

OVERARCHING IMPACT INSIGHTS

UNITING THEMES ACROSS
BUILD IT BACK BETTER

NATION
SWELL

BUILD
IT BACK
BETTER

DATA FOR GOOD

CULTURE OF CONNECTION, BRIDGING AND BELONGING

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND FUTURE OF WORK

CLIMATE JUSTICE

EDUCATION



WHAT IS 'BUILD IT BACK BETTER'?

In 2020, NationSwell launched 'Build It Back Better', an initiative designed to create a space for purpose-driven leaders to navigate through the competing crises of COVID-19, racial injustice and economic upheaval, and surface and advance solutions to some of the world's biggest challenges — to seize the portal of opportunity to rebuild our systems in a way that is more equitable, inclusive and resilient for all.

This report synthesizes the key insights and impact arising from across the six issue-driven tracks of activity we produced: Climate Justice; Culture of Connection, Bridging & Belonging; Data for Good; Economic Opportunity, Education and the Future of Work.

At NationSwell, our mission is to strengthen society and the planet by helping purpose-driven leaders and organizations take their impact to the next level. We hope you will use these insights to inform your strategy, collaborations and solution-building going forward.

Sincere thanks to all our partners and participants who made this work possible.

With gratitude,



Greg Behrman
NationSwell Founder & CEO

BUILD IT BACK

BETTER IN NUMBERS

6

TRACKS

30+

EVENTS

36

FEATURED SPEAKERS

200+

EXPERTS

50+

PIECES OF ORIGINAL CONTENT

13+

MILLIONS ENGAGED ONLINE

THE RELATIONAL ERA
A Culture of Connection, Bridging, and Belonging

REGISTER AT [BBB.SPLASHTHAT.COM](https://www.bbb.splashthat.com)

Jacqueline Nazarety
Founder and CEO of Reunion

John A. Powell
Founder of the Office of Bridging & Belonging
Institute of Religion

in partnership with **EDMORN COLLABORATIVE** **AARP Foundation** **CAMEBACK VERDUGO** **pivotal**

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ANTIRACISM AND THE POSSIBILITY OF THIS MOMENT

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Carmen Rojas, PhD
Professor & CEO, Magueta-Cano Foundation

Dr. Ibram X. Kendi
Professor of History and the Founding Director of the
Harvard University Center for Antiracist Research

AARP **CAMEBACK VERDUGO** **pivotal**

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THE FIGHT FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE

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Bill McKibben
Author and Environmentalist

Heather Tony
National Policy Lead for Green New Deal Institute

Dr. Robert Bullard
Author and Environmental Justice

Starbucks **UNICEF** **pivotal**

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DRIVING TOWARD EQUITY AND OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL GENERATIONS OF WORKERS

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Jean C. Accius
The Robert R. McCormick Award-Winning Thought Leader

Lisa Marsh Ryerson
President, AARP Foundation

Chike Aguh
Chief of Economic Security Programs at Brookings Institute

AARP **AARP Foundation** **EDMORN COLLABORATIVE** **CAMEBACK VERDUGO** **pivotal**

NATION SWELL **BUILD IT BACK BETTER**

HUMAN-CENTERED CAPITALISM

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Wes Moore
The Author

Andrew Yang
Founder, HUMANITY FORWARD

UNITED STATES **AARP Foundation** **CAMEBACK VERDUGO** **pivotal**

NATION SWELL **BUILD IT BACK BETTER**

THE FUTURE OF THE CLIMATE JUSTICE MOVEMENT

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Alexandria Villaseñor
Climate Change Activist & Founder of Earth Opponent

Kristy Drutman
Founder & Director of Green Deal Union

Dr. Katharine Wilkinson
Author & Co-Founder of THE ALL WE CAN SAVE PROJECT

Starbucks **UNICEF** **pivotal**

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SHARED INSIGHTS

As part of the 'Build It Back Better' initiative, we dove deep into six different issue areas. But certain shared insights arose across all the tracks that we as impact leaders can learn from — whether we are grassroots community leaders, to heads of national philanthropies, through to socially conscious global business leaders — to make our impact work more effective and equitable. Here are eight 'ah ha' moments of insight that surfaced from this work.

1. Your work should be as intersectional as life
2. Institutions need to be stewards of belonging
3. It's time for philanthropy to be brave
4. Funders must decenter themselves to center communities
5. We have to break down silos to share essential data
6. Let's turn lifeboats into bridges
7. Put people at the heart of success
8. We must work together to build back better



1

YOUR WORK SHOULD BE AS INTERSECTIONAL AS LIFE

In life, we cannot separate out the many things that influence who we are or where we end up. The same is true for big, systemic issues that determine people's ability to be safe, healthy, educated, employed and free. And so impact work must recognize and address that intersectionality, and not make arbitrary distinctions. Is it enough to focus on sustainability without also addressing social justice? Can we separate people and planet?

“When we talk about creating solutions to climate change the centerpiece is justice, fairness and equity... Climate justice is racial justice, economic justice, health justice, food justice, gender justice; anything where disparities have been compounded.”

— Dr Robert Bullard, author and ‘The Father of Environmental Justice’

2

INSTITUTIONS NEED TO BE STEWARDS OF BELONGING

Whether we are part of a school or a business, a nonprofit or a foundation, every institution has the power to create systems and behaviors that can either create inequity and exclusion, or foster belonging and create equitable opportunities. If there is a problem at the systems level, don't blame the individuals — look at the institutions creating and maintaining those systems, and ask them to change.

“We create a belonging through the institutions, the cultures, the stories we tell, and about having experiences with each other.”

— john a. powell, Director of the Othering & Belonging Institute at the University of California

“There needs to be less of a focus on how organizations are self declaring that they are “antiracist” and instead focus on how you are embodying anti-racist practices, policies, behaviors and ideas.”

— Dr Ibram X. Kendi, Author & Founding Director of the Boston University Center for Antiracist Research.

“We need organizational cultures in which DEI becomes so ingrained that it becomes the new system, making the older system obsolete.”

— Lisa Marsh Ryerson, President, AARP Foundation

IT'S TIME FOR PHILANTHROPY TO BE BRAVE

If we are to truly build our solutions and systems back better then we must also build a better, braver philanthropy: one that eschews tinkering around the edges of a broken system, for supporting ambitious new solutions that shape new systems where everyone has a right to security and happiness.

For example, the Marguerite Casey Foundation has created the Freedom Scholars Award — an annual \$250,000 award to each of twelve of “the nation’s boldest scholars [standing] at the forefronts of movements for economic and social justice... creating the catalytic ideas for transformative change.” There are intentionally no restrictions or requirements with the award. One of the recipients, Dylan Rodriguez, a professor in the Department of Media and Cultural Studies at the University of California, Riverside, said he was shocked because he’s been so used to the “nonprofit industrial complex” ignoring or eschewing academics in fields like the Freedom Scholars’, whose work is drastically underfunded when compared to other academics whose work largely supports the status quo of society as we know it.

“We have to remember that our job [in the philanthropic sector] is not to make pain tolerable. Our job is to break down why the pain exists in the first place, and make sure people don’t have to keep going through it. There is actually a unique role that philanthropy can play. It can be the seed capital, the risk capital, the thing that’s able to address and come up with things that have the potential to be scalable, show how to be scalable and pass them on to our governmental partners to address it in the long term. Philanthropy should not be thinking about itself as a line item.”

— Wes Moore, CEO of Robin Hood Foundation

You can read more on this topic at [NationSwell](#).

4

FUNDERS MUST DECENTER THEMSELVES TO CENTER COMMUNITIES

First and foremost, listen. Show up and show support. Build trust. Meet them where they are. Ask them what they need and what solutions they have built that need resources. Don't impose your preconceived ideas on what the "problem" is and what will "solve" it. Don't assume you are the first organization to try to "help."

This manifests in many ways across every issue area. For example, the need to address climate justice by first asking those communities affected by climate change what solutions need funding. The need to decolonize data by deconstructing how and why it was collected in the first place, and recognizing whose voices and experiences it doesn't account for

"Don't show up with solutions to make them resilient, give them a seat at the table, listen to their experience and support their solutions. People who hve survived inequity are actually the masters of resilience, so listen."

— Heather McTeer Toney, Senior Advisor, Moms Clean Air Force

5

WE HAVE TO BREAK DOWN SILOS TO SHARE ESSENTIAL DATA

Nonprofits and community organizations often have rich insights into what communities really need and experience of what solutions work and what doesn't (for reasons of inefficacy or inequity). However, too often those organizations lack the skills, capacity and/or incentives to share that data between them, which leads to inefficiency: duplication of work, lack of nimbleness in solution building and scaling, and lack of long term learning about community needs, and more.

We need to be investing in capacity building around data and AI, re-thinking metrics for nonprofits to incentivise data sharing, and investing in long term data infrastructure.

"Asking individuals to become their own data stewards is asking too much — between baffling usage agreements, online scraping, and more. We need institutions to step forward. Nonprofits are uniquely positioned to serve this role... We're beginning to see how cooperatives and nonprofits like NCAI are stepping forward to become data advocates and take control of data gathering and stewardship in these communities to present a new face to federal service providers, and to demand what is just. This same model could happen across the data landscape if we equip nonprofits with this capacity."

— Vilas Dhar, President of the Patrick J. McGovern Foundation

Read the full Op-Ed by Vilas Dhar and Patrick McGovern at [NationSwell](#).

6

LET'S TURN LIFEBOATS INTO BRIDGES

Short term solutions will not result in long term change. We must be thinking about building solutions that build long term equity for underserved communities — opportunities and access to dismantle the old structures of white privilege and the distance between “the haves and the have nots.”

Across all issues, more long termism is urgently needed. Whatever the challenge — from economic opportunity (creating meaningful career pathways and not just more low income jobs), to climate justice (investing in community-rooted solutions that center the needs and wisdom of indigenous communities), to future of work (equipping workers of all ages with the training they need to learn while they earn), to data for good (investing in the long term privacy and data stewardship infrastructure necessary to build trust back in our systems) — we cannot simply prioritize short term gains and hope to do justice to justice.

“Equity is a financial, not just a social, imperative for the nation.”

— Chike Aguh, Chief Innovation Officer, the Department of Labor

”The quest for justice is no sprint, it’s a marathon relay, you pass the baton to the next generation; celebrate small victories but don’t celebrate too long because you have to prepare and mentor the next generation for the long haul”

— Dr Robert Bullard, author and ‘The Father of Environmental Justice’

7

PUT PEOPLE AT THE HEART OF SUCCESS

For too long, the metrics by which we define the success of a project, an organization, a nation even, have been skewed to suit the needs of the privileged or “the economy”, and to ignore the more nuanced consequences and long term impacts on people’s lives. If we are to support new ideas and focus resources on solutions that truly help people thrive, we must rethink the ways in which we measure the success of those innovations.

“We need to change the very measurements of our progress... from GDP, stock market values and unemployment rate; to life expectancy, mental health, freedom from substance abuse and childhood success rates... If you had the right dashboard, you could have a capitalist set of incentives that reward human flourishing and human well being.”

— Andrew Yang, Humanity Forward

WE MUST WORK TOGETHER TO ‘BUILD BACK BETTER’

The challenges that we face are so often systemic and require a systemic, cross-sector approach in order to build solutions that are truly sustainable and equitable.

For instance, closing the opportunity gap cannot be achieved by just providing support and training through nonprofits — it will take cooperation from business leaders to commit to equitable hiring practices, innovation from higher education institutions to become more accessible and offer more career-ready training, and governmental collaboration. Innovators like Opportunity Network are responding to this need by creating programs that work with both young people and the institutions and businesses they seek to join to bridge gaps.

“Every sector has a different role to play, but if you want to unpack and make progress on the complex wicked problems, each sector must come to the table ready to fully utilize its resources and leverage from its vantage point. This must be done in a concerted manner. What took centuries to create — which was done with intentionality — will require the not equal but tenfold amount of effort to undo if we are going to realize a nation we all deserve and even more so if we are going to #builditbackbetter”

— Nikka Lemons, Global Citizens Development

“We’re not a movement that has a collective approach to the work, but there is no sector that needs to be more integrated. If we are going to continue to apply pressure on the system and drive local solutions, we need to be better about working together.”

— Marie Groark, Director of Programs, Schultz Family Foundation

“We are doing the advocacy work to really make sure we’re putting the right policies in place at the federal and state level to ensure people can be connected. And we are making sure we are not just talking about the benefits of technology but getting it into critical areas of need and teaching people how to apply it because with this generation of young people, a lot of them will go on to be the entrepreneurs and employees that are going to fuel our economy and help build it back better.”

— Rose Stuckey Kirk, Verizon

WHAT THEY SAY

“NationSwell have been great thought partners on the content and direction of the sessions. We appreciated their ability to bring together exceptional keynoters who inspired us, as well as the participants. What I love most is NationSwell’s commitment to helping us address these issues does not end with the convening and discussions.”

— Michael Kobori, Chief Sustainability Officer, Starbucks

“How we shape the future of data and AI for social good is among the most important conversations of our age. We were thrilled to partner with NationSwell to engage with technologists, entrepreneurs, and social change leaders to explore how we can use these tools to build it back better. There is much work ahead, and I’m inspired by our collective optimism, innovation and commitment to a brighter future.”

— Vilas Dhar, President, Patrick J. McGovern Foundation

WHAT THEY SAY

“NationSwell is the premier organization that brings together the most authentic leaders around the most important conversations — giving us the space and support we need to ask the big questions, to grapple with the big issues, and to learn from each other so we can be at our best as leaders.”

— Rose Stuckey Kirk, Chief CSR Officer, Verizon

“This track has delivered content that stopped me in my tracks and forced me to confront things about myself, the environment we create in our organization, and the space that our work creates for deeper connection and impact at fundamental levels. I’m grateful for the leadership of the organizers and for their commitment to delivering powerful and provocative sessions!”

— George Tsiatis, CEO & Co-Founder of the Resolution Project

WITH THANKS TO OUR PARTNERS

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GET IN TOUCH

In response to the needs raised by Build It Back Better — in particular the need to bridge divides and break down silos in order to have greater impact — in 2021 NationSwell is launching ‘Collaboratives,’ bringing diverse leaders to the table to foster cross sector coalitions that build stronger solutions together.

PLEASE GET IN TOUCH IF YOU WOULD
LIKE HELP TO TAKE YOUR IMPACT TO
THE NEXT LEVEL:

NEW@NATIONSWELL.COM

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