



**FUNDERS FOR
A JUST ECONOMY**
NEIGHBORHOOD FUNDERS GROUP

BUILDING POWER IN PLACE

St. Louis: Organizing Toward a Re-Imagined City

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WHO WE ARE



Neighborhood Funders Group (NFG) is a network of national and local grantmakers throughout the U.S. We bring together funders to learn, connect, and mobilize resources with an intersectional and place-based focus. We create inspiring organizing spaces for funders to explore shifting power and money in philanthropy towards justice and equity. Our member network includes donors, philanthropic institutions, and their staff interested in supporting racial, economic, gender, and climate justice movements across the US.

Leading the Building Power in Place project, **Funders for a Just Economy (FJE)** is a program of NFG committed to advancing the philanthropic conversation around intersectional economic justice and workplace power. We are committed to placing organized labor, worker centers, worker justice campaigns, policy efforts, and organizing strategies at the center of our efforts. Partner groups address the disparate impact of economic policies on people of color, women, migrants, and low-income individuals and families. Two of our key programs include (1) Meeting the Moment, creating collaborations for a just future of work(ers) that also addresses long-term racial, gender and climate justice and (2) Labor's Evolution, strengthening ties among labor unions, community-based organizations and philanthropy and charting new directions in worker-led organizing.

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Our BPP work in St. Louis is only possible thanks to long-term foundational work from and FJE's partnership with NFG's Amplify Fund. Launched as the first grantmaking fund at Neighborhood Funders Group (NFG), **Amplify Fund** believes that community power is the key driver of just and equitable development. As a funder collaborative, the Fund supports Black, Indigenous, people of color and low-income communities to build power and to influence decisions about the places they live and work. Amplify centers racial justice and believes in following the wisdom and guidance of local leaders. In addition to guiding our strategies and grantmaking, Amplify is committed to living these values through internal operations, administrative functions, and behavioral norms to the fullest extent possible. They fund in 8 places -- Missouri, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, South Carolina, Tennessee and in California (via the Fund for an Inclusive California). Amplify selected these places because of: 1) the prioritization of power building work led by people of color and low-income people, and focused on equitable development; 2) the relative absence of national philanthropy; 3) the potential to mobilize local philanthropic dollars. In each place Amplify follows the guidance of local advisors and the wisdom of those with lived experience to develop context-specific strategies.



**FUNDERS FOR
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INTRODUCTION: THE PROJECT

The newest uprisings for Black lives, accelerated in 2020, not only put Black-led organizing at center stage, but it also remapped the ways philanthropic and other institutions think about power to incorporate the South and Midwest. So too has the success in shifting state-level power and national electoral results in Georgia and Virginia. Yet places like St. Louis, Missouri are rarely on the radar as hubs of change. Yet such a headline-driven view obscures both active changes and the seeds of long-term transformation to build power.

More broadly, the impulse and intention to direct new resources to the South and Midwest and to rural communities can often be met with confusion on where to even begin - or with rapid action wrapped in assumptions on what works where. This can translate into frustration in these underfunded areas as local movements for change are bypassed for more well-resourced groups with national reach, or are asked to replicate one model that may not fit local geography, history, and power relations.

When it comes to expanding the geographic reach of funding to support lasting change on inequality, in other words, mobilizing resources must be met with a deeper knowledge of and partnerships with Black, Indigenous,

migrant, and people of color-led movements rooted in place. Local funders, too, must also be considered in this landscape and as potential partners.

Building Power in Place emerges from a recognition that there is no “one size fits all” solution to addressing low-wage worker issues and economic inequality in the US, especially if we want to pay attention to race, gender and climate. In fact, many challenges workers and low-income communities face are place-based or geographic. Think about how local policies like a \$15 minimum wage can be undercut by state pre-emption, or the power that corporate forces like Amazon or agri-business exert in rural and exurban places. This has never been more clear than under COVID-19, where essential worker protections are a complex patchwork, and often include battles among local cities and state governments in intervening in dangerous industries like meatpacking.

We ask: How are low-wage workers and organizations that represent them addressing unequal economic, health conditions, given the complex geography of power in the US? Where are their connections among places in terms of both what low-income Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) communities face and how they organize? What role are funders playing – and where can they shift - to best respond to the specific place-based conditions related to economic justice?



This project is as much a research process rooted in community voices as it is an active process to help forge a shared understanding among funders, community, and labor organizations, and other key stakeholders through listening, learning, and building together.

Generously funded by the Public Welfare Foundation, BPP has **3 goals**:

#1 Identify specific urban and rural communities with organizing, policy advocacy and other efforts regarding economic justice for low-wage workers and understand how conditions are shaped by place-based factors such as state preemption. Deepen knowledge of the ways in which organizations respond to geographically-specific conditions and the ways they tangibly shift power and the economic prospects for low wage workers.

#2 Bridge donors, funders, and organizations engaged in related areas - including workforce development, community health and equity - regarding building power for workers. Share more information about worker-led strategies shifting precarious conditions and creating new visions of the economy in places that have not traditionally received significant funding for movement-building and grassroots organizing.

#3 Build and strengthen relationships with local and regional funders in the identified communities through larger events on issues facing marginalized workers, and facilitate a deeper relationship to national funders, community groups, and NFG.

INTRODUCTION: THE PROCESS

OUR METHODOLOGY

BPP is driven by interviews, public conversations and informal dialogue as qualitative research. Each site was selected in partnership with our member organizations, with community groups where we have partnerships, and with our NFG programs. They were narrowed down through a process where we mapped places (1) outside the more conventional sites of significant foundation funding; (2) where NFG programs had active ties, in order to build on our prior commitments and ensure longevity of work; (3) where there was active worker organizing and/or locally-specific manifestations of anti-worker policy (for example, state preemption.) Sites were then filtered to include a diversity of rural-urban or state/local relationships, and to ensure spread across South, Midwest, and rural regions.

At each site, we interviewed local community, family, and collaborative grantmakers, as well as state/national funders with a strong and active



presence in a location. Interview outreach for foundations was conducted via existing NFG networks and community partner recommendations. We then snowballed to map out a wider network of funders and to determine which officers and staff would be the appropriate interviewees. Questions included what the interviewee viewed as the most pressing economic justice issues; how foundations supported work to change these conditions; what challenges they faced in distributing funding; and what gaps they see in local and regional funding related to economic justice. Interviews lasted 45 minutes to 1 hour, and were recorded with transcripts.

We also interviewed and held open info-gathering conversations with labor and community organizations, an approach designed to both gather data and foster new connections among these movements and foundations. Partners for this are selected based on analysis of active worker-led organizing; groups were selected that (1) are led by BIPOC, including in management, (2) work across labor unions and community organizations, and (3) include an emphasis on intersectional organizing. Outreach was conducted to interview leadership of these groups through various networks, including other NFG programs. In the case of St. Louis, we conducted more than a dozen in-depth interviews.

Quotes are anonymized to protect confidentiality. Qualitative data was supplemented and fact-checked with secondary source academic literature, labor and economic statistics (most significantly from the University of Southern California Equity Research Initiative (ERI)/PolicyLink [National Equity Atlas](#)) newspapers, and other media.

OUR ANALYTICAL APPROACH

How do we begin to get a grasp on the local economy? To start to address this, we turned to a longer tradition of theory that views the economy as underpinned by **land, labor, and capital** (where corporations are subsumed). These three planks are not fixed containers, a long history of political and economic research tells us, but in fact, there is significant tension between the drive to commodify these and the social destruction reaped by free market ideas and practice. **Indigenous, Black radical, decolonial and/or feminist scholars and activists** have driven this point home repeatedly, **showing how we value land, labor and capital is never a given**. How we conceive of property or work can be transformed to better serve all life and reflect broader visions beyond the destructive, extractive market – as it has been historically in certain indigenous, Black and other cultural traditions, and many strive today to make possible at a community level in many ways. While (racial) capitalist transformation has sought to make land, labor and



capital solely profit-driven, there have been key moments of political transformation that have pushed back to redefine these economic elements more responsive to and rooted in social needs like care. In other words, these *Building Blocks* of the economy **not only shape power but are active sites where power is contested and challenged**. The terms of labor, land and capital (from the local on up) must be up for debate if we are to shift the systemic, historical inequalities that shape worker's lives. To highlight place dynamics tied to people and environment, we also look at geography and demographics as building blocks influencing the local economy.

In what ways then, do movements practically shift power on this complicated terrain? Significant new work has been done linking movements, funders, and practice in place. Focusing on the possibilities for progressive governance at the US state level, the **University of Southern California Equity Research Institute (USC ERI)** [*Changing States framework*](#) **lays out six key arenas for contesting and wielding governing power**. The research shows the electoral, legislative, judicial, administrative, communication, and corporate must each be addressed to make change last. The USC ERI framework offers a critical intervention in both recognizing the specific ways power plays out at different geographic levels, but also where and how movements develop multi-issue, multi-faceted strategies that can take them from building bases and influencing decision-making

towards wielding governing power. These arenas of governance thus form one leg of how *Power in Place* is enacted.

Frameworks like *Changing States* and related movement research helps address what capacities are necessary, such as a diverse coalitional and leadership development structures, to change arenas of governance. To understand more precisely how the specific economic landscape fits, we brought in a third area of research by scholar Beverly Silver and others on **the ways workers historically have shifted economic power**. First, workers can build associational power with political or community groups via legally-recognized forms. Second, they can wield their position in the market, such as striking when there are few options to replace them. Finally, they can leverage their position in a key industrial area or production process. Merging these complementary vantage points on progressive movement and worker power under *Movement Ecosystems*, we paid attention to **both the forms and strategies power-building takes** - and how these respond to and reshape local (and state, national, and global) economic building blocks.

Foundations are, of course, inseparable from movement capacities and strategic orientations to the economy, so we also include them in *Power in Place*. Our findings across these **lead to our roadmap on ways forward for**



philanthropic partners in change, *Redefining Power*. As all of our research is rooted in local realities, each of these recommendations will look different by place – though we anticipate commonalities that we will also use to inform our own responsibilities as a funder network.

INTRODUCTION: ST. LOUIS

The police murder of Michael Brown and subsequent uprisings in Ferguson may have galvanized philanthropic attention to St. Louis, but St. Louis has always had a strong tradition of Black leadership and community organizing.

The economic base of the region has been shrinking due to active disinvestment and wealth extraction, which has been partially shaped by corporate dominance of the governance agenda. Fortunately, movement and community groups have opened alternatives to new corporate oriented development plans. Worker organizing is also moving with the times to new sectors that are becoming core to the regional economy, which are relying upon Black, Latinx, and migrant labor, and require a lens to include semi-rural exurbs of St. Louis. Key principles to a reparative, sustainable approach to the region are deep engagement, community voice, and long-term funding - one that puts ownership in the hands of the community.

Components	Key Elements	Key Questions
Building Blocks	Geography & Demography	What key contextual elements shape the landscape of economic & political power?
Building Blocks	Capital Labor Land	Where is economic power contained & sustained locally?
Power in Place	Arenas of Governance	Where and how do government and other institutional actors enact power over land, labor, and capital locally?
Power in Place	Movement Ecosystems Where Funders Fit	Where and how do movements organize and strategically wield power in the economic building blocks? Where do/how can funders play a role in this?





Figure 1: Organizers at a rally in front of City Hall. (Photo Credit: Action STL)

THE BUILDING BLOCKS: GEOGRAPHY & DEMOGRAPHICS

The state of Missouri and the Missouri River are both named after the Missouri Tribe, which once lived in the region and controlled traffic and trade along the Missouri River and its tributaries, but were forcibly moved to Oklahoma in 1881.¹ Before the Indian Removal Act of 1830, there were nine tribes in Missouri: Chickasaw, Delaware, Illini, Kanza, Ioway, Otoe-Missouria, Osage, Quapaw, Sac & Fox, and Shawnee.² Currently, the St. Louis region is home to about 3,000 American Indians from many different tribes.³

Today, St. Louis is a city of around 315,000 residents. Population peaked in the 1950s at around 850,000 residents, and in years since the city has experienced around 63% population loss and continues to lose population today. The metropolitan region has around 3 million residents, many of whom have moved from the city to the larger county. The St. Louis region is marked by deep residential segregation that is best understood through an intertwined racial and economic lens. Historically the city has been divided

¹ <https://www.omtribe.org/who-we-are/history/>

² <https://libguides.jeffco.edu/missouritribes>

³

<https://news.stlpublicradio.org/arts/2016-04-09/curious-louis-annual-pow-wow-gives-american-indians-living-in-st-louis-a-chance-to-connect>



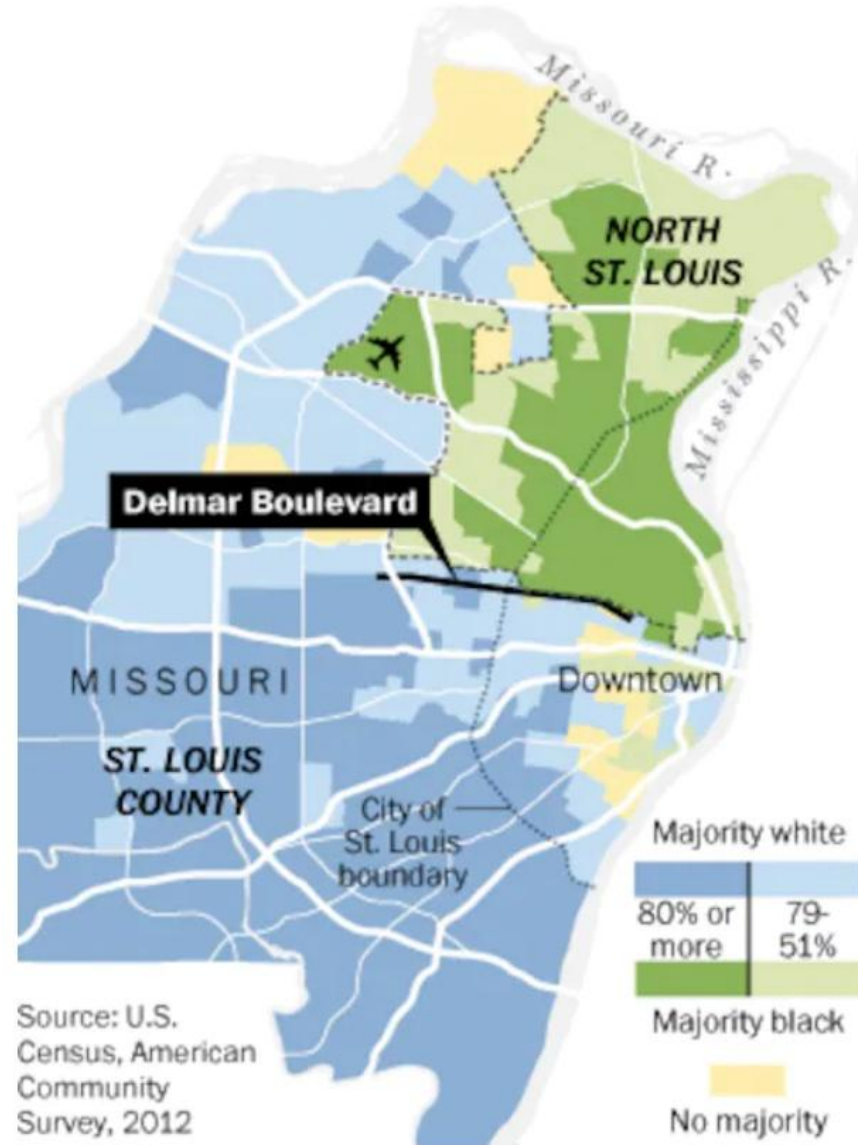


Figure 2: Map of St. Louis, featuring the Delmar Divide (Source: Washington Post)

north-south, with North city being primarily Black and South city being primarily white. Delmar Ave is the understood dividing line, resulting in the concept of the “Delmar Divide.” However, despite perception, the absolute nature of this dynamic has changed somewhat in recent years as Black people from North city have moved in larger numbers to South city, which now has more Black residents than North city does total.

Historically, white St. Louis city residents moved out to the county as a part of white flight and the subsidized movement of white families into the suburbs post-WWII. But today parts of North County – where municipalities like Ferguson and Jennings are located – are more predominantly Black. This segregated reality has effectively excluded Black residents of the region from all manner of opportunity and has produced extraordinarily inequitable economic, educational, and health outcomes along lines of race.



THE BUILDING BLOCKS: CAPITAL & CORPORATIONS

Wealth Extraction and the Making of the Delmar Divide

St. Louis' crisis of economic development and growth is often framed as part of a broader shift to the "rust belt," with the departure of auto and other large-scale manufacturing. But organizers and researchers most actively argue that such a narrative treats this as an abstract process. The fact is that the economic base of the region has been shrinking due to active disinvestment and wealth extraction, which took the value that auto, airport, and other industrial and service workers built. Auto manufacturing, along with large corporations like TWA, departed in the late 1990s, while elite bankers and developers helped remove usury laws in the state of Missouri. This opened the door to predatory lending to a struggling middle class, which included housing, business and personal loans. At the same time, small subdivided municipalities (created as part of white flight) turned to extracting wealth from residents via relentless policing and a regime of fines, fees, and tickets.

Ferguson, as organizers interviewed explained, opened the eyes of the nation to the kinds of wealth extraction that transformed St. Louis. Such

extraction did not affect all residents equally. Ferguson also brought new light to the ways that segregation has become suburbanized in many US cities like St. Louis. The "Delmar Divide," entrenched by decades of Jim Crow violence, residential segregation, redlining, uneven investment, and more, now has shifted such that many Black residents have moved to the South part of the city. In 2014, at the time of the Ferguson uprising, on one side of the divide residents were 99% black, with a \$73,000 median home value, and a median income of \$18,000, while on the flipside the other side was 73% white, a median house price \$335,000 and median income of \$50,000.⁴ In other words, St. Louis' histories of economic (de-)development have been indelibly shaped by racial inequality, with Black and non-white workers, taxpayers, and residents bearing the brunt of the disinvestment and extractive financial and municipal policies.

St. Louis' Corporate-Controlled Agenda

Part of what has shaped an economic trajectory of extraction and inequality is corporate dominance of the governance agenda. This is representative of the city's Fordist past - i.e. the era of big corporations, a bigger state, and big labor. But while the welfare state and labor power was undermined

⁴ Purnell, Jason, Gabriela Camberos, and Robert Fields. "For the Sake of All." Joint Report, Washington University in St. Louis and Saint Louis University, May 30, 2014. Available at <https://forthesakeofall.files.wordpress.com/2014/05/for-the-sake-of-all-report.pdf>



systematically, corporate power remained. For decades, 5 key corporate actors run by local families dominated St. Louis: Enterprise Car Rental, Peabody Energy (coal), Bayer Crop Science/Monsanto, Purina (now bankrupt), and Arch Resources (formerly Arch Coal). Such corporations wielded significant power over the St. Louis region's policy agenda, especially through an entity called Civic Progress, a Chamber of Commerce of sorts. Many of the companies that were headquartered in St. Louis have since left the region, or maintained an office but not a headquarters.

In the last decade, tech companies have entered this small and powerful group, including Accenture and ESRI. With the development of a National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency headquarters, the single largest investment in St. Louis of \$2 billion, historical trends continue to place corporate power above local needs. A unified agenda of lobbyists has sought a regime of tax breaks and incentives that have benefited mostly tech companies and developers.⁵ These kinds of lock-step moves among city, county, and state officials and corporate power threaten to further entrench inequality in new ways, including further uneven development and new gentrification, without resolving the deep power imbalances that have most hard-hit communities of color.

⁵ <https://www.governing.com/archive/gov-tax-breaks-cities-affluent.html>

Enacting a Grassroots Vision

Fortunately, movement and community groups have opened alternatives to new corporate oriented development plans, like Greater STL Inc., that echo the past histories of Civic Progress. While the Greater STL plan was dominated by different corporations, organizers have sought to intervene to move this agenda beyond, as one expert explained, “merely mouthing the language on economic mobility.” This has helped shift priorities, to some extent, in areas like the STL 2030 Jobs Plan to speak frankly about racial segregation and inequality. It focuses on five key areas - aerospace, automotive and defense; advanced business services; advanced manufacturing; transportation and logistics; and biomedical and health services. The question is of course how this will lead to shifts in tangible practice, in terms of workforce development, worker voice, training, and broader investment in local communities of color.

Surprisingly helpful in this process, according to several interviewees, is that St. Louis funders are convening a “forward-thinking” forum of local philanthropic organizations, financial institutions, corporations, and local government funding agencies to align flow of capital to advance equitable economic mobility in the St. Louis region, though not specifically to grassroots organizations. While at the beginning stages, such directions give a specific role for philanthropy in helping move this conversation of



development away from historical trends of extraction and towards a vision shaped by those most affected by inequity (and providing the labor to fuel growth).



Figure 3: Image of masked organizers in Black Voters Matter sweatshirts. (Source: Action STL)

THE BUILDING BLOCKS: LABOR

Unemployment

In St. Louis (like much of the US today), one cannot discuss labor without discussing unemployment. The pandemic has exacerbated racialized unemployment in St. Louis, which according to data from the Policylink/ERI National Equity Atlas from 2019 affected 12% of Black residents of the city of St. Louis and 10% people of color overall, while white residents had a 3% unemployment rate.⁶ Unemployment has a strong correlation to involvement with criminalized activities, as well as an over-burdening by fines, fees, and harassment. So too does unemployment deepen the divide on other indicators, including health and life expectancy. The clear impact of policing on workers supported the important decision to remove the St. Louis Police Officers Association from the St. Louis Labor Council. Even with the growing presence of tech companies and a geospatial hub, access to these opportunities is stunted due to a lack of workforce development pipelines. As one interviewee shared, “Communities that are hardest hit have no access to the education and training required to be engaged in those growth industries,” not to mention the ways that status quo racialized

⁶ nationalequityatlas.org/



hiring can persist if there are no real mechanisms to challenge them inside a company.

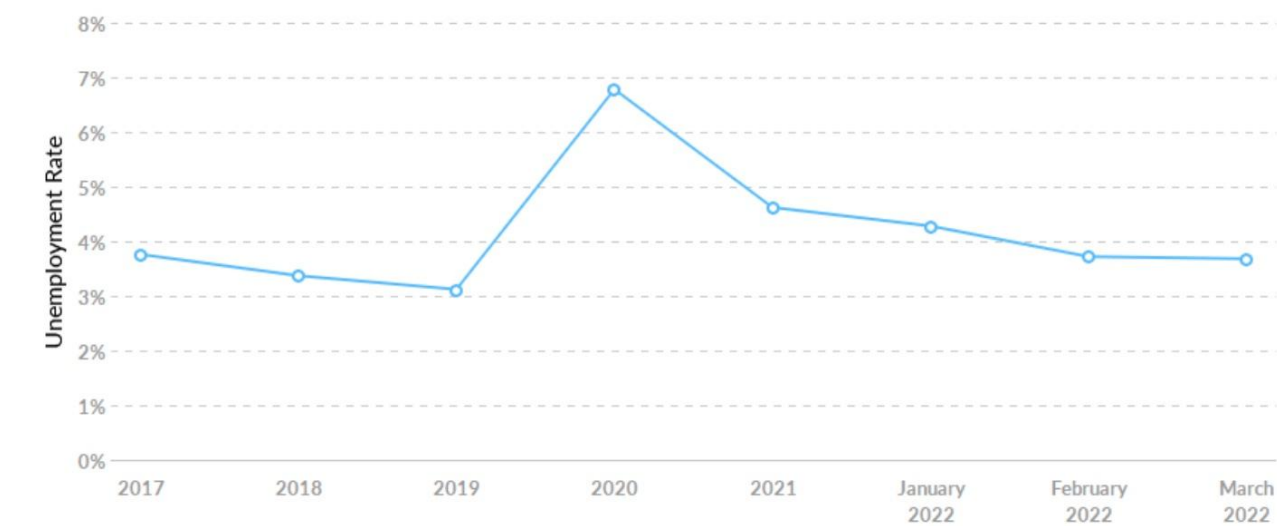


Figure 4: Unemployment trends from 2017 to March 2022. (Chart credit: National Equity Atlas)



Figure 5: Workers organizing for fair pay. Source: St. Louis Jobs with Justice.



The Fight for \$15 and an Equitable Future

Those residents who can find work often find themselves in the rank of the “working poor,” receiving barely below 200% of the federal poverty line; this particularly hits Black workers hard at a rate of 17%, as well as Latinxs at 16%, while white workers were only 7% of this income bracket.⁷

Interconnected labor, faith-based, and neighborhood movements have sustained a concerted effort to challenge the ways in which the jobs that exist perpetuate racial and other inequality in St. Louis. Building from a longer history in the Fordist era of union power, some labor organizations have pivoted to directly address racialized wage inequality through the Fight for 15. At the center of this struggle have been mostly Black women in the fast food industry who helped launch this campaign in 2012, and have brought together groups like SEIU, Missouri Jobs with Justice, and others. The long, protracted struggle for a higher minimum wage began with a local ordinance that workers secured in 2015, only to be pre-empted by the Republican legislature. Pre-emption has been a major source of frustration in general for grassroots movements, who have seen progress upended by an overzealous conservative state that has stopped everything from paid leave to gig work restrictions to plastic bag bans.⁸

⁷ nationalequityatlas.org/

⁸ <https://www.epi.org/preemption-map/>

Undaunted, workers took the fight to the state itself, with organizations like SEIU and others winning a 2018 statewide \$15 minimum wage (even in a midterm election year). The victory showed the tremendous need but also the kinds of transformational movement relationships building between new generations of labor and community groups. Increasingly organizations like the Movement for Black Lives have also shifted this labor conversation and helped influence efforts like the “Show Me \$15 and a Union” to accelerate implementation of the wage change.⁹ With such campaigns, worker-leaders have also made clear in new organizing that the minimum wage is just a first step, and that real worker voice means unionizing the sectors that now define St. Louis, including food service and healthcare.¹⁰ Workers have sought to take on paid leave as well, with more than 600,000 workers without paid leave in the state, per one interviewee. While the St. Louis economy moves through new phases and shifts, and community intervenes to shape that agenda, worker



Figure 6: Organizer with sign demanding an end to union busting and a fair contract for workers. Source: St. Louis Jobs with Justice.

⁹ <https://www.jwj.org/in-missouri-sharing-connections-to-achieve-racial-justice-goals>

¹⁰ <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/fight-for-15-and-union-st-louis>



organizations and allies are making significant strides to establish a baseline for all workers who sustain the region.

Looking to Logistics and Living Out Racial Justice

Worker organizing is also moving with the times to new sectors that are becoming core to the regional economy, which are relying upon Black, Latinx, and migrant labor, and require a lens to include semi-rural exurbs of St. Louis. One such project is a growing warehouse worker organizing effort, spearheaded by the Missouri Workers Center. Fast food workers have led the way for this new precariously-positioned sector to also begin to organize, and are linked via the Worker Center, which has centered an anti-racist platform in its efforts. These speak to the promise of new, transformational alliances that first and foremost, are focusing on “developing worker leaders” who practice storytelling and finding ways to bring white workers to the fight against racism. This is being matched with more sectoral research on the industry and where gains are possible. Histories of organizing in the region show if St. Louis’ unions further take the lead from Black-led organizers and center countering the deeply entrenched racial segregation that has marked St. Louis’ economy, the possibilities to more rapidly shift course from a low-wage logistics sector to a high-road industry will become more real by the day.

THE BUILDING BLOCKS: LAND

Invisible Housing Crises and Homes for All

St. Louis is not the first place one thinks of a housing crisis, but unlike those often framed as a supply-based problem like New York or California, St. Louis is one radically shaped by disinvestment - like much of the “rust belt.” White and capital flight (and the extraction that came with it) in the 1980s and 1990s meant significant loss of resources, investment, and a tax base both on the predominantly Black side of the Delmar Divide, but also East St. Louis and the broader northern county. As one of the few US cities to never have suffered a massive fire as well, much of these areas feature older housing stock where absentee landlords and property managers ignore problems like asbestos, mold, and other major health risks and hazards. Where there are problems, or when underemployed and struggling tenants cannot pay, landlords simply evict tenants without resolving structural issues - a reality deeply worsened with 8,500-plus evictions in the first year and half of the pandemic. At the same time, at the edges where new tech capital is moving, housing prices are rising, and eviction is also following.

One leader shared: “There is a narrative going around that the cost of living is lower. People assume, especially progressive politicians, ‘Oh, well it’s



cheap and how could people be struggling?” But, the leader explained, there is only a surplus for residents with 80% of the area’s median income, while those at 30% of this rate - who have most often faced decades of racial inequality - there is a “shortage of housing.” Organizations like Homes for All STL are drawing attention to the invisibilized crisis and the ways predominantly Black and other residents of color are beholden to slumlords and property managers who inflate rents, and the price to well-being. Homes for All STL has also fought for a vital agenda of a tenant bill of rights for St. Louis, a process that has involved gaining input from residents on what their concerns and needs are, while also ensuring real implementation of rental relief and protections from the housed and unhoused alike, as residents face dangerous winters and scorching summers. The Black-led local group has also drawn from strategies and collaboration with their national network, that include a range of climate justice and [Right to the City](#) partners. Other organizations and formations collaborating to work on housing justice and eviction defense in the region include [Action St. Louis](#), [ArchCity Defenders](#), [The St Louis Housing Defense Collective](#), and [KC Tenants](#) at the statewide level.



Figure 7: Organizers at a protest. Source: Action STL



Developing a New Vision

While corporate-dominated development strategies led by a handful of powerful elites may have defined the past in St. Louis, many young leaders are fighting to make sure they can set a community-led vision of development. More broadly, the region has a major lack of Community Development Corporations (CDCs), and a weak development financing infrastructure (CDFIs). But the solution, many we spoke to shared, is not simply to dump community financing or to erect undemocratic institutions. Several interviewees cited the dangers of bank actors moving alone in this context, such as Bank of America's 100 million commitment to Black-led organizations that actually went to white-led groups speaking for the Black community and made little impact on longer-term development.

Key principles to a reparative, sustainable approach to the region are deep engagement, community voice, and long-term funding - one that puts ownership in the hands of the community. Such experiments are being developed in the Dutchtown area of South St. Louis, a part of the South city that has included a much larger Black population (i.e. post-Delmar Divide), and faced a crisis of viable housing stock. It's also one of the most populous neighborhoods in the City. The [Dutchtown South Community Corporation](#) (DSCC) has taken an approach to housing and economic justice in the region, rooted in equity, collaboration, community ownership and transparency.¹¹ Along with moving affordable housing, the CDC has also brought new pocket

parks, art, storytelling, and community-building to the area. Importantly, DSCC has also joined Homes for All to include tenants rights organizing as part of its work, and made a concerted effort to bring Black and refugee leadership on both its staff and board.

The Dutchtown project is tied to a growing, larger network that has centered more Black voices in the investment and development process, [Invest STL](#). Alongside Dutchtown, the collaborative also supports Cornerstone Corporations' effort to bring new investment into the West End in ways that benefit existing residents and transform place for all. Invest STL came out of conversations and research that recognized the dearth of CDCs and CDFI's in 2014 and 2015. Helping move finance capital out of banks' hands while still mobilizing patient capital from actors like US Bancorp and JP Morgan Chase, Invest STL has also included providing participatory research action tools, investment networks, and more.

[Beyond Housing](#) has also recognized the challenge of bringing together the 24 municipalities that are part of the region under [the 24:1 initiative](#), which has helped coordinate key services and deal with coordination issues. This approach has also included demonstrating how investment must include housing stock rehabilitation but also an ecosystem of education, housing, health, job training and access, economic development, and personal finance.

¹¹ https://www.dutchtownsouth.org/_files/ugd/6aacd7_b484956a509f4394a89d2b66350999da.pdf



Perhaps most promising, rooted in Black-led movements, and responsive to the comprehensive disenfranchisement and disinvestment marking the region, is the [People's Plan St. Louis](#), an alignment plan anchored by Action St. Louis and ArchCity Defenders. The Plan, generated through deep collaboration with community, recognizes that there is not one lane by which community development is reimagined, and takes seriously the need for public financing via tax reform (and not just moving bank or foundation money in singular ways), universal housing, more inclusive voting rights, deep investment in green technologies, a rights-based approach to housing and more as part of a truly community-rooted and long-lasting shift. DSCC is one of many members of this powerful coalition, and the Plan is further detailed in the **Movement Infrastructure** segment of this BPP report.

Centering Environmental Justice to Re-Envision the City

The People's Plan St. Louis draws to the center the ways the long intergenerational effects of racialized inequality can also be seen in the ways that communities are exposed to both environmental hazards like air pollution and in homes but also deprived of access to clean water, green space, fresh foods, and other resources vital to healthy, full lives. Key issues also include the lack of green space and trees, which generates heat islands deeply exacerbated by climate change. Trash dumping by industrial polluters, businesses, and slumlords has also marred community life. Aged infrastructure leaves schools with lead-ridden water, and houses with mold, a lack of weatherization, and more. These realities hit Black communities

hardest, as well as shape the lives of migrant Latinx and Asian Pacific Islander communities.

The People's Plan and its grassroots participants bring environmental justice concerns into the conversation, as they relate to housing, land use and health, and center Black voices in a future-forward agenda. Solutions to food access such as urban farming are entering community development strategies, but as one organizer made clear, “actually effecting change in these environmental issues requires building power.” The People's Plan is a key anchor to such strategies, and promises to redefine the ways a green vision of the city must also be one rooted in racial, gender and economic justice.

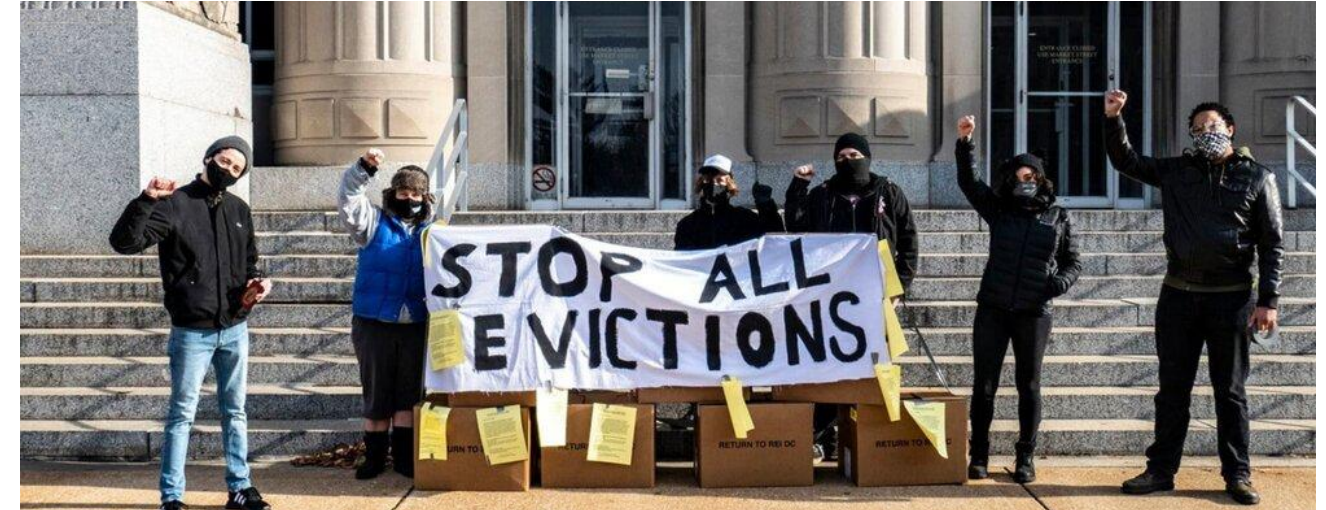


Figure 8: Community members holding 'Stop All Evictions' banner. Source: Action STL



POWER IN PLACE: GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE

With a large and fragmented municipal government, which in the largest definition of the region represents 88 local governments, civic engagement has been a challenge, leaving many fronts open for organizing and to move power towards co-governance. As one organizer shared, “Changing 88 fiefdoms is impossible. There are too many police departments - not 80 but too many. This allows people with power to pit municipalities against each other using tax incentives, etc, to undermine equity.” This challenge, though, as noted in the Land section of this project, is being met with ingenuity and new ideas around how to plan and make policy from a more regional perspective. Cross-cutting groups are setting a broader agenda that includes “equity-forward regional unification,” while building planning and policy agendas that address questions of housing, equitable job development, stopping punitive injustice, and more.

In many areas, organizers have turned the small-scale nature of politics into an opportunity to organize for electoral base-building, leading to victories such as the election of Missouri 1st Congressional District Representative Cori Bush and St. Louis city Mayor Tishaura Jones. As one organizer shared, “the movement to governing is an important maturation of the work” that has been building up and centering local leadership and solutions even prior to the Ferguson uprisings.

While local power may be growing in multi-faceted ways, right-wing conservative forces - representing elite exclusion - have taken hold at the state level for several decades. They have attempted to stand directly in the path of grassroots mobilization in elections by placing numerous restrictions on voting rights. At time of writing, [Missouri ranks third in the country in the number of voter restrictions](#), squarely aimed at Black and brown communities and impeding registration and poll access. In response, Action St. Louis in its [#WokeVotersSTL](#) and others have mobilized hundreds of thousands to register, and brought marginalized communities local debates and voter guides.

Local grassroots organizers have also sought to direct the ways federal funds are spent, to ensure equity and reinvestment in long-ignored communities. Most recently, groups have sought to engage voters to understand and help imagine and direct where nearly [\\$68 million in American Rescue Plan](#) money goes. The visible need in St. Louis has made communities eligible for large chunks of stimulus funding and other investment, but how this is spent requires continuous dialogue and mobilization - moving newly elected leaders like St. Louis city [Mayor Tishaura Jones to engage in participatory budget processes](#).

Here again, the Missouri state elite representatives have continually sought to pre-empt progress, from holding down tax rates to suing to halt COVID-19 protections to attempting to halt the minimum wage. The success of the state’s often-silenced majority to pass legislation for the minimum wage



(even higher than first proposed locally in St. Louis) has made clear that the state's pre-emptive hand represents only a small set of interests. As organizers continue to operate at multiple scales, there is potential to turn this pre-emptive tide and make Missouri another example that demonstrates that it is possible not just to shift the state towards one with more progressive policies across the board, but towards an agenda and practices that re-affirm and protect Black life.



Source: Arch City Defenders

POWER IN PLACE: MOVEMENT INFRASTRUCTURE

The police murder of Michael Brown and subsequent uprisings in Ferguson may have galvanized philanthropic attention to St. Louis, as well as the formation of organizing coalitions, but St. Louis has always had a strong tradition of longer-term Black leadership in the region and in the years since the Ferguson uprising in the fall of 2014, powerful young Black organizers have carried the torch on, despite regional disinvestment and extraction. The Ferguson Uprising raised consciousness, mobilized activists in the St. Louis region, brought new leaders to the fore, and sparked several new experiments at coordinating strategy among groups on the ground. People who felt powerless moved into leadership as powerful organizers. New, younger Black leaders came to the fore of the movement and have birthed new organizations, forged new relationships, and deepened existing ones. Many wins have been centered in relationships, activists also being trusted messengers building power for their communities, and multiracial worker organizing.

The [Close the Workhouse](#) campaign demonstrates the power of organizing on the local level. Often the conversation on incarceration focuses solely on prison and sentencing and not on the impact of local policing and incarceration policies that fuel pre-trial detention. The campaign focuses on



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organizing Black people directly impacted by these systems while also setting forth a vision of how communities can thrive when we address underlying issues that perpetuate harm, and communities are resourced. In recent years, the campaign has had major successes including the passage of legislation to fully close the jail in 2020. In 2021, the jail was emptied and defunded from the city's budget. While the workhouse has not fully shuttered, there has been an incredible decline in the pretrial population. The campaign continues to organize for the full closure of the jail and to ensure that the building is not used for future detention in any way.



Incarcerated people protest from within The Workhouse. Source: Action STL

There have been instances of strong partnership and coalition between community organizations and labor in St. Louis, based on the understanding that the issues that organizations are fighting for directly impact the base that labor wishes to organize. Connecting across issues allowed for deep relationships and stronger campaigns. As Kayla Reed of [Action STL](#) shared with us, the people most impacted by the workhouse and the discriminatory and predatory systems of incarceration in the city of St. Louis are often young Black people who are most likely to work in industries such as fast food retail and healthcare. During the Ferguson uprising in 2014, when protests sparked, many of the leaders who organized marches and led powerful demonstrations were leaders associated with the Fight for 15 campaign. These leaders have gone on to become organizers, elected officials, and union leaders, and was the foundation for a strong partnership between SEIU and the Close the Workhouse campaign.

As noted in the prior sections, the [People's Plan](#) is a comprehensive policy agenda designed to help build power and redistribute resources in St. Louis, anchored by many grassroots organizations, as well as labor. Also essential in resourcing movements to build civic power is funder work to move resources towards both c3 and c4 efforts, such as the work of the [Missouri Organizing and Voter Engagement Collaborative](#).

Too often, power structures divide Black leaders, particularly when there is not deep investment in finding alignment and understanding collective power. Conversations with young Black movement leaders have resulted in a



new project called LeadBlackSTL. LeadBlackSTL will build deeper and sustainable relationships between Black leaders in the St. Louis region and work towards political alignment by building a leadership development program designed by and for young Black leaders in the region. The design team was anchored by the Directors of Action STL, ArchCity Defenders and WEPOWER and will launch in 2022.

POWER IN PLACE: WHERE FUNDERS FIT

1. Shift from Crisis Approaches to Resourcing Long Term Organizing

Since the Ferguson uprising, funding has become more accessible to some organizations that have historically been unable to secure long term substantial funding. However, it is not always the case that local organizations are able to attract national funding to support the work. If and when they are able to successfully attract resources, those resources are not long-term and are narrowly focused on programmatic work instead of understanding the direct relationship with the infrastructure of an organization and their ability to build capacity (including staffing) and win campaigns.

Additionally, the influx of funding was inadequate to the depth and scale of the problems that surfaced, and some grassroots leaders felt that locally, foundations invested millions into programmatic and direct service solutions led by organizations that had no history of addressing systemic racism and systems change with the excuse that they “couldn’t find Black organizers” because they did not make the time to have conversations with



community. Philanthropy has a prescriptive view of what the work looks like and who should get funding that gets in the way of the movement ecosystem being healthy and strong. A focus on funding long-term organizing with principles, goals, and actions defined by the organizations that lead them will interrupt crisis-based funding that does not fully resource organizations or address problems.

2. Coordination

Increased coordinated funding, collaboration, and communication amongst funders locally, regionally and nationally would strengthen the philanthropic landscape in St. Louis. A regional agenda with co-investment would result in more comprehensive and deeper resourcing, rather than funders aspiring to independently present the solution that solves everything. Relationship building amongst funder peers grows the ability to partner and obtain commitments to funder tables and pooled resources, especially across issue areas. Coordination among funders who are prioritizing POC-led community organizing and those who are open to and learning more about it, is especially important given the legacy and current undue impact of corporate interest in governance.

There has been growing investment from local foundations in Black organizations, as well as collaboration between national foundations and local foundations. An example of this is the working relationship between the Amplify Fund, Missouri Foundation for Health and the Deaconess Foundation. This collaboration has led to deeper investment in Black-led organizations that are building the power necessary to shift conditions. Increased coordination in these ways would prove to further bolster the organizing ecosystem of St. Louis.

3. Changing Practices

Throughout the philanthropic space, funders are looking at better ways to do things. We often talk about shifting practices toward ceding power and less cumbersome and unnecessary labor for community organizations, but what does this actually look like? Examples include taking the time to build relationships and actual trust with community organizations, especially those that are Black-led. Be invested not just in their success, but in the organization's well being. Funders truncating and simplifying application and renewal processes, as well as creating space for conversational reporting, has also been helpful. Taking the time to meet and build with initial stakeholder groups and actually following the advice that is heard. Avoid creating hurdles where they don't need to exist like forensic budgeting requests and longform proposals. An example of trust-based



relationships between funders and grantee partners can be found in [this SSIR article co-written by the Amplify Fund and one of their grantee partners, ArchCity Defenders.](#)

Shifting the local landscape takes time and deep investment, and organizations struggle to identify national philanthropic partners that are willing to make that level of investment. Funders must provide long-term general operating support and utilize funding practices that create space for organizations to experiment and pivot without hindrance to demonstrate their trust in the vision of organizers.

