

# Dismantling exclusionary power structures

## Expanding our tables

Without truly hearing and responding to the voices of Black and Brown people with the lived experience who have traditionally carried the burden of inequity, those in control continue to promote the same policies that have enforced inequity and displacement in Black and Brown communities. To effectively dismantle exclusionary power structures, those with the power must follow the lead of those closest to the problems and invest in their success by actively supporting participation in political and economic decision-making.



**Equity is healing and is essential for achieving liberation of all humans and our planet.**

**–Sekita Grant,**  
Vice President of Programs,  
The Solutions Project



## Discussion points

- 1. Innovation comes from the bottom up.** The people who experience environmental, racial, and economic oppression firsthand are in the best position to create the most effective solutions to inequity. To facilitate a bottom-to-top reset of who leads innovation, we need to invest in those with lived experience who understand the needs of their community.
- 2. Local governments have an obligation to expand participation.** In order to create and implement policies that serve all residents, city leaders should adopt participatory governance and budgeting processes. Elected officials should put community partnerships in place that allow residents to share ideas as policies are being formulated. To be productive, this form of governance will take time and education and requires elected bodies that are invested in improving community involvement. Participation from people across sectors and experiences broadens potential solutions and fosters support for policy implementation.
- 3. Equity requires accessibility.** Black and Brown community members need access to information about policies and procedures, accurate and trustworthy news sources, and the data and research needed to make informed decisions. A lack of accessibility creates (or exacerbates) further barriers to participation in policymaking and perpetuates the power imbalances between those who have access to information and those who do not.



## Questions to ask

1. How do we best reach the voices that are not normally heard? And how do we instill a sense of trust between them and the systems that have historically failed them?
2. What would it look like for you/your office/your agency to cede some power to others who have historically had little?
3. A city's budget can illuminate where the city's values lie. How can we plan our budget to reflect the values of community members? How can our budget actively promote solutions offered by Brown and Black residents?
4. What standards do we have for how we share information? What is our role in correcting misinformation? How can we identify speakers or sources of information that community members trust, and how can we present information in the spaces where they feel most comfortable?

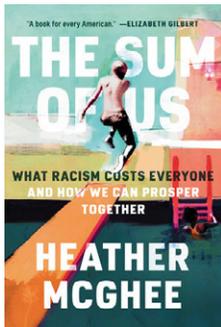
## Recommended reading



### **The Great Real Estate Reset**

by *Smart Growth America*

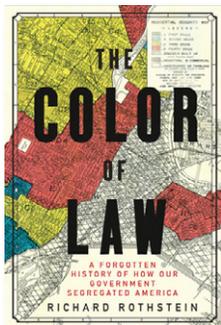
The real estate industry has failed to evolve with the communities it serves. SGA explains the trends that are causing the misalignment between the industry and what is actually needed to build an equitable society.



### **The Sum of Us**

by *Heather McGhee*

McGhee traveled across the United States to collect stories about what we lose when we believe progress must come at the expense of others. She offers a poignant look at how racism is detrimental to us all.



### **The Color of Law**

by *Richard Rothstein*

Through an exploration of modern American history, Rothstein provides a detailed report of how the government and court system have upheld and perpetuated racist policies that maintained segregation.

## What to do next

### **Policymakers:**

Find ways to incorporate participatory governance into your policymaking. Write policies that require a variety of community members to have a seat at the table. Look to Seattle, Washington and Baltimore, Maryland as examples of cities that have had success with participatory governance and budgeting.

### **Planners:**

Reevaluate your budget priorities. Assess where money is currently going and look at the current outcomes. Are they enabling inequitable practices? Is there a way to provide solutions, like increasing access to land and capital, for Black and Brown residents through the budget?

### **Community coalitions:**

Identify ways community coalitions can share local news and policies. Find ways to make information readily available and understandable, especially when local officials do not make transparency a priority.