Closing The Gaps NETWORK

Closing the Gaps Network Survey

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Credits

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Introduction

The Closing the Gaps (CTG) Network is a ten-year initiative that brings together leaders from cities across the country who are committed to imagining what an anti-racist society might look like, and to playing an important role in building it through the transformation of government policies, practices, and operations.

Within the network, six cities are engaged more deeply through a Year of Reckoning cohort. The Year of Reckoning is about local government leaders coming together with other leaders in their cities, acknowledging that—when it comes to racism and inequity—the past is present. The Year of Reckoning is the foundational racial equity training and competency-building component of a multi-faceted approach to Living Cities' work with city governments.

After hosting an intensive, five-month Undoing Racism workshop for the Year of Reckoning cohort and a series of monthly convenings about foundational racial equity topics for the CTG Network, we surveyed participants about their experiences.

Art by Molly Costello, sourced from their community art

Survey Purpose

This survey supports us to ground in our value of racial equity as a process and an outcome. Through exploration of where cities are in their process of centering racial equity in local government, we can identify shifts and break through the binary notion of "good" and "bad" cities. The survey also served a number of concrete purposes for Living Cities and our work:

- Develop an assessment of participants' racial equity competency and analysis
- Provoke deeper reflection among participants about their experience in the network and their racial equity work
- Support the Living Cities team to understand the impact of designing a network to build a collective, foundational anti-racism analysis among cohort participants and support city teams in applying and operationalizing that analysis
- Inform improvements and priorities for our work that can support public sector gatekeepers to use their power to implement more racially equitable policies and practices

We hope that reviewing these results is an invitation for other cities and institutions to embrace racial equity work and a reminder that no matter where you sit within your institution or how far along your journey you might be, you can start the work with small, daily shifts and practices.

ground in our value of racial equity as a process and an outcome

Key Takeaways

● Participation in CTG has increased respondents' capacity to apply a racial equity lens and approach their work as anti-racist organizers. Repeated engagement in the Undoing Racism® workshop strengthens this impact.

● Engagement with the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond (PISAB) through Undoing Racism® has critically shaped respondents' analysis of racism and approach to anti-racism work. Having space to process with each other and Living Cities staff increased their capacity to apply their learnings.

● Practicing racial equity work in our own institution better equips Living Cities staff to design liberated spaces and model new ways of working for network participants.

● Living Cities' hypothesis that grounding racial equity work in deep competency building will both grow individuals' ability to practice anti-racism and impact the ways that they set policy and make decisions is proving to be true.

Summary of Results

How has CTG participation increased participants' capacity to organize for racial equity in their city departments?

Undoing Racism® workshops have a significant impact on respondents seeing themselves as anti-racist organizers and growing their capacity to apply a racial equity and inclusion lens to their work.

- After the workshops, **87%** of survey respondents do or may see themselves as anti-racist organizers.
- Folks who had not participated in an Undoing Racism® workshop prior to joining CTG (**64%** of respondents) were less likely to see themselves as anti-racist organizers.
- Of the folks who did identify as anti-racist organizers, **92%** had attended at least one Undoing Racism® workshop prior to joining CTG.
- A few people felt their participation in CTG hasn't changed their perception on anti-racist organizing. The most common reasons were either a newness to this approach, or the opposite: they have been organizing for years. One person shared, *"I live this life daily. The workshop was reaffirming and at times offered additional layers of understanding."*
- The majority (**83%**) of respondents--and **100%** of those who had previously participated in Undoing Racism®--expressed that their participation in CTG has increased their capacity for applying a racial equity and inclusion lens to their role, department and city.

"The facilitators are like conversation doulas trying to help us birth an analysis to be stronger organizers, they shepherd the conversation by supporting the participants to look inward and then see how we fit in the systems we say we want to dismantle."

Key takeaway: Participation in CTG has increased respondents' capacity to apply a racial equity lens and take an organizing approach in their work. Repeated engagement in Undoing Racism® strengthens this impact.

What tools for anti-racist organizing have CTG participants found most helpful?

Respondents are seeing the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond (PISAB)'s [anti-racist organizing principles](#) modeled through the work and finding it more possible to embed the principles in their own institutions as a result.

- Reflecting on the principle of Networking, one person shared, *"From the music being played as we come into meetings to the deep conversations we have in breakouts or the funny notes in the chat-- it all makes the space so engaging, powerful and helpful."*
- Additional PISAB principles that were concrete in CTG activities included sharing culture, gatekeeping, maintaining accountability, and learning from history.
- Some tools that CTG provided, such as PISAB's norms for how to engage with the space and their anti-racist organizing principles, were especially helpful in supporting folks to organize within their roles or departments.
- Concepts PISAB introduced such as power analysis and internalized racial oppression have impacted respondents' anti-racism analysis.

"At first, I believed that anti-racist organizing was only done outside of work, but looking at the tools that were provided within CTG, it helped me realize that there are actions we could take within our work utilizing specific tools."

Respondents have greatly appreciated learning from each other in monthly meetings, peer sharing, and breakout peer spaces.

- Respondents found that learning from one another and looking to other cities for models of equitable practices and policies has guided them and helped them feel less alone.
- Respondents have found value in one-on-one calls with Living Cities staff members. One person shared, *"Living Cities was so open about their journey that it gave me the courage to be more open about my struggles and my city's struggles."*

"I feel like some of the white participants from my city have begun to develop their equity IQ and we can now have conversations that we couldn't have before and we can co-conspire to transform systems - something that wouldn't be possible if they hadn't been exposed to anti-racist organizing."

Key takeaway: Engagement with PISAB through Undoing Racism® critically shapes participants' analysis of racism and approach to anti-racism work. Having space to process with each other and Living Cities staff increases their capacity to apply their learnings.

"The support I've received from this network has given me the confidence to lead."

Art by [Rommy Torrico](#), sourced from [Amplifier Art](#)

Where is the network in terms of racial equity competencies and the application of competencies to policy making?

A majority of respondents report growth in their racial equity competencies, including:

- Greater understanding of anti-racist organizing
- Greater ability to embrace the power they hold to shift institutional processes
- Appreciation for having a shared analysis among their colleagues and different lenses through which to see and understand their role in racial equity work
- Increased sense of accountability for the ways they're using their power
- Embracing their responsibility to use the resources they gatekeep to bring more intention to their decision-making processes
- Thinking about what it looks like to give communities of color a seat at their power structure
- Feeling more empowered to take risks and be bold in the work that they do. One participant shared, **"Prior to my involvement I found it hard to blend equity and anti-racist work into all areas of my professional role. Part of this is indicative of the environment I work in, but now I feel emboldened to apply an anti-racist lens to my personal and professional life. Understanding my power and power dynamics in general has really encouraged me to be thoughtful and intentional."**
- Feeling a greater sense of accountability to communities of color and more clarity around the need to center integrity in this work

"I'm much more aware of how I serve as a gatekeeper. Before I thought the answer was to just use my power for good. Now, I'm shifting to sharing power and co-creating."

About **65%** of respondents report that they've seen a policy, practice and/or process change as a result of their participation in CTG. Below are a few examples that respondents shared:

- Enhanced relationships with internal government staff and business community to support anti-racism initiatives

- Passed a comprehensive piece of legislation that strengthens and reaffirms their city's commitment to racial equity
- Feeling braver about inserting breathwork and other centering tools. Thinking more broadly about who can help them create processes and tools to work against their defaults as an organization
- Working with colleagues who are part of the cohort to create a book club with affinity spaces for both white and BIPOC city staff
- Increased language accessibility so that City information is now translated into languages beyond English
- Creation of a core equity team with GARE's support to help advance the work. *"Living Cities has been instrumental in helping us to make the choice to become members of GARE as well."*

100% of respondents report that they:
- interrogate decisions and actions with a power analysis in mind so that power can be shifted to communities of color
- are willing to take risks and challenge the status quo in their role to push for racial equity in their department

90% of respondents report that they:
- believe they have power to change policies, practices, or processes in their system to be more racially equitable.
- actively seek stories that uplift the resiliency and strength of communities of color.
- believe there are no cities in the US that are racially equitable, but that does not mean that we cannot change this reality.

Key takeaway: Our hypothesis that grounding racial equity work in deep competency building will both grow individuals' ability to practice anti-racism and impact the ways that they set policy and make decisions is proving to be true.

How has Living Cities' own racial equity journey impacted the design of CTG network?

Respondents feel as though the practice of introducing norms and agreements was helpful to understanding how participants were expected to show up in the space. This practice, which was introduced to Living Cities by PISAB and reinforced by our internal racial equity team, is an example of how shifting our internal practices impacts how we design CTG spaces.

- Reintroducing the norms at the top of each convening felt consistent and affirming.
- Respondents felt the space was held in an accountable way. They noted that trainers brought wisdom, questions, kept the group moving together, and met the group with a balance of challenging and supporting them.

"What is helping me is seeing how intentionally Living Cities is putting their resources and support together -- working with Black Womxn Flourish, local artists, centering breath work, relationships, storytelling. I have so much power and so many resources I control (or could control) --- I'm learning from that model when I think about intention, culture-building and allocation of resources."

There's explicit gratitude for the ways in which humanity is centered in CTG spaces and the intention that is put into facilitation.

- Respondents named practices like referring to pronouns, asking for correct pronunciation of names, calling people by their names, active listening, and acknowledgement of indigenous lands as some of the ways they felt humanized in the space. These are all practices we at Living Cities have been cultivating and practicing with one another.
- Respondents report feeling respected and value the space to take what they need and the ability to show up as their "full selves."
- One respondent shared that Living Cities' modeling what it looks like to center the well-being of POC and particularly Black women in this work empowered them to create racial affinity spaces in their department.

"I appreciate the fact that Living Cities is going through its own racial reckoning and that the leadership seemed to give a lot of power to the staff who organized my cohort and I applaud you for taking that power and doing things differently than a typical experience."

Key takeaway: Practicing racial equity work in our own institution better equips us to design liberated spaces and model new ways of working for network participants.

Art by Molly Costello, sourced from their community art

Implications For Our Work

The results of this survey, as well as our ongoing conversations with participants of the Closing the Gaps Network, will inform the evolution of the network and Living Cities' work broadly. Some of the key implications for our work based on what we learned from the survey are below.
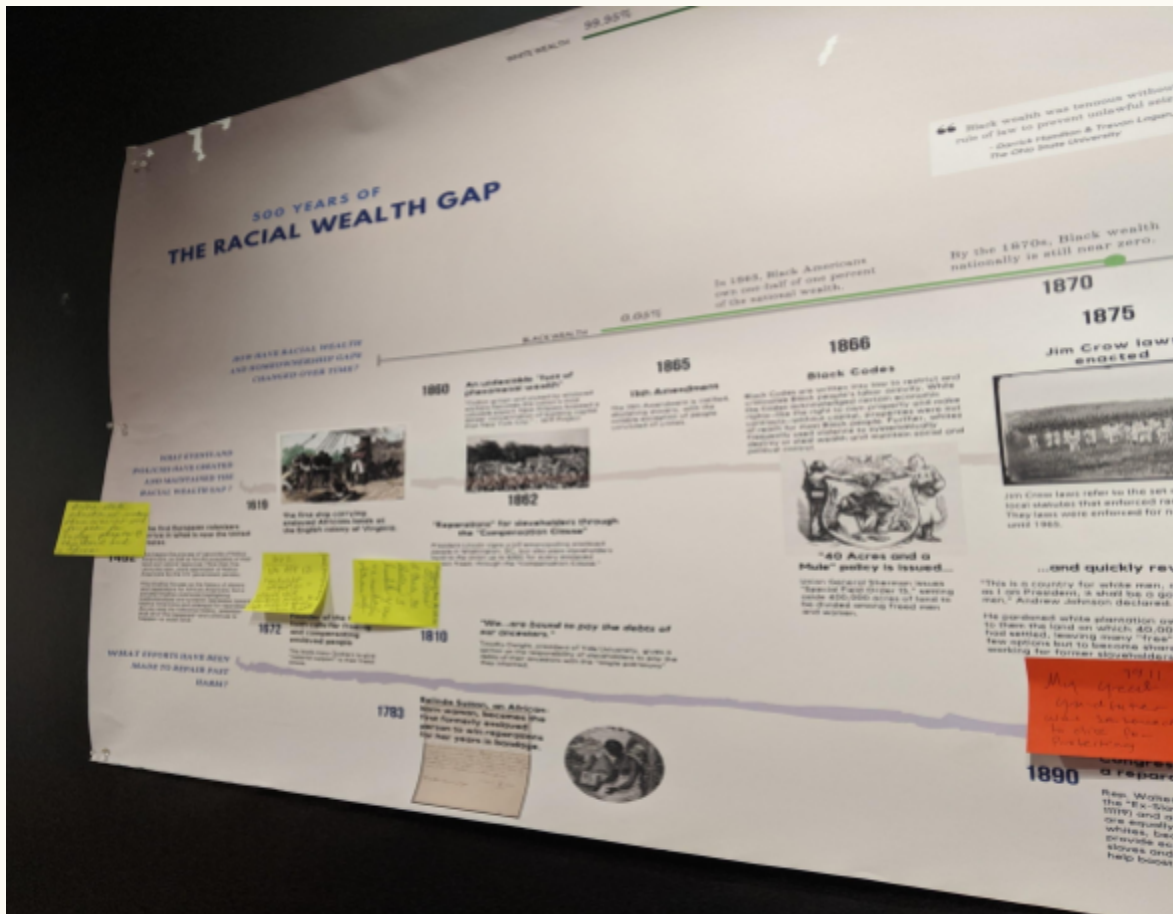
In our **curriculum and convening** work, we will...
- continue to create opportunities for network members to experience Undoing Racism® with the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond to build the foundational racial equity competencies that help folks feel more empowered.
- create even more space for network members to learn from one another and share experiences across cities.

In our **network management** work, we will…

- continue to uplift the organizing framework offered through Undoing Racism® and interrogate what it actually takes to organize across cities.
- lean into experimentation and co-creation across all network activities.
- build intentionality around how to maintain the culture of emergence, responsiveness, and choice that has been created in the Year of Reckoning cohort as new folks are integrated.
- create more opportunities for cities in the network to experience deeper anti-racism work through experience-sharing with people from the Year of Reckoning cohort.

In our **learning, storytelling and results** work, we will…

- interrogate the possibilities of asking deeper, more strategic questions to guide our learning and network design
- build greater intentionality around CTG Online as a virtual space for network members to self-organize and foster community with each other

This is not an exhaustive list, but a reflection of the specific things we heard from the survey. We encourage you to continue providing us with feedback and insights so we can learn and grow together.

culture of
emergence,
responsiveness,
and choice