



TZEDEK SOCIAL JUSTICE FUND

COMMUNITY RESEARCH MINI-REPORTS

INTRODUCTION

Over the last several years, Tzedek Social Justice Fund embarked on a journey of learning, discovery, and relationship building. This process was designed to ground our work in the visionary brilliance that comes from lived experience and the wisdom gained by doing transformational work towards collective liberation.

Tamiko Ambrose Murray of Ambrose Consulting and Beth Trigg of Taproot Consulting designed a participatory community research process that gathered the wisdom of 29 people—movement and community leaders working in Asheville, community partners and grantees, and leaders within the field of social justice philanthropy—through in depth one-on-one interviews. We also convened a group of trusted advisors—11 Asheville community members selected based on the question: “Whose voices need to be heard?” Trusted advisors and Tzedek staff worked together to distill those interviews into key learnings.

In the end, we had a brilliant collection of stories, wisdom, and advice guiding us toward high-impact social change work grounded in equity and trust.

Tzedek has used this research to inform our strategic plan, programmatic offerings, organizational structure, and grantmaking. But the learnings unearthed in this process were too rich to keep to ourselves. In our last gathering with trusted advisors, a collective hope emerged—that the insights collected in this process would be shared beyond Tzedek throughout the philanthropic and nonprofit sectors and to the wider Asheville community.

So we crafted four mini-reports, highlighting our overarching learnings. The first highlights advice from leaders in the field about what it looks like to practice social justice philanthropy. The second explores how to sustain the leadership of those most impacted by systemic oppression. The third spotlights the possibilities and the challenges for creating a more just Asheville. The fourth provides a vision of a world where everyone thrives.

Throughout, you’ll find the words of interviewees and trusted advisors shared with permission.

As we crafted these mini-reports, we wondered—what liberatory work can these words do in the world? The research findings are important, but it's the words of these changemakers that we keep returning to as we discern a path forward.

These voices show us the way.



- 1. “BE BOLD BOLD BOLD”**
Practicing Social Justice Philanthropy
- 2. “PEOPLE INVESTED IN ME”**
Sustaining Impacted Leaders, Practicing Healing Justice
- 3. “THERE’S A LOT OF MAGIC HERE”**
The Gifts and Challenges of Asheville
- 4. “WE CAN BE OUR ANCESTORS’ GREATEST DREAMS”**
Visions Of A Community Where Everyone Thrives



MINI REPORT #1

“BE BOLD BOLD BOLD”

Practicing Social Justice Philanthropy

SILENCE
IS
BETRAYAL

“Is it possible for a funder to be a co-conspirator in the journey toward liberation?”

- **Marsha Davis**, Tzedek Executive Director

“

Funders are going to have to begin practicing a different way, an alternative way. [They need to practice] being part of community, being part of movement, [being in] partnership. If they are really committed to social transformation then they have to be willing to sit in the circle rather than being at the top, no longer being paternalistic. They're a contributor just like everybody else in the circle. They're part of the pie, part of the community, but every person at the table has a gift that they bring, a resource. How do you leverage [everyone's gifts] rather than the paternalistic model we've seen in the past? People doing the dance to get the money and doing the work that needs doing while appeasing a board of directors - that model doesn't really transform community because it's still really rooted in that white supremacist culture, that paternalism.”



INTERNAL ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES



ACKNOWLEDGE that equity work is messy work. In the process of trying to do better, we get it wrong. Make mistakes, and try again.



CONFRONT PRIVILEGE to reconnect with our shared investment in social movements and collective liberation. This requires dismantling the subtle ways charity mindset and white saviorism pervade the



HUMBLY STEP BACK and acknowledge what you don't know.



DEVELOP an organizational learning stance that acknowledges communities as experts of their own experience.

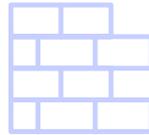


USE AN EQUITY LENS to build organizational systems and culture. For example, offer benefits packages to meet wide-ranging needs, and invest in mentoring staff new to the philanthropic sector.

INTERNAL ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES



INVESTIGATE and dismantle internal systems of domination. Explore how power currently functions and envision what transformative relationship with power you're working towards.



BUILD FOUNDATION staff capacity around truth telling and leveraging power.philanthropic sector.



RECRUIT AND RETAIN STAFF, A BOARD, AND ADVISORS who represent the identities of grantees so that the work is culturally grounded and responsive.

“

I think we're just at a political moment where funding is great but sometimes speaking is more powerful than writing a check and so how can funders show up in a way where they're also advocating for the people that they're funding, and how can funders organize other funders to invest money and resources - it may not even be money - into the people who are on the ground doing the work. We all need money to do the work that we're doing but, sometimes if someone can have a conversation with someone in power, sometimes that is more important than writing a check.”

LIBERATORY PHILANTHROPIC PRACTICES

1. PROVIDE multi-year general operating support and capacity building ranging from technical assistance to board development, sustainability planning to leadership coaching.

2. SHARE decision-making about grants with impacted communities through participatory processes.

3. CONVENE other funders to create spaces to push for sector change and advocate for grantees.

4. EXPAND the role of foundation staff to include fundraising for grantees and co-learning in community so that collective analysis can emerge.

5. CREATE flexible and simple application and reporting processes that build connection. Focus on relationships, getting to know the people doing the work and deepening trust so that funders can be called on as needed.

6. MOVE beyond grantmaking to regenerative redistribution. Invest in no-to-low interest community loan funds, land trusts, and cooperatives.

7. SHIFT towards a spirit of redistribution and repair by spending down assets and pursuing reparations in order to build security and restore wealth of Black and Brown communities.

8. CREATE responsive accountability systems so that foundations can nimbly and quickly evolve to reflect emerging learnings, shifting landscapes, and community feedback.

9. PRIORITIZE deep and responsive listening as an indispensable skill set of foundation staff. Go to the spaces where people are, listen, and be led by community voices.

10. LEARN in public. Share missteps and efforts to do better. Boldly claim who you are as a funder, what your analysis is, and what you hope to achieve.

11. OWN and leverage power--financial resources, networks, skills, and capacities. Approach funding as an essential role that is a part of broader movements for justice.

This report is based on a research process co-created and facilitated by Tamiko Ambrose Murray of Ambrose Consulting and Beth Trigg of Taproot Consulting. The title of this report comes from an interview completed as part of the research.

MINI REPORT #2

“PEOPLE INVESTED IN ME”

Sustaining Impacted Leadership, Practicing Healing Justice



Who has nurtured your leadership? What would help you sustain your emotional, spiritual, physical and mental health long-term as you work for justice?

When asked these questions, participants shared stories of deep, intentional relationships and reflected on structural, cultural, and practical interventions that facilitated growth and holistic support.

“

I think for the most part, people who step into this work step into it because it is their life's work. You know, a lot of us don't have traditional 9-5 hours, we're working around the clock and our phones are never off, we may put email responders on but that doesn't mean we are not doing the work. I think continuing to create a movement culture that supports people to take care of themselves. I guess I don't really know what that looks like but I know that sometimes it feels like people are battling to be the most productive organizer - and it's hard sometimes to actually prioritize mental health and physical health because you just want to keep going.”



WHAT PROMOTES AND SUSTAINS THE LEADERSHIP OF PEOPLE MOST IMPACTED BY SYSTEMIC OPPRESSION?



1. ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT

- Collaborative leadership models
- Doors opened for new and better opportunities
- Administrative and general operational support
- Time and space for staff training and leadership development
- Human-centered expectations to prevent overwork
- Technical assistance (for example, web development, communications and promotions, etc.)
- Access to skill-building and credentialing opportunities (for example, database management and paralegal training)

3. INTERPERSONAL SUPPORT

- Powerful role modeling from mentors and elders
- Honest feedback
- Peer relationships grounded in learning, accountability, and love
- Political education across identities

2. CULTURAL SUPPORT

- Honoring wide-ranging pathways for self-care
- Valuing risk taking and learning
- Prioritizing voices across the generational spectrum
- Encouraging time off for rest and reflection
- Values and practices designed to counteract the prevailing culture of white supremacy, specifically urgency, perfectionism, power hoarding and defensiveness
- Trauma-informed policies and practices
- Opportunities to unravel internalized oppression and superiority
- Shifting narratives that perpetuate inequities

4. FINANCIAL SUPPORT

- Tuition
- Sabbaticals
- Health care
- Childcare
- Liveable, thriveable wages
- Coaching matched to leaders' individual experience and identities

WHAT DO WE NEED FROM EACH OTHER AS WE MOVE TOWARD HEALING?



- Being seen, heard, and valued
- Deep empathy
- Trusting relationships
- Spaces that invite and celebrate our full selves
- Affirmation that leadership looks many different ways
- Freedom to create and emerge
- Structured practices for accountability to push against urgency and overwork
- Time for ritual and celebration
- Generosity of spirit
- Opportunities to grieve

“

Like what makes a good leader is a person who has mental and spiritual wellness, a person who can show up to a meeting and know that my children are in a safe space and they're fed and somebody is there to make sure that their homework is done. To make sure that my personal needs are being met so that I can show up and be a superstar, or I can show up in the best light that I can be. What usually happens is we are showing up to be a light for everyone else, but our personal affairs are in a shambles.”

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MINI REPORT #3

“THERE’S A LOT OF MAGIC HERE!”

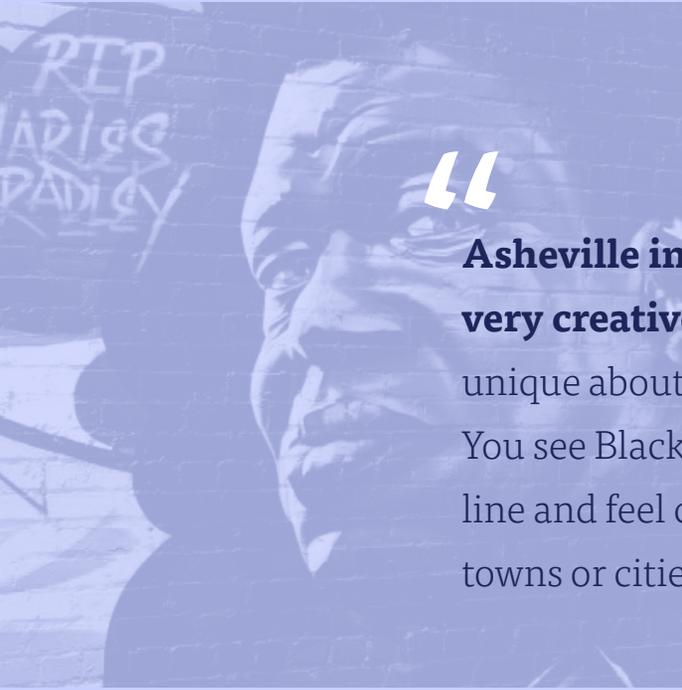
The Gifts and Challenges of Asheville

This is a time of great unveiling.

Asheville, a place long heralded as a wildly progressive Southern city, is also undergoing gentrification at a faster pace than almost any other place in the country. Racial disparities in everything from public education to policing are some of the highest in North Carolina. Asheville is for many the happiest town in America, but it's also a place of blissful ignorance. The dominant story of this place is one-sided. It ignores the gorgeous history of movement building here and the legacies of harm that are a part of Asheville's history.

Listening is the first step towards healing. Here we spotlight the voices of people living and laboring for justice in Asheville, voices often ignored and overlooked by those with power and resources.





“

Asheville in particular has some incredibly gifted and loving people who are very creative. I'm amazed at the art that comes out of this trauma. I think that's really unique about Asheville - people are really creative, and they tend to work across lines. You see Black and Latinx and LGBTQ people working together...Trans people cross the line and feel comfortable enough to do that in Asheville. I don't see that in other places, in towns or cities, or working at a national level.”

“

I think people here are living with the impact of urban renewal, redlining, and gentrification and it's hurtful, it's painful. And I feel like the City of Asheville and even the County - it's one thing to have a proclamation for racial healing but it's another thing to actually get on the ground and roll up your sleeves and say we're going to stop some of the stuff we've been doing and we're going to work to get people back in their communities that their families settled in over 100 years ago.”



WHAT GIFTS ARE PRESENT IN ASHEVILLE?



COLLABORATIVE SPIRIT

“The spirit of genuine collaboration is one of Asheville’s greatest strengths....I find myself in several different circles where people genuinely want to be a partner.”

CREATIVITY

“We are a community with so many creative people...And we have a whole pipeline, a whole generation that we could activate and move forward around really focused agendas. That’s about changing the region as a whole.”

LEGACY + CULTURE

“Connection to Appalachia and cultures of resistance.”

“Rural and Southern emphasis on connection and community-building.”

ORGANIZING BASE AND INFRASTRUCTURE

“You just see a really strong, connected, community organizing base that is - it can’t just be rolled over.”

“There’s artists, there’s strategy folks, there’s on-the-ground direct support.”

DEEP RELATIONSHIPS

“The incredible generosity of spirit and heart and people who just, you know, care about each other...just love each other.”

FINANCIAL WEALTH

“There’s a lot of money in Asheville. And I really see money moving towards movement work and being utilized in this really profound way that I haven’t seen in other parts of the US.”

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES OF THIS PLACE, IN THIS TIME?

ENDURING LEGACY OF INJUSTICE

“The level of ridiculousness of how this community treats marginalized people, just...the extremity of it.”

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CENTERED ON TOURISM

“Our city and our region has built an image around tourism that is not grounded in the reality of the community and, therefore, are attracting people who evolved into a dream that they continue to perpetuate and build in Asheville. And that dream excludes whole communities.”

HIGH COST OF LIVING + LOW WAGE JOBS

“Right now we’re in a crisis where we have to feed our families and it’s work, work, work but we shouldn’t have to work two or three jobs to make our ends meet.”

ASHEVILLE’S PROGRESSIVE IMAGE

“The belief in us being a liberal, progressive town is a barrier [to justice]. Because the majority is quite convinced that a small action or even statement will yield impact and change whereas all it actually is is words but because we have such a liberal, progressive identity those words are enough for us to think that something good has just happened...”

LACK OF INFRASTRUCTURE FOR RESOURCES TO FLOW

“I think there are a lot of resources that are untapped.”



WHAT IS NEEDED IN THIS TIME, IN THIS PLACE?



CONVENING TO REFLECT, CONNECT, AND HEAL

“I think what’s important is continuing to create space for cross-movement conversation and solidarity to happen.”

INVEST IN COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

“If we can’t get land, other people are going to buy it and they’re going to put more houses, and they’re going to put more breweries, and connect to the greenway, because it’s just two minutes from downtown, and you know it’s been happening so fast. And that’s what feels impossible sometimes, catching up to the fast pace of gentrification.”

A PLAN FOR REPARATIONS

“I continue to read the State of Black Asheville, and it just is heartbreaking because there’s been so much research done in Asheville regarding the Black community, and the only answers that folks seem to have is just ‘let’s just put money into this nonprofit and hope it goes well, and let’s just have bias training and hope it goes well,’ and I think those things are good, but I just question: how are we changing the material conditions for people? You can have all the bias trainings and fund all the most amazing organizations but we still have people who can’t pay their light bill. We still have people suffering. For me I just wonder: what does this work mean if the majority of the community is still suffering?”

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY ACCOUNTABILITY PROCESSES

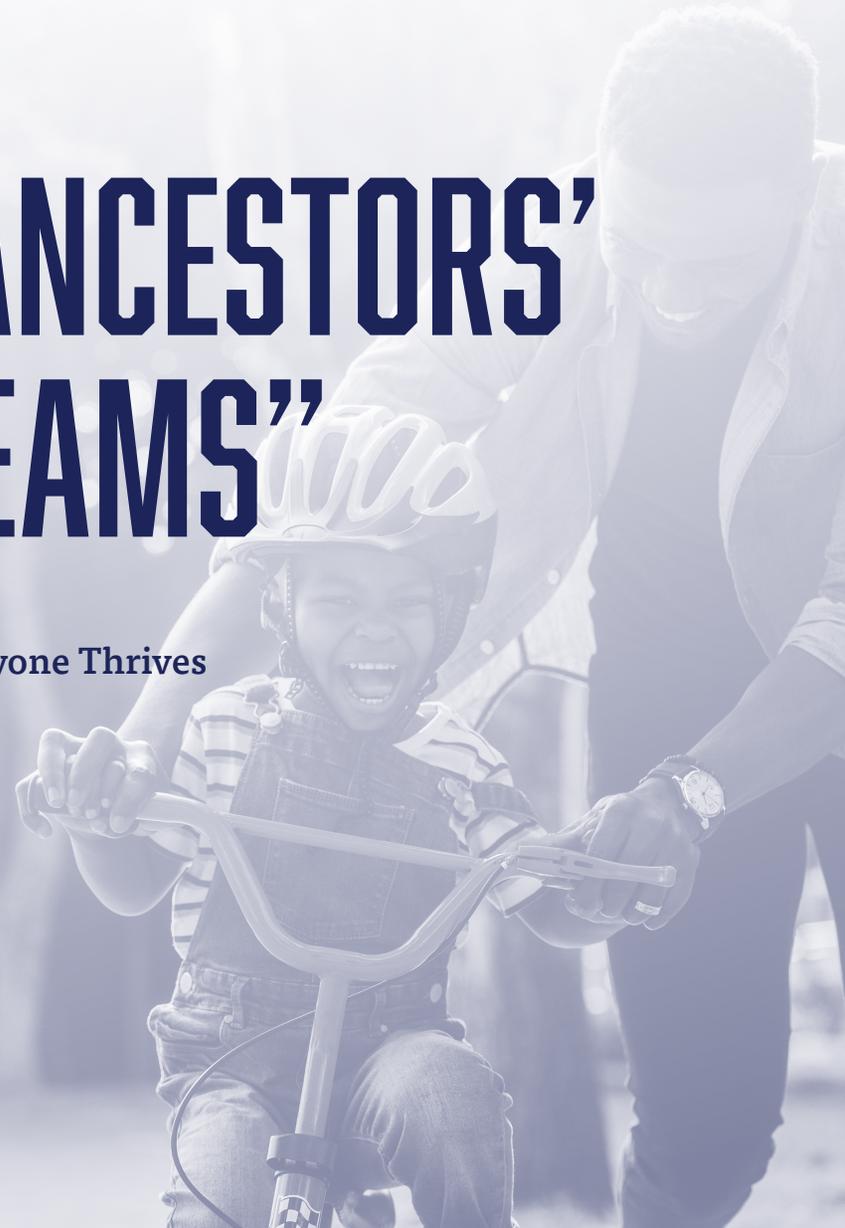
“Our city hasn’t built, we haven’t built really any processes around healing of conflict, dealing with harm.”

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MINI REPORT #4

“WE CAN BE OUR ANCESTORS’ GREATEST DREAMS”

Visions of a Community Where Everyone Thrives



How do we build a community we've never experienced?

One that transcends structural racism and other oppressions, one where we do more with our days than simply survive...one where everyone thrives? These questions ignite grief and heartache. The longing for a different world is so deep. When asked to share hopes and dreams, to outline visions of a transformed community, the following threads emerged.



“

I think the deepest hopes are being able to be connected with each other, to really be able to be a community without a shadow of fear hanging over us. To really be in community without fear. To have freedom to create and express ourselves in all our beauty.”



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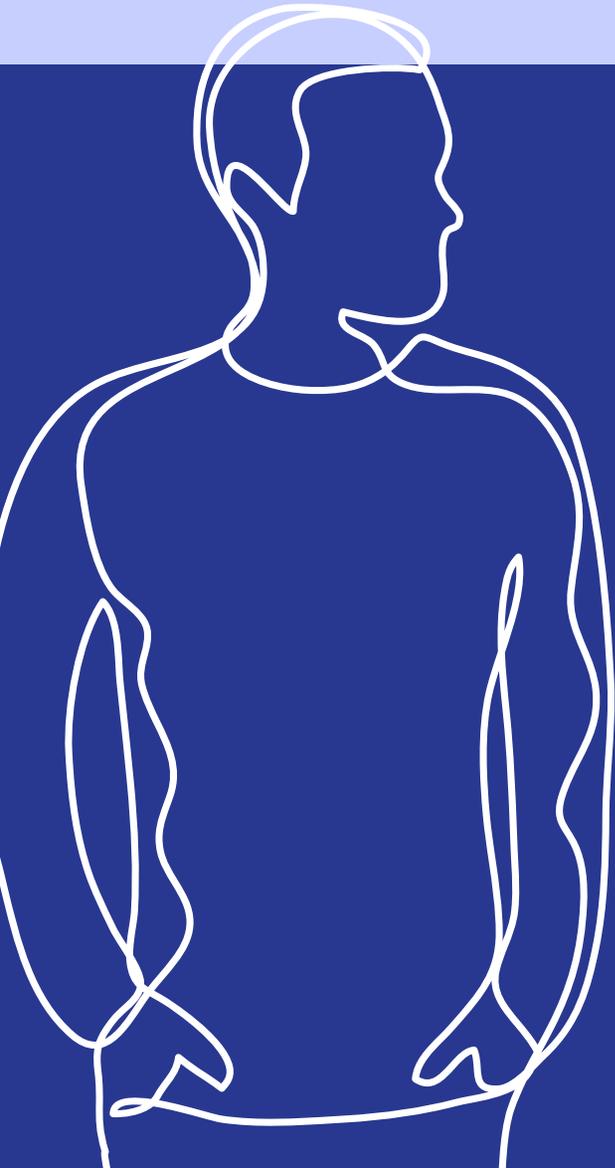
We can focus on deep healing and re-imagining and re-creating economic and social structures to center and meet the needs of the most marginalized peoples in our communities, in particular Black and brown people and poor people.”

“

Our people have been through so much that can never ever ever be undone. But the best we can do is live and survive and thrive today. As a form of ancestral healing. So one of the biggest hopes is that we can be our ancestors’ greatest dreams, which is free, and happy, and well-fed, and glowing.”



WHAT IS NEEDED IN THIS TIME, IN THIS PLACE?



COMMUNITY SELF-DETERMINATION

- Self-actualization
- Autonomy
- Community control over community destiny
- Community ownership of land and housing
- Power to make decisions about community development

SPACE TO BE

Space to breathe, to exist, to be witnessed and acknowledged, and just to be

HEALING

- Opportunities to name the real consequences of systemic harms
- Organizations and individuals practicing accountability by taking responsibility for their impact
- Spaces to rest, restore, and nourish created and led by impacted communities

PEOPLE AT THE CENTER

People-centered systems, cultures, and communities rooted in relationships and care

REAL CHANGES IN PEOPLE'S DAY-TO-DAY LIVES

Safe communities, thriving children, meaningful work, housing for all, compassionate healthcare, and access to healthy food

WHAT IS NEEDED IN THIS TIME, IN THIS PLACE?



DIGNITY AND RESPECT

Pay deep attention to how we are with each other

SAFETY

- Freedom from fear and the looming threat of violence
- Freedom from assimilation, accommodation, and hiding
- Freedom to move with ease

ART

- Culture that reflects the diverse communities that live here
- Acknowledgment of the cultural workers who have contributed to Asheville's beauty and vibrant arts scenes

CONNECTION

A culture of belonging where people feel cared for

A THRIVING AND EQUITABLE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Schools that center the wellbeing and value the brilliance of Black and Brown children

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Redistributing money. Shifting power. Supporting systems change and community healing.

PUBLISHED 2022

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