

CLF

Identify + Amplify = Diversify

Leadership Input Report



METHODOLOGY

Community Leadership Fellows conducted a series of leadership input workshops between February 9, 2021 to February 26, 2021. Small groups were invited to participate in this interactive virtual exercise. A variety of community stakeholders that included block club presidents, government employees, nonprofit staff, police officers, faith-based members, elected officials, youth, and business owners were represented.

LIVE HERE

Westside residents provided input on what they look for in a leader.



WORK HERE

Current staff and employees serving Westside communities provided input on what it takes to be successful in community impact.



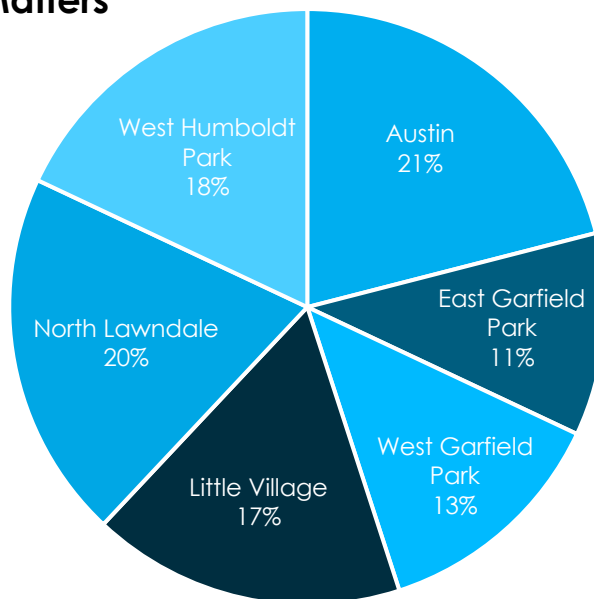
LEAD HERE

Current executive leaders provided input on how they successfully lead teams on the Westside.





Representation Matters



Nine small group workshops were conducted virtually in February 2021. Ninety individuals who live, work, or lead on the Westside of Chicago participated and provided input on the guided prompts related to leadership priorities referenced in this report. The community participants represented the diverse landscape of the Westside as depicted in the above chart. Each group had discussion topics that were tailored to their experiences. The following notes include common themes, unique perspectives, and a summary of ideas shared.

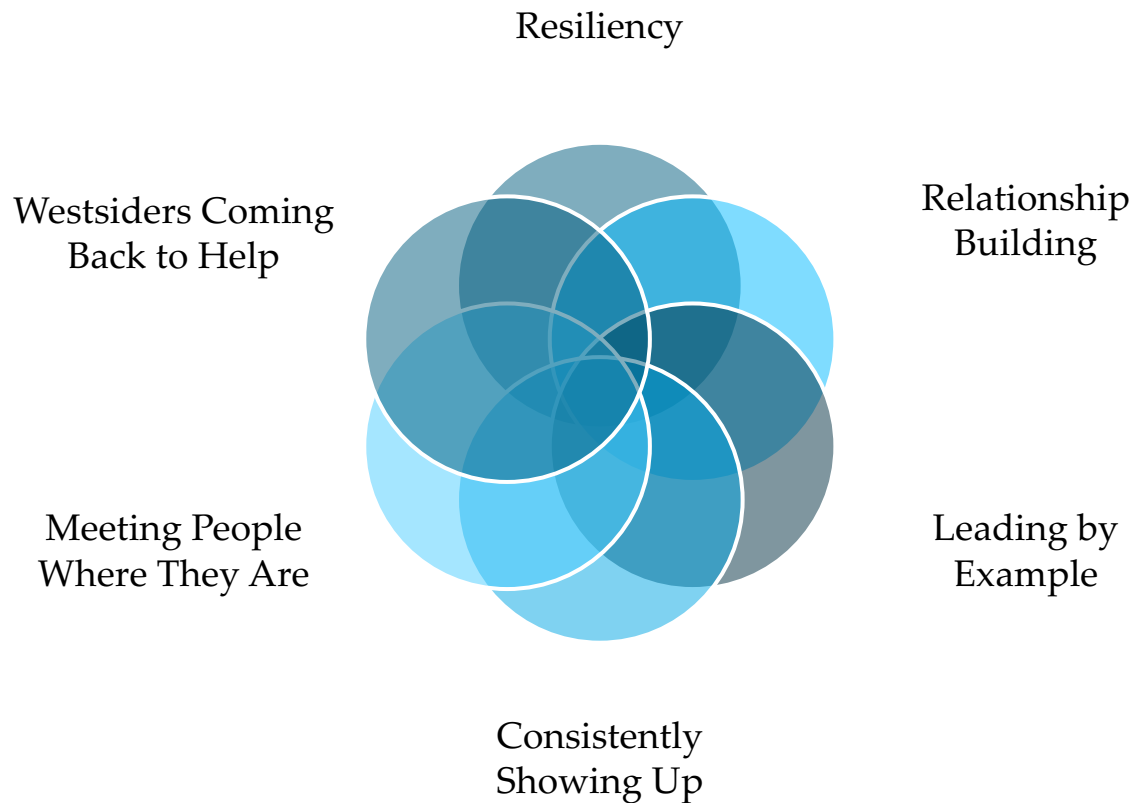


A black and white aerial photograph of a city street corner. In the foreground, a brick building with a flat roof and multiple windows is visible. A crosswalk with white stripes crosses the street in front of it. A large, leafy tree stands on the sidewalk to the right of the building. Several cars are parked along the street. In the background, more city buildings and a distant skyline are visible under a clear sky.

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What Are the Strengths of Your Community that Must Be Supported and Uplifted?



Residents acknowledged their community's ability to persevere. Resiliency was touted as the greatest strength of Westside neighborhoods. Leaders should understand that ability and draw power from the residents' abilities to fight through the most difficult of circumstances. Consistency and relationship building were identified as key strengths that set successful leaders apart from others.

Westsidiers who return home to help create change in neighborhoods receive a great deal of respect from community members. The shared lived experiences make these individuals relatable and inspiring. These leaders embody the culture of leading by example. Modeling behavior was a key identified priority. Homegrown talent working on the Westside successfully accomplish this feat.

The popular strategy of meeting people where they are was mentioned frequently. To provide a better understanding of how this technique is successfully utilized, residents dissected the actions that worked best as: starting on the ground in the homes and knowing the difference between informing and educating.

Westsidiers are incredibly proud of their community. However, they are faced with challenges when it comes to the perceived image of the Westside. Community image has the ability to negatively or positively impact residents. Negative imagery leads to psychological trauma. A West Humboldt Park resident stated, "If you live in a space that's run down and abandoned, you feel run down and abandoned." In cases where beautification activities exist, pride in place uplifts the spirit of residents. As they lead projects to restore and revitalize their environment, the needs and perspectives of the community are acknowledged in places where they live, work and lead. Beautification impacts human health and well-being allowing the community to thrive.

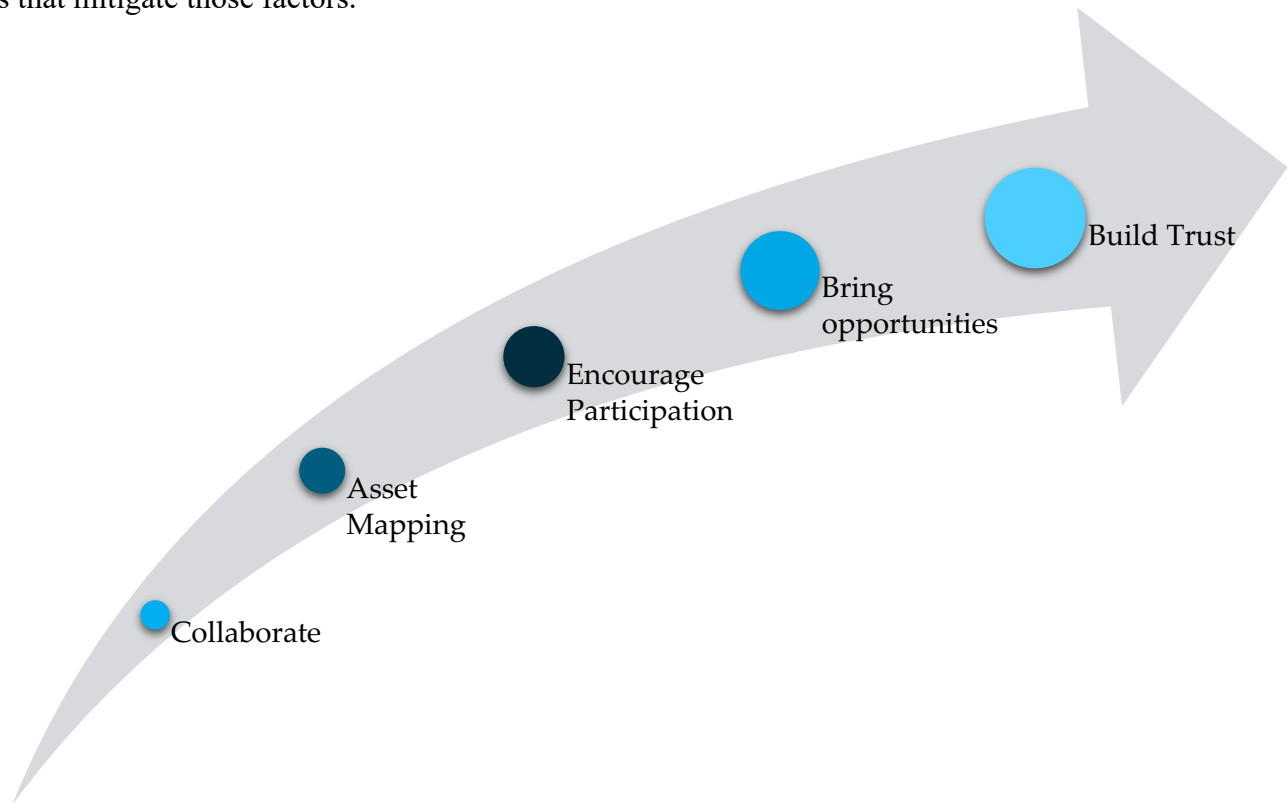
"The relationships I gained from being active in my community made a big difference. Now I can always count on them to be there to support me."

-Little Village Resident

What Steps Must Be Taken by Leaders to Create Change in Your Community?

Residents require that leaders first build trust in order for any program or initiative to be successful. Trust is achieved through consistency. Showing up on a regular basis to pose the question, “How can I help?” shows genuineness and the willingness to put the community first.

Sustainable change is achieved through empowerment. Bringing opportunities and then encouraging residents to participate in these opportunities is the path toward empowerment. The programs themselves are important but the most valuable step in the empowerment process is the leaders’ ability to get people involved. It is not uncommon to see low turnout at meetings and fairs. This failure is the result of the inability to understand barriers and design practices that mitigate those factors.



Providing real life examples of success encourages participation. The pathway to transformation can be highlighted by the use of storytelling. Success stories of actual residents and participants who were guided through a program shows tangible proof of the light at the end of tunnel encouraging others to embark on the journey.

No one organization or plan can do it alone. Collaboration is imperative; however, this concept is easier said than done. Residents expressed concern that systems have too much competition built into procedures. In most cases groups are pitted against each other because of funding or resource constraints. Collaboration requires an understanding of assets that exist in neighborhoods. Asset mapping is not only beneficial to residents but also organizations. Operating with a firm understanding of the strengths in communities will facilitate opportunities to fill gaps and maximize resources.



“Leaders must be willing to step on toes. Demanding change will offend some people.”

-Austin Resident

Staff & Employees

What Should Be the Priorities of organizations and Agencies that Serve the Westside?

Investing in people was named as a major priority for organizations and agencies serving the Westside. By investing in staff and the communities they serve, organizations and agencies will effectively build the human capital needed for people and families to prosper. By providing meaningful training and skill development, members of the community will be empowered to create sustainable change in their lives. This effective empowerment will allow the people on the ground to be heard, thus uplifting the voice of the community.

Also emphasized was the need for building strong relationships. Trust needs to be at the forefront. Leaders must get to know the residents being served, understand their stories, their struggles, and the barriers they face. Only when someone takes the time to cultivate relationships, will they truly understand their audience and develop meaningful connections. Leaders should be authentic and keep an ear to the ground by talking, collaborating and networking with both residents and those serving the Westside. This will allow for well-rounded organizations to meet the needs of the community by filling the gaps for necessary services.



What Are the Most Effective Ways to Connect With Those You Serve?

Connecting with people in a meaningful way takes time and trust. It is about building authentic relationships. It is about removing the transactional process that often takes place between those doing the work and those being served. Members of the community can quickly identify those who genuinely care. They show human kindness and love. They listen, they organize, they make residents feel valued. They take the services to the residents. They are consistently showing up.

While building relationships with residents was overwhelmingly stated as an effective way to connect with those they serve, it was also shared that residents want to see new ideas put into action. Staff should understand the needs and wants of the community. It is important for an organization or agency serving the Westside to understand the barriers that exist. Residents look to them to address these barriers and provide access to resources. By collaborating on efforts, staff provide residents with the opportunity to advance the work needed to uplift the community. **Staff should provide the residents with the tools and know-how to navigate systems so that when an organization or leader leaves, the access to resources remain.**

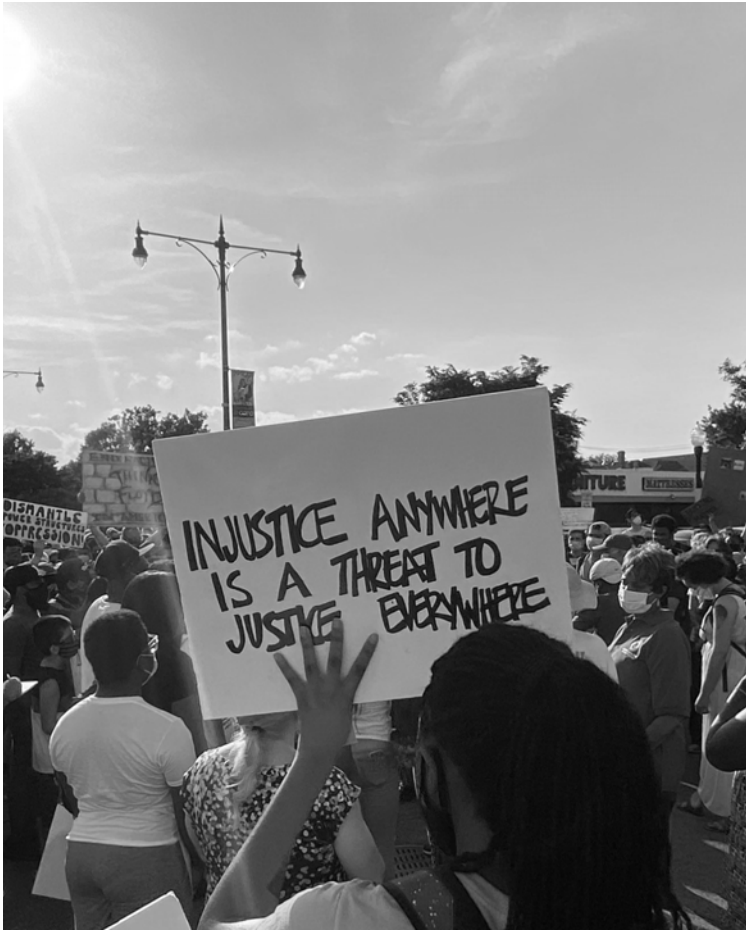


What Steps Need to Be Taken to Create Change on the Westside?

- Support changes that will eliminate barriers
- DE&I, having people in leadership who represent communities
- Leadership must listen to the needs of the community
- Trust the people who have boots on the ground who know the community
- Humility from organizational leaders
- Be upfront and honest
- Create a space for community voice
- Create a space for team members
- Storytelling
- Collaborate with other organizations
- Become a referral for other agencies
- Encourage a different lens in philanthropy
- Teach people how to think outside the box; no need to solve problems the same way
- Create effective empowerment
- Leaders must produce other leaders
- Dissect and understand privilege
- Networks can get us through doors that degrees cannot
- Create equity by educating communities
- Stop thinking it's US versus THEM
- Ability to succeed is based on us working together
- Never burn bridges, keep avenues open
- Everyone can make a contribution
- Nonjudgemental responses - every household, every individual is different
- Reflect vibrancy, dark places create havoc on the psyche
- Providing a little bit of support makes a big difference in someone's life

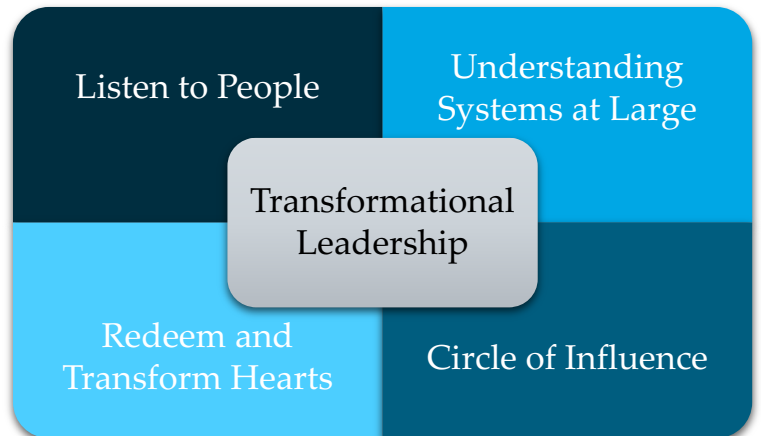
“If you build people, you build communities.”

-Nonprofit Staff Member



Executive Leaders

What Should Be the Priorities of Organizations and Agencies That Serve the Westside?

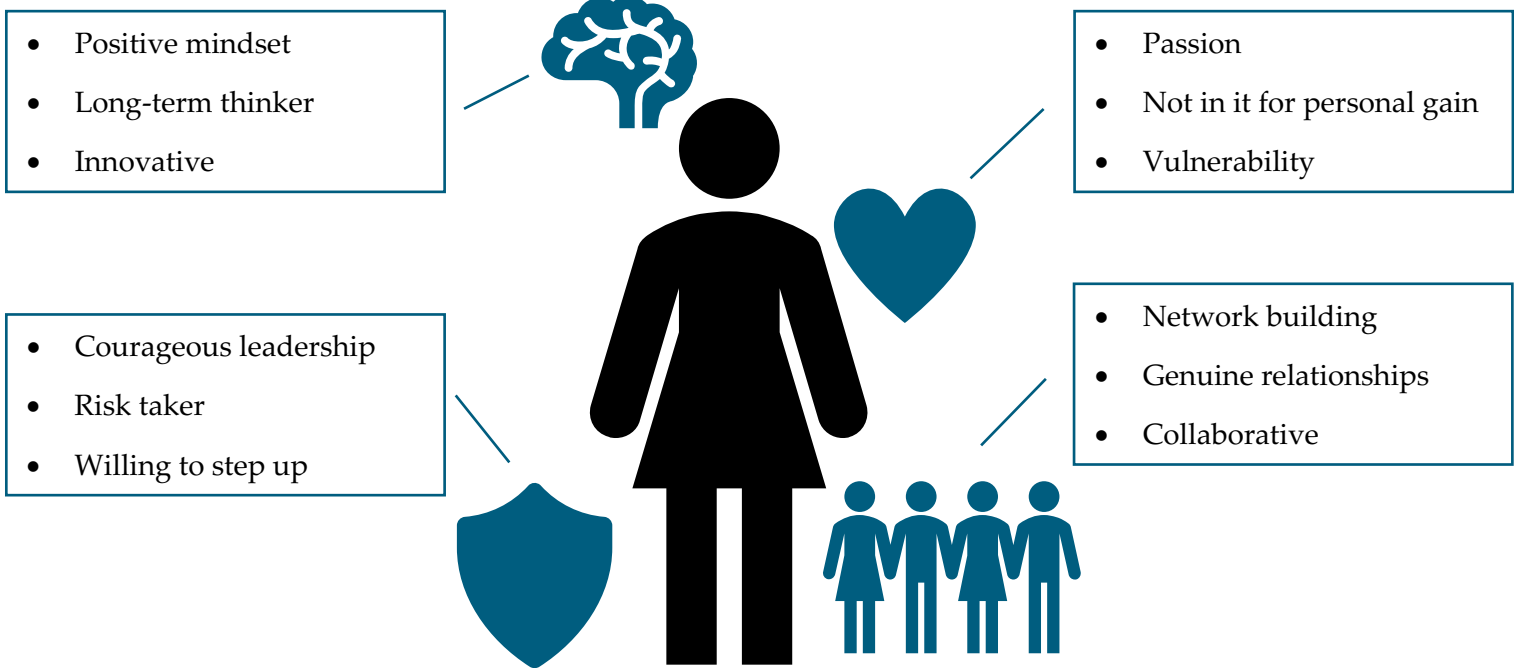


Executive leaders identified three primary leadership disciplines necessary for success. Transformational leadership, ethical leadership, and community organizing are believed to be essential functions of impactful leaders. This people-centered approach supports the needs of communities and amplifies the strengths of those doing the work.

“We must invest in potential, even if it means we won’t see it in our lifetime.”

- Current Executive Leader

How Do You Identify People to Support the Work in Addressing These Priorities?



What Investments Should a Leader Be Willing to Make In Order to Promote Growth?

Access – Leaders must be confident in their position in order to provide valuable mentorship. They must engage, invest and impact those following in their footsteps. They must be willing to introduce others to their networks.

Communication – Leaders share the right message at the right time. It is important to be deliberate when your intention is to craft messages intended to inspire, motivate, and offer reassurance. Leaders encourage open discussions and involve others in developing plans. A leader’s action and attitude determine credibility and trust.

Time - Effective leadership involves time to work with individuals on their growth. It is important to guide and help others through their leadership path. Allowing time for leadership development will open up possibilities for those just entering their leadership journey. Leadership is not a quick fix; it is a long-term commitment.



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