Reflecting On 2020

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"It taught me that we've got answers and the ability to come up with answers. It's just figuring out how we do it together and implement."

– Pastor Andre Alexander, President, Tabernacle Community Development Corporation
Serving and leading in the Jeff-Vander-Lou, the Ville, Greater-Ville, and O'Fallon neighborhoods

"So now neighbors look out for neighbors"

We got $100, but let me tell you, that $100 went a long way!

– Sherri Bailey, Block Unit Captain, 5200 block Kensington Avenue
Serving and leading in the Academy/Sherman Park neighborhood

WE'VE GOT the POWER

"Even out of that wilderness, something phenomenal emerged."

We grew leaps and bounds because we were able to meet what our population that we serve needed at that particular time.

– Dr. Paulette Sankofa, Founder and CEO, Peace Weaving Wholeness
Serving and leading in the Old North neighborhood

"I'm ready to see the community shine."

The benefit was that we got more trust from people. To know that they had support, a resource, that the door was open. It's building growth, it's social growth and it's a resource, so they know exactly where to go.

– Karen Greer, Owner, Angels Within CDS Home Health Care, LLC
Serving and leading in the O'Fallon neighborhood

NEIGHBORHOOD Solidarity Fund On average, **$0.82** of every dollar awarded was received by Black/brown-led entities for a total investment of **$744,111.**

Reflecting On 2020

Invest STL takes this moment to pause, breathe and reflect on the year that was 2020. We are growing steadily, both internally as an organization and through our impact in St. Louis neighborhoods. Getting to know and grow our relationships with community partners and neighborhood leaders are key to how Invest STL is showing up. We sat down with some of our partners to lift up their highly collaborative and responsive work spawned by the newly created Neighborhood Solidarity Fund and the urgent needs 2020 amplified in the community. We will share some of their experiences; their quotes populate the cover art and offer a glimpse into the kind of neighborhood level perspective and passion that Invest STL is all about centering. Their stories will pop up throughout these pages as detours into a particular neighborhood, sharing a local leader's perspective. We will also catch you up on some of our own efforts and offerings, including launching the Neighborhood Toolbox, growing our team, and claiming our digital home. We invite you to go beyond the pages here and get to know the St. Louis community on the neighborhood level; use the highlighed links to access those neighborhood tools and to go deeper into the stories of residents and the neighborhoods they live, serve and lead in.

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Breathe.

The experience that was 2020 delivered us to a unique, nearly collectively-felt confluence of angst, pain, loss, rage, isolation and bouts of helplessness. While a global pandemic forced us apart and our country and region's relentless strain of racial injustice persisted to block us from a perfect union, we did not pause. We all got to work with an unspoken question in mind: Where do we go from here?

This frequent wondering throughout human history found the framework of an answer from Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in his final publishing in 1967. Dr. King's words placed our humanity at a crossroads of chaos, a path that inertia would have us continue, and community. Community, like hope, is an intentional act that chooses the promise of many coming together to forge a path forward that honors human dignity and mutual liberation. While 2020 – and the start of 2021 – demonstrated many unthinkable moments of chaos, what endures is the aligned will of an abundance of people to deliver us to higher ground.

Neighbors pooling together funds, food and family to keep our blocks healthy, connected and cared for. Organizers resisting distraction of the moment to sustain the movement for an anti-racist, economically just nation. Artists, practiced and newly discovered, foretelling who we can be: imaginative, radically collaborative and led by compassion for ourselves and others. Even the boulders of government, industry and philanthropy have allowed themselves to break a little and reinvent practices, policies and partnerships to build solutions to our current multi-stanza riddle. We've been holding our breath for generations, waiting for the day we choose community over chaos, justice over chaos, hope over chaos. I am growing to believe that day may be near.

Change is hard. Let's acknowledge that. Change is also an existential, and thus moral, imperative. So now we work to answer a new question: Are we there yet? There are many signs that we are heading in the right direction. Invest STL is honored and humbled to be but one member in the brilliantly hued coalition for a beloved community. Let's exhale (and laugh, create, reflect, give, and accept grace) as we strive together towards yes.

In community,

Dara Eskridge

“Even out of that wilderness, something phenomenal emerged.”

NEIGHBORHOOD SOLIDARITY FUND
OLD NORTH NEIGHBORHOOD

Dr. Paulette Sankofa, founder and CEO of Peace Weaving Wholeness, reflects on 2020 and the Doors of Old North project she produced with artists Andrea Hughes and Luisa Otero Prada. Doors of Old North is a dynamic and powerful expression of the convergence of art, wellness, and neighborhood improvement. It’s this type of emergent action that sprung up in 2020 through the Neighborhood Innovations in Connectivity grant, one of three separate opportunities created by the Neighborhood Solidarity Fund, a COVID-19 funding response developed by Invest STL in consultation with community partners and neighborhood leaders.

Dr. Sankofa and the women of the NORC (Naturally Occurring Retirement Community) in the Old North neighborhood put a joyful spin on the work of looking out for each other, bringing together beauty, and strategy to respond to community needs. The wonder of the imagery, the color, the themes, the Doors of Old North have a lot to offer us, if we pause to look. We sat down with the artists team to learn more about the project and how the challenges of 2020 pushed them to fall back on their creative powers.

> We grew leaps and bounds because we were able to meet what our population that we serve needed at that particular time.
>
> – Dr. Paulette Sankofa, Founder and CEO, Peace Weaving Wholeness
> Serving and leading in the Old North neighborhood

NEIGHBORHOOD SOLIDARITY FUND
a COVID-19 Funding Response

Within two months after launching the Neighborhood Solidarity Fund, Invest STL had awarded grants to 176 neighbor-led collectives, CDCs and small businesses for a total of $744,111. For a visual breakdown of the investments by category take a spin through the 2020 Neighborhood Solidarity Fund Investees Map. With a focus on areas with the highest share of residents of color and highest concentrations of people living in poverty, NSF grantees represent all 40 neighborhoods and county subareas prioritized by the fund.

Generous support was provided by Commerce Bank, Dowd Bennett, JP Morgan Chase, UMB and Wells Fargo.

On average, **$0.82** of every dollar that was awarded was received by Black/brown-led entities for a total investment of **$744,111.**

A collaborative team of community partners brought technical assistance to each organization, expanding the Neighborhood Solidarity Fund's capacity to support neighborhoods by teaming up with the talented teams around us. Invest STL has partnered with St. Louis Association of Community Organizations (SLACO), Community Builder Network (CBN), the St. Louis Economic Development Partnership, the Small Business Empowerment Center (SBEC), the Veterans Business Resource Center (VBRC), and Purpose First Advisors to assist with outreach, reviewing applications and providing technical assistance to grantees throughout the process.

Our investments teach us too. By working with the Lift Small Business investees, we are deepening our understanding that supporting the local economy must be a part of our investments and is needed to build strong communities. COVID-19 has reminded us of the key role small local businesses play in maintaining strong, vibrant neighborhoods.

"I really appreciated the way that Invest STL approached the process; I think it was kind of unique compared to other funders. It was important for Invest STL to work with folks who were well-equipped to provide technical assistance to each pool of grantees."

– Jenny Connelly-Bowen, Executive Director, Community Builders Network of Metro St. Louis

NEIGHBORHOOD SOLIDARITY FUND
in the O'FALLON NEIGHBORHOOD

"I'm ready to see the community shine."

Karen Greer, a Small Business Lift investee is the owner of Angels Within CDS Home Health Care, LLC. Karen is working out of the 21st Ward in North City, St. Louis, which is also in an Opportunity Zone. It is a challenging place to own a business, but Karen sees a lot of potential and she is expanding her footprint as a result. Despite the nature of 2020 and how the pandemic affected her, Karen has a deep commitment and drive to be a positive force in the O'Fallon neighborhood.

During the rising pandemic she used her business, resources, and connections to supply clients, staff, and the community, with critical PPE. For Karen the value goes beyond the immediate health and safety support her organization provided, there is a bond in giving and receiving,

> "The benefit was that we got more trust from people. To know that they had support, a resource, that the door was open. It's building growth, it's social growth and it's a resource, so they know exactly where to go."
>
> – Karen Greer, Owner, Angels Within CDS Home Health Care, LLC
> Serving and leading in the O'Fallon neighborhood

To hear more about Karen's journey in 2020 as a small business owner and community developer link here to our conversation.

@ Invest STL

Growing the Team

The team's capacity is growing steadily. We welcomed Vontriece McDowell as Neighborhood Solidarity Partner, acting as our primary connection point and "guide on the side" to our existing and upcoming cohort of neighborhood investment recipient partners. Michael Pagano joined the team as Narrative + Communications Coordinator, working closely with the team to listen for, weave together and raise up the experiences of our neighborhood partners and the people they serve.

Through the process of growing we were able to take stock of the abundance of regional talent that is present in St. Louis. The skills, passion, and commitment folks bring to the table are inspiring and add to our sense of confidence. While we are grateful to make additions to our team, it's also good to know that as we move in the region we are surrounded by a ton of great people in the ecosystem.

Who We Are

Click through to meet the team.

Dara Eskridge
Executive Director

Marilyn Trauner
Executive Assistant

Shannon Dickerson
Investment Program Officer

Vontriece McDowell
Neighborhood Solidarity Partner

Michael Pagano
Narrative + Communications

Claiming Our Digital Home

Invest STL established a new standalone website in 2020, providing the new foundation for our digital home, our virtual neighborhood and our regional story. That story is all about collaboration, and our team was sparked by the skills and contribution of a Washington University Goldman Fellow, Colleen Avila. Colleen worked with Shannon Dickerson, the project lead and our Neighborhood Investment Program Officer, to create a clean and simple website that delivers. Now when you enter InvestSTL.org, you can explore our team, our partnerships, and a growing collection of equitable neighborhood development practices, resources, and tools.

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Launching the Neighborhood Toolbox

featuring STL Community LAB + Neighborhood Organizations Map

We are a community rich with individuals committed to shaping a bold, thriving St. Louis to the benefit of all. The resources available in the growing online toolbox seek to lift up and leverage the skills and connections of even more neighborhood leaders in organizing and aligning their actions towards a just, powerful future.

What can you find in the Neighborhood Toolbox? Thanks to a collaboration between SLU Law Clinic and MU Extension's community development office, a Neighborhood Organizations Map has been created to support neighborhood residents in working collectively, encouraging coordination and collaboration, and facilitating quality community engagement. The map's evolution has received input from the City of St. Louis Planning and Urban Design Agency, St. Louis Regional Data Alliance, Community Builders Network and Invest STL.

"The map boosts our city's community development ecosystem by helping neighborhood residents work collectively to impact decisions affecting their neighborhoods," said Dana Malkus, director of the Entrepreneurship and Community Development Clinic at Saint Louis University School of Law and a member of the St. Louis Vacancy Collaborative. "At the same time, it makes it easier for residents, developers, the city, and the business and philanthropic sectors to work together to achieve shared goals."

The Neighborhood Toolbox also features a growing collection of opportunities to learn, act, and build with STL Community LAB, an online catalogue of community development related trainings offered throughout the region by a range of community partners. Invest STL is proud to be the inaugural sponsoring partner for STL Community LAB. Our sponsorship supports further development of the platform, including continuing to add learning providers and their offerings to the site and attracting community members to the central platform to engage in their own capacity building for leading change within their neighborhoods.

For us the pandemic didn't bring these things to our awareness, it just highlighted them and accelerated them. These were issues people face even if COVID never came into existence. They are still there. They are still very real.

– Pastor Andre Alexander, President, Tabernacle Community Development Corporation
Serving and leading in the Jeff-Vander-Lou, the Ville, Greater-Ville, and O'Fallon neighborhoods

NEIGHBORHOOD SOLIDARITY FUND
in the JEFF-VANDER-LOU NEIGHBORHOOD

"I learned how creative and innovative, as people, we can really be."

Pastor Andre Alexander, President of Tabernacle Community Development Corporation, serves the Jeff-Vander-Lou neighborhood and leverages that heightened sense of urgency and accelerating energy of 2020 to grow TCDC in a multitude of ways. Forging ahead with ongoing strategic partnerships, the NSF CDC Stability grant supported TCDC's operations infrastructure and provided room to think through with others, to imagine and breathe into these relationships,

"It allowed us time to begin deepening current relationships that we already had,like with Mission St. Louis, Urban K-Life, the Urban League's Block Unit Federation. Those all are things that have been able to grow as a result of looking at the pandemic asking, 'What's the best way to strategically connect and utilize what we do great and what others do great?'"

The TCDC also grew their physical footprint in 2020, acquiring a few additional properties, stabilizing those buildings, and readying them for families. Pastor Andre speaks with joy about their love for preparing these spaces to be the site of a family's own stabilization and transformation process. He understands the nature of home and community, how they are critical to our well-being. Andre also shares what it's like to come through the chaos of 2020 having caught a glimpse of something promising.

"It taught me that we've got answers and the ability to come up with answers. It's just figuring out how we do it together and Implement."

– Pastor Andre Alexander, link here to our conversation.

Sustaining Neighborhood Investment Partnerships

Like many community-based organizations across our region, our partners in the West End and Dutchtown South felt, responded and adapted to the shocks of the last year. They experienced staff changes and shortages in the midst of growing community needs, yet found space to adjust their operations, deepen their relationships with their neighbors and partnering organizations, and stepped up to serve and lead in ways that were at times familiar and at times completely new. Take a glimpse of how Cornerstone in the West End and Visitation Park neighoborhoods and Dutchtown South Community Corporation in the Dutchtown, Marine Villa, Gravois Park, and Benton Park West neighborhoods connected, organized and supported their neighborhoods through the uncertainty of 2020.

Cornerstone

When we began our partnership with Cornerstone in 2018, the organization was on the cusp of its 40th year as a housing ministry to 50 households. In 2020, after significant internal reflection and consideration for the next phase of its service legacy, Cornerstone reinvisioned itself to be a community development organization committed to the holistic wellbeing and economic growth of the entire neighborhood it serves. While Cornerstone is at the beginning of this bold journey, our partners fully embraced this enhanced mission in how they connected with their neighbors throughout 2020. Take a look back at a couple snapshots of Cornerstone's commitment and effort, documented in their own words.

Revitalizing Streetcar Tracks To Greenway Residents Leading The Way, May 3, 2020

Opening the Community Hub with Residents + West End Planning Committee, October 20, 2020

Dutchtown South Community Corporation (DSCC)

Over the last few years, DSCC has grown into a widely respected and followed social justice leader in our community. With the twin pandemics of racial injustice and the coronavirus delivering heightened challenges for Black, Latinx, immigrant and people with few economic means, DSCC mobilized its deep relationships and organizing strengths to quickly connect residents and small businesses to much needed resources and peer support. Take a look back at how DSCC convened community throughout 2020, documented in their own words.

Building Skills at the Renter Power Assembly in Dutchtown, July 16, 2020

Celebrating New Construction + the Value of Doing It Differently, September 28, 2020

“So now neighbors look out for neighbors.”

– Sherri Bailey, Block Unit Captain, 5200 block Kensington Avenue
Serving and leading in the Academy/Sherman Park Neighborhood

Safety and solidarity go hand-in-hand in any neighborhood. Sherri Bailey, the Block Unit Captain for the 5200 block of Kensington Avenue, understands her role as part of a legacy of effective neighborhood organizing and community building. As part of a documentary project, Sherri has heard the oral passing down of stories from folks who have been in the neighborhood since the 50’s,

> One of the things that they said was that they stayed in their own Academy, or Fountain Park, or West End neighborhood because there was this comaradarie that they had. They felt safe in the neighborhood. That’s kind of how we feel now. COVID was bittersweet, but with these resources it really brought people together. And I thank you all for giving us this opportunity. It really went a long way.

NEIGHBORHOOD SOLIDARITY FUND
in the ACADEMY/SHERMAN PARK NEIGHBORHOOD

“We have a very active block unit and we created a campaign called, ‘Kensington Cares’ and we took it a step further. We went all the way down to Kingshighway and created a phone tree with the neighborhoods. With all the isolation this helped us figure out what people needed. There were folks who needed energy assistance, people who had lost their jobs, who got laid off from the Hyatt Hotel. We were able to connect them to resources. We have a great relationship with the West End, Cornerstone, the West End Neighbors, Lisa, Tonnie, Monique, Fountain Park, Vandenenter, the Ville, Dutchtown, everybody up and down Delmar, the Makerspace. We have relationships with other neighborhoods, so therefore, we are able to share those resources and knowledge.”

> When you refer someone to a resource, you’re not just talking a lot of hot air, just to get them off your phone. They get results! They get results and they are really happy about that.

Sherri is keen on how a small investment in connectivity can pay off in huge ways for people. Their lives are improved through the solidarity that folks show to one another. Link here to our conversation.

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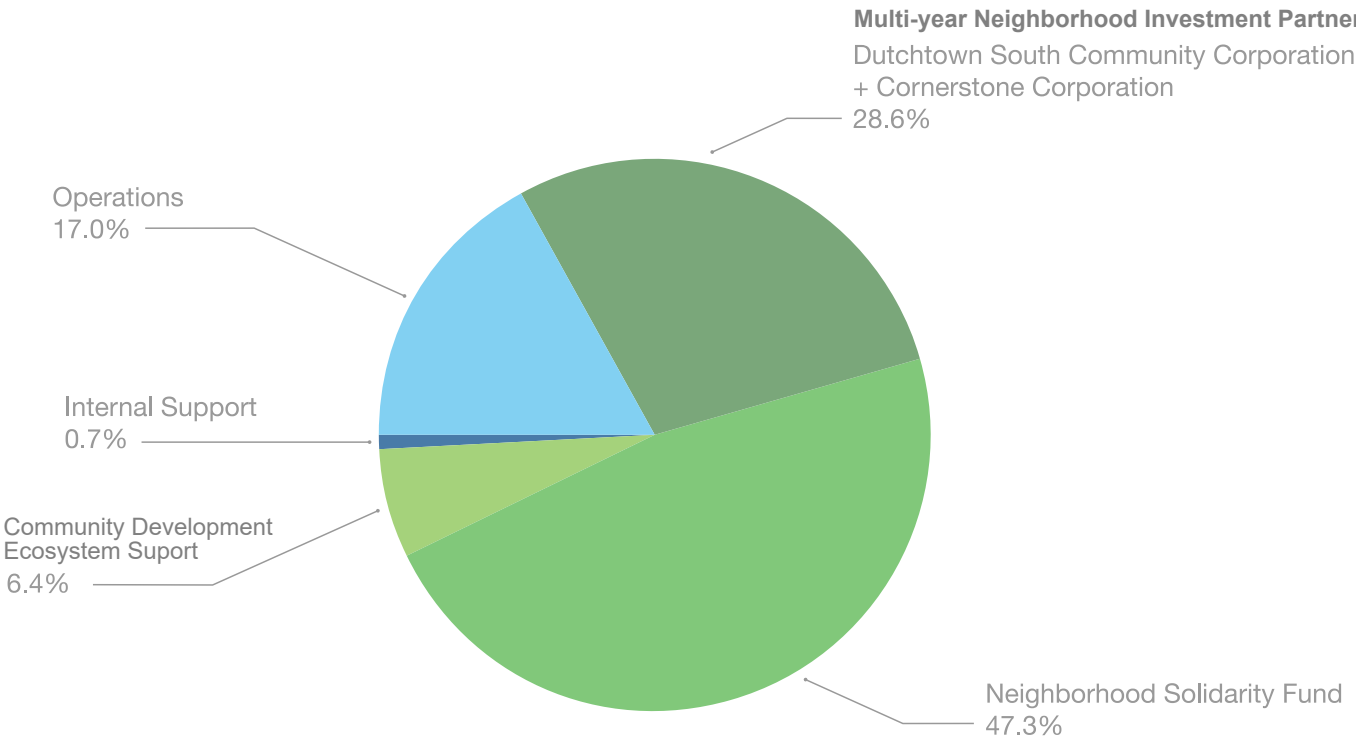
Sharing the Fiscal Picture



External with STL Community + Ecosystem

Nieghborhood Solidarity Fund	$819,749.00 incl. 3rd party TA costs
DSCC + Cornerstone	$495,787.50
Systems Support	$111,641.25
External Total	$1,427,177.75

Internal @ Invest STL

Operations	$294,489.45
Internal Support	$11,400.00
Internal Total	$305,889.45
Total	$1,733,067.20

LEADERSHIP BOARD MEMBERS

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St. Louis Community Foundation

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