



BELOVED COMMUNITY
TO WEWORK:

AMERICAN
COMMUNITY
TODAY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper intends to provide an overview of community in America today. It is written for a cross-sector audience that is interested in understanding and learning more about the meaning and emergence of community in America 2020. It is written in three parts.

PART I
problematizes community today. How does the current moment exacerbate these problems? What are communities in reaction to and with? Why are they forming and dissolving?

PART II
is designed as a landscape survey of what individuals and institutions are doing to build and bridge community today.

PART III
is forward-looking and seeking to describe future pathways and directions for hope and renewal.

This paper, at its best, is designed to be a discursive document. Its authors hope that it will be used to guide a process of meaning-making in delving into how might we, as professionals, siblings, children, parents, community stakeholders, board members, and citizens, build and strengthen our communities. Indeed, the genesis of this paper is just that: in a time where we have been watching social, economic, and political realities reach a multiplicity of tipping points we believe that our society is begging to be connected in ways that have been lost. We believe that the necessary questions and answers in our society today, while hard to separate, aren't overtly social, economic, or political, but moral and spiritual. We must ask ourselves what do we want our communities to be? Each one of us must have this conversation with ourselves and one another.

Community is the human expression of Divine love. It is where I am valued simply for who I am, how I live and what I give to others. It is the place where they know my name.

RABBI JONATHAN SACKS

I want a city that is run differently than an accounting firm; where planners “plan” by negotiating desires and fears, mediating memories and hopes, facilitating change and transformation.

LEONIE SANDERCOCK

We wish to use community as a way to gather a diversity of people and ideas together in courageous conversations, to connect and learn. We wish to provide a space grounded in broad representation and lived experience. Lastly, we wish to strengthen organizations, coalitions, and networks that empower individuals to build trust and make positive and lasting changes in their own communities.

CONCEPTUALIZING COMMUNITY: DEFINITIONS AND CONTEXT

WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT THE WORD COMMUNITY, WHAT COMES UP FOR YOU?

Perhaps a religious group or professional convening? Perhaps a neighborhood association or set of people with whom you shared an experience? What happens when you search the word “community” in Google? The first page of results is dedicated to the NBC TV show *Community* and how to stream it online.

Community is a difficult word to contain. It is defined as, “A unified body of individuals” and a “social state or condition.” How we conceive of and act in our own communities impacts everything from the friends we engage with, to the jobs we have, to the opportunities we are afforded through the course of our lives. And there are costs and tradeoffs to the communities from which we belong, to the communities from where we are omitted.

COMMUNITY IS NOT EASILY DEFINED.

One person’s definition of community can be, and often is, different than another person’s definition. To some community can be threatening, to others embracing. As Philip Selznick describes in his work, *The Communitarian Persuasion*, “For many thoughtful people, ‘community’ is a very troublesome idea – frustratingly vague, elusive, even dangerous.”¹ Selznick describes what he labels as “the animating principle of community” to be “the union of solidarity and respect.”² Selznick’s principle gets to the point that people are not fungible economic goods to be traded on the market, indeed, they are humans with complex and contradictory thoughts, expressions, fears, hopes, and desires. *The New York Times* columnist and author, David Brooks, adds to this argument, writing:

One of the reasons that America is so angry right now is that there is so much dehumanization. Racism reduces a human being to a skin color. The first casualty in a cultural, political or generational war is the willingness to see the full humanity of the other. In this moment, some people seem eager even to dehumanize themselves by reducing themselves to a simple label and making politics their one identity. “Speaking as a ...”

If liberalism left little space for group identity, the current conversation makes group identity everything and leaves no space for individual conscience. You get all these absurd generalizations: White people believe this. Elites believe that.

Personalism is the belief that at the heart of any successful relationship, any successful organization and any just society, there is an earnest and ongoing effort to see the full depth and complexity of each human person.³

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TO BE PRESENT IN A COMMUNITY IS TO BE SEEN.

For the Zulu tribe in South Africa, for example, individuals greet one another not by saying “hello,” or “good morning,” but by saying, “I see you.” Through this symbolism of sight, one recognizes and respects the other person, and in doing so, moralizes community.

David MacMillan and David Chavis in their article, “Sense of Community: A Definition and Theory,” describe a community consisting of four distinct elements, these being: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection.⁴ Further, MacMillan and Chavis summarize their definition of community through the following sentence, “Sense of community is a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together.”⁵ It is relevant to note that MacMillan and Chavis incorporate the notion of faith into their definition, in that, members have a shared faith that their needs will be met. Thus, according to MacMillan and Chavis, community is psychologically and spiritually constructed in a belief or set of beliefs as much as it is socially constructed through societal norms and mores.

WHAT DRIVES AN INDIVIDUAL TO SEEK COMMUNITY IN ONE PLACE AND NOT SEEK IT SOMEWHERE ELSE?

Perhaps a developed personal symbology within us enables us and engages us towards certain communities. A primary reason why this could be is, as MacMillan and Chavis note, “Members are more attracted to a community in which they feel that they are influential.”⁶ It would logically follow that our comfort level with certain symbols would lead us to engage those comfortable symbols given our presumption of greater influence. Moreover, the need for consensual validation, as MacMillan and Chavis describe, through the “pressures of conformity and uniformity”⁷ act upon this personal symbology in that we desire, as individuals who are socially oriented and constructed, to find others who share a similar symbology. In addition, “There is a significant positive relationship between cohesiveness and a community’s influence on its members to conform.”⁸ Stronger communal ties result from conformity and symbols aid and abet this process of desired conformity.

Barry Wellman, in his article, “From Little Boxes to Loosely Bounded Networks: The Privatization and Domestication of Community,” speaks to life as a network in which “Scholars and the public have traditionally seen communities as densely knit solidarities,” whereas according to Wellman, “In reality, personal communities are usually sparsely knit and loosely bounded.”⁹ Selznick would have us believe, as mentioned, that the animating feature of community is its “union of solidarity and respect;”¹⁰ however, Wellman begs to differ. Wellman asserts that a given personal community in the 21st century is a highly fragmented set of relationships and in turn, “People must actively maintain each supportive relationship rather than relying on solitary communities to do their maintenance work.”¹¹

The explosion of social media over the last decade exemplifies this argument. Given this assertion, one’s personal symbology is increasingly important in the formation of a community

in that these symbols allow us in the fog of networked relationships to provide for order, classification, and clarification in providing structure for ourselves. Furthermore, these personal symbols allow us the ability to more readily gravitate towards those to which we feel will reflect our own symbols, thus perpetuating a sense of symbol-based conformity, community, and continuity.

Robert N. Bellah *et al*, in their work, *Habits of the Heart*, observe that “Communities . . . have a history – in an important sense they are constituted by their past – and for this reason we can speak of a real community as a ‘community of memory,’ one that does not forget its past.”¹² Peter Marris adds, “The meaning we make of our lives, therefore, is embedded in the history of our relationships, and the histories of the communities of which we are part. Our sense of it, at any particular moment, depends on how we use those histories to confront the present and the future.”¹³

THUS, IN ORDER TO BE A COMMUNITY, MUST A GROUP OSTENSIBLY HAVE A SHARED HISTORY?

In an age where informal communities exist and dissolve in virtual spaces, must a community have a past, and more so, must wrestle with this past as constitutive of its present and future? If the answer is yes, this shared history brings to light notions of narrative and storytelling as ways in which this history is performed. Telling stories builds a creatively discursive space for the translation of knowledge to action, indeed the construction of narratives in an evolving social and psychological milieu bounds a sense of values and norms for a given community. Stories illustrate what a community is and what it is not. The ways in which communities decide upon audience, tone, and relation in these collective narratives reflect upon the qualities of that community in relation to its past and contemporaries, and ultimately provide for pathways to a collectively envisioned future.

WHAT ARE THE STORIES WE TELL OURSELVES ABOUT COMMUNITY TODAY?

According to the Pew Research Center, many of those stories are grounded in a declining public trust in both the federal government and in our fellow citizens. Three-quarters of Americans say that their fellow citizens’ trust in the federal government has been shrinking, and 64% believe that about peoples’ trust in each other.¹⁴ For those who think interpersonal trust has declined in the past generation, numerous reasons and rationales are brought to bear, including,

“... a sense that Americans on the whole have become more lazy, greedy, and dishonest. Some respondents make a connection between what they think is poor government performance – especially gridlock in Washington – and the toll it has taken on their fellow citizens’ hearts. Overall, 49% of adults think interpersonal trust has been tailing off because people are less reliable than they used to be.”¹⁵

Notice the language, “... the toll it has taken on their fellow citizens’ hearts.” Eroding trust in our public and interpersonal lives fundamentally corrodes at the hearts of our fellow citizens. That is a spiritual story and outcome.

Nearly two-thirds (64%) say that low trust in the federal government makes it harder to solve many of the country’s problems. People of color, poorer, less-educated individuals and younger adults have lower levels of personal trust than other Americans. There is bipartisan agreement that it is important to improve trust in both the federal government and in fellow Americans, as well as that there are ways to do so. Indeed, more than eight-in-ten Americans (84%) and (86%) believe it is possible to improve the level of confidence people have in the government, and in each other, respectively.

MOST AMERICANS THINK THE DECLINE IN TRUST CAN BE TURNED AROUND.

Our fellow citizens report feeling isolated and divided. A Kaiser Family Foundation study notes that 1 in 5 Americans always or often feel lonely or socially isolated, including many whose health, relationships and work suffers as a result.¹⁶ Young people are not immune from this loneliness epidemic. According to a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) report, the rate of Americans ages 10-24 who died by suicide rose by 56 percent from 2007 to 2017¹⁷. Depression rates among teens shot up 63 percent in the same time period.¹⁸ Tens of thousands of Americans die annually because of opiate addictions. The American life expectancy rose for the first time in 2018 in four years after declining from 2015-2017—a reflection of the opioid epidemic and what have become known as deaths of despair—“younger people dying from overdoses, suicide, and alcoholism.”¹⁹

Our media environments and ecosystems make it easy to adopt and opt-in to various community symbologies that give us and our communities shorthand for identities. For instance, Red vs. Blue America, which sprouted out of the 2000 Bush v Gore election fiasco, and has led to folks fundamentally conceptualizing decisions like where they live based on whether it aligns with these political labels. This example is one in a larger phenomenon that the journalist Bill Bishop has coined as The Big Sort – the process of the self-segregation of Americans into like-minded communities. Bishop suggests that Americans choose to live in neighborhoods where most residents share beliefs similar to their own. The media social and political echo chambers that exist online are also geographically spatialized where people can avoid interacting with anyone who disagrees with them on political issues.

Greg Martin and Steven Webster in an article in The Atlantic, agree that there is rapid growth of geographic polarization in the United States, but disagree with Bishop on the cause. They describe a political polarization manifesting itself geographically largely because partisan preferences are strongly correlated with population density. Further, they speak to how partisan identities now align with social identities, such as race, religion, and education level, far more closely than they did a generation ago before the political re-alignments associated with the 1960s.²⁰

CERTAINLY, THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IS UNEARTHING ADDITIONAL STORIES.

In a recent survey done by the Federal Reserve on the Impact of COVID-19 on Low- to Moderate-Income Communities, 60% of individuals said that there was a significant disruption/difficult recovery on economic conditions for the people and communities they serve.²¹

Leading economists in this period of economic turmoil are even warming to the utilization of stories in the ways in which they conceptualize and communicate information. Humanities majors unite, you have nothing to lose but your student loan debt! Certainly, catastrophe can serve as a catalyst, as Derek Thompson writes in The Atlantic,

Normal times do not offer a convenient news peg for slow-rolling catastrophes. When we look at the world around us—at outdated or crumbling infrastructure, at inadequate health care, at racism and poverty—it is all too easy to cultivate an attitude of small-minded resignation: This is just the way it has always been. Calamity can stir us from the trance of complacency and force us to ask first-principle questions about the world: What is a community for? How is it put together? What are its basic needs? How should we provide them?

These are the questions we should be asking about our own world as we confront the coronavirus pandemic and think about what should come after. The most important changes following past catastrophes went beyond the catastrophe itself. They accounted fully for the problems that had been revealed, and conceived of solutions broadly. New York did not react to the blizzard of 1888 by stockpiling snow shovels. It created an entire infrastructure of subterranean power and transit that made the city cleaner, more equitable, and more efficient.²²

AND OF COURSE, THERE ARE STORIES TOLD TO US.

Silicon Valley is good at this, as author and co-founder of the Sacred Design Lab, Casper ter Kuile, notes:

Venture capitalists are investing in companies that put community at the heart of their strategy. As one VC wrote recently, “The 2020’s will belong to the entrepreneurs who can help build authentic communities.”

This is exciting stuff! Just imagine, a whole new generation of products and services that intentionally foster human connectivity!

But it’s also a little scary. Just as social networks, especially Facebook, used the language of friendship to describe the simple act of allowing our attention to be captured by someone’s status update, we’re already seeing the denigration of the word ‘community.’

My team at Sacred Design Lab and I call this ‘community-washing’. The language is inspired by the term ‘greenwashing’—wherein companies claim environmental brownie points without changing anything significant in their operations. Think of oil and gas companies releasing ads featuring windmills and solar panels despite massively investing in fossil fuels, for example.

The danger with community-washing is two-fold.

1. First, that we are promised community (a rich, complex experience) but what we get is a second-rate, emoji-enabled soulless product or service that never gets anywhere deep.
2. And second—more dangerously—that the poverty of community experience that we experience through these products and services diminishes what we think is possible for community itself.

The Silicon Valley notion of consumable community is at the heart of where many companies have and continually hope to lead us, and is at the heart of the consumer/citizen divide in the ways in which we see ourselves in society. As Casper and his team note, “We form community with others when we allow others choices and decisions to have consequences for us. Community can’t be consumed. It only exists when, to some extent, we allow ourselves to be subsumed.”

THE HISTORY OF CO-OPTING COMMUNITIES FOR CORPORATE DESIRES IS NOT NEW TO OUR TIME.

Sam Adler-Bell shares in his article, “The Capitalist’s Kibbutz,” that companies like WeWork are a part of a longer narrative arc:

How did a company that sublets office space manage to become a cutting-edge global brand worth tens of billions of dollars? Like many founders before him, Neumann had the good sense to express his megalomania and greed in the language of community and social change. He took the ideological blueprint provided by previous Silicon Valley behemoths – Google’s “Don’t be Evil”; Facebook’s aspirational globalism – and distilled it to an essence. “The past ten years was the decade of ‘I,’” Neumann declared in 2011. “This decade is the decade of ‘We.’”

Neumann’s gambit was the apotheosis of a process set in motion half a century earlier by marketing gurus who discovered the communitarian sensibility of the counterculture could be divorced from its transgressive, egalitarian ethos – and used to sell products. (This revelation is memorably depicted in the final scene of AMC’s *Mad Men*, which finds Don Draper meditating on a California bluff, apparently conceiving Coca-Cola’s happified 1971 ad “I’d Like to Buy the World a Coke.”) So shameless and total was Neumann’s drive to commodify the image and effect of togetherness that he trademarked the very word “We” – and sold it to his own company for \$5.9 million. (Facing backlash, he later returned the money.)²³

WeWork has said its mission is to “elevate the world’s consciousness.”²⁴ In doing so, WeWork notably imploded in 2019 at the time it was attempting to IPO. Neumann was ousted as CEO and thousands of WeWork employees lost their jobs.

There are also stories that we build together across differences and shared purpose in formal and informal ways.

WHAT DO THESE TYPES OF ACTIONS AND INITIATIVES LOOK LIKE AND REVEAL?

These are a few examples of existing and exciting ways in which community has been shaped and formed globally. A key point of revelation within is that so many of us are motivated by similar desires and fears in regards to how we wish to live our lives – and the act of finding our allies and conspirators in this work is of primary significance in activating change.

Part II of this report looks to the present as we seek to detail and dialogue with different types of communities today in hopefully coming to terms with the typology and diversity of American community life.

COMMUNITY GARDENS

The city of Boston sponsors community garden projects through the Grassroots and Open Space Development Project where government funding gives low-income neighborhoods the money to start these gardens to provide fresh, healthy food to citizens.

FIGHTING DEFORESTATION

Across major Indian metropolises, such as New Delhi and Mumbai, residents are fighting back against deforestation. When the Delhi government proposed to cut 14,000 trees in 2018, roughly 1,500 protesters reacted and stopped the project.

BETTER BLOCK

A community revitalization program entitled Better Block started in Dallas in 2010 and has since spread to other communities including Louisville, Kent, through the work of Center for Neighborhoods. The program seeks to transform derelict corridors into actionable space to serve the local community.

PLACE-HEALING

The notion of “place-healing” has been lifted up as a way to characterize stories and action of adaptation and transition. With an emphasis on communication, understanding of differences, assets, and limitations; considering new metrics; nudging social networks towards more civic and public service; co-creation; and embracing the “front porch” – place healing may serve as a catalyst for how we build and bridge communities.

CHARACTERIZING COMMUNITY

Coming to terms with what community means is not an easy task. As this paper has reflected, community manifests in many forms – a diversity along a spectrum from abstract to concrete; formal to informal; and inclusive to exclusive that can be difficult to measure. Community is, indeed, qualitative – it involves personal vulnerability and implicates the individual in a relationship that has both benefits and potential drawbacks.

What does community look like today? What are emerging forms, displays, and manifestations of community? On the next page is a simple typology matrix of varying forms of community. It's shown here as one example of the ways in which qualifying and quantifying communities is both a bit of art and science.

*All I have is a voice
To undo the folded lie,
The romantic lie in the brain
Of the sensual man-in-the-street
And the lie of Authority
Whose buildings grope the sky:
There is no such thing as the State
And no one exists alone;
Hunger allows no choice
To the citizen or the police;
We must love one another or die.*

W.H. AUDEN

*If you understand that
being part of something greater than
yourself is meaningful and if you're not driven
just by material goods, then you're part of
the We Generation.*

ADAM NEUMANN

Following this matrix, this paper will delve into a few brief case studies of various communities and the ways in which they engage their constituencies.

	INCLUSIVE	EXCLUSIVE
INFORMAL	Drum Circle Camp Ground Kibera Slum in Nairobi	Religion Giving Circle High School Dance
FORMAL	Neighborhood Association Sports League City Council Meeting	Fellowship Family Foundation Private University

INFORMAL/INCLUSIVE

C40 Mayors' Agenda for a Green and Just Recovery – 15-minute cities

What would it look like to live in a place where all residents of a city are able to meet most of their needs within a short walk or bicycle ride from their homes? That is the conception of the “15-minute city” put forth in a recent report by C40 mayors. This report outlines bold steps to deliver an equitable and sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Led by C40 mayors around the globe, the specific measures outlined in the agenda focus on creating green jobs, investing in crucial public services, protecting mass transit, supporting essential workers and giving public spaces back to people and nature.

The specific 15-minute city idea is promoted in particular by Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo who has made the idea that Parisians should be able to meet their shopping, work, recreational and cultural needs within a 15-minute walk or bike ride a centerpiece of her recent reelection campaign. The C40 proposal suggests that following such a model would help global cities live up to the promise of equitable access to jobs and city services for all, and rebuild areas economically hard hit by the pandemic.

Fifteen-minute cities, micromobility, and more space for walking and biking are innovative solutions that will help our cities rebuild and restore our economy while protecting lives and cutting dangerous pollution.

CAROL M. BROWNER
former EPA administrator and board chair
of the League of Conservation Voters

FORMAL/INCLUSIVE

Military OneSource

Military OneSource is the one-stop shop to engage virtually and obtain resources and support for military members and their families. On their landing page, Military OneSource promises to: (1) be the ONE SOURCE that stands ready to assist as you master military life; (2) give you expert support and information that is proven and practical; (3) be there, day and night, wherever you are, when you need a trusted voice, private and confidential; (4) have answers

you can depend on in pursuit of your best goals and your best MilLife; (5) be one dedicated community whose sole mission is you.

Examples of the ways in which Military OneSource supports and resources those in the service include: connecting to entertainment, travel information, and recreational activities; learning about housing options and connecting to free legal and personal finance services; and resilience tools and employment resources.

INFORMAL/EXCLUSIVE

Theory of Enchantment

The Theory of Enchantment is an innovative framework for social emotional learning (SEL), character development, and interpersonal growth developed by journalist and change-maker Chloe Valdary. The curriculum uses pop culture as an educational tool in the classroom and beyond. Materials include popular films, songs, books, and essays that help students understand the complexity of the human condition. The hope is that students come away with a strong and resolute sense of self-worth as well as a robust toolkit for contributing to the health of their communities and society at large.

The training incorporates three principles. Principle One is: Treat people like human beings, not political abstractions. Principle Two is: Criticize to uplift and empower, never to tear down, never to destroy. Principle three is: Root everything you do in love and compassion.

Partners include Hadassah, TED, UJA Federation of NY, Yext, and the Federal Aviation Administration.

I am a former police officer (current federal agent) and I can only wish I knew your Theory of Enchantment when I worked as a patrol officer. I never abused anyone, but I could have certainly used a lot more empathy in my interactions. I intend to fully incorporate the principles embodied in the Theory into my own personal and professional life, and would like to spread your message of love.

LEO B.

FORMAL/EXCLUSIVE

Emerging Practitioners in Philanthropy (EPIP) – Sankofa Summer Community Care Circles

EPIP is a national network of changemakers who strive for excellence and equity in the practice of philanthropy. Their mission is to empower emerging leaders and elevate philanthropic practice in order to build a more just, equitable and sustainable world. Through professional and leadership development; advocacy and innovation; and community building, EPIP advances their vision of a world where people of all identities can live full and prosperous lives, supported by a diverse, equitable, inclusive and effective philanthropic sector.

Before the COVID-19 Pandemic, EPIP was planning for their annual conference in Summer 2020. However, given the realities of the pandemic they pivoted to an online conference. To augment online sessions, EPIP has offered a series of Community Care circles for subsets of their community, including Black, White, and People of Color attendees.

Two years ago, I participated in a healing circle for white people via EPIP National. It took me a long time to process + led to a lot more reading + personal work. In reflecting today, I realized how much impact that had on how I show up. Thank you, EPIP, for creating space.

PARTICIPANT, 2018

These gatherings are facilitated by Erika Totten of Unchained Visions and limited to 40 people each focusing on gathering for collective healing. Each session for a community subset is two hours long and they take place across a half dozen dates in July and August. These Community Care circles are a virtual piece of what has been a regular and highly-valued part of EPIP's in-person conferences in the past.

CRAFTING COMMUNITY

So far, we have come to terms with the meaning and context of community – what various writers and thinkers have to say about the concept – as well as being to understand what community exemplified looks like in America today through various case studies and typologies.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

How might we challenge and re-imagine our idea of community? How might we build new coalitions to effect positive social change?

It's a question we often ask ourselves and of our communities. And our answers have come in the form of other guiding questions:

1. *What is my community, and what makes me define my community this way?*
2. *What do I want my community to be, and who am I missing in my community?*
3. *How do I get there from here?*

This work began with relationships—and we believe it must continue to be nurtured with relationships. We, the authors and advisors of this work—twelve fellows who comprise the first class of the Community Gathering Fellowship—have begun to search for the future through the design of a virtual, cross-sector Community Gathering. We are excited by the idea to serve as a potential “proof of concept” in propelling this work forward. Motivated and inspired by our purpose to bridge allies and build courageous communities, we have entered into a process of emergent discovery that will lead us to the inaugural Community Gathering in February 2021.

We have gathered a dynamic group of fellows and advisors to set some potential outcomes, including:

- ▶ CONNECTION: Participants meet new folks they would not have otherwise met
- ▶ LEARNING: Participants offer questions and topics for future learning
- ▶ ACTION: Participants share ideas and pathways for community actions

We see our audience for the Gathering as educators, organizers and activists; board members and foundation professionals; nonprofit, public and private sector leaders. Folks who embody the values of compassion, courage, curiosity and accountability.

How we conceive of and act in our own communities impacts everything from the friends we engage, the jobs we have, the opportunities we are afforded—and are not—through the course of our lives. There are costs and tradeoffs to the communities in which we belong, and to the communities from where we are excluded. We are interested in intersectional community—more specifically—we are interested in the ways we can bridge allies to build courageous communities.

Naturally, this work is not about us but about all of us. We believe that we need to see each other more as people and professionals to understand and improve our work. We believe that by bridging allies to build courageous communities, deeply thoughtful and creative connections, learning and action will emerge. We believe that we need to get started now.

JEFFREY TIELL



Jeffrey Tiell is a cross-sector professional interested in how individuals, organizations, and communities can build and scale social change work in creating a more just and equitable world and how we transform current civic and social infrastructure to fit the challenges of our present-day society. Jeff is a fervent believer that boundary-spanning solutions are the key to creating meaningful, sustainable social change.

Jeff has worked in a variety of settings and organizations focused on community-based work. He has served as a community and philanthropic strategist, where he was consulting for the national funder collaborative, Fund for Shared Insight, a national funder collaborative working to improve philanthropy by elevating the voices of those least heard.

For five years, Jeff provided support and guidance to a portfolio of grantees at the center of meaning, connection, and purpose within the Jewish education sector as a Program Officer at the Jim Joseph Foundation, one of the leading Jewish funders in the United States.

Jeff received his B.A. degree from Brown University and Master's degree in City Planning with an emphasis on Community and Economic Development from the University of Pennsylvania. He completed doctoral coursework at the intersection of community planning, education, and social disparities of health at the University of Maryland.

SETH LINDEN



Seth Linden is principal of Gather Consulting, where he advises philanthropists and nonprofits on board governance, leadership development, and strategic planning. Seth has 20 years of experience as a high school teacher, social entrepreneur, foundation professional, and nonprofit consultant. Most recently, he was a program officer at the Jim Joseph Foundation in San Francisco where he managed a portfolio of grants related to Jewish leadership development, early childhood education, and education technology / digital engagement.

Seth serves on the board of the Jewish Studio Project and the Alpert Jewish Community Center. He lives in Long Beach, CA with his wife and two boys, after spending the last 20 years in the Bay Area. Seth loves nothing more than connecting people and ideas and gathering in community.

Seth received his B.A. from Stanford University and Master's degree in Teaching from Brown University. He has a teaching credential and a bartending credential. Both come in very handy while building community.

Our goal is to foster leadership and connectivity, to work across lines of difference, and to build social-civic muscles to engage in deep and difficult conversations in our neighborhoods, organizations, and institutions.

HOW MIGHT WE CHALLENGE AND RE-IMAGINE OUR IDEA OF WHAT WE WANT COMMUNITY TO MEAN FOR US?

We'd love to hear from you.

Drop us a line at seth@gatherconsulting.org.

ADDITIONAL LINKS & ARTICLES

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The image features a light beige background with three large, overlapping circles in purple, orange, and dark green. Thin, flowing lines in a light tan color weave through the circles and across the page. The text is centered at the bottom of the green circle.

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