

Investing in Detroit

Since our founding in Michigan in 1936, we have been deeply committed to Detroit. From supporting the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and the Detroit Institute of Arts in the 1940s to committing \$125 million over 15 years to the city's 2014 Grand Bargain, our aspirations and work are uniquely rooted in our history there to ensure that the city is prosperous, equitable, and sustainable.

After Detroit filed for the largest municipal bankruptcy in American history in 2013, we are continuing our work with the city to rebuild and secure a better future for its residents by preserving affordable housing, strengthening civic engagement, and creating opportunity for all. We support policies and reforms that disrupt entrenched racial and class inequities at city and state levels, and work with government, philanthropies, business, and civil society across Michigan to promote collaborative partnerships to rebuild a thriving, more just city and region.

Portfolio Snapshot

Annual Budget
\$13 million

Grantees
77

BUILD Budget
\$5 million

BUILD Grantees
3

The Challenge

Filing for bankruptcy allowed Detroit to invest \$1.7 billion into improving ineffective city services. Despite this, it is still experiencing uneven economic growth and development, exacerbating long-term racial, class, and economic tensions that the city's power brokers—both public and private—have never fully addressed.

Many Detroiters, particularly longtime black residents, are at risk of further marginalization as the city continues its recovery. Underinvestment in Detroit's low-income areas has reduced black homeownership and left **30 percent of the city's housing stock vacant**. The city's **median income has steadily declined over the past 15 years**, and almost half of its residents live at or below the poverty line. And yet the city's downtown area—a mere 7.2 square miles of Detroit's almost 139 square miles—has received almost **\$5 billion** in investments, creating new businesses and housing for some but deepening the racial and geographic disparities for low-income residents.

While a growing number of local nonprofit leaders and organizations have called for more equitable recovery efforts, there is significant underinvestment in organizations and coalitions led by people of color and the communities closest to the issues at hand. The philanthropic, public, and private sectors historically have also approached these issues in fragmented ways, failing to collaborate effectively with local organizations to advance the city's and state's goals of a prosperous recovery. As a result, Detroit has made limited progress in addressing its historic racial and economic inequalities.

The Opportunity

Detroit has received more local, national, and global investments than any city of its size in the country since its bankruptcy. As interest from institutional and private investors continues, the city is at a critical moment to strengthen partnerships across the philanthropic, public, and private sectors to advance equitable growth and racial equity. We work to ensure that these investments work better together to benefit all Detroiters, no matter which neighborhood they're born into.

Recent local and regional government appointments, as well as increased civic leadership among Detroiters, have sparked new momentum toward a democracy that fully represents all communities across the state. A growing number of local leaders, organizations, and networks are

partnering across the city's and state's historically divisive lines to push reforms that expand voting rights, economic mobility, immigrant rights, and racial and disability justice for residents who face the greatest barriers to prosperity.

Our Aim and Approach

We aim to support Detroit's leaders, residents, and businesses as they strive to transform the city and the state of Michigan into a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable place where everyone thrives. We focus on:

- **Community-based leadership and mobilizing.** We support civic engagement efforts that nurture local leadership, build community power, and mobilize voices that know best how to rebuild Detroit and reform Michigan. By putting the community at the center, the city's systems can be reimagined to better serve all residents and drive local and state policy reforms.
- **Affordable housing and equitable development.** We fund local, regional, and national efforts to preserve affordable housing and promote more equitable development across the state. We work with grassroots and community organizations that empower Detroiters to hold city government and developers accountable, so they deliver inclusive housing policies and practices that prevent foreclosures and displacement and make housing opportunities accessible to everyone.
- **Shifting the narrative through journalism, creative arts, and storytelling.** We help build the capacity of community organizations to tell more balanced, locally driven narratives that put activists, advocates, and grassroots efforts at the center of Detroit's story of equitable recovery rather than just businesses and corporate players.

- **Strategic partnerships across sectors.** We build partnerships across the philanthropic, public, and private sectors, bringing together civic leaders, funders, and other stakeholders to promote greater coordination in creating transformational change in Detroit and across Michigan. We work to develop coordinated funding strategies with other investors, including private foundations, corporate donors, and state agencies, that share our vision for equity and inclusion.

Our Impact

We work to create a sustainable social justice ecosystem in Detroit that builds community power and leads to innovative reforms in affordable housing, civic engagement, and economic development by influencing key stakeholders. We are focused on three outcomes:

- **Powerful, coordinated coalition-building.** Local, regional, and statewide organizations will join forces with affected communities to build their capacity, increase civic engagement, and develop integrated strategies that advance progressive policy change to reduce inequality in Detroit and Michigan.
- **Affordable and equitable housing for all.** Low-income residents will have equitable access to safe, high-quality affordable housing in diverse, thriving neighborhoods across Detroit. Housing and land use policies will promote security for all and help reduce historical racial and economic disparities.
- **Strong partnerships and investments across sectors.** Building partnerships across the philanthropic, public, and private sectors locally and nationally will align investments across programs and initiatives to advance equity and inclusion in Detroit and Michigan.

Grantee Snapshot

Providing legal support to racial justice movements

The Detroit Justice Center (DJC) is a nonprofit law firm that works to reduce poverty, end over-criminalization and mass incarceration, and build thriving communities. DJC has helped expunge criminal records for hundreds of Detroiters and supported efforts by Detroit residents advocating for alternatives to a new Wayne County jail, including investments in the community and its people. DJC surveyed Detroiters at various community events to provide their definition of safety, and held a design summit for young residents to envision the development of community resources in lieu of a new jail. DJC has also partnered with other legal organizations to create the Detroit Coordinated Defense Coalition, which provides legal support to protestors arrested in response to 2020's fatal police shootings and the Covid-19 pandemic.

Photo: Detroit Justice Center

