



Advancing Racial Equity

June 2021

This brief is one of a four-part series examining how collaboratives funded through JPMorgan Chase's *AdvancingCities* and PRO Neighborhoods competitions adjusted their activities in response to COVID-19 and the racial justice movement in 2020. This brief focuses on the ways the collaboratives deepened their commitments to racial equity. Visit [this page](#) to read the other briefs on supporting small businesses, making digital adaptations, and ensuring housing stability and affordability.

The disparate impact of the pandemic on people of color and the heightened nationwide attention to racial justice in 2020 highlighted the need to develop and apply systemic solutions to address historical, deep-seated inequities. Building on their long-standing commitments to racial equity, the *AdvancingCities* and PRO Neighborhoods collaboratives honed in on their equity objectives, using internal learning and reflection to inform and adjust their programs, services, and approaches. Some partnered with other nonprofits and companies to influence policy at the local level.

Key Findings

- Building on their past commitment to and experience with racial equity, the collaboratives deepened their focus on racial equity and justice in 2020.
- The collaboratives used **internal learning and discussions** within their organizations and communities to inform and adjust their programs.
- Some collaboratives **expanded their involvement in racial equity and justice work** by partnering with and seeking to influence employers, educational institutions, and local government to advance racial equity concerns.
- The COVID-19 pandemic and racial justice movement in 2020 underscored the need to **work systemically** to promote racial equity and justice.



Background

The organizations funded through JPMorgan Chase's *AdvancingCities* and PRO Neighborhoods competitions work collaboratively to strengthen communities and address pressing local needs.¹ In October 2020, Abt interviewed representatives from sixteen collaboratives.² The collaboratives provide technical assistance and financing to local businesses, capital and training for affordable housing development, and cross-cutting solutions to address workforce challenges, among other activities. Although the projects and communities each collaborative serves are unique, all share a commitment to addressing economic and racial inequity in their respective neighborhoods and cities. The collaboratives help address systemic barriers and the effects of long-standing disinvestment and discriminatory practices that have disadvantaged and disenfranchised people of color.

The Challenge

Communities of color face substantial challenges grounded in disparities in access to wealth and capital, high rates of poverty and food insecurity, inadequate public transportation and job access, and underfunded schools, health systems and other essential infrastructure. The pandemic exacerbated these systemic disparities as people lost income and community resources were exhausted. The murder of George Floyd and the subsequent racial justice movement further highlighted the inequities and injustices that Black communities in particular face.

The Response

Building on their long-standing commitments to racial equity, the *AdvancingCities* and PRO Neighborhoods collaboratives honed in on their equity objectives and took action to further ensure that racial equity is embedded at the core of their work.

Even before the pandemic, the collaboratives were committed to addressing racial inequities in their target neighborhoods as a fundamental part of their work. Several collaboratives' grant activities grew out of a larger city-wide initiative or longer-term equitable development strategy specifically designed to address historical inequities and discriminatory practices that harm residents of color.

1 The *AdvancingCities* and PRO Neighborhoods collaboratives and their projects are listed here: <https://www.abtassociates.com/files/Projects/PDFs/2021/advancingcities-and-pro-neighborhoods-collaboratives-2014-2020.pdf>

2 Abt interviewed representatives from the lead grantee organization from the five collaboratives that received *AdvancingCities* challenge grants in 2019, the seven collaboratives that received PRO Neighborhoods grants in 2019, and the four collaboratives that received PRO Neighborhoods grants in 2018.

• **Kensington Lending Partnership** (Philadelphia, PA, 2018 grantee) supports affordable housing, small business development, and consumer finance as part of the Heart of Kensington Collective Impact 2022 initiative. Decades of disinvestment and deindustrialization led to a weak real estate market, limited access to capital, and increased drug and crime rates in Kensington, a predominately Latinx neighborhood. In 2017, 51 percent of Kensington residents lived in poverty, and over 20 percent of adults were unemployed. The Heart of Kensington plan seeks to combat these challenges through a trauma-informed, participatory approach to community development. In 2016, leaders established a community planning process. The process generated a revitalization strategy that built on community strengths to attract investment, increase collective efficacy, and promote social cohesion among neighborhood residents. The revitalization strategy also supported increased public health and safety and improved access to employment and affordable housing. To support the plan's goals, the collaborative provides financial counseling to residents and loans to small businesses, local housing developers, and homebuyers.



• **Fresno Community Capital Collaborative for Economic Mobility** (Fresno, CA, 2018 grantee) promotes economic development in Fresno as part of the D.R.I.V.E. (Developing the Region's Inclusive and Vibrant Economy) initiative, which centers racial equity in its economic growth plan for the city. D.R.I.V.E. is a coalition of 150 public and private organizations that convened after a 2018 Urban Institute report ranked Fresno 59th out of 59 cities in California on the measures of racial disparity, economic health, and economic inclusion. The organizations recognized the need to address Fresno's history of systemic racism that has disenfranchised its residents of color. Overall, D.R.I.V.E. identifies 19 initiatives in the areas of economic growth, human capital, and neighborhood development. The collaborative spearheads several of those initiatives by providing loans and technical assistance to increase affordable housing development and support the creation and expansion of Black-owned and women-owned businesses.

Several collaboratives engaged their organizational leadership, staff, collaborative partners, and communities in education and dialogue about racial inequity and injustice to inform changes in their activities.

Organizational leadership invested resources in learning about the history of inequity in their cities and how it affects their work. Leadership also engaged in conversations about diversity and equity in their service provision and internal hiring processes, which in some cases led to changes in how they identify and reach communities in need.

- Motivated by a renewed focus on racial justice in 2020, **Equitable Wilmington** (Wilmington, DE, 2019 grantee) brought equity to the forefront of internal organizational conversations. Leaders from the collaborative's lead organization, Cinnaire Lending Corporation, attended a 21-day racial equity challenge hosted by the United Way of Delaware. The challenge engaged participants in exploring concepts such as white privilege and systemic racism in criminal justice, education, and housing. Prompted by the 21-day challenge, Cinnaire's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion committee sought additional readings to educate themselves on racial inequity in housing and community development to better inform their work. The organization is building on the momentum to reassess their 2021 corporate goals and ensuring diversity, equity, and inclusion is incorporated in their work by being intentional about who they work with and fund. For example, Cinnaire is reviewing their lending platform to ensure that they are adequately supporting emerging housing developers, developers of color, and women.
- Digital Inclusion and Economic Resilience** (Louisville, KY, 2019) fostered conversations and deep learning about systemic racial inequities. In October 2020, the collaborative partners attended a training given by the Center for Health Equity to explore how national and local policies contributed to racial wealth gaps in Louisville. The second part of the training introduced a racial equity assessment tool that can be used in organizational decision making. Building on the shared understanding and foundation the training provided, the collaborative participated in a training called *Race, Wealth, and Power: Building a Collective Understanding* to foster cohesion and collaboration about community and systems-level changes required to ameliorate historically racist policies. Collaborative members began discussing a shift in its framework from a collective impact model to a model focused on equity and justice, which involves rethinking data collection and service provision to truly represent the community and enact change. The framework will center around residents and their needs, and the evaluation team will be more intentional with data collection, data presentation, and policy recommendations. For example, when the collaborative first began its work, it only worked with people in specific zip codes. One of the partners recognized that this did not account for many residents in need of services, as many residents were displaced when public housing in those areas was dismantled. The collaborative no longer uses zip code as the only criteria or means for identifying residents in need. Instead, the collaborative also serves residents outside of the target zip codes on a case-by-case basis by reviewing income eligibility and other circumstances that warrant support, particularly for people of color as they have faced structural barriers to economic mobility and have been those most adversely impacted by the pandemic.





Some collaboratives created new initiatives and built deeper connections with key partners in their city to advance racial equity. Several of these initiatives worked to elevate the voices of community residents of color by advocating to change the policy or practice of influential entities such as employers, educational institutions, nonprofits, and local government.

- **Advancing San Diego (ASD)** (San Diego, CA, 2019) facilitated discussions about racial equity and diversity with the employers and educational institutions with which they work. The collaborative promotes economic security for residents and small businesses by connecting traditionally underserved students in educational institutions to high-demand jobs provided by small technology companies. After the murder of George Floyd and heightened global awareness of the Black Lives Matter movement, ASD began hosting monthly human resources forums with executives from San Diego’s largest companies to provide space for executives to share best practices for promoting racial equity and inclusivity in the workplace, particularly in hiring practices. Additionally, ASD is working with educational institutions and employers to build more equitable systems. Specifically, ASD is helping educational institutions build a more diverse student body and connect students with meaningful employment opportunities at local companies. The collaborative noted that employers are attuned to the equity, diversity, and inclusion practices of local educational institutions and intentionally choose to work with institutions that take seriously efforts to make their institutions more equitable and diverse.



- The **West Side United** collaborative (Chicago, IL, 2019 grantee) was asked to participate in the Chicago mayor’s Racial Equity Rapid Response Team (RERRT), a data-driven, community-based, and community-driven initiative to reduce COVID-19 sickness and deaths among Chicago’s Black and Latinx communities. The collaborative works to improve health outcomes in the majority Black and Latinx West Side neighborhood through investment, job procurement, and business expansion in the neighborhood’s health systems. As part of RERRT, West Side United contributed their best practices and networks to convene community anchor organizations and other key stakeholders to enlist rapid testing, resources, and data to mitigate COVID-19. In addition to their COVID-focused relief





work, the collaborative worked to improve resident relationships when collaborative members witnessed rising tensions between Black and Latinx residents. To address the tension, West Side United's Community Advisory Council held community-wide conversations about Black and Latinx unity.

- **Memphis CDFI Network** (Memphis, TN, 2019 grantee) joined a coalition of Black nonprofit leaders called Memphis Nonprofits Demand Action, which formed in response to the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. Memphis CDFI Network works to increase affordable housing, expand small businesses, and improve the financial health of residents in the majority Black Frayser and Whitehaven neighborhoods which have been subject to decades of disinvestment, discriminatory lending practices, and police brutality. The Memphis Nonprofits Demand Action coalition wrote a public letter to Memphis leaders that outlined key policies and steps to reduce police violence and improve employment and education for Black residents. The collaborative signed onto this letter, attended regular meetings to discuss relevant issues, and pressed the city to address the demands articulated in the letter.

Lessons Learned

Each collaborative reacted somewhat differently to address racial inequities exacerbated by the pandemic and highlighted by the racial justice movement. Their experiences illustrate a continuum of learning and engaging to help address systemic racial inequities.

1. **The success of the collaboratives in contributing to advance racial equity highlights the value of investing in organizations and collaboratives with an explicit focus on equity.** The pandemic exacerbated and further highlighted long-standing racial inequities, which became even starker during the associated economic downturn. The *AdvancingCities* and PRO Neighborhoods collaboratives were well positioned to help address these challenges because of their commitment to racial equity.
2. **A range of strategies is needed to make progress in addressing racial inequity within multiple systems.** Some collaboratives delved deeply into education and dialogue within their own organizations to learn more about the history of racism in the U.S. and how it manifests in their organizations. Others turned a sharper eye toward reassessing the funding and services they provide to ensure funding and service provision adequately addresses communities' needs. Still others worked with advocacy organizations and local policymakers to embed racial equity in city policies. These efforts demonstrate collaboratives' commitment to embedding and centering racial equity in policy and practice.

This report was prepared by Abt Associates as part of its evaluation of *AdvancingCities* and PRO Neighborhoods.

Abt Associates is an international policy and research organization with a 50 year history of conducting rigorous evaluations and supporting implementation of housing and community development initiatives. In 2018, JPMorgan Chase selected Abt Associates to be the national evaluator of PRO Neighborhoods and *AdvancingCities*.

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JPMorgan Chase is one of the oldest financial institutions in the United States. JPMorgan Chase invests millions of dollars each year to enable more people to contribute to and share in the rewards of a growing economy. PRO Neighborhoods is a \$125 million initiative designed to support communities with the capital and tools they need to drive local solutions to address key drivers of inequality. *AdvancingCities* is a \$500 million, five-year initiative to drive inclusive growth and create greater economic opportunity in cities across the world.

About *AdvancingCities* and PRO Neighborhoods

The benefits and hardships that result from changing economic conditions accrue unevenly; some communities, neighborhoods, and individuals thrive while others are left behind. To help more people benefit from a growing economy, JPMorgan Chase created two initiatives, the *AdvancingCities* Challenge and the Partnerships for Raising Opportunity in Neighborhoods (PRO Neighborhoods) Competition, to support cross-cutting projects that enact creative, sustainable solutions to local challenges. The competition winners are collaboratives, comprising two or more local organizations from among the nonprofit, government, and business sectors. Collaborative partners work together to apply innovative approaches to solve complex local challenges.

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