



Reflections on 2025: Responsive + Intentional

Since setting our 20-year organizational clock in 2022 to sunset Invest STL by 2042, we have taken deliberate and intentional action to advance people-centered, place-based investments that foster system-level change in St. Louis communities affected by disinvestment and systemic anti-Black racism.

When 2025 began, we were rounding home on the first phase – **“Activate + Prepare”** – of our 20-year timeline to lay our organizational foundation. It was to be a final year of slow and steady, marked by calm and clarity. But 2025 had much, much more in mind and propelled us into our second stage – **“Experiment + Model”** – which requires the rapid testing of ideas and formation of networks. Our organization remains committed to rigorous self-examination and openly sharing our organizational learnings. This reflection highlights a few key lessons learned and bright spots experienced along the way.

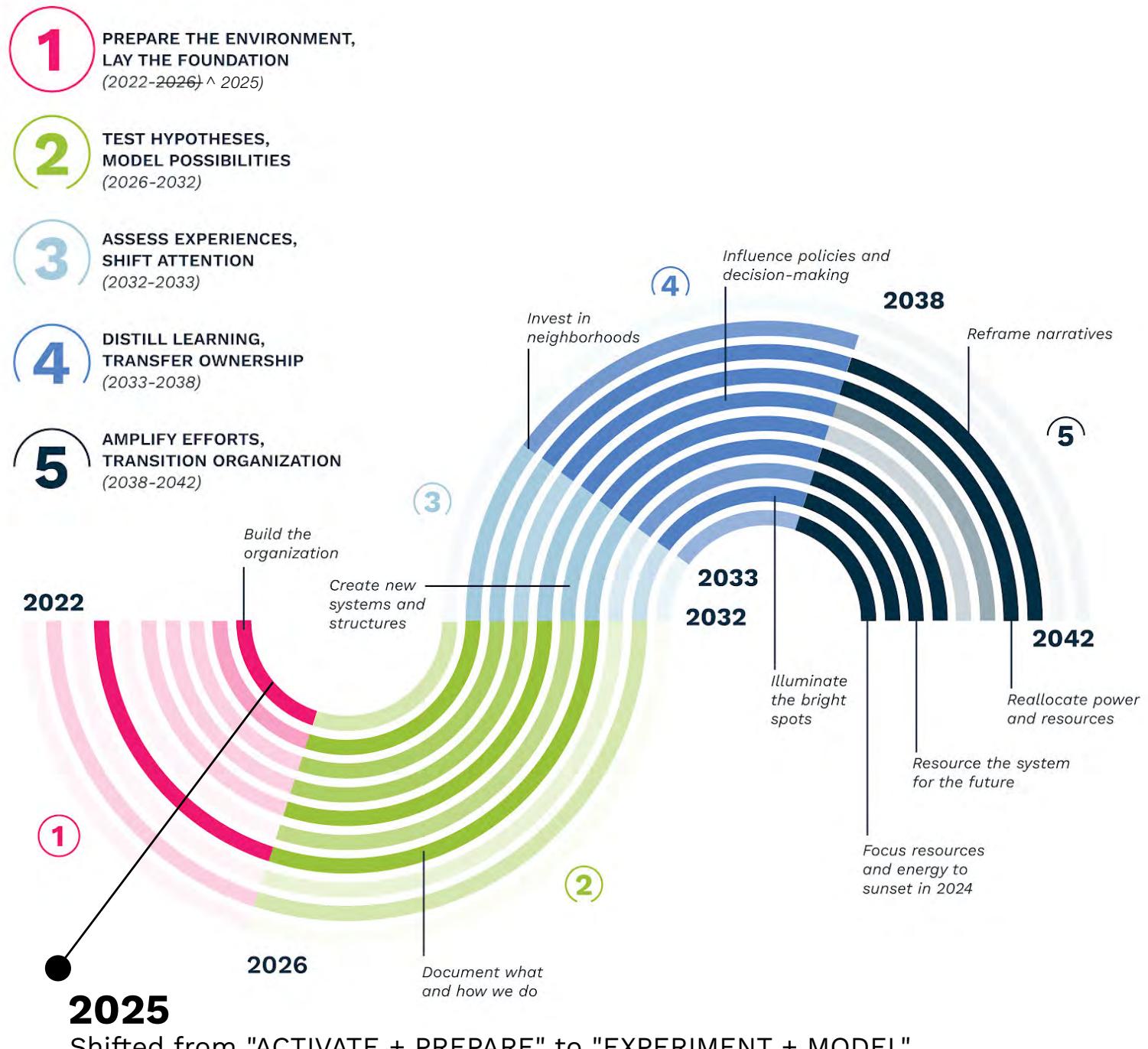
In 2025, we gained traction by:

- Developing a deep understanding of how the community-economic development ecosystem is structured and functions, including the political processes that either enable or impede scaling resident-led organizing and action, as well as expanding the regional practice of place-based investing.
- Sharing our tools and insights across the region’s urban core and, where relevant and feasible, nationally, to increase accessibility and impact.
- Strengthening and leveraging critical relationships that positioned us to respond quickly and effectively in the aftermath of the May 16 tornado.

Every St. Louis neighborhood is a chosen place to live, raise children, and grow old.

Our 20-Year Theory of Change

We're focusing our resources and energy to build a thriving ecosystem of leaders, organizations, and neighborhoods to deliver on this vision in one generation and sunset Invest STL by 2042.



Shifted from "ACTIVATE + PREPARE" to "EXPERIMENT + MODEL"

Operations

Our Operations team designs and maintains efficient, effective internal practices and processes that optimize our human, financial, and intellectual resources in support of our mission and vision.

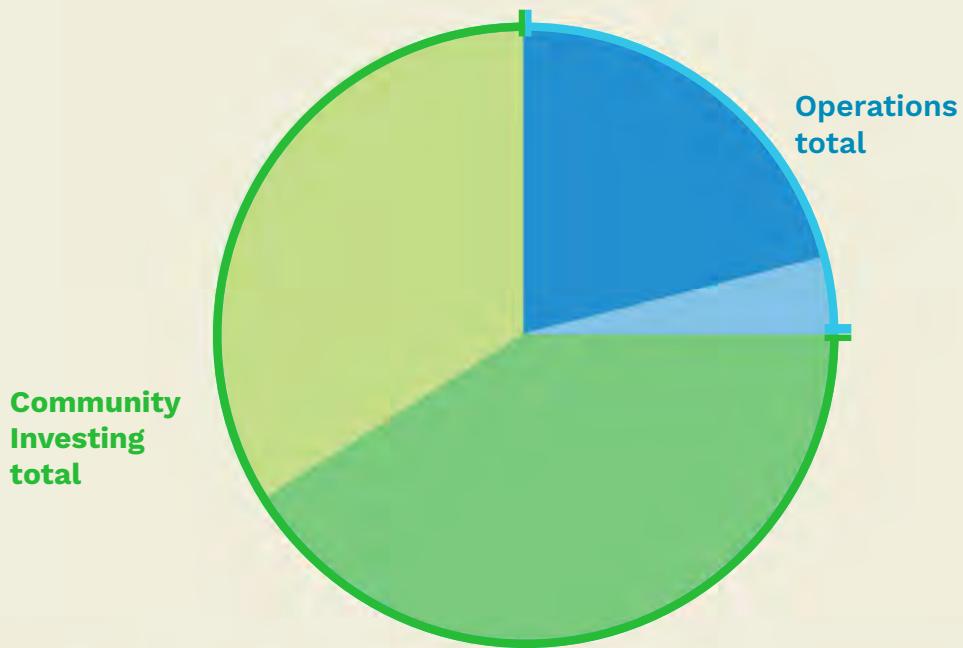
LEARNED + NAVIGATED

- Integrated findings from our first financial audit to further build out our practices and processes, while updating internal controls and standards

BRIGHT SPOTS

- Grew team to 20, staffing each of our five work teams with at least three members
- Organized six team learning days that embedded us in Lewis Place and Fountain Park, Carr Square and Columbus Square, St. Louis Place, Lansdowne in East St. Louis, Wellston, and University City's 3rd Ward. We gained greater understanding about St. Louis City's zoning and planning history and current reforms while growing our practice in principled struggle.

2025 - Total Expenses: \$9,261,130



Operations - \$2,310,491 (25%)
Staff - \$1,919,450 (21%)

Community Investments - \$6,950,638 (75%)
Tornado Response - \$4,160,368 (45%)

Neighborhood Investing

Our Neighborhood Investing team moves in solidarity with the people's vision for the neighborhoods we invest in. The team serves as a trusted "guide on the side" and primary steward for our deep, multi-year investments in a growing constellation of neighborhoods.

LEARNED + NAVIGATED

- Initiating new practices with investees and leaning on past practices, our guiding principles, and emergent understanding to do so in ways that foster mutual accountability and care while holding the neighborhood and its people at the center of our why

BRIGHT SPOTS

- For the first time since 2018, initiated investments in two new neighborhood clusters: The Ville/Greater Ville/Kingsway East (St. Louis City) and University City 3rd Ward neighborhoods (St. Louis County)
- Supported neighborhood partners toward improved governance and collaboration for plan implementation by introducing shared practices and consistent meeting and communication processes, such as building consensus and how to make decisions when consensus isn't possible

Our Neighborhood Investing Investees:

- West End/Visitation Park: [Cornerstone Corporation](#), [weCollab](#)
- Dutchtown/Marine Villa/Gravois Park/Benton Park West: [Dutchtown South Community Corporation \(DSCC\)](#)
- The Ville/Greater Ville/Kingsway East: [4theVille](#), [Northside Community Housing, Inc. \(NCHI\)](#), [Kingsville Corporation](#)
- University City 3rd Ward: [Sustainable Housing & Equitable Development \(SHED\)](#)



System Investing

Our System Investing team guides systems-focused development and convening, and supports the capture and sharing of internal and programmatic learning.

LEARNED + NAVIGATED

- Understanding the best methods to pull together investments for collectives, not just individual organizations
- Modeled the process for and guided a collective to make decisions by consensus

BRIGHT SPOTS

- Convened the Community Development Funders Forum to initiate the first round of community investments from aggregated funds (Total investment was \$140,000)
- Continued supporting resident groups from 55+ neighborhoods by activating their neighbors and celebrating their agency through the Small Dollars Action Fund (SDAF)
Partner: Saint Louis Association of Community Organizations (SLACO)

Our Systems Investing Investees:

Community Builders Network, North Newstead Association, Academy-Sherman Park Neighborhood Association (ASPNA), Advocating for the Community, Neighbors Informing The Community, Cahill House Tenant Association, The Blumeyer Village Tenant Association, Dutchtown Main Streets, People's Joy Parade, 63137 Collective, ACORN (Across Cherokee Organizing Residents and Neighbors) Informal Collective, 3900 Greer Block Unit, We Kin'Folk: Kinloch Coalition, Marine Villa Neighborhood Association, Mark Twain Neighborhood Association, Mark Twain Neighbors Block Unit 1831F, Wellness Collective, Town of Norwood Court (TONC) Residents, O'Fallon Informal Collective, Penrose Neighborhood Community Association (PNCA), St Louis Place Informal Collective, Garden Heights Neighborhood Association, West End Informal Collective, 5000 Vernon Neighbors, Federation Block Unit #274, Lynfield Place Collective Residents, The Resource Line, Northside Independent Neighborhood Association (NINA), Project Sneakernet, Fairground Neighborhood Revitalization Organization, Busy Bee History, Glasgow Village Neighbors, Group Frank/Chin, Greendale Neighborhood Association, The Village of Hanley Hills Neighborhood Watch Association, 19th Street Federation Block Unit, Be The Change, Informal Wellness Collective, Euclid Connection Informal Collaborative, Northside Scattered Site Informal Collective, Mount Pleasant Neighborhood Association (MPNA), Community Chess Night With Courtney Chess Club, Bridging Generations: Intergenerational Engagement and Senior Support (Block unit 1656), O'Fallon Community Developing Organization, O'Fallon Park Community Informal Collective, Northside Collective, Old North St. Louis Restoration Group, Village of Pasadena Park Informal Collective, Clinton Peabody TAB, Penrose Park Proud, Walnut Park West Block Challengers



Policy Piloting + Influencing

Our Policy Piloting + Influencing team designs and implements initiatives to test ideas that have the potential to advance placekeeping and wealth building for long-term residents, with a focus on investing directly in people.

LEARNED + NAVIGATED

- Placing new pilots on hold as we leveraged our previous learnings to inform broader tornado response efforts
- Examining emerging initiatives through the lens of post-tornado realities and adjusting our approach for the relevancy and urgency required

BRIGHT SPOT

- Developed and released the *Rooted Powerbook*, a practical and replicable roadmap for communities to address displacement, build long-term wealth, and boost economic mobility. The *Rooted Powerbook* is based on learnings from our three-year Rooted: Cultivating Black Wealth in Place pilot. Early results and impact across neighborhood and resident participants indicate the *Rooted* model has the potential to help communities around the country advance long-term wealth-building strategies at scale. Download the powerbook [here](#).

Partners: [JEME](#), [Third Space Action Lab](#)



Reframing Narratives + Communications

Our Narrative Reframing + Communications team shapes how we tell our story and share our work, collaborating across our organization to gather, weave together, and amplify the lived experiences of our neighborhood partners and communities.

LEARNED + NAVIGATED

- Building and navigating media partnerships, relationships, and collaborations to ensure narratives are grounded with community and resident lenses
- Balancing internal team collaboration needs, external outputs, and Narrative + Communications Team-led projects

BRIGHT SPOTS

- Activated a [Pop-up Storytelling Lounge at Trap Run](#) in The Ville to collect visions for the future + preview an example of future neighborhood storytelling practice engagements
Partners: [4theVille](#), [This Isn't My Degree Studios](#)
- Shared stories and participated in "[Through Oz](#)" gallery exhibit, which encouraged attendees to explore the role of fantasy and joy in times of upheaval



PHOTOGRAPHY ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We are deeply grateful to the following photographers whose work appears throughout this reflection. Their images capture moments, people, and places with care and intention, helping tell a fuller story of the communities and partners who shape this work. We are thankful for their talent, trust, and willingness to share their perspective.

[Kadin Houston](#), [Lance Thurman](#), [This Isn't My Degree Studios](#), [Tyler Small](#), and [Invest STL team members](#)

Our Response to the May 16 Tornado

On May 16, 2025, a devastating EF-3 tornado tore through the City of St. Louis. Neighborhoods north of Delmar Blvd. — on the shortchanged side of the city's longstanding dividing line between where large investment and opportunity are abundant and where they are withheld from — bore the brunt of the destruction. Homes in 19 Northside neighborhoods were devastated: roofs torn off, trees uprooted, and entire structures rendered uninhabitable.

We quickly responded and stood in the gap, along with other Black-led, community-based organizations such as [Cornerstone Corporation](#), [Dream Builders 4 Equity](#), [4theVille](#), [314 Oasis](#), and [The People's Response](#) via [Action St. Louis](#) and [ForTheCultureSTL](#).

We practiced our principles of being guided by an activist spirit while mobilizing institutional resources and acting with urgency to drive investment in Legacy Black St. Louis neighborhoods impacted by the storm. We:

- Organized and deployed our team to 'neighbor' and support tornado recovery efforts in North City, with key locations in The Ville and West End. **We served 4,500+ families with construction materials, cleaning and hygiene supplies, food, water, and more; stabilized 360+ homes in North St. Louis City (tarped, boarded, and light shoring); and mobilized 660+ volunteers and donors across St. Louis.** Our support also included messaging, media coordination, government relations, and information sharing, and we leveraged collaborative partnerships and relationships to confront the types of stories and narratives shared in the aftermath of the May 16 tornado.

Partners: [4theVille](#), [Dream Builders 4 Equity](#), [The People's Response](#) via [Action St. Louis](#) and [ForTheCultureSTL](#), [Cornerstone Corporation](#), [Key Strategic Group](#)



Our Response to the May 16 Tornado

- Created and launched [The Northside Resilience Fund](#) direct cash assistance initiative — a grant that provided **\$3,000 in direct, unrestricted emergency funds to 1,378 North St. Louis City households** displaced or at risk of displacement due to the tornado. A total of \$4,134,000 in cash assistance was distributed.

Partners + Contributors: [Berges](#), [Boniface Foundation](#), [Deaconess Foundation](#), [Community Health Workers Coalition](#), [Fitz's](#), [Franciscan Sisters of Mary](#), [Illinois Community Power Fund](#), [James S. McDonnell Foundation](#), [LeadBlack](#), [Marillac](#), [Rio Vista Foundation](#), [Sow Joy Fund](#), [St. Louis Realtors Fund](#), [St. Louis Community Foundation](#), [The People's Response via Action St. Louis](#) and [ForTheCultureSTL](#), [Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis](#), [US Bank](#), [Wells Fargo](#), [William T. Kemper Foundation](#) and 100+ contributors

- Conducted outreach to over **1,500** people and supported **109** households in accessing their deeds for property ownership validation after the tornado

Partners: [Cornerstone Corporation](#), [North Newstead Association](#), [Northside Community Housing, Inc \(NCHI\)](#), [Park Central Development](#), [St. Louis City Deeds Office](#), [Tabernacle CDC](#)

- Made more Small Dollars Action Fund funding available to applicants living in eligible May 16 tornado-impacted neighborhoods to support residents in responding to tornado-related community-building needs

Partner: [Saint Louis Association of Community Organizations \(SLACO\)](#)





people | power | place | systems

reflections *On* 2025

Looking Ahead

In 2026, we are organizing for the careful and persistent efforts of Phase 1 to spark a surge of initiatives across our region, exploring new ways to build wealth, amplify power, and strengthen collective action — benefiting Legacy Black neighborhoods and beyond. Stay connected and engaged with us on this journey!

Stay Engaged

If you'd like regular updates on Invest STL, please check out our News + Updates page: <https://www.investstl.org/news-updates>.

If you have direct questions or feedback, contact: info@investstl.org.

For media inquiries, please contact: apotter@investstl.org.

Our Mission

Invest STL facilitates investment in the power of people and their neighborhoods to develop communities of justice and opportunity in places that continue to endure the legacy of systemic anti-Black racism.

Our Investment Areas

- Neighborhood Investing
- System Investing
- Policy Piloting + Influencing
- Reframing Narratives

Our 20-Year Theory of Change

Our 20-Year Theory of Change focuses our resources and energy to build a thriving ecosystem of leaders, organizations, and neighborhoods to deliver on this vision in one generation and sunset Invest STL by 2042.

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