WHAT’S GOOD DETROIT!

2020 is wrapping up and we’re all doing a lot of reflecting on the year. Time Magazine recently called 2020, “the worst year ever” and I’m certain that many Americans share that same sentiment. A year of incomprehensible loss, collective trauma, and deep uncertainty. Many people are frightened by present circumstances and have little hope toward the future because it feels so out of reach. In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, folks were forced into a daunting confrontation with their own mortality especially here in the city of Detroit. Detroit was one of the early hotspots for coronavirus infections and we paid a high price with lives that were intricately connected to our own.

The pandemic laid bare the deeply rooted inequities that have existed for decades and we got to see these disparities up close because the world was literally on pause. Long lines at grocery stores & pharmacies, overcrowded morgues, massive unemployment, and disparate healthcare all came front and center during the early stages of the pandemic and it was underscored by the largest civil rights movement in modern history after the killing of George Floyd.

BridgeDetroit launched publication on May 18, 2020 just seven days before the world watched the murder of George Floyd on video. Our team knew intrinsically that the city needed a hyper local public record of all of the things happening in Detroit by reporters who have skin in the game as residents. The team had only met in-person once before the launch for a socially distant photoshoot at the Dequindre Cut to encapsulate the moment.

During launch, the bar was set high. I remember saying during the presser that “BridgeDetroit will be a newsroom that is responsive to the information needs and gaps that Detroiters themselves identify through an iterative process that will build out our Community Priorities Model.”

The challenge then became how we were going to reach the residents most affected by information disparities absent face-to-face interaction in a city that has a significant digital divide? We also put together a Community Advisory Council made up of a cross-section of leaders from around the city that met virtually to oversee the fidelity of the process and implementation. We partnered with community development organizations and grassroots groups to help gather their resident constituencies virtually for focus groups.

This process was no small feat as everyone was in transition trying to figure out the new ‘zoom world’, get PPP loans to sustain operations for their organizations, and for some: embark on an agonizing process of having to furlough or terminate employees. We trudged along anyway by partnering with over 10 organizations and talking to a little over 100 Detroiters about their experiences.

This following is the first progress report toward the building out of the Community Priorities Model and we will release quarterly reports as we continue to employ creative new methods of communicating with residents and asking new questions.

Yours In Community,

Orlando P. Bailey
Director of Engagement
COMMUNITY PRIORITIES MODEL

The Community Priorities Model will continually engage Detroiter to identify and prioritize the issues that challenge their understanding of and connection to vital civic information.

The Community Priorities Model will take in information from a number of sources (e.g., surveys, polling, publicly available data, social media) and refine it into a quarterly report that will guide the responsive work of BridgeDetroit’s journalists and influence the work of other local media organizations. BridgeDetroit’s ongoing in-person and digital engagement activities with Detroiter will also be determined according to the results of the Community Priorities Model and the journalism it produces.

In the challenging circumstances surrounding Covid-19, BridgeDetroit launched in advance of completing the work of the Community Priorities Model. To guide our work until the Community Priorities Model can be completed, we have turned to a list of “Community Critical Information Needs” developed by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) for a 2012 report. These eight categories encompass the information necessary for community members “to live safe and healthy lives; have full access to educational, employment, and business opportunities; and to fully participate in the civic and democratic lives of their communities should they choose.” Categories include:

- Emergencies & Risks (COVID-19)
- Health & Welfare
- Education
- Transportation
- Jobs & Economic Opportunities
- Environment
- Civic & Community Info
- Political & Public Policy Info

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

- Focus Groups
- Surveys
- Phone Polling
- In-Person Meeting

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic and strict restrictions on being able to gather well into the summer, BridgeDetroit opted to partner with community development organizations and grassroots organizations to reach as many residents as possible. We spoke at length to over 100 residents in the city of Detroit and it is our intention to speak with more. The process is iterative and opportunities to engage year-round will be available.

BridgeDetroit conducted a total of 12 focus groups (11 virtually and one socially distanced outdoors at a vacant lot with the East Davison Village Community Group). Following the sessions, participants were sent a digital survey to complete. Phone polling was also used to reach residents who were unable to join focus groups.

In total, 127 Detroit residents participated in Phase 1.
PRELIMINARY RESULTS* DEMOGRAPHICS

* The survey has a margin of error of 6%.

**Age Distribution**
- 65 < 12.9%
- 55-64 17.6%
- 45-54 9.4%
- 35-44 10.6%
- 25-34 35.3%
- < 17 5.9%
- 18-24 8.2%

**Ethnicity**
- Black / African American 80.0%
- Caucasian 7.1%
- Hispanic / Latinx 8.2%
- Mixed Race 1.2%
- Diasporic African 3.5%

MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES [ # of Responses Detailed ]

**Neighborhood Development**
- Lack of Public Knowledge
- Community Engagement/Input
- Home Repair Resources
- Public Money for Development
- Community Benefits Agreements

**Housing Stability**
- Home Repair Resources
- Quality Affordable Housing
- Property Tax Foreclosure
- Homeowners/Renters Insurance
- Landlord & Tenant Issues

**Public Transparency**
- Department Procedures
- City Budget
- New Development Plans
- Who to Call for Assistance

**Covid-19**
- Infection Rates
- Mask Mandates Ignored
- Access to Testing
- Contact Tracing Accuracy
- Social Distancing Guidelines
- Lack of Health Insurance

**Education**
- Classroom Size
- Student Safety
- Returning to In-Person Classes
- Distance Learning
- Testing
- Police Presence in Schools

**Crime**
- Neighborhood Safety
- Police Community Relations
- Police Response Time
- Lack of Police Presence

BRIDGE DETROIT
COMMUNITY PRIORITIES MODEL: A PROGRESS REPORT
85 Total Participants (8 via phone polling) with 1,873 Years Combined Experience in the City of Detroit

Most Important Issues by # of Responses

- Neighborhood Development
- Education
- Covid-19
- Housing Stability
- Property Tax Foreclosure
- City Services
- Employment
- Public Transparency
- Crime
- Transportation
- Food Accessibility
- Environment
- Utility Assistance

Employment
- Access to New Jobs
- Training for New Industries
- Job Placement Assistance
- Access to Trade Facilities
- Unemployment Benefits

Property Tax Foreclosure
- Loss of Homeownership
- Inflated Property Assessments
- Vacancy
- Community Blight
- Possible Demolition

Food Accessibility
- Lack of Neighborhood Grocers
- Buying from Detroit-Based Farmers
- Travel Time to Fresh Food Grocers
- Farm to Table Products

Environment
- Public Health Consequences
- Corporate Pollution
- Climate Change
- Carbon Emissions
- Rising Sea Levels

Transportation & Mobility
- Lack of Regional Transit
- Crossing Multiple Lane Streets
- Bus Routes & Schedule
- Bike Lane Development

Utility Assistance
- Shut-offs
- Public Health Risks
- Potential Displacement
- High Interest Payment Plans

City Services
- Responsiveness to Residents
- Service Consistency
- Service Schedule Information
**BIGGEST CHALLENGE**

Summary of participant survey responses when asked “What Is the Biggest Challenge You’ll Face in the Next 10 Days”

- **Isolation**
  - Family/Friends
  - Vacation needs vs Travel restrictions
- **Work**
  - Completing projects
  - Leading others in uncertain times
- **Voting**
- **Immigration**
- **Finances**
  - Keeping up with expenses
  - Providing for my kids
- **Blight Gentrification**
- **COVID-19 Risks/Prevention Testing/Treatment**
  - Food
    - Having enough/Finding fresh & local
    - Free snow removal for seniors
    - Winter weatherization
    - Financing home repairs
  - Health
    - Access to my doctor for regular checkups
  - Home
    - Property tax exemption
    - Fighting foreclosure
  - School
    - Keeping up grades

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**NEXT STEPS**

BridgeDetroit will continue to engage with the community and refine the Community Priorities Model by:

- Producing journalism that will help address community priorities while attempting to speak with as many Detroiters as possible.
- Partnering with Outlier Media to leverage their responsive text service to interface with residents to ascertain their needs.
- Conducting more phone polling & eventually face-to-face interviews with residents once it is safe to do so.
- Publishing quarterly progress reports on the Community Priorities Model given the fluidity of needs.
- Meeting with the Community Advisory Council for guidance on coverage of these issues while leveraging their networks to attract widespread attention to our model and journalism.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

BridgeDetroit would like to thank our entire staff, our Community Advisory Council, Focus Group Partners, curators, and every Detroit resident who took the time to speak with us during this iteration of the process.

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COMMUNITY PRIORITIES MODEL:
A PROGRESS REPORT

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