that allows communities to establish common goals and create strategies to support specific groups. When we understand how we are each situated in relation to the vital conditions we all need to thrive, we are better able to meet the unique needs of our friends and neighbors—and move toward shared outcomes.

### UPHOLD CIVIL RIGHTS & HUMAN RIGHTS

We must uphold civil rights and human rights for all. US history shows substantial benefits when we enforce established civil rights with respect to health care, education, employment, housing, transportation, voting, environmental protection, and other vital conditions—all of which remain unrealized.

### DEPOLARIZE PARTISAN POLITICS & WEAVE SOCIAL FABRIC

We must work together to discover what we have in common, building our social fabric around shared values and productive discourse. Organizations like Braver Angels, Weaving Community, Local Voice Network, and Living Room Conversations offer resources and strategies for facilitating conversations and dialogues across differences.

### TRACK CHANGES IN BELONGING & CIVIC MUSCLE

Design a knowledge platform to track changes in belonging and civic muscle in communities across the country. This platform would spot trends and assess the influence of civic interventions intended to catalyze local, state, and national conversations about what transformed civic life could look like.

**BELONGING AND CIVIC MUSCLE**  
IS BOTH A VITAL CONDITION  
AND A PRAGMATIC NECESSITY  
FOR SUCCESS IN ALMOST ANY  
ENDEAVOR TO EXPAND WELL-  
BEING.

#### PATH TO RENEWAL

Belonging and civic muscle shape our civic life, who feels they are able to take action, and how we co-create our common future. A strong civic life requires active participation to produce communities that meet the needs of all residents.

ADAPTED FROM THE [BELONGING & CIVIC MUSCLE](#) DEEP DIVE

**Citizenship does not end.** It is not a task to be completed, and certainly not a drive to defeat other citizens. It is work: continuous, difficult, often frustrating, yet inherently dignified, personally rewarding, and publicly meaningful work—work that embodies inclusive democratic ideals for the frankly practical reason that no one group or generation can do it.

**HARRY BOYTE & TRYGVE THRONTVEIT**  
INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC LIFE AND WORK



In 2007, the Kansas Health Foundation invested an initial \$30 million over 10 years to establish the **Kansas Leadership Center**, dedicated to developing civic leadership across the state. Today, the Kansas Leadership Center reaches more than 2,000 people a year, redefining leadership and explicitly building civic capacity and resilience through its provocative programs and establishing a track record of helping others make progress on adaptive challenges. By shifting the focus of leadership from a few leaders in the heroic mold to pervasive leadership from all parts of society, the Kansas Leadership Center is transforming the civic culture of the state.



# PATHS TO RENEWAL

HOW CAN WE HEAL THROUGH ADVERSITY  
& SECURE LEGACIES OF WELL-BEING &  
JUSTICE FOR GENERATIONS TO COME?

Even in the wilderness of pandemics new and old, we believe America's communities can find their way through the woods. This section continues our wayfinding for the journey ahead.

Long before the crises of 2020, life in America was out of balance. We have been consumed by an inhumane style of winner-take-all capitalism, by fight-to-the-death politics, and by a White-is right culture. It is exhausting. And it has locked us in an unjust loop: living-to-work, not working-to-live, feeling socially short-changed, emotionally adrift, spiritually tested, and civically cynical. A pandemic that endangers our lives, halts the economy, and falls hardest on People of Color makes this maddening way of life unworkable. Ghastly scenes of racial injustice exemplify how deep the dysfunction goes. A super-majority of Americans agree that our entire system is spiraling out of control.

But renewal is within reach. In this legacy moment, we hear the same refrain: we cannot go back. Yet there are many paths forward. Those willing to work for renewal must make choices that may well change the world. Elders will do their part to clear the way. Youth will rise and rapidly take the lead.

This section explores three paths for renewing Civic Life, Economic Life, and Social, Emotional, and Spiritual Life. Each avenue braids the vital conditions together into cohesive but still-evolving proposals for how our lives together could unfold. Short-term pivotal moves may help us to change course. However, the renewal we need requires persistent, courageous, trend-bending effort on many frontiers—always directed toward our north star expectation: All people and places thriving—no exceptions.

*I have hope. People are ready. People want to do more. People want to be able to work in their communities. People want to see their communities whole.*

**MARY WILSON**

SOUTH FULTON PEOPLE-CENTERED  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
COLLABORATIVE

# RENEWING CIVIC LIFE

HOW DO WE WORK ACROSS  
DIFFERENCES TO CREATE A FUTURE WITH  
ALL PEOPLE AND PLACES THRIVING?

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LISTENING & RESPECTING

BELONGING

CONTRIBUTING





# RENEWING CIVIC LIFE

## WORKING ACROSS DIFFERENCES

### TROUBLING TRENDS

The global Democracy Index has officially downgraded the United States to a “flawed democracy”<sup>1</sup>

Loneliness was a rising public health threat before 2020—the pandemic has made it 34% to 47% worse<sup>2,3</sup>

Over the last 5 years, hate crimes have increased in the United States<sup>4</sup>

Legacies of residential segregation continue to fuel racial and wealth achievement gaps<sup>5</sup>

80% of American adults believe the country is “spiraling out of control”<sup>6</sup>

**CIVIC LIFE IS ABOUT LIVING, LEARNING, AND WORKING TOGETHER**, as shared stewards, to shape our common world. It encompasses the infinite ways that people may connect and contribute to their community and society: from voting in an election, organizing a neighborhood arts festival, standing up for a just cause, or doing everyday work with pride in its public impacts and civic significance.

For the last several decades, many democratic norms and structures have been decaying, while mistrust has been rising. Pernicious forces, such as systemic racism, hyper-individualism, and partisan division are also causes and consequences of declining civic life. The physical distancing of COVID-19 reminds us that we are social beings. The crisis has revealed a civic silver lining, shown in an outpouring of civic generosity and mutual aid. However, public displays of racial injustice remind us of the many ways we are not yet in right relationships with each other.

This is a legacy moment, an opportunity to reimagine and renew our civic life. We have a chance now to embrace our interdependence and strengthen the civic muscle we need to create just and productive communities. Success depends on our ability to create pluralistic spaces that foster relationships of belonging, ensuring everyone has the privilege and motivation to contribute to a thriving community.

### SIGNS OF MOMENTUM

- **Increasing perception that “we are all in it together”** (up from 62% in the fall of 2018 to 90% in April 2020).<sup>7</sup>
- **9 out of 10 American workers are willing to earn less money** to do more meaningful work.<sup>8</sup>
- **43% of young Americans say they will likely vote in their party’s primary or caucus**, up from 36% four years ago.<sup>9</sup>
- **Since 1949, the National Civic League has recognized more than 500 communities** that leverage civic engagement, collaboration, inclusiveness, and innovation to successfully address local issues.<sup>10</sup>
- **Communities are working across sectors to build inclusive**, welcoming public spaces like parks, playgrounds, and riverfronts.<sup>11</sup>
- **There is resurging interest** in the role that libraries, small businesses, and community-oriented schools play as civic anchors.<sup>12</sup>
- **Support is growing for robust national service** that ties service opportunities to possibilities for meaningful careers.<sup>13</sup>
- **Anticipating post-election conflict on November 4, 2020** (regardless of who wins), people and organizations are pre-committing to hold *With Malice Toward None* events sponsored by Braver Angels.<sup>14</sup>


# LEGACY QUESTIONS

FOR RENEWING CIVIC LIFE

How do we listen differently **with respect for the humanity and value** of those who differ from us?

How do we make sure that every person has a **genuine sense of belonging**?

How do we make sure that every person has **multiple ways of contributing**?



**Fox Cities** has a vision. It has a true north and a sense of belonging is right in the center. You're seeing a hospital, two different foundations, nonprofits, and businesses working together to try to work on how we really connect with people in our community. The more you do that, the more you have the muscle, the more you practice, the more you can make an impact.

**JASON SCHULIST, BOLDT**

# TREND BENDERS

## LISTENING & RESPECTING

HOW DO WE LISTEN DIFFERENTLY WITH RESPECT FOR THE HUMANITY & VALUE OF THOSE WHO DIFFER FROM US?

Seek or create spaces to encounter ideas different from your own.

Stay curious, ask questions, and prepare to listen differently, especially to youth, elders, everyday workers, and those who experience racial injustice every day.

Remain open to the possibility that people with strongly opposing partisan views can still respect their shared humanity and value.

## BELONGING

HOW DO WE MAKE SURE THAT EVERY PERSON HAS A GENUINE SENSE OF BELONGING?

Tell a new story in which human differences are a collective strength, not a cause to separate from or destroy each other.

Reshape neighborhoods, organizations, and public spaces to be open, inviting, exciting, and also free from segregation, violence, or neglect.

Uphold, enforce, and expand both social norms and legal safeguards against discrimination in all forms.

Make investment more fair through targeted universalism (i.e., pursue universal goals with investments targeted toward those who have been excluded and left furthest behind).

Convey the dignity and civic value of work through fair pay and safe workplaces.

## CONTRIBUTING

HOW DO WE MAKE SURE THAT EVERY PERSON HAS MULTIPLE WAYS OF CONTRIBUTING?

Encourage all forms of civic contribution, including voting, volunteering, engaging with government, and looking for the civic significance in everyday work.

Innovate new ways for people to participate in civic governance (e.g., by helping to frame problems and solutions, contributing their civic energies and talents, and influencing judgments about how to invest resources).

Bridge the digital divide and support the free exchange of ideas, art, and cultural expression.

Inspire a new generation of civically engaged professionals who are not detached, but connected to the lives and cultures of the places they work.

Shift authority to local communities for direction and accountability, along with incentives to contribute through national service.

Defend democracy against disinformation and authoritarianism.



### MEASURES THAT MATTER

#### Listening & Respecting

- Trust
- Disconnected youth
- Diffusion of stewardship mindsets and actions

#### Belonging

- Sense of belonging
- Connection to government
- Social vulnerability
- Residential segregation
- Area deprivation
- Violence and hate crimes
- Incarceration rate

#### Contributing

- Strength of civic muscle
- Civic indices (agency, capacity, engagement, learning)
- Job satisfaction, purpose in work
- Civic associations
- Social capital
- Voting rate
- Volunteering rate
- Digital divide
- Democracy index
- Engagement with public officials and institutions

In 2017, 32 community stewards launched **Imagine Fox Cities** (WI), a regional network designed to create the future of Fox Cities together: What do you want Fox Cities to be like for your kids and grandkids?

To understand the concerns and ideas of the community, the Imagine Fox Cities team: conducted 3,000 surveys, facilitated 81 conversations, and held a 300-person summit. The team identified a central theme: the importance of belonging. In response, the Imagine Fox Cities team developed the Belonging Working Group.

“The purpose of the Belonging Working Group of the Imagine Fox Cities initiative is to serve as a catalyst for creating a community in which all who live in the region see themselves, their needs, contributions, and culture represented every day in the life and work of their community. Our efforts are intended to increase the ability of individuals to belong across all the constituencies within the Fox Cities region.

Our objectives are to (1) educate the community about what it means to belong and strategies to promote a sense of belonging; (2) provide opportunities for active engagement in activities on the part of individuals, groups,

and institutions that facilitate greater empathy, trust, mutual understanding, and cooperation among community members; and (3) monitor and share our progress by identifying measures of belonging for the community as a whole and across various segments on a regular basis.

Our ultimate goal is to promote positive change that enhances the well-being of all who live and work in the Fox Cities by convening, catalyzing, measuring, connecting, and influencing members of the community to enhance the sense of belonging of everyone in our community.”

## **BELONGING WORKING GROUP IMAGINE FOX CITIES**

# SUMMARY OF RENEWALS

## THREE PATHS TO RENEW LIFE ACROSS AMERICA

### RENEWING CIVIC LIFE

HOW DO WE WORK ACROSS DIFFERENCES TO CREATE A FUTURE WITH ALL PEOPLE & PLACES THRIVING?

	LEGACY QUESTIONS	TREND BENDERS	MEASURES THAT MATTER
<b>Listening &amp; Respecting</b>	<i>How do we listen differently with respect for the humanity and value of those who differ from us?</i>	<p>Seek or create spaces to encounter ideas different from your own</p> <p>Stay curious, ask questions, and prepare to listen differently</p> <p>Remain open to our shared humanity</p>	<p>Trust</p> <p>Disconnected youth</p> <p>Diffusion of stewardship mindsets and actions</p>
<b>Belonging</b>	<i>How do we make sure that every person has a genuine sense of belonging?</i>	<p>Tell a new story in which human differences are a collective strength</p> <p>Reshape public spaces to be open, inviting, and exciting.</p> <p>Uphold, enforce, and expand social norms and legal safeguards against discrimination</p> <p>Make investment more fair through targeted universalism</p> <p>Convey the dignity and civic value of work through fair pay and safe workplaces</p>	<p>Sense of belonging</p> <p>Connection to government</p> <p>Social vulnerability</p> <p>Residential segregation</p> <p>Area deprivation</p> <p>Violence and hate crimes</p> <p>Incarceration rate</p>
<b>Contributing</b>	<i>How do we make sure that every person has multiple ways of contributing?</i>	<p>Encourage all forms of civic contribution.</p> <p>Innovate new ways for people to participate in civic governance.</p> <p>Bridge the digital divide.</p> <p>Nurture a new generation of civically engaged professionals.</p> <p>Incentivize national service and shift authority to local communities.</p> <p>Defend democracy against disinformation, and authoritarianism.</p>	<p>Strength of civic muscle</p> <p>Civic indices (agency, capacity, engagement, learning)</p> <p>Job satisfaction, purpose in work</p> <p>Civic associations</p> <p>Social capital</p> <p>Voting rate</p> <p>Volunteering rate</p> <p>Digital divide</p> <p>Democracy index</p> <p>Engagement with public officials and institutions</p>

## SUMMARY OF RENEWALS

### RENEWING ECONOMIC LIFE

HOW DO WE ASSIGN VALUE, DEFINE PROSPERITY, & INVEST RESOURCES?

LEGACY QUESTIONS		TREND BENDERS	MEASURES THAT MATTER
<b>Maximize Long, Thriving Lives</b>	<i>How can we be midwives to an emerging well-being economy?</i>	Imagine capitalism at its best	Well-being and justice goals
		Redefine progress and shared prosperity Align incentives for purpose, profit, and values Divest from harmful industries with just transitions Decentralize and democratize rule-making Create a thriving commons	Living standards Opportunity indices Gini index Climate indices Education indices Just capital rankings Climate for entrepreneurs Impact investments Just transitions for changing industries
<b>Grow Local Economies That Work for Everyone</b>	<i>How can we co-create local economies that routinely produce all of the vital conditions we need to thrive?</i>	Channel ingenuity and investment toward vital conditions	Financial well-being
		Insist on humane living standards Root out systemic racism in economic opportunity Design work with dignity, value, and purpose Anchor local living economies	Ability to afford emergency expense Household finances Job satisfaction Community wealth Healthy places index Food security Safe, active transportation Housing safety, stress Health insurance Health care adequacy Incarceration Police violence

### RENEWING SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, & SPIRITUAL LIFE

HOW DO WE CULTIVATE EMOTIONAL STRENGTH, GROW RESILIENCE, & CARE FOR OTHERS?

LEGACY QUESTIONS		TREND BENDERS	MEASURES THAT MATTER
<b>Whole Health</b>	<i>How do we foster human thriving from day one?</i>	Prioritize the first 1000 days of life	Percent of individuals uninsured or underinsured
		Guard against mental health crises Integrate mental and physical health care	Incidence and prevalence of mental health disorders and addiction Percent identified and treated for mental health
<b>Community-Centered Workforce</b>	<i>How do we cultivate caring and compassion?</i>	Shift tasks to train caregivers to address basic mental health needs	Out-of-pocket costs
		Localize care to build trust and credibility Reduce stigma	Workforce shortage rates Net promoter scores Rates of drug and alcohol misuse
<b>Leading Causes of Life</b>	<i>How do we break the cycle of intergenerational trauma?</i>	Connection	ACE score
		Coherence Agency Inter-generativity Hope	Child abuse and domestic violence Co-located social emotional programs Deaths of despair