Stanford SOCIAL INNOVATION Review

Bringing Equity to Implementation Supplement
Trust the People
By Blake Strode & Amy Morris

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practices, and policies. (See "Elements of Equitable Implementation" on page 4.) They include:

- **Trusting relationships** fuel all implementation efforts. The importance of trust between the Children and Youth Cabinet in Providence, Rhode Island, and its community members is illustrated throughout the stages of their partnership.
- **Dismantling power structures** is critical in equitable implementation. Funders have indisputable power and cannot respond to the needs of communities without acknowledging and redistributing their power and privilege. Engaging youth leaders throughout the development and dissemination of Youth Thrive was central to the success of the initiative.
- **Investments and decision-making to advance equity** shift from the normal practice of funders bringing in resources, and with that, power. Decisions—large and small—are made throughout implementation. Each decision point provides an opportunity to promote equitable implementation, as well as who to involve, whether to move forward, and what changes may be necessary. The partnership between ArchCity Defenders and Amplify Fund illustrates how strategic and funding decisions emerged from community expertise and belief in the knowledge and insights that come from lived experience in a community.
- **Community-defined evidence** supports the notion that credible and useful evidence is not the exclusive purview of randomized controlled trials. Programs developed with evidence drawn from practice and community experience are more likely to succeed because they respond specifically to the community's needs, assets, and history. Both Village of Wisdom and the Bienvenido Program demonstrate the value of generating and using community-defined evidence to develop interventions and accompanying implementation strategies that advance well-being.
- **Adaptation and cultural adaptation** seek to enhance interventions and implementation strategies based on context. The articles on a cardiovascular health initiative in Chicago and a parenting intervention in Travis County, Texas, both illustrate how shifts in evidence-based practices and accompanying implementation strategies improved access and uptake, so that everyone who can benefit from an intervention actually receives the intervention.
- Finally, the **critical perspectives** on implementation science article encourages us all to interrogate how we currently implement interventions and services and to explore why we aren't getting the results we seek. The article offers three calls to action to change common implementation practices in service of equitable outcomes.

These articles show that the elements of equitable implementation are interrelated. It's not possible to share power without trusting relationships. Community-defined evidence and cultural adaptations depend on engaging those most affected by interventions from start to finish. These articles also reveal that this work is hard. Departing from business-as-usual takes time, effort, and a willingness to learn new ways of work. We hope this supplement serves as both a call to action for equitable implementation and proof that it can be done. ●

NOTE

1   Kris Putnam-Walkerly and Elizabeth Russell, "What the Heck Does 'Equity' Mean?" *Stanford Social Innovation Review,* Sept. 15, 2016.

Trust the People

Centering equity in funding relationships requires trust. It also takes time, resources, and a willingness to shift power to the people closest to the problem.

BY BLAKE STRODE & AMY MORRIS

This is a story about a relationship between a legal advocacy organization (ArchCity Defenders) and a philanthropic funder (the Amplify Fund) that is grounded in mutual trust. We came together around a campaign to close a jail and to redirect its resources back into the hands of the community it's harming. Our story is about small moments gone right against a backdrop of problematic relationships and power dynamics between funders and the organizations they purport to support. We've found that it is in the mundane, everyday moments where we most frequently have the capacity to choose: the violence of the status quo, or the transformative possibility of trying something new. We share our practices for funders and grantees pursuing equity in and through their implementation relationships.
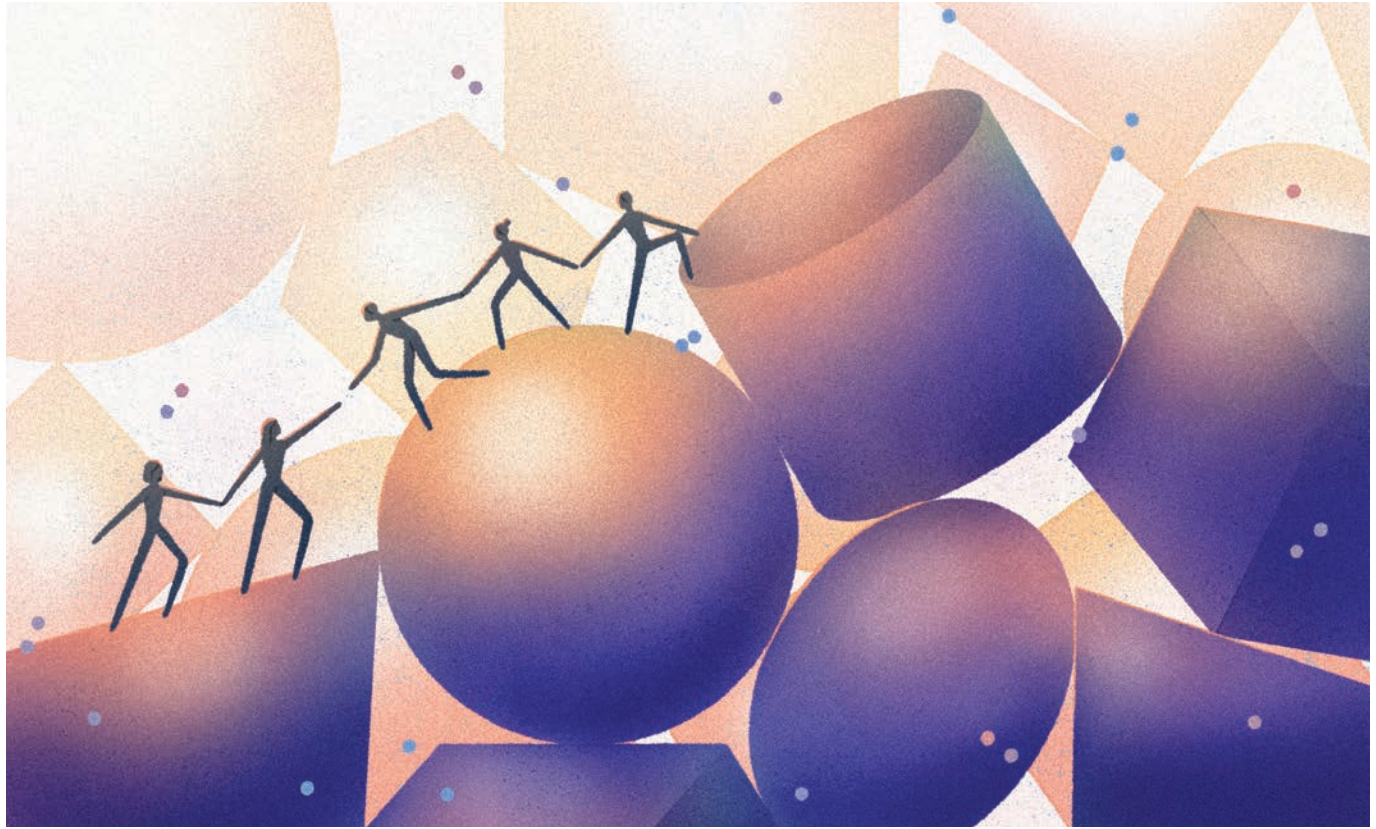
Blake Strode: I am the executive director of ArchCity Defenders (ACD), based in St. Louis, Missouri. ACD engages in direct representation, civil litigation, media and public engagement, and close partnerships with organizers across the St. Louis region. We take a holistic approach, meaning that we provide a range of legal and nonlegal supports to our clients, and we engage in individual and systemic advocacy that is varied and multifaceted. We work with people seeking to rebuild their lives after being targeted and punished by a criminal legal system of police, courts, and jails in communities struggling to overcome decades of neglect, disinvestment, state violence, and exploitation. Our client relationships are the most important part of our work and are a model for the relationships we pursue with colleagues, partner organizations, funders, and the greater St. Louis community.

I come to this work as a proud native son of St. Louis, a queer Black man and a former athlete-turned-litigator-turned-executive director, an attorney by profession and an advocate by vocation. My life was forever changed by the 2014 uprising in Ferguson. Just a few days after Michael Brown Jr. was shot and killed by police, and left lying on the hot August pavement for the world to see, I was set to depart St. Louis for my final year of law school. Like so many others, I watched the uprising in my hometown with a bevy of emotions: fury at the all-too-familiar sight of white supremacy and racist violence; deep distrust of the institutions marshaling to justify and rationalize the injustice; and growing pride in the brave young people calling an entire nation to account. At that moment I knew, contrary to my earlier intentions, that I aspired to return to St. Louis and be a part of the fight for justice.

The uprising was about more than extrajudicial killing. St. Louisans rose up to protest the broader systems of policing and prisons that

BLAKE STRODE is the executive director of ArchCity Defenders, a holistic legal advocacy organization in St. Louis, Missouri, that combats the criminalization of poverty and state violence, particularly in communities of color.

AMY MORRIS is the director of the Amplify Fund, a pooled grantmaking fund with 12 member foundations, housed at Neighborhood Funders Group. Amplify Fund's core purpose is to support BIPOC and low-income communities to build their power, influence, and direct decision-making authority to determine their own futures.

destroy countless lives, families, and communities, sometimes over infractions as trivial as an unbuckled seat belt, speeding, or a property-upkeep ticket. One of the most infamous sites in this devastating system of wealth-based criminalization is St. Louis' "Medium Security Institution," commonly known as the St. Louis Workhouse. For decades, the Workhouse has held St. Louisans in cages with black mold, routine violence, rodent and insect infestations, mice feces in food, snakes in showers, and terrible medical care, while costing taxpayers $16 million every year. While advocates and organizers, including ACD, have broadly exposed the extent of the devastation in recent years, St. Louisans have long known the Workhouse terrorizes people, most of whom have not even received their day in court. In 2017, ACD met with partners from Action St. Louis, the Bail Project, and Missourians Organizing for Reform and Empowerment (MORE). ACD was already in deep relationship with these partners, having previously worked to organize town halls in communities impacted by policing and mass incarceration to amplify and lend voice to those communities' visions of re-envisioning public safety. Now, we were committing to combat the injustice and to put the public funds wasted on the Workhouse back in the people's hands. The official Close the Workhouse Campaign (CTW) was finally born.

But good ideas need resources. We explored many sources of funding, but it was difficult to find philanthropic support. CTW's goals and political frame directly challenge the kind of power and privilege held by philanthropy, and the campaign's work was not so easy to communicate in palatable terms. Some funders responded that our initiative was insufficiently "measurable" or "practical." Other funders demanded a single accountable party, not just for application and reporting purposes, but also to ensure that all funder expectations would be met. Some funders were willing to fund legal work but not organizing, or fund organizing but not wraparound support for members, or fund bailouts for "nonviolent offenders" but not legal advocacy. With their offers of funding, these outside actors were seeking to define not only what change was needed but also how change needed to happen. The need to jump through ever-changing hoops and contort ourselves to satisfy potential funders' prescriptive desires was exhausting and would sap energy from the real work. We needed a different kind of funding relationship.

Amy Morris: I have the privilege of serving as director of the Amplify Fund at Neighborhood Funders Group. Amplify is a pooled grantmaking fund with twin goals: Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color (BIPOC) should have more power to influence decisions about the places where they live, and philanthropy should have a clear model for equitable development centered in racial justice. Amplify emerged to challenge the weakness inherent in many models of philanthropy, with foundations serving as tax havens and without accountability. By creating a pooled fund, Amplify is working to disrupt the traditional role of program officer as benevolent overseer, and move toward getting in relationship, and in line, with work already underway.

In 2017, when the initial funders launched Amplify, I was the only staff member. I showed up in places like St. Louis with a clear theory of change: bring resources to BIPOC leadership, respect their knowledge of local communities and needs, and support their work holistically—not through oversight, reporting, and requirements, but by putting decision-making power in their hands, taking tasks off their plates, and amplifying their work on a national stage. Through a months-long process, we would build relationships, learn about the organizational and movement infrastructure, gather a group of local strategy advisors (LSAs)—local leaders from movement and philanthropy—and work with them to cocreate a grantmaking strategy.

I also showed up in St. Louis as a white woman who had never set foot there before my first trip with Amplify in 2017. I had watched the Ferguson uprising in 2014-15 from my then-home in Brooklyn, New York. Outraged, I showed up for solidarity protests, but didn't grasp how decades of planning and development decisions had made St. Louis one of the most segregated metro regions in the United States, ripe for this sort of uprising.

Those doing the work on the ground in St. Louis did not need, and would not tolerate, another well-meaning white savior. In listening to local leaders, I learned how national philanthropy reacted to the Ferguson uprising from a place of urgency—working in uncoordinated and unaccountable ways that exacerbated negative dynamics between leaders in the region and unknowingly deepened generational, political, and gender divisions between groups. In coming to St. Louis, I learned, once again, the critical challenge in relationship building while holding more power—as a white-led organization with resources—was demonstrating our trustworthiness to local leaders, not the other way around.

We met ArchCity Defenders through our LSAs, many of whom were ACD's close allies. One of them was Kayla Reed, executive director of Action St. Louis, which is also a core partner of the CTW campaign. Our LSAs explained that ACD was an anchor in the region

and in the movement ecosystem. However, it took time for us to really connect with ACD. While we built strong relationships with our LSAs early on, we stumbled in building our broader web of connections. Through a mix of ambition, new-project energy, and minimal staffing, we promised presence to ACD when we didn't yet have the bandwidth to build additional relationships.

Fortunately, our relationships with LSAs gave us a second chance. We learned from early mistakes and staffed a St. Louis team member. Our relationship with ACD eventually blossomed after devoting more time and presence. We built trust together, through long and meandering conversations. We learned about ACD through their public-facing work like ACD's and Action St. Louis' podcast Under the Arch. ACD learned about us through the people they already trusted—LSAs who had come to know Amplify. We asked about ACD's clients, and ACD asked about our values and priorities. We also observed how ACD and the LSAs were already building power together and learned our role was to support an ecosystem already alive and breathing.

And yet I hesitated when CTW told us that they needed flexible funding to support divestment from the Workhouse: "Equitable development is our focus, not closing a jail. Right?" My colleague Lorraine Ramirez of Funders for Justice, and Amplify's senior program officer, Melody Baker, helped me check my assumptions: BIPOC communities

A Trust-Building Check (Yourself) List for Funders

For funders, building trust means shifting power to grantees. Shift power and build trust by giving more time, resources, and control than you take. We offer a set of principles and questions that can help you practice power shifting to build trust with grantees. However, shifting power and building trust are practices that live in context. These suggestions are neither sufficient nor exhaustive. They won't guarantee that you are trustworthy, or that grantees trust you. But we think they are a good start.

BUILDING TRUST MEANS GIVING MORE TIME	BUILDING TRUST MEANS GIVING MORE RESOURCES	BUILDING TRUST MEANS GIVING MORE CONTROL
Get to know grantees and their work fully—not just the program you might fund. Ask grantees (and believe them): What is the context in which they sit? What is at the heart of their work? What is (already) making them successful?	**Provide grantees with resources for what they say equity requires. Do not limit your contribution to what you think of as equitable implementation.** Ask grantees (and believe them): What collaborations, projects, programs, campaigns, or back-end supports need funding for this grantee to be successful? What are the resources they say they need?	**Follow local expertise. Prioritize BIPOC leaders.** Ask around (a lot!): Who does the community(ies) already trust? Who can keep us aligned with what the community(ies) need? Pay attention to whose names come up over and over again, from diverse sources.
Get to know yourself and your power before you show up. Check yourself: How might I cause harm by entering this context? How can I mitigate those risks? What learning do I need to do, and do we need to do as an organization, to be the trusting partner we claim to be? Who can help me do this learning among those who are not my potential grantees?	**Fund the ecosystem that supports grantees. Don't create an environment of competition and scarcity.** Ask grantees (and believe them): What other organizations, collaborations, or relationships need funding to sustain this grantee? Who else is critical to this grantee's success? Orient conversations toward the collective, rather than creating competition for resources.	**Maintain clarity of roles. Give grantees power over the decisions they want to make, and make the decisions they don't want to take on.** Ask grantees (and believe them): What decisions do they want to take on? What decisions need their perspective the most? What decisions do they say will be burdensome, and easier made by you?
Learn what is and isn't working. Don't assume your role will (always) be helpful. Ask grantees (and believe them): How is our role as a funder helping/hindering the process so far? What do we need to do (or stop doing) to be a better partner?	**Take on administrative work. Don't overburden grantees.** Check yourself: How can we reduce our administrative requirements? What proposal and reporting mechanisms can we eliminate? Ask grantees (and believe them): What administrative requirements are burdensome? What work are you currently doing that we could take off your plate?	**Rely on grantees' vision—especially when you disagree.** Check yourself: What might I be missing from where I am positioned? How does this make sense from where they are positioned? Ask grantees (and believe them): How can I help support your vision (even when I feel concern)?

building power to influence or decide what the city invests in is equitable development. Strategic Black leaders are telling us that CTW is a key opportunity. Instead of relying on my preexisting vision for equitable investment in St. Louis, I needed to listen, align, and act.

Ultimately, we provided CTW with flexible resources, and—because it is always our practice—minimal proposal and reporting requirements. Then we got out of the way. The CTW coalition used those funds to further cement a robust and nimble campaign that combined bailouts, legal advocacy, public education, and grassroots organizing of impacted people. After two years of official CTW organizing, the campaign reached an incredible milestone: On July 17, 2020, the St. Louis City's Board of Aldermen voted unanimously to close the Workhouse, and to use a participatory budgeting process to reinvest its budget.

Learning from Local Leaders

Amplify's local strategy process

1. Staff traveled (a lot!) to each place. They met with local leaders to listen and learn about the local context.

2. Staff invited local strategy advisors for each place. Amplify made a $25,000 grant to each advisor's organization to support their time and involvement in the strategy process.

3. Staff met with each strategy advisor one-on-one to talk through Amplify's theory of change and learn about local opportunities, needs, and priorities.

4. Advisors convened in each place for a facilitated session to come to consensus about the local grantmaking strategy.

5. Then, advisors cowrote the local strategy paper with support from Amplify staff. (Literally lots of people writing, editing, and commenting in one Google document.)

6. Advisors and staff then presented the completed local strategy for steering committee approval (via modified consensus).

We've seen the power-shifting and power-building that is possible when funders get in line with movement. Through our experience in St. Louis, Amplify's staff has come to see divest-invest campaigns as a pinnacle of equitable development. By trusting people closest to the problems, and adapting our strategies to their needs, we are winning what some people saw as an impossible fight. But the work is far from over.

Blake Strode: At ACD, we have learned that the only way to keep winning is by deepening and spreading our connections. Through our collaborative work together, Kayla Reed of Action St. Louis, Charli Cooksey of WEPOWER, and I had long talked about the importance of cultivating relationships with other young Black leaders in St. Louis. Kayla and Charli are also Black leaders of organizations fighting for racial justice, so we share a desire to expand the region's movement ecosystem. The energy and courage of the Ferguson uprising made new things possible in St. Louis and across the country. But without infrastructure for collective strategy, local leaders struggled to coalesce and focus that energy in alignment with shared purposes. So, we set about designing a shared space to align our strategies and develop our leaders to respond to this challenge. What we have been building is now called leadBlack STL.

At first, we tried to convene ourselves. But our efforts sputtered due to ongoing demands on our time, limited resources, national actors' unhelpful insertions (and withdrawals), moment-to-moment trauma, and gendered and generational dynamics. Yet we kept talking about the need. As Amplify listened and learned through the process of cocreating a Missouri grantmaking strategy with local leaders (LSAs), they reflected back our own desire for a leadership, learning, and strategy-building space. Amplify, along with Deaconess Foundation—a key funding and convening presence in the region—also shared their willingness to provide the resources we needed to get this off the ground.

It was important to all of us, including Amplify, that the process of forming such a space reflect our values: shifting decision-making power toward those most directly affected, and the burden of logistics and coordination toward those with resources. In practice that meant confronting our own conditioning within philanthropic culture. In our

experience, funders typically require reports of expenditures, impact statements, or presentations. They typically require final decision-making power. Even funders leading with the language of equity tend to eventually vie for control or punish deviations from the routine of philanthropic relationships. These mundane surveillance patterns, assuming distrust and presuming grantees are the ones who need questioning, are often the difference between equitable implementation and philanthropy as usual.

Taking this approach led to questions like: Who should build the process? Who should write the RFP for a design consultant? Who should interview candidates? Who should select the candidates? Whose input do we need along the way? Once we have a design consultant, whose approval do they need? We struggled through these questions together. Amplify staff members Amy and Melody checked in regularly throughout the request for proposal and hiring process—continuously searching for the right role that would articulate our voice, respect our decision-making, and not add to our workload. With practice, we found a principle to guide us: It was our decision, without limitation, but also with support. We were free to ask for help that took work off our plate. Through consistent practice, one step at a time, we developed a different kind of funding relationship.

After a months-long design process, we are set to launch leadBlack STL in late 2021 as a base for young Black leaders in St. Louis to develop a shared political analysis informed by a lens of systems change and racial justice, and to build the power of Black leaders to create transformative, just, and equitable systems so that Black people can have better lives in the St. Louis region. We are currently seeking more financial support for this effort before launch, and we hope it will help us grow an even stronger relationship ecosystem.

Blake Strode & Amy Morris: At ACD, we are practicing building relationships in alignment with our vision for a liberatory future. At Amplify, we are still improving our ability to build trust, and believe doing so makes us better, more aligned, and our grantmaking strategy more equitable. Together we've learned that trust is built through a series of very small, but very radical, shifts in how we relate to each other over time. We know that trusting relationships are integral to the change we seek. ●