

# Dreaming Futures

## Black and Indigenous Solidarity in Phoenix



### Coalition Organization Members

Black River Life Collective \* Cahokia Phx SocialTech + ArtSpace  
Cihuapactli Collective \* InSite Consultants \* Mass Liberation Arizona  
Re:Frame Youth Arts Center \* Savvy Pen Consultants

A 2023 report documenting three conversations on building Black and Indigenous solidarity offered by a coalition of art and culture organizations in Phoenix, AZ. Primary fiscal support for the Coalition provided by LISC Phoenix.

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These convenings were held on the ancestral territories of the Akimel O'odham (Pima) and Pee Posh (Maricopa) Indian Communities also known as Phoenix, Arizona. The state of Arizona is home to 22 federally recognized Tribal Nations who are the sovereign governments of 27 percent of the physical land of Arizona.

*Cover photo: Participants seated outdoors on folding chairs forming a circle, at a Politics of Place event. Credit: Mary Stephens.*

## Introduction

A coalition of organizations (Black River Life Collective, CahokiaPhx SocialTech + ArtSpace, Cihuapactli Collective, Mass Liberation Arizona, Re:Frame Youth Arts Center, and Savvy Pen Consultants) was formed in January 2023 by InSite Consultants, with the idea that it will take a grassroots-grounded approach, not tied to a political or institutional group, to invoke change in Phoenix. Core to this process is an embrace of the iterative nature of community organizing and an urgent need to collectively address current local issues such as the rapid displacement of people in South Phoenix ([Tunning & Cordel, 2022](#)).

The civil unrest that began in response to George Floyd's death on May 25, 2020, was a pivotal point nationwide in bringing to the public's attention the structural inequities that Black and Indigenous communities have to contend with on a daily basis. Nationally, there is a growing movement of Black and Indigenous solidarity building through candid conversations such as the article "[Distinct Histories, Shared Solidarity](#)" by Nickita Longman, increased scholarship like Kyle T. Mays' (Black/Saginaw Chippewa) book *An Afro-Indigenous History of the United States* and a demand for nuanced conversations centering the Afro-Indigenous identity from activists such as Amber Starks (African American and Muscogee [Creek]). Yes! Magazine's "Building the Block" series also documents this current solidarity movement in the following three online articles: "[Stolen Lands: A Black and Indigenous History of Land Exploitation](#)", "[Indigenous and Black Communities Are Finding Common Cause for Land Justice](#)", and "[Healing the Land and Themselves](#)". With actionable steps such as the [Bush Foundation investing \\$100 Million](#) to support two Black- and Indigenous-led community trust funds, Nexus Community Partners and NDN Collective.

***"Indigenous sovereignty and Black liberation are tied to one another. While our people have unique histories and current needs, we are subjected to similar discrimination and violence – and neither of us will be free without the other."***

***—Joint statement by Nexus Community Partners and NDN Collective (2021)***

Black and Indigenous communities in Phoenix, AZ, also grapple with these national issues of environmental injustice, land rights and police brutality. But in addition, they have to combat the erasure of their communities' history and culture through false dominant narratives that are rooted in the history of American westward expansion of the Southwest. Bryan McKinley Jones Brayboy, Ph.D., and others discuss how "sometimes invisibility comes in the form of unfounded and unsubstantiated myths" for the Phoenix Indigenous community in [this video by Arizona State University](#). While scholar Meskerem Z. Glegziabher, Ph.D., uplifts how the Phoenix Black community's historical and cultural narrative has been erased by the common stereotype of Black residents being recent transplants to Arizona, in contrast to the documented truth of Black residents arriving in the 1860's ([Glegziabher, 2022](#)).

This invisibility and erasure further exacerbate the large gap between Indigenous and Black communities in building solidarity together within the sixth largest city in the United States. It's with this goal of building bridges together that the Politics of Place Coalition was formed.

Together the Coalition outlined four goals for its first year:

1. To create a space for deeper relationships between Black and Indigenous partners in the greater Phoenix area.
2. To share out recommendations and offerings that come out of its work together.
3. To surface the tensions and positive overlaps between the struggles of Black and Indigenous communities in Arizona.
4. To move the City of Phoenix and other large non-profits toward support of Black and Indigenous methods of working.



*Participants at “Braiding Our Stories”, the third public convening, held outdoors along the Rio Salado riverbed in South Phoenix on November 6, 2023. Photo credit: Mary Stephens.*

### **A Note on the Language Used in this Report**

The term Black is used in this paper to refer to individuals and communities of the African diaspora in the United States. Indigenous is used in this paper to refer to individuals and communities who self-identify as being native to the lands now known as the Americas. We recognize and honor the many global communities of the African diaspora and Indigenous peoples and cultures. We also recognize that individuals and communities may have different preferences for specific language and terms used to refer to themselves. We ask that the reader hold the truth that the language used in this report is imperfect and is not meant to override anyone’s autonomy in naming.

### **Author Positionality**

This coalition was originally organized by a member of InSite Consultants who identifies as a cis-gendered white woman, who has been an active resident and organizer in downtown Phoenix for several decades. The documenters and writers of this report self-identify as a cis-gendered East Asian woman and cis-gendered Latinx woman, who acknowledge that our own lived experiences and positionality may have influenced the drafting of this report.

## Coalition Methodology

All Politics of Place Coalition members are from community-based arts and culture organizations active in social justice and grassroots community organizing spaces in the Phoenix area. It was important to convene those with an existing practice of holistic arts and cultural production for their expertise as interpreters of lived experiences and connectors to shared wisdom. It should also be noted that the organizations who participated in these gatherings and conversations were those with available time and capacity to commit to this process, leaving some aligned groups without similar availability out of the Coalition at this point in time.

Members met monthly to share space, hold discussions and plan collective action. The Coalition utilized a shared leadership methodology called “murmuration”<sup>1</sup>, the flocking of birds, an amorphous collective that practices multiple and shifting leadership toward a coherent and shared goal(s) which ensure the dignity of the group. In the context of Politics of Place, coalition members served as both collaborators and leaders at shifting moments; coalition members routinely changed from leader to collaborator, as the project called for. As the Coalition built community together, natural and desired leadership pairings and partnerships emerged, with each partnership defining their own parameters for working together and defining how other members could support that work. Just as a rhizome does not start from anywhere or end anywhere; it grows from everywhere and is the same at any point, the Coalition was not a fixed entity—everyone a leader, everyone a collaborator, at once. This rhizomatic development was positive evidence that the Coalition had grown beyond what was originally conceived. Therefore, as leadership pairs responded to their own understanding of the concepts of politics and place, each event expanded the definitions of Politics of Place.

***“If we want to dismantle oppressive systems that exist, then we have to stop being oppressive to each other.”***

***—Kyle T. Mays, Ph.D. (Black/Saginaw Chippewa)***  
Indigenous Peoples’ Day: Black-Indigenous Youth Advancing Social Justice *[video]*

Though the Coalition operates with a horizontal structure, the occasional need emerged for a trusted individual to ‘hold uncertainty’ and group accountability. This happened organically with coalition members reaching out individually for support or calling additional meetings as needed. During one particular instance, the Coalition leaned on the founder, InSite Consultants, to help hold accountability for a conflict within the group.

Though member organizations entered into this coalition with both aligned and disparate missions, their shared focus of the mutual benefit of Black and Indigenous solidarity has allowed a space to be created that allows for generosity, thoughtfulness, dignity and deep reflection on the solidarity they hope to spur.

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1 Murmuration- a flock of birds whereby each bird is both a participant and leader at different and appropriate moments. *Emergent Strategy*, by adrienne maree brown, identifies the collective power of the murmuration as an expression of individual importance toward collective liberation.

## Learnings on Coalition Building

### **Solidarity work is difficult and requires an intersectional approach.**

- Solidarity is an iterative process built through sharing experiences and fostering understanding.
- Welcoming and generative spaces must be intentionally created with organizers uplifting connection points and shared struggles.
- An arts and culture framework helps to break walls and ground conversation (e.g. cultural ritual, music, poetry, etc.).

### **Generative conversations will sometimes lead to discomfort, but holding space to voice past and current harm is productive both for those sharing and for those witnessing.**

- Not many spaces allow for the complicated conversation needed for solidarity. By normalizing talking about harms inside and outside of the Coalition, organizers can build language, tolerance and skill when inevitable conflict arises.
- It's important to sit in discomfort and reflect on where it comes from.
- Discomfort and harm can extend beyond a conversation or convening. It is important to recognize that, follow up and provide for continued care.
- Experiences of individual harm can be an obstacle to solidarity if not addressed.

### **Coalition-building is difficult and navigating conflict is always fraught.**

- There is not a scripted formula for building solidarity, which can feel awkward for organizers. It can be helpful to have a designated person to hold that uncertainty for the group and to provide space to discuss.
- Establish norms of accountability for Coalition members and structure check-ins consistently and routinely.
- It is vital to establish boundaries and expectations around conflict in the beginning. Clear but flexible roles for navigating internal and external conflict are needed. For example, coalition members agreed on a protocol similar to the one below.

#### ***Sample protocol for conflict resolution:***

1. Timely debrief (no later than 1 week)
2. Conflict "holder" talks with parties
3. Define accountability
4. Move toward repair
5. Follow up

## Learnings on Black and Indigenous Solidarity

In fall 2023 the Politics of Place Coalition members organized three public panel discussions. They were intentional spaces of in-depth conversation, allowing for the sharing of lived experiences and exploring pathways toward Black and Indigenous solidarity in Phoenix. Below is a digestion of key concepts that were discussed and which should be returned to in this iterative process of community work.

### **Displacement and disparity affecting Black and Indigenous communities is by design. A solution needs to be intentionally designed as well.**

- Conflict between Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color is a product of larger systems of oppression which encourage fighting among themselves. Intentional and productive space is needed to work toward mutual support and universal justice.
- White supremacy culture perpetuates the binary and divisive designations, such as blood quantum. These are not reflective of current multiracial communities and instead inflict harm within the community itself.
- Solidarity begins by learning about issues impacting other communities.

### **Arts and culture are a conduit to share lived experience and build connection between communities.**

- Artists and cultural workers do not just create artworks; they create practices and experiences that spark a creative break from the disciplines that narrow imagination and perpetuate the status quo.
- Art connects us to our memories and is a way to articulate to others what is and what could be. For example, a Tohono O'odham mural shares the community's history before the militarization of the border, so younger generations can imagine an alternative future.

### **Memory keeping is an act of resistance.**

- Culture is rooted in the stories we pass on, in both personal and collective memory.
- Staying connected to culture and the community's ways of knowing helps individuals reflect on their own decisions and resist the violence of assimilation.
- Both Black and Indigenous peoples have experienced the loss of memory and culture through the violence of colonization, assimilation and displacement.
- Memory and culture can be rekindled.
- In a world full of misinformation, ancestral knowledge keepers often hold more valid information than the current system of western knowledge.
- Memory is an essential connection to both a community's ancestral ways and to dreams of new futures for their descendants.

**The struggles of Black and Indigenous communities are connected through the land and environmental injustice.**

- Environmental pollution affects everyone and is a direct determinant of quality of life and health outcomes. By supporting each other, we improve our own lives.
- The way that governments and corporations treat land is reflective of how they regard its people. This is shown by the pollution and disinvestment in Black and Indigenous communities.
- Water is a connecting force for our communities and our struggles.
- Many of us are from displaced peoples and hold a reality of being a perpetual guest. Connection and stewardship of the land we inhabit can still connect us to our ancestors, traditions and collective memory.

*“How can we use each other’s differences in our common battles for a livable future? All of our children are prey. How do we raise them not to prey upon themselves and each other? And this is why we cannot be silent, because our silences will come to testify against us out of the mouths of our children.”*

— *Audre Lorde, A Burst of Light*

**Self-care and holding space for others is critical to building solidarity.**

- Organizers, activists and community members need to feel safe and accepted when sharing individual and collective joy and harm. Space is needed to process thoughts and emotions, to make mistakes and to learn from them.
- While doing this work, it is critical to nurture the space and freedom to laugh and see beauty.
- Generosity and acceptance toward yourself builds a muscle that enables you to hold the same space for others.
- One’s own identity is sacred. Everyone deserves to be able to express all parts of their being without being forced to fit into prescribed labels of how others see them.
- Personal and collective worth is inherent and should not be based on income, labor or productivity.

# Panel 1: Rooted Memory

## Black and Indigenous Creative Placemaking

### Speakers

**Eunique Yazzie** (Diné)  
Cahokia SocialArt + TechSpace  
(moderator)

**Dr. Tamika Lamb-Sanders**  
Savvy Pen Consultants  
(moderator)

**Enjolie Lafaurie**  
Cihuapactli Collective

**Alex Soto** (Tohono O'odham)  
**Ah'sha Notah** (Diné)  
Labriola National American Indian  
Data Center at ASU

**Joe Larios**  
Mass Liberation Arizona

The first panel was hosted by Cahokia SocialArt + TechSpace and Savvy Pen Consultants on September 19th, at Cahokia's gallery space in downtown Phoenix. This event explored the impact that memory, identity and land have on the way Black and Indigenous people navigate the world and preserve their culture.

The environment of the event mirrored this intention by highlighting Black and Indigenous culture, heritage, and traditions. Drinks and food made from native Arizona plants were provided by Danny Chully from Jinjééh Coffee and Roastery and Ádítsiin Bakery. Artists Israel Solomon and Keven Peart from Kapsol Music and dancer Cata Villegas grounded the conversation with a performance, highlighting artforms that originated from the mixing of African, Indigenous and Latin American cultures. The crowd was invited to join in and share in this history by dancing along. The panelists sat on two couches resembling an intimate family space, inviting the crowd to not just observe but to participate alongside the panel.

Panelists talked about how the act of preserving memories contributes to the cultural identity and longevity of a community in a specific place. How these memories are an act of resistance against the violence of assimilation, which occurs when “real” culture, that is passed down through family and experience, is displaced by “false” culture and stereotypes that are spread by media and corporations. Holding these memories (either our own or those passed on from our community) can ground decision-making and be a way to navigate the challenges of the present with authenticity and intentionality. In these conversations, defined along the social construct of race, panelists also discussed their realities as multi- and/or biracial individuals, and the difficulty in navigating multiple identities in communities that are sometimes at odds with each other. They emphasized the importance of preserving memory and culture while also building their own individual narrative and communities to support them on their journey.

The discussion then turned to place and how memory-keeping also involves land stewardship and environmental



Participants seated in Cahokia's gallery space for “Rooted Memory”. Photo credit: Mary Stephens.



justice. The panelists reflected on the changes that have occurred to the land in and around Phoenix—rapid urban development, construction of major roads and freeways through communities and the loss of green space. Current residents exist in this space as victim and perpetrator, both suffering and benefiting from the effects of urban development, all while holding the familial trauma that comes from continuous displacement. These changes, with the accompanying contamination of the land, air and water, negatively affect health outcomes and connection to ancestral ways. Panelists agreed that the way forward involved being a witness to the change, sharing ancestral memories and traditions and fostering a positive relationship with the land. This is true for both Indigenous communities who have a sustained connection to the local landscape and for Black residents who heal and build community by stewarding the land they inhabit.

The final topic discussed was data sovereignty regarding community data and ancestral knowledge. Black and Indigenous communities both share the trauma of their ancestral knowledge and history being stolen, lost or commodified by colonizers throughout history. Panelists shared their experiences with how community data is misused in current day academic research, Eurocentric librarianship, and in the requirements that grant funders request from community organizations in exchange for funding. Data sovereignty empowers Indigenous leaders, scholars, and activists to control and manage information from their own communities in the context of research, policy-making, water rights and food security. Culture is data, thus a more protective stance is needed to protect it as the community's intellectual property. A community protecting and preserving its data, knowledge and traditions is manifesting a broader sense of sovereignty and resistance to cultural colonization and assimilation<sup>1</sup>.

Throughout the night, the overlapping struggles of Black and Indigenous communities were uplifted, and the idea of building connections and community in the face of structural systems built to divide Black and Indigenous communities was returned to again and again. Panelists shared their lived experiences and held space for others to listen and process it with the shared goal of fostering grass-roots social change. Intentionally holding personal and collective memory, identity, and connection is one path toward challenging divisive systems and moving toward solidarity, mutual support, and universal justice.

### **Reflection Questions from “Rooted Memory”**

*Please use these questions to guide your own community work.*

1. How does the act of preserving memories contribute to the cultural identity and longevity of a community in a specific place? How can these practices strengthen the bond between people and their ancestral lands?
2. Thinking about multiple identities, how do you navigate collective memory-keeping to honor multiple strong identities at once?
3. How does documenting the past also shape the aspirations and continuity of a people within their ancestral landscape?

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<sup>1</sup> A good place to understand more about ethical community research is the book [Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods](#) by Shawn Wilson.

## Panel 2: Sharing the Fire

### A Black and Indigenous Solidarity Gathering

#### Speakers

**Maria Del Carmen Parra Cano**  
**Enjolie Lafaurie** (moderators)  
Cihuapactli Collective

**Brian Watson**  
**Collette Watson** (moderators)  
Black River Life

**Ebone Johnson**  
Independent Consultant

**Sean Avery**  
Poet

**Beyonce Beasley**  
**Arrow Wiseman**  
**Anobel Gutierrez**  
Local Residents

On October 17th, Black River Life and Cihuapactli Collective hosted the second event, centered around the shared experience of sitting around a fire. The event began at twilight and was held outdoors, in a vacant lot next to The Sagrado, an independent art gallery centering community, arts and culture in South Phoenix.

Great care was taken to create a space that was welcoming to all, including families with children. Folding chairs were placed in concentric circles around a small bonfire. A small altar was placed to the east with several medicines: cedar, tobacco, creosote, and other natural elements. To the west was the circle's opening with a microphone. Also to the west was a table holding the items for a pour ceremony. All of these elements and their meanings were explained throughout the gathering with care and intention. Outside of the circle were various tables with light refreshments and activities, like crafts and coloring pages, to allow attendees a place of respite and space to process what was being shared in the main circle.

After a welcome and introduction to the space and the event, the two host organizations performed ceremonies to open the gathering--a pour ceremony from Black River Life; a prayer from Cihuapactli Collective, in which a conch shell was blown to the 6 directions (east, west, north, south, sky and earth) and Funga Alafiyah, a welcome song performed by Collette Watson. Organizers made a point to name the awkwardness of sharing and participating in ceremony rituals and traditions that may be unfamiliar, but part of the intention of the gathering was to be a witness to a community other than your own, with generosity, in order to work toward solidarity and understanding.

For the main portion of the gathering, a panel of community members affiliated with the two host organizations discussed topics revolving around shared histories and experiences of Black and Indigenous communities both current and historical: Black and brown displacement, intergenerational trauma, and the historical impact of solidarity movements and collective action. Speakers shared their personal stories of how they came to South Phoenix, dreams of justice and peace for their descendants, and overall present a shared notion of solidarity.

The most telling and impactful portion of the evening came when the hosts opened the floor for comments from the 'outer circle', or the public attendees. Those that shared echoed the need for justice and peace for their communities now and for their descendants in the future. However, some also shared personal experiences of harm from the 'other' community. A black attendee recounted harm from those of Indigenous backgrounds in her job and in the community. Indigenous attendees commented that those outside of their community didn't understand their culture, history and the oppression they face. Hosts from the Cihuapactli Collective and Black River Life both addressed the

rising tension, recognizing that the safe space they sought to create was disrupted, but also recognizing that each attendee (as well as the panelists) have their own valid lived experiences.

Before the gathering closed, an effort was made to come back to the central issue of solidarity. That this conflict between communities is a product of larger systems of oppression which encourages Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color to fight among themselves, rather than work toward mutual support to achieve a universal justice. After the event, both host organizations issued statements on social media, apologizing for the anti-Black and anti-Indigenous statements made by attendees and for any harm perpetuated through the event. They both re-committed to working toward solidarity, and for healing, justice and liberation for all oppressed peoples. Comments on social media were supportive and that night tensions seemed to ease as the crowd dispersed. People lingered to help the hosts clean up or stood in small groups debriefing.

The reactions and comments in the moment spoke to the further need for gathering, listening, sharing and understanding before the work of true solidarity and concerted collective action can occur.

***Funga alafiyah, ashe ashe  
Funga alafiyah, ashe ashe***

***Welcome, how are you  
Hope you are fine  
Welcome, how are you  
Hope you are fine***

Funga Alafiyah, performed by Collette Watson at the “Sharing the Fire” gathering, is often sung at the beginning of African Diaspora cultural events. Though often attributed to West Africa, it was composed by LaRocque Bey, an African American choreographer, dancer, and percussionist.

### **Reflection Questions from “Sharing the Fire”**

*Please use these questions to guide your own community work.*

1. How did you come to live in your community?
2. What are your biggest dreams for your descendants? And what does that reveal about the grief you or your ancestors hold?
3. What do Black and Indigenous communities have to offer each other?

## Panel 3: Braiding Our Stories

### Land, Housing and Place in Phoenix, AZ

#### Speakers

##### Mary Stephens

InSite Consultants (moderator)

##### Joe Larios

Mass Liberation AZ (moderator)

##### Dr. Tamika Lamb-Sanders

Savvy Pen Consultants  
(moderator)

##### Eunique Yazzie

CahokiaPHX SocialTech +  
ArtSpace

##### Rebecca Larios

Local resident

##### Rashaad Thomas

Poet and local resident

The third event was held along the Rio Salado riverbed on November 6th and coincided with the M pact Transit + Community Conference. InSite Consultants and Mass Liberation Arizona convened a group of artists, poets, activists, residents and visiting urban planners for a walking tour centering stories of the surrounding community of South Phoenix. To counter the surface narrative of booming growth and urban development from the M pact conference, this final Politics of Place gathering focused on how the ongoing light rail development of South Phoenix has perpetuated issues of environmental pollution, community neglect and displacement for residents and their families.

Upon arriving at the Rio Salado trailhead, attendees engaged in an interactive mapping exercise led by staff from Re:Frame Youth Arts Center. Participants were presented with a large map of South Phoenix and asked to place a green dot on outdoor spaces for recreation and family gatherings, a red dot on policing hotspots and high surveillance areas, a yellow dot on so-called “community resources” that actually cause harm, and a blue dot on true community resources that are helping the community of South Phoenix to thrive. It was an effective

opening activity to get participants thinking about their community and for Re:Frame to gather resident perspectives for their [Rio 2 the Mountain youth journalism map](#).

Attendees were then invited to listen to [three audio files](#) which introduced the program as they walked the short path to a central ramada. The outdoor venue gave a perfect vantage point to see contrasting views of the tall buildings of downtown Phoenix, nearby industrial sites along the riverbed and the restored wetlands with its walking trails. The late afternoon sun was still bright, and traffic could be heard beyond the tall grasses. The high was 93° that day, so organizers also made sure to create a welcoming and accessible environment for those attending, with water, snacks and umbrellas for the shade. Golf carts were also available for anyone requiring mobility assistance as the speakers would be presenting at various spots along the dirt trail.



Interactive mapping activity led by Re:Frame Youth and Art Center. Photo credit: Ashley Hare.

To open the program, participants were asked to introduce themselves to someone new and share their own family histories of displacement. Dr. Tamika Lamb-Saunders presented the first spoken word piece followed by a poetry reading by Eunique Yazzie that focused on the environmental degradation of sacred lands and waters. The restored riverbed near 7th Avenue where we met is part of a relatively recent attempt to clean up past pollution and industrial dumping sites along the Rio Salado. In the late 1990s, the river was artificially dammed upstream to create Tempe Town Lake for recreation and economic development<sup>1</sup>. However, this caused the lower stream near Phoenix to remain dry for most of the year.

Around the dry riverbed, speakers easily pointed out industrial sites, dumping grounds, and brownfields, contaminated land unfit for development due to past industrial use. These sites negatively impact the health and wellbeing of the majority Black and brown communities in South Phoenix.

After another short walk, a local resident shared her family's history of displacement: immigration from Mexico, then being displaced by the development of downtown Phoenix, and again by the expansion of Sky Harbor Airport in the 1970s<sup>2</sup>. Her family is currently being threatened again by rising housing costs and gentrification from the Valley Metro light rail's southern expansion. This resident expressed frustration at how previous efforts over past decades to improve and invest in this community have been ignored and are now only being addressed as Phoenix's urban core encroaches.

*...The Akimel O'odham People (River people)  
The surviving two bands,  
continue to do so,  
in the face of colonial displacement.  
On the banks of this river,  
between these mountains,  
in this desert, but pushed to the outskirts.  
Inter-twinning, connecting, innovating,  
passed down to protect the people,  
the animals, the land, and the water.  
Our traditions and cultural values,  
a philosophy...  
Centered  
on this RIVER.*

*It is Sacred.  
It is Sacred.  
It is Sacred.  
"Water is Life"*

*—Eunique Yazzie (Diné)  
Excerpt from "Time Immemorial"*

At each transition point, organizers encouraged attendees to meet back up with their partners from the first sharing activity and debrief on the information being shared and how it affects them, their community or their work. This push toward discussion and generative action made otherwise heavy topics feel hopeful and surmountable. The final presentation took place back at the central ramada. Rashaad Thomas shared a spoken word piece before a brief period for comments from the attendees and closing comments from the event hosts. Key takeaways shared by participants centered the shift in perspective that can happen when space is made to gather and share lived experiences; the difficulty in holding similar space in planning and policy meetings; and the need to center people, community, and land over development and investment dollars.

1 The original concept for the damming of the Salt River to create Tempe Town Lake came from Arizona State University student concept design drawings in the 1960s. (Phoenix Planning Department, 1991)

2 Over 6,000 people were displaced by eminent domain from Golden Gate Barrio, a predominantly Mexican-American community. (Dean & Reynolds, 2006)

## Lessons for Funders

Foundational to the success of the Politics of Place events was the unrestricted funding from LISC Phoenix as the primary sponsor, and the City of Phoenix as a minor sponsor, which allowed Coalition leadership to dedicate the time and energy to the dreaming, planning, and execution of the events. The two institutional partners understood the nascent stages of the Black and Indigenous coalition collaboration, which needed additional financial and resource support to establish a strong foundation. Funders paid Coalition members generously and fairly for their labor, and provided funding for full production support, including ADA accessibility and Spanish/English interpretation. The equitable redistribution of money from LISC Phoenix and the City of Phoenix deepened trust between the Coalition members and these institutions.

Notably, leadership and staff from both funders attended all three of the events and offered full support and appropriate reflective feedback, without over-stepping boundaries. Often funding is an imbalance of high expectations and rigid requirements which hinders the ability to create the spaces needed for generative production or action, as documented by the [Center for Effective Philanthropy](#). Instead of the typical paternalistic funder relationship, both LISC Phoenix and the City of Phoenix Department of Environmental Programs acted in right-relationship, prioritizing trust, presence, learning from mistakes, curiosity, and ongoing thought-partnership. This was especially true of LISC Phoenix, who remained a steadfast and dedicated partner throughout the entire process.

While InSite Consultants was the primary holder of funding relationships with LISC Phoenix and the City of Phoenix, there was a concerted effort to establish direct links between the Coalition's Black and Indigenous-led organizations and these funding institutions for the express purpose of power-sharing and effective lasting resource redistribution. Early in the process, relationships were established to support future funding pathways.

- Funders should view their allocations as redistribution of resources, NOT as sponsorship or good deeds. Coalition members recommend that funders remain publicly invisible and not require logos/"thank you"s at events.
- Funders should attend and support the process, ask thought-provoking questions and offer supportive insights.
- Funders should use their positional power to open new pathways of funding streams while assuming large parts of the labor to ensure funding continues.
- New and visionary collaborations need EXTRA funding support, not less.
  - \* Funding to help navigate difficult or uncharted areas of collaboration, which include increasing capacity, navigating conflict, and production support.
  - \* New collaborations and relationships are always bumpy, because the territory is often unknown. Additional funding and material resources mitigate frustrations and allow the group to concentrate on deepening the relationship instead of focusing on logistical problem-solving.

## About the Coalition

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**Black River Life Collective** is a love letter, a loudspeaker and an exploration of the many streams of Black life. We deliver news, information, documentary films, cultural events and community gatherings that highlight the African diaspora.

<https://www.blackriver.life/>

**CahokiaPhx SocialTech + ArtSpace:** We uplift indigenous design, art, and culture through pop-up events and retail. Cahokia is where self-determination and a solidarity economy intersect.

<https://www.cahokiaphx.com/>

**Cihuapactli Collective's** purpose is to provide healing for urban Indigenous Peoples from the diaspora. This is done by sharing wisdom, connecting resources, revitalizing Traditional Knowledge, promoting and advocating for health & wellness. Rooted in ancestral and Traditional Knowledge, the Cihuapactli Collective is committed to inclusively empowering families by sharing of our sacred bundles.

<https://www.cihuapactlicollective.org/>

**InSite Consultants** catalyze institutional transformation through anti-racist policies, cultural and artistic organizing, and place-based approaches accountable to those most impacted. InSite centers the experience, knowledge, culture and practice of those most impacted by systemic disparity. We hold ourselves accountable to marginalized communities and align our politics with grassroots Black liberation movements.

<https://www.marginstocenter.com/>

**Mass Liberation Arizona** seeks to DECARCERATE and DIVEST from the criminal (in)justice system. We believe all prisons, detention centers and jails should be abolished and we must invest in solutions that strengthen our communities. We are led by those most impacted by the system and we center Black Liberation because we believe in doing so, everyone gets free!

<https://masslibaz.org/>

**Re:Frame Youth Arts Center** is a space to center the knowledge and experience of young people, before they are 18 years old. We are reimagining what it looks like for youth and adults to share leadership space to support their community.

<https://www.reframephx.org/>

**Savvy Pen Consultants** uses arts education programming to create strategic partnerships between learning institutions and the community to improve educational outcomes for students and provide access to greater resources and opportunities for growth.

<https://savvypen.com/>

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### About the Studio for Creativity, Place and Equitable Communities

The mission of the Studio for Creativity, Place and Equitable Communities is to leverage the power and possibilities of Arizona State University as the New American University to integrate arts, culture and design in community development, planning and related fields in order to help redress historic inequities and create healthy, equitable, more just communities where all people can thrive. The Studio is a collaboration between the Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts and the Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions.

<https://creativeplacemaking.asu.edu/>





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