



Centre for
Public Impact
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Earned Legitimacy Learning Cohort

Impact report

Optimized for text-to-speech.

About the Centre for Public Impact

At the Centre for Public Impact, we believe in the potential of government to bring about better outcomes for people. Yet, we have found that the systems, structures, and processes of government today are often not set up to respond to the complex challenges we face as a society. That's why we have an emerging vision to reimagine government so that it works for everyone.

A global not-for-profit organisation founded by the Boston Consulting Group, we act as a learning partner for governments, public servants, and the diverse network of changemakers who are leading the charge to reimagine government. We work with them to hold space to collectively make sense of the complex challenges we face and drive meaningful change through learning and experimentation.

This work was led by the North America Legitimacy team, including Jorge Fanjul, Naja Nelson, Brian Zuluaga, Alejandra Montoya, Saumya Shruti, and John Burgoyne, with support from Elysa Neumann and Megan Humes.



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Acknowledgments

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This work would not have been possible without the humble, equitable, accountable, open-minded, and curious Cohort members from core teams in Carlton County, MN; Detroit, MI; Harris County, TX; and Salt Lake City, UT. Thank you for the opportunity to learn alongside you!

Carlton County, Minnesota

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Kaletta Lynch (Government Lead), Weston Clark (Community Lead), Ashley Cleveland, Brijette Williams, Eva Lopez, Luke Allen, Mayara Lima, Moana Uluave-Hafoka, Olosaa Solovi Jr, Yvette Zayas

Our thought partners

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Thank you all for giving the Earned Legitimacy Learning Cohort (ELLC) the great gift of knowledge!

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The 2021-2022 Earned Legitimacy Learning Cohort

Foreword by Mayor Erin Mendenhall

As local governments across the nation continue to navigate the demanding challenges and consequences of COVID-19, public servants have also been tasked with another responsibility: maintaining and restoring trust in our public institution's ability to serve its residents. With this in mind, last year our city participated in the Earned Legitimacy Learning Cohort with an ambition to strengthen the relationship between our local government and communities most impacted by police activity.

Our Salt Lake City team, which consisted of colleagues in my office and individuals from other departments across the city (ex. Parks and Public Lands & the Police Department) primarily focused on public safety in the program. Building on our current initiatives, such as the [Racial Equity in Policing Commission](#), our team was tasked with engaging communities to cocreate policy solutions to the history (past and present) of systemic racism in policing. By embracing values such as equity, open-mindedness, humility, accountability, and curiosity, we were able to develop solutions alongside communities our government has historically harmed.

Notably, many residents shared ideas that are already being implemented by our city government. This has led me to ponder on both the accessibility of our government services, as well as how effectively we are communicating those services to the public. However, many residents also came up with brilliant, novel ideas to solve challenges in policing, such as mental health de-escalation training for law enforcement. In centering residents through the Earned Legitimacy program, we were able to arrive at policy recommendations that are designed for the needs of residents and we were also able to demystify government services by highlighting active programs that can serve their communities.



I'm proud of the hard work the City has done to build trust and legitimacy with communities through community navigators, trusted community organizations, and by ensuring that the City actively listens and asks more open-ended questions to provide exactly what communities need instead of assuming what they want. We identified more creative, realistic, and timely community outreach strategies that allow for us to engage with the public in a more convenient way that is less disruptive to their personal and daily lives.

In hearing about the successes of the Earned Legitimacy Learning Cohort, I am most hopeful for the continued ability to empower residents and collaborate on the ideas they have for a more equitable tomorrow. Oftentimes, in government we ask residents for input, but stop short of truly sharing power with the community and implementing policy alongside those who will most benefit. I am excited to see the toolkits and mindsets of Earned Legitimacy permeate throughout Salt Lake City government and I appreciate my team's commitment to championing these values throughout their public service.

Sincerely,

Mayor Erin Mendenhall



Executive summary

Government undoubtedly operates best when both residents and government officials work together to overcome their most pressing policy obstacles. However, the relationship between Americans and the government has [deteriorated substantially in the last 50 years](#), leaving many feeling that the government has ignored, or even worked against, their best interests. The COVID-19 pandemic only exacerbated these feelings. The pandemic made it clear that the government's ways of doing things had failed residents by neglecting to address the stark disparities that exist amongst the American people, particularly marginalized groups.

Fortunately, when it comes to local government, Americans feel differently, with [recent polling showing](#) that municipal government systems have remained the most trusted level of government in the nation. The Centre for Public Impact (CPI) saw this as an opportunity to help rebuild and foster trust between the government and the people it serves. The Earned Legitimacy Learning Cohort (ELLC) was developed as a 10-week pilot program to bring together cities and communities across the country to help repair relationships through acknowledging past wrongs and showing a commitment to confront present-day justice and civil rights issues.

CPI served as a learning partner for the ELLC by helping program participants - made up of government officials, staff, community leaders, and residents - learn, listen, and adapt as they built new skills and deepened their relationships with each other. To create an environment conducive to learning, CPI helped the Cohort focus on centering community perspectives and sharing power with those closest to impacted communities. Through the introduction of cocreation techniques and tools, and by emphasizing the values of humility, openness, equity, curiosity, and accountability, participants were able to test and learn more trusted public engagement strategies alongside community residents.





Curiosity: We embrace a learning mindset, intentionally testing our assumptions and remaining open to adaptation based on what we learn.



Open-mindedness: We are open-minded and non-judgemental; we intentionally seek out perspectives that are different than our own and embrace failures as opportunities to learn and grow.



Humility: We recognize our limitations, do not position ourselves as the expert or holder of all knowledge, and admit when we are wrong.



Accountability: We are accountable to the communities who we intentionally center throughout this work and are willing to accept responsibility for our actions that impact them.



Equity: We commit to taking measures to ensure everyone has access to the same opportunities; we strive to correct systemic imbalances.

The ELLC's focus on relationship building and skill cultivation among program members helped participating municipalities reimagine their already existing public engagement systems. Through the program, these governments began the work of reaching a greater degree of community-driven impact through increased trust. Program impact highlights included:

- **42 Cohort members** engaged **50+ community members** to generate **250+ ideas**;
- **100% of participants** agreed they **could apply what they learned** over the past 10 weeks in the Cohort to have a greater impact in their work beyond the program;
- **93% of participants** agreed they **learned how to foster trusting relationships** between government and communities so that they can work openly and effectively together through their participation in this program;
- **93% of participants** agreed they **would recommend the program to a colleague**.

This report outlines CPI's learnings after the inaugural ELLC. A section on the impact of the program details the response by participants and the effects it had on their work. Furthermore, four case studies are included that dive into the programs of the municipalities CPI partnered with. The case studies discuss the scope of each city/county's work throughout the ELLC.



Introduction

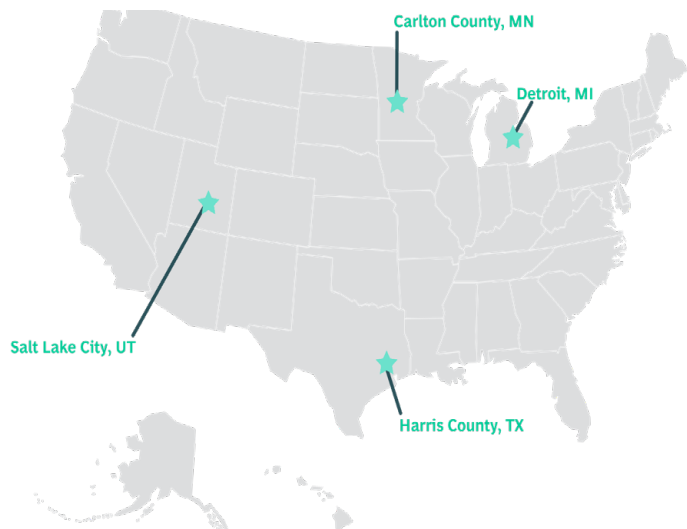
What is earned legitimacy?

Why earned legitimacy? What does it mean? Are you saying that government is not legitimate? These are all questions that have been posed to the Centre for Public Impact (CPI) upon developing the Earned Legitimacy Learning Cohort (ELLC). CPI's position is simple: a government is arguably only legitimate if it has the support of the people it purports to serve, and that support is invariably tied to the amount of trust the people feel for their government. A more legitimate government system is one where the governed feel a higher degree of trust towards those in power and the existing systems that maintain that power. Earned legitimacy refers to the admission that the government must work tirelessly with its people to increase community trust, continuously demonstrate its value in people's lives, and maintain the very promise of democracy.

Our inaugural Cohort

The ELLC pilot program took place in two cities (Detroit, Michigan and Salt Lake City, Utah) and two counties (Carlton County, Minnesota and Harris County, Texas). In developing this inaugural Cohort, CPI considered a wide range of factors, including population size, geography, ethnic and racial makeup, and the city's or county's socioeconomic status. Each city or county within the Cohort developed a core team of community leaders, local government staff, and other local actors (e.g. community foundations, academic, and local private sector leaders). Each city or county was partnered with a CPI Learning Liaison, who acted as coaches for the teams. Core teams then selected their own issue area of focus.

In the end, Detroit chose to focus on partnering with the disability community, Salt Lake City focused on policing in communities of color, Carlton County focused on increasing community belonging, and



Harris County focused on homelessness and affordable housing. ELLC culminated in a capstone project consisting of their individual case studies, which were then presented to other local government leaders and to the community as a whole for consideration.

Our methodology and approach

CPI focused on two complementary sets of practices for the ELLC: sensemaking and action-learning. [Sensemaking](#) refers to learning by creating space for listening, reflection, and exploration of meaning beyond the usual boundaries within which governments operate daily. Action-learning is adopting an experimental mindset regarding day-to-day activities - trying out new approaches, embracing that some of these approaches will fail, and seeking to use these failures to learn and improve your next attempt. Together, sensemaking and action-learning allow for innovative approaches to establishing new pathways toward community cocreation. These new opportunities for transformation came about when participants not only worked to develop new learnings but were then able to use them to better engage with community residents.

The purpose of the Earned Legitimacy Learning Cohort impact report is to share the findings from the program in a way that helps inform and excite. As a [learning partner](#), CPI's role is to enable other organizations to build their own capacity to learn. For the ELLC, learning was focused on Government Legitimacy - the relationship between government and the people it serves.

When this relationship is strong, government and people can work together more effectively to address community needs. The ELLC focuses on how the government can strengthen this relationship by examining where power sits, sharing power, and reimagining more systems. CPI works to help partners hold themselves accountable for their learnings and be able to track, measure, and share the impact of those learnings. With a special focus on serving as an organizer during the ELLC, CPI helped build relationships that enabled cocreation and shared learning.



Our impact

CPI sought to help local governments foster stronger and more trusting relationships with communities, ultimately increasing government legitimacy. Quantitative and qualitative data were gathered throughout the inaugural Learning Cohort to assess the impact of ELLC's work. CPI collected data from Zoom polls, a baseline survey, and an end-of-program survey assessing each Cohort member's comfort with these key skills. Qualitative data consisted of participants' reflections, experiences, and feedback.

Demographics and outreach

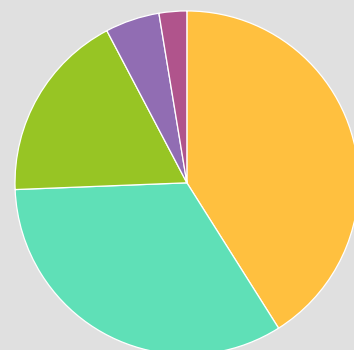
The ELLC hosted a diverse group of public servants, government, and local community leaders. The ELLC consisted of 42 members from Harris County, Texas; Carlton County, Minnesota; Salt Lake City, Utah; and Detroit, Michigan.

Data was gathered from the baseline survey conducted at the beginning of the program.¹ Having a racial and gender diverse Cohort was critical for creating a safe space for all members to build reconciliatory relationships between local governments and communities. Similarly, having a trusting and empathetic environment was critical for the core team to provide each other unbiased feedback and work together.

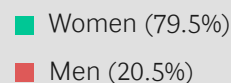
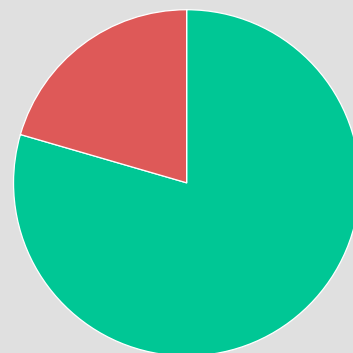
Additionally, core teams held cocreation sessions where they brainstormed with community members about solutions for local issues. In total, the 42 Cohort members, representing government and community leaders from our two cities and two counties, **engaged 50+ community members** to generate **250+ ideas focused on building a stronger relationship between government and community**.

1. 39 of 42 participants completed the baseline survey.

Races represented in ELLC



Genders represented in ELLC



Participant outcomes

Zoom polls, a baseline survey, and an end-of-program survey were conducted for the duration of the program. These assessments aimed to understand how Cohort participants were feeling about the program and evaluate their growth. The Zoom Polls conducted from week five to week ten of the program surfaced the following results:

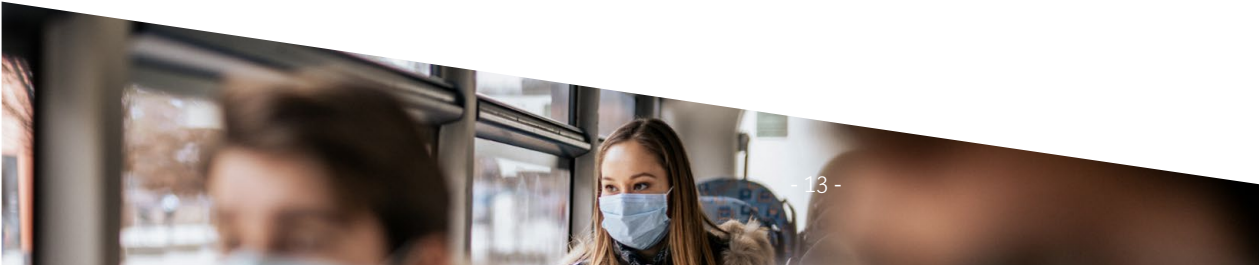


Week five to week ten of the Earned Legitimacy Learning Cohort saw an average of 13.6 people respond. While each Cohort-wide session did not have full attendance, the responses to the Zoom poll surveys demonstrate that the Cohort-wide sessions were effective in enabling learning that participants could apply to their work.

Furthermore, participants began to use the tools taught during the program in their daily work.

“As the first Chief Equity Officer for Salt Lake City, I have already started encouraging my new team to utilize asset and systems mapping, and community ideation. Once we use these tools to identify where power currently lies, those who are involved, and those who are missing or lack access, we can then move forward to increase engagement with very focused groups. The intention is to build a safe space for these focused groups and actively listen to establish the needs of the group... We (government employees) must show up and be present with clear intentions, honesty, acknowledgment of past hurts, and listening ears as the first step to humanize and demystify.”

-Kaletta Lynch, Chief Equity Officer for Salt Lake City



“Great information was received through the community listening sessions and interviews. We identified a need for people to be heard.”

-Susan Zmyslony, Community Member, Carlton County

A majority of the participants found CPI’s program beneficial, indicating that the Learning Cohort model has proven effective in enabling learning that leads to greater impact in government and the community.

Impact in the policy space

The final capstone presentation to government leaders outside of the program was an important tool for creating policy change in each municipality. The learnings throughout the program, coupled with the team’s government experience and focus, molded their final projects, policy suggestions, and budget prioritization.

Carlton County’s focus on connecting with its rural communities culminated in a presentation to their County Board where they walked through some of their recommendations. These recommendations included required Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) training for all government employees, as well as providing \$10,000 in funding to support locally-driven projects that incentivize residents to take a leading role in building stronger, more vibrant communities. Both of these proposals were voted on and approved by the County Board, the first step in creating a more legitimate government for marginalized communities.

Next, Detroit, Michigan’s core team presented their final capstone project to the Director of Human Resources for the city and the Chief of Staff for Detroit’s Mayor. The Detroit team left this meeting with an agreement to connect with other departments that interact with the disability community to ideate and cement ideas that would reduce accessibility barriers throughout the city.

Following that, Harris County presented their work to the Commissioners Court of Harris County and were able to discuss both the process of the ELLC, along with the steps they took to host community

listening sessions while accommodating for transportation needs and technology access needs. Harris County continues to brainstorm ideas for earning legitimacy and will meet with the Commissioners Court in a couple of months.



Finally, Salt Lake City's core team met with Mayor Mendenhall to discuss the results of this 10-week learning process. The core team and Mayor agreed to further investigate interest in leading a systems map exercise with department leads. They also agreed to schedule a follow-up conversation to discuss community coffee chats and how that can be worked into the city budget. These coffee chats would be a way for SLC government officials and staff to connect with community members on a personal level.

Finishing the program with the policy recommendations fulfilled ELLC's goal of creating promising solutions to address the challenges communities face. Local government participants also developed different strategies to build legitimacy within their own remits. The first steps that Cohort members took to bring systemic change underscore the impact that CPI's ELLC had on these four municipalities.

The themes of earned legitimacy

As core team members learned about earning legitimacy with their community of focus, CPI synthesized several themes that frequently arose during the program. These themes highlight the lessons that were most important to Cohort members for understanding how to earn legitimacy with their community.

Humanizing and demystifying government	Humanizing government means allowing the community to see the people behind the closed doors of government. Demystifying or making government more transparent is helpful to marginalized groups because it makes government programs and resources more known to them. By increasing awareness of available services, the government is able to create stronger relationships with communities.
Centering residents in governmental processes	Core teams focused on residents' experiences with the government, began to build deep relationships with them, and found creative ways to connect with residents. This is helpful for marginalized communities because it recognizes their importance in communities and permits the government to create stronger working and personal relationships with them.
Importance of understanding place and history	Historical context worksheets uncovered pain points that were brought up by residents during the Community Listening Sessions and Cocreation sessions. Understanding place and history recognizes the harm that the government may have perpetuated on marginalized groups. Addressing past harm is one of the first steps to earning legitimacy.
The power of hope	The Cohort mentioned 'hope' as an emotion they associated with engaging and sharing power with communities. Earning legitimacy is about being vulnerable and apologetic with communities about the role the government plays in systemic challenges today. When working together in a deeper relationship, earning legitimacy becomes easier to obtain and inspires hope and action for a better tomorrow.

“I really sensed the “Power of Hope” emerge through the process. In fact, it was interesting and inspiring to experience how we moved from challenges to possibilities over the life of the engagement activities...The program allowed for important connections between the community and local government.”

-Phyllis Meadows, Senior Fellow, Health Programming at The Kresge Foundation, Detroit

These four themes appeared in the work of each county and city that participated in the Earned Legitimacy Learning Cohort. They underscore the most relevant concepts regarding earning legitimacy. Humanizing and demystifying government, centering residents in government, understanding place and history, and embracing hope are critical to building legitimacy. The learning environment that CPI established brought these themes to the forefront of Cohort members’ thinking and they expect it to guide their work post-program.



The image features a vibrant cityscape under a clear blue sky with scattered white clouds. In the foreground, a lush green park with several trees and a few benches is visible. Behind the park, a dense cluster of modern skyscrapers dominates the skyline. Notably, there is a tall, cylindrical glass building on the right and a more rectangular glass building on the left. A large, semi-transparent teal geometric shape, composed of several overlapping triangles, is superimposed over the central part of the image. The text 'Case studies' is written in a clean, white, sans-serif font across the middle of this teal shape.

Case studies

Case study: Carlton County, Minnesota

A place with a deep history

Many in Carlton are proud of their community, but not everyone feels like they belong.

In June of 2012, a 100-year flood devastated communities in northeast Minnesota, causing millions of dollars in damage in Carlton County and surrounding areas. Nearly a decade later, folks in Carlton reflect on the impact of the flood, but the conversation isn't typically focused on the damage. Rather, it's on the [heroic tales](#) of community members who stepped up: volunteers identifying needs, local businesses and community groups helping address them, and neighbors pulling together to support each other. A disaster of this magnitude can break some places, but not Carlton. Carlton's response in that moment is just one moment in their rich history, but it demonstrates a core aspect of their identity: this small, rural county has a tight-knit, supportive community that takes great pride in its resilience.

While the 2012 flood response shows how the deep relationships among neighbors and sense of pride in Carlton can be a powerful asset, it can also come with challenges. Carlton is 89% white, but its Black and Native American population [has been steadily growing](#). Given that strong community bonds are often built over generations, it can be difficult for newcomers or those with different backgrounds to form meaningful connections. Further, the high level of pride in Carlton can make it challenging to identify, discuss, and address failures.

Through their participation in the Earned Legitimacy Learning Cohort, Carlton County explored how they can strengthen the relationship between local government and communities, especially those who feel less connected. They formed a core team of local government and community leaders who worked with the Centre for Public Impact (CPI) in the 10-week program. CPI served as a learning partner for this Cohort – helping participants learn, listen, and adapt as they built new skills while deepening their relationships with each other.

Key Demographics

- **Population:** 36,207
- **Gender:** 47.8% Female
- **Race:** 89% white, 1.7% Black or African American alone, 6.0% American Indian and Alaska Native, Asian: 0.6%, 2.7% Two or More Races, 1.8% Hispanic or Latino
- **Median household income:** \$63,098

A human-centered, learning approach to putting residents first

Carlton's core team built deeper relationships with those who don't feel heard.

The unique factors that contribute to Carlton's history amount to a strong sense of community that benefits many, but not all. According to data gathered from 25 conversations with community members prior to the program, along with five additional listening sessions during the program, groups such as women, young people, and Native Americans don't feel heard, valued, or connected to their community. While these initial listening sessions began to build individual relationships between government and community, there was still work to be done.

To address the lack of connection amongst these groups, CPI supported Carlton's core team in facilitating in-person and virtual cocreation sessions, dedicated to generating ideas on how to build a stronger sense of connection. One core team member noted that there was "some apprehension about convening groups who represented opposite ends of the political spectrum", but that "the folks attending meetings found a lot to agree on and actively came up with creative solutions."

Hope for a path forward

While there's still work to be done, the ideas sourced and relationships built provide hope for a more inclusive community.

In addition to sourcing solutions, these listening sessions led to new relationships with community members the government hadn't engaged with previously. One of the common emotions that community and government leaders alike brought up when engaging each other was 'hope.' One core team member reflected, "a community member from the Indigenous community...said us sitting down and listening to her concerns brings her hope to start repairing harm within her community." While the relationship between government and some communities may feel broken, there was a strong sense of optimism when folks had a chance to engage in authentic dialogue. Core team members forged hopeful relationships by humanizing government and centering resident experiences.



With the support of the community, the core team was able to map out a path that offers great hope. They synthesized the lessons from the community listening sessions with nearly 47 Carlton County residents into 13 insights, 115 ideas, and three recommendations that the board of commissioners approved, including:

1. The data from the community listening sessions will be included in the county's strategic planning and budgeting process
2. All county government employees are now required to have two trainings that community members recommended: 1) diversity, equity, and inclusion, and 2) adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)
3. \$10,000 in funding will be allocated to mini-community grants that support community members interested in organizing events, projects, and other ideas to build community

These actions represent a small step towards a more inclusive Carlton, where the county government brings an authentic, transparent approach so that all community members feel informed, heard, and involved in decisions.



Case study: Detroit, Michigan

A resilient city filled with a rich history

Detroit has a deep history of overcoming unfavorable odds.

When people think about Detroit, there are a few things that come to mind. For some, it's the rich history of the Motown dynasty and the city's invaluable contributions to America's auto industry as the "Motor City" in the 20th century. For others, the city's stark economic difficulties and earth-shattering news of bankruptcy in 2013 fill their minds. Either way, Detroit's history is riddled with highs and lows that have required their residents, community, and city leaders to remain nimble and resilient in the face of adversity.

The city of Detroit displayed this same level of nimbleness and resilience in June 2021, when they announced the creation of their Office of Disability Affairs. Despite the office being less than a year old, the City made a bold decision to join the Earned Legitimacy Learning Cohort with an ambitious [goal](#) to "strengthen the relationship between the disability community and the city government, and make Detroit a more welcoming, inclusive, and accessible place."

Through participating in the Earned Legitimacy Learning Cohort, Detroit explored strategies focused on strengthening the relationship between local government and marginalized community members. Detroit's core team comprised of local government and community leaders, who collaborated closely with the Centre for Public Impact (CPI). CPI served as a learning partner for Detroit— supporting the core team as they explored new skills such as systems mapping, facilitating community ideation sessions, and community prioritization exercises.

Key Demographics

- Population: 639,111
- Gender: 52.6% Female
- Race: 14.7% white, 78.3% Black or African American alone, 0.4% American Indian and Alaska Native, Asian: 1.7%, 1.8% Two or More Races, 7.7% Hispanic or Latino
- Median household income: \$30,894



Committed to partnering with community in spite of likely pushback

Detroit core team members were excited to lay the foundation for a healthier relationship with residents.

In preparation for the community listening sessions, the team acknowledged that they were aware they would likely receive criticism for their lack of adequately meeting residents' needs. Despite this, they leaned fully into preparing for the listening sessions by customizing facilitation guides and hosting practice sessions with CPI. The team hoped to learn more about resident experiences, in particular those living with disabilities.

Core team members who were respected community organizers leveraged their strong community ties for leading the recruitment efforts for the community listening sessions. The core team was intentional in their recruitment and preparation efforts in order to achieve their larger goal of humanizing and demystifying the local government to residents.

Through active listening, the team heard an array of perspectives, including valid criticisms of the “lack of follow-up and failed execution of reported issues in the community by government leaders.” Other residents expressed a desire to collaborate more closely with local leaders by sharing how “they want their children to have a good experience like what they had, and want to use their skills to build out a more inclusive culture in Detroit.”

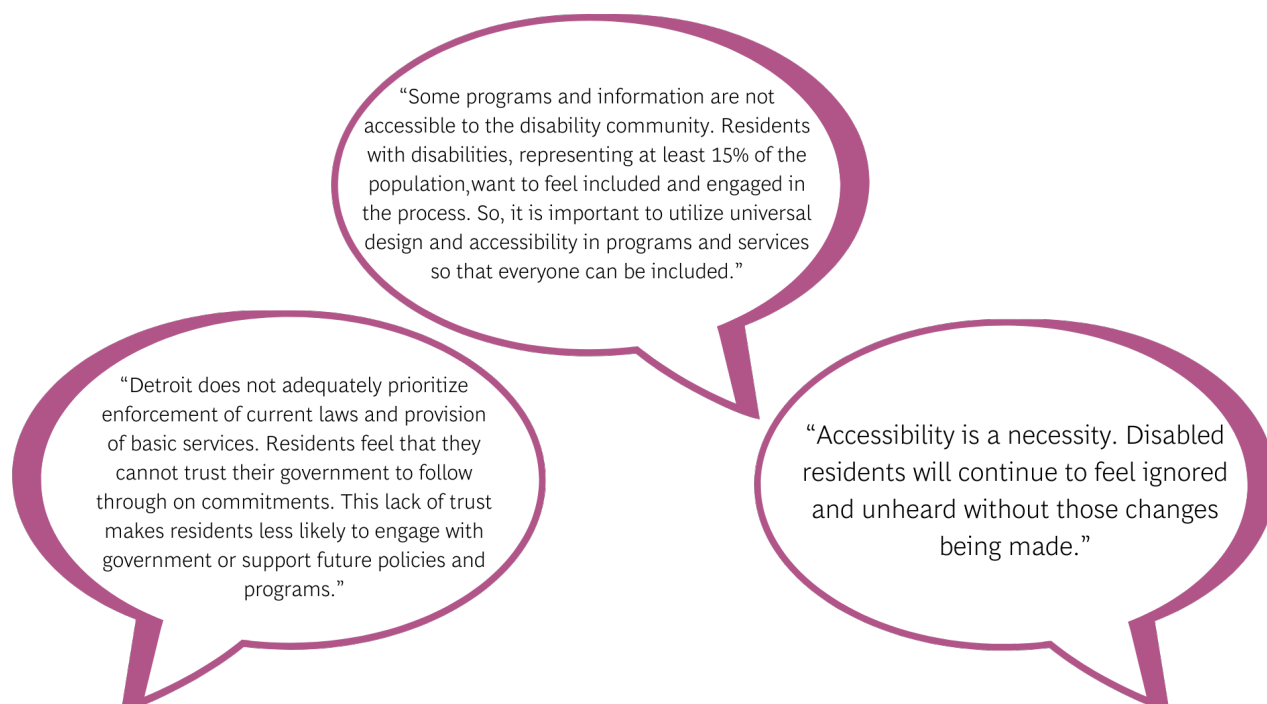
Many of the core team members appreciated the opportunity to sit and hear residents directly. Phyllis Meadows, a Detroit core team member, shared how “the listening sessions were a reminder for me of how important it is to hear and understand. Government is the people, and it doesn't have to be a one-sided pull. The community is the center.”



Looking ahead centered on action

Detroit core team members are excited to continue moving this work forward through action for residents.

Following the initial community listening sessions, Detroit core team members developed insights based on what they heard from residents. A few of which include:



While the insights varied, a consistent theme was the increasing need for more concrete actions by the local government to center residents in their processes. Driven by a new sense of motivation, the team set out to recruit residents living with disabilities to take part in a community ideation session to generate solutions alongside residents.

On December 2, 2021, the Detroit core team hosted a virtual community ideation session. To prioritize accessibility, the Detroit Core team hired two ASL translators, provided closed captioning, and shared ground rules for a more inclusive discussion. During the session, residents proposed 40 solutions.

Through an idea prioritization exercise, residents selected eight ideas they believed Detroit city leaders should prioritize. Listed on the following page are those top ideas.



Following the community ideation session, Detroit's core team presented these ideas to their city's senior leadership team, who were incredibly receptive and appreciated how closely residents were involved.

In this meeting, the senior leadership agreed to prioritize mandating disability awareness training for city employees and departments along with setting up an action plan based on the top priorities from the community ideation session. Looking ahead, the core team remains committed to ensuring that "they are doing more than just listening but also doing something about it" when residents share their needs.



Case study: Harris County, Texas

Natural disasters and other impediments to affordable housing

In 2017, Houston experienced the second-costliest hurricane in American history. In only four days, Hurricane Harvey dropped [1 trillion gallons of water](#) across Harris County, causing [36 flood-related deaths](#) in the county alone and totaling \$125 billion in damage across Texas. This resulted in 154,170 homes being flooded, or 9%-12% of the total number of [homes in the county](#). Due to decades of [discriminatory housing policies](#), many Black, Hispanic/Latinx, and low-income residents reside in low-lying lands that received insufficient investment toward flood protection and mitigation. Ultimately, this resulted in the flooding [disproportionately impacting these communities](#), displacing these residents and leaving many homeless.

Beyond Hurricane Harvey, there are a myriad of other factors that have contributed to the level of homelessness and the need for affordable housing in Harris County. A culture of NIMBY-ism, or “not in my backyard”, has opposed the development of mixed-income housing or more [affordable housing in many neighborhoods](#). These residents have utilized their power and privilege to maintain racial and economic homogeneity, creating numerous barriers to affordable housing.

Key Demographics

- **Population:** 4,731,145
- **Gender:** 50.4% Female
- **Race:** 69.6% white, 20% Black or African American alone, 1.1% American Indian and Alaska Native, Asian: 7.3%, 2% Two or More Races, 43.7% Hispanic or Latino
- **Median household income:** \$61,705

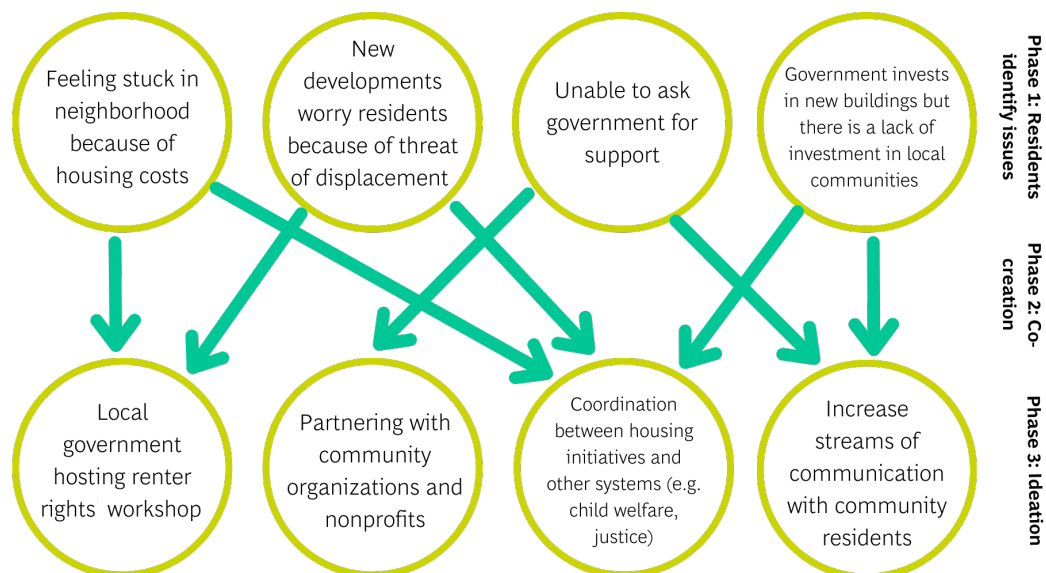


Despite these challenges, the Harris County government and local community organizations have worked to coordinate programs to better serve residents either at risk of losing housing or who are currently homeless. While the long history behind which communities are most affected after natural disasters has undoubtedly weakened the trust between residents and their government, there is great hope that this trust can be regained, and perhaps just as importantly, maintained.

Community pride and affordable housing ideation

To strengthen trust in government, the [Harris County Community Services Department](#) identified individuals in need of affordable housing and the homeless community as the residents they wanted to focus on during the Earned Legitimacy Learning Cohort. Harris County team members understood that they needed to hold conversations with residents living in Greenspoint, East End, and Southwest Harris County and prioritize meeting with immigrant communities. They further believed that they should strengthen trust with housing developers who have a significant amount of influence in constructing affordable housing.

With this scope in place and support from the Centre for Public Impact, the Harris County team interviewed ten residents through community listening and cocreation sessions. CPI helped support the team to recruit residents through thoughtful outreach and understanding of local power dynamics. During the cocreation sessions, the Harris County team encouraged the participating residents to dream of solutions to housing problems. Listed below is the outcome of those sessions:



Despite these circumstances, a majority of residents displayed pride living in Harris County and highlighted occasions where community members assisted each other. The Harris County team worked to make these conversations accessible to residents by providing bus passes and reserving spaces in their offices. This effort towards equitable and inclusive community engagement ensured that many more residents had the ability to participate.

Relationship-building moving forward

The relationship-building during the Earned Legitimacy program was only the beginning for the Harris County team. Now, the team wishes to expand the reach of Earned Legitimacy concepts and methods throughout the County to apply to outreach, program, and policy development. One team member even demonstrated interest in leading a training on cocreation for her coworkers. Additionally, the team wishes to host a listening tour in neighborhoods they haven't heard from (Southwest Houston, Baytown, and Katy), engage with community organizations such as [Houston in Action](#), [OCA - Greater Houston Chapter](#) or [FIEL - Houston](#), and form a cross-county group to test and implement ideas sourced from the community cocreation sessions.

Clearly, there is an energy and hope from the Harris County team to form authentic relationships with their residents and to regain the trust of residents harmed by past actions from the local government.

"A jurisdiction can demonstrate the will to include residents in your governmental processes and decision making; however, if residents don't trust the system or know various ways to access the system then such a desire will be unrealized." - **Staci Lofton**

"Being inclusive of those without access to the levers of power currently is paramount in the pursuit of rethinking government and our pursuit of earning legitimacy among the community."
- **Jon Garcia**



Case study: Salt Lake City, Utah

Advancing equity in Salt Lake City policing

After a summer of Black Lives Matters protests against police brutality, Salt Lake City Mayor Erin Mendenhall, the Salt Lake City Council, and members of the community announced the [Commission on Racial Equity in Policing](#). The commission was a new advising body created to make recommendations to the Mayor and City Council on Salt Lake City's policy, budget, and culture of policing. This Commission was convened to break down institutional racism and to achieve greater equity in policing outcomes. Historically, Salt Lake City residents have organized for police reform, for example, after the shootings of 17-year-old [Abdullahi "Abdi" Mohamed](#) in 2016 and the police killing of [Bernardo Palacios-Carbajal](#) in 2020.

This history of activism is nuanced by Salt Lake City's unique relationship to state politics. In 2021, [eighty-nine of the 103 state-level lawmakers](#) were members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (about 86%), while the percentage of LDS lawmakers from Salt Lake City was significantly lower. In addition to this majority, there is a strong majority of Republicans in the state legislature, which contrasts with the Democratic majority in Salt Lake City. This political rift between the local and state government often leads to the clashing of conservative and liberal policies.

Key Demographics

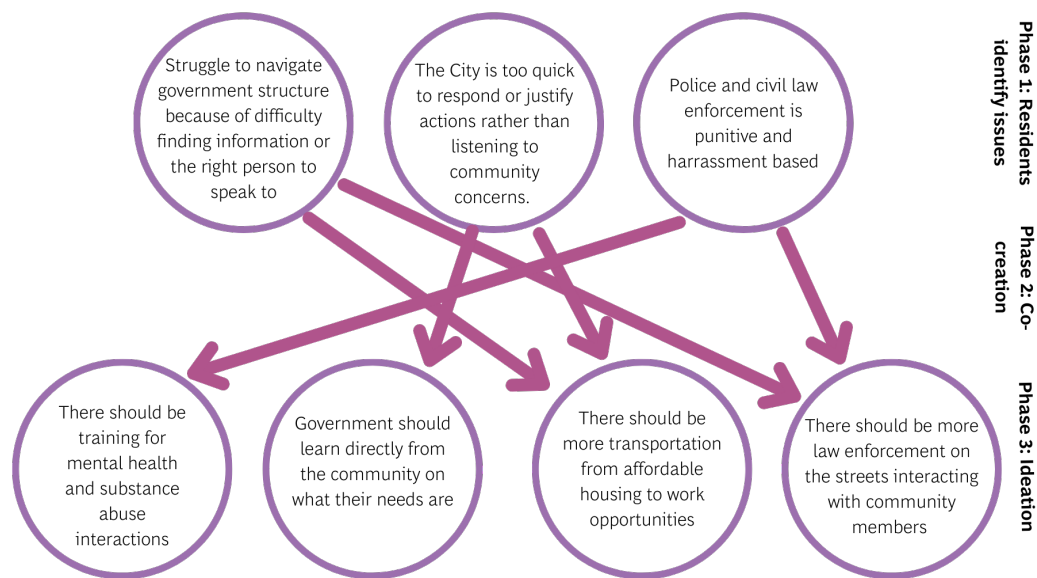
- Population: 199,723
- Gender: 49.1% Female
- Race: 72.8% white, 2.6% Black or African American alone, 1.5% American Indian and Alaska Native, Asian: 5.4%, 3.3% Two or More Races, 21.8% Hispanic or Latino
- Median household income: \$60,676



Residents have played a pivotal role in advocating for their community's interests within the realm of policing, as well as affordable housing, and many more issues. The nationwide BLM movement may have been the [largest movement in American history](#), but this spirit of activism and reform remains alive in Salt Lake City. There has without a doubt been a decrease in government trust, but there is great potential in collaboration between Salt Lake City government and its residents.

Understanding Salt Lake City concerns and imagining a safer future

The Earned Legitimacy's Salt Lake City team consisted of individuals from the Mayor's Office, Parks and Public Lands Department, the Community & Neighborhoods Department, the Police Department, and the University of Utah. This diverse group of individuals was all committed to rebuilding trust between their local government and the residents, particularly aiming to improve policing and to increase affordable housing. Salt Lake City team members identified residents in the Westside (Glendale & Rose Park) and low-income residents from Magnolia to better understand these working class neighborhoods and to begin to build bridges with these communities. In total, the Salt Lake City team spoke with five residents through the Community Listening and cocreation sessions.



Notably, due to Salt Lake City's multi-issue focus, they were able to source ideas on policing and housing from residents.

Goals for long-term trust-building

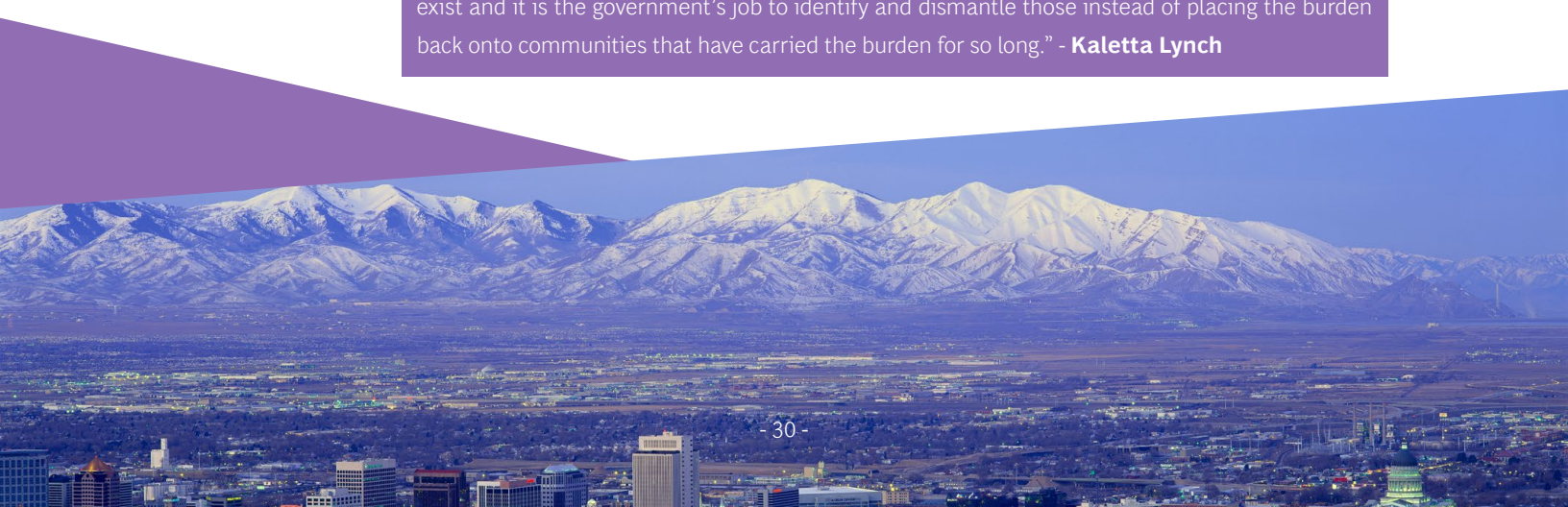
Building on systems maps & power sharing methods shared by the Centre for Public Impact, Salt Lake City aims to push trust-building forward across a range of issues and departments. The team aims to hold more 1:1 interviews with Westside residents and to reach out to other neighborhoods. The team also aims to teach the cocreation method to other departments across the City, to update residents on government actions through a monthly newsletter, and to incorporate the cocreation method within the Police Department's Community Meetings.

In promoting cocreation, Salt Lake City is actively sharing power with residents and centering them in the policies that directly affect them. In embracing CPI's belief in humanizing government and relationship-building, Salt Lake City hopes to not only rebuild trust, but maintain it through continuous dialogue with the community.

"We can't truly humanize government because it is a system that continues to perpetuate the historical inequities that underserved and underrepresented communities have been affected by for centuries. However, we can humanize government employees and demystify the intentions of those who were appointed and elected to serve the public." - **Kaletta Lynch**

"I appreciate taking the time to talk with residents and have them talk through the complexities of government on their own and through their own experiences. In the end, they are coming up with solutions that might be helpful to their issues, but they also often talked through how they understand it is hard and that one solution might not fit all - or be reasonable. By allowing residents to walk through this process and help understand that limited time and resources play a big role in the government's ability to respond." - **Weston Clark**

"The relationship between City government and communities of color is delicate and should be navigated (from government's side especially) in a respectful, open, transparent and reconciliatory way. Due to centuries of disenfranchisement, lack of affordable housing, and restricted and often non-existent access to quality resources and services for communities of color, systemic barriers exist and it is the government's job to identify and dismantle those instead of placing the burden back onto communities that have carried the burden for so long." - **Kaletta Lynch**



A group of diverse people, including men and women of various ethnicities, are gathered in a circle on an outdoor patio. They are all smiling and raising their hands to do a high-five in the center. The patio has wooden tables and chairs. The image is overlaid with a large, semi-transparent teal triangle that points from the top left towards the bottom right. The word "Conclusion" is written in white, bold, sans-serif font across the middle of the teal triangle.

Conclusion

Conclusion

Throughout the 10-week Earned Legitimacy Learning Cohort (ELLC) pilot, the cities, counties, learning liaisons and facilitators embarked on a journey together to learn from the rigidity that has previously hampered governments from embracing humility, openness, equity, curiosity, and accountability. Participating municipalities worked to develop learnings based on creating new pathways that share residents' concerns with government. This allowed ELLC participants to begin brainstorming a new public engagement agreement for communities, one that centers community voices and has outcomes cocreated by both the community and the government. The ELLC approached its work by first doing a historical analysis of each of the Cohort's pasts and through introspective self-exploration of previously held assumptions. Through these exercises, Cohort participants uncovered how their respective governments had harmed members of their communities through both past and present actions. Participants were therefore empowered to grow their understanding of marginalized populations and begin to focus on strategies restoring hope and repairing the fractured relationship between government and the community.

After developing a better understanding of why and how trust needed to be earned by those in government, the Cohort focused on solutions. They worked on uplifting community voices through asset mapping, took stock of already existing institutional knowledge and resources found within their communities, and worked with their own neighbors through holding a community listening series. The lessons learned then influenced their final projects and proposed policies, which would in turn later impact policy making and budget priority setting by their governments. Policy suggestions that improve how government works better for all provides proof of concept that in only ten weeks, the ELLC has already begun to impact the lives of community residents and government officials.

As society looks to increasing challenges in 2022 and beyond, protecting democracy and building bridges between governments and the communities they are meant to serve will be even more important. Today, society is still suffering through a pandemic while swamped with misinformation, the electoral system is being threatened by foreign and domestic actors, and voting rights are again being debated. The relationship between local forms of government and communities may be the only trusted vehicle through which residents are able to connect with each other by focusing on their commonality, rather than their differences.

CPI believes that bringing this model of Earned Legitimacy to scale builds upon their commitment as a nonprofit learning partner to organizations and municipalities that want to reimagine government in transformational ways. [We invite prospective partners](#) to join CPI's efforts in working together to better realize the great promise of a democratic society—one that provides a more fair and equitable relationship for the people, by their government, and through its systems of power.

Appendices

Appendix A: definitions

Read our [CPI dictionary](#) for definitions to common terms used in community-centered design, innovation, and earned legitimacy.



Appendix B: approach to Earned Legitimacy Learning Cohort

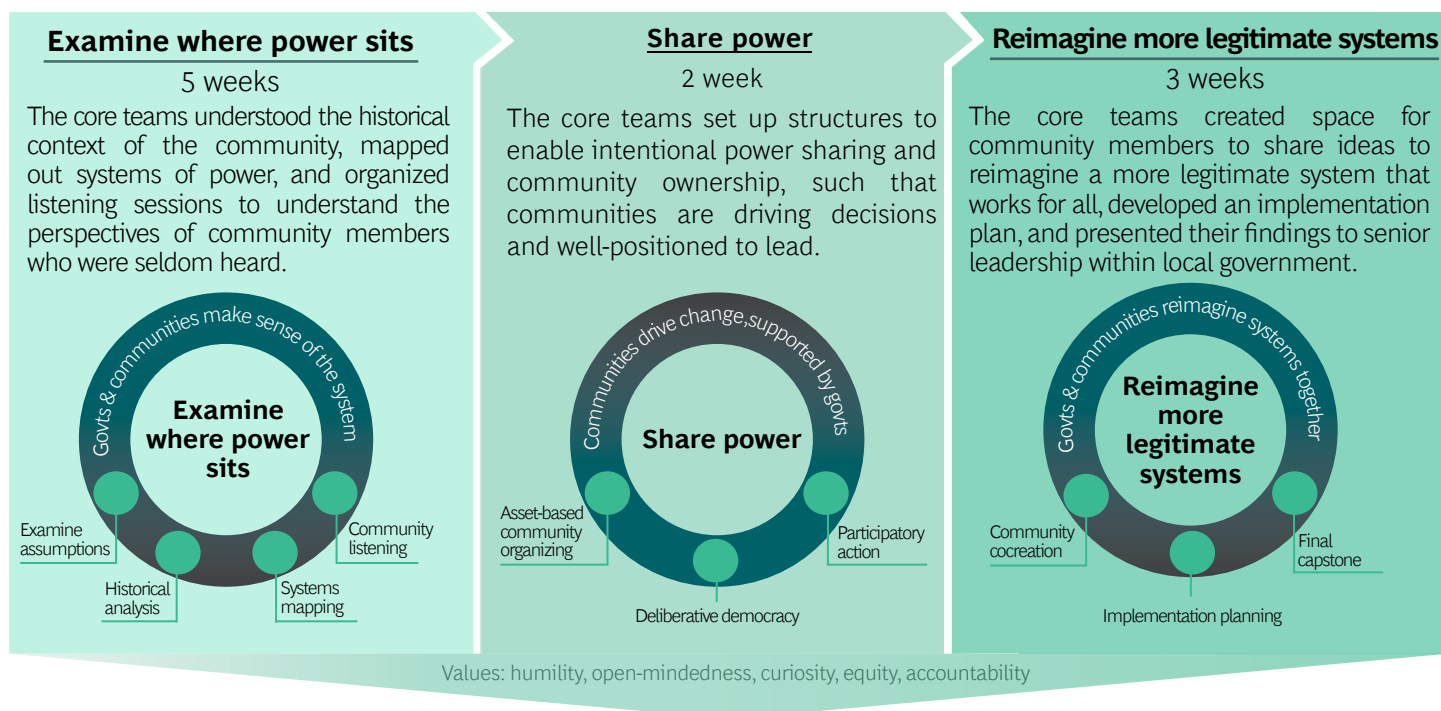
An inaugural Learning Cohort of cities and counties across the country worked together to learn, listen, and adapt to communities that have been historically oppressed and disinvested in – earning legitimacy and strengthening the relationship between government and the people it serves.

CPI served as a learning partner for this Cohort, supporting local governments and communities to dismantle inequitable power dynamics and enable community-driven change.

Participants were expected to contribute 4 hours per week for the duration of the 10-week program. The program included the following core activities:

- **Six cross-city workshops**, where participants from all Cohort cities came together to learn about and discuss concepts that are core to building legitimacy, such as examining where power sits, sharing power, and reimagining more legitimate systems
- **Individualized support** from an expert CPI coach that guided them through the program
- **Core team project work** equipped teams with core community engagement and legitimacy skills that prepared them to apply what they learned in their local communities to increase trust between government and residents

The 10-week program focused on three interrelated phases: Examine Where Power Sits, Share Power, and Reimagine More Legitimate Systems. Each phase had individual modules within it.





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