Data as a Tool to Support Black Wealth Building

Thursday morning 9:15 - 10:30 a.m.

The "racial wealth gap" is a common term for many who are working to advance racial equity, but others may bristle at perceived implications underlying the phrase. As "wealth" often invokes images of influence and affluence, when researchers and advocates talk about balancing wealth gaps, it's a short leap to imagine that efforts to redistribute wealth aren't far behind. Those on the upper end of the wealth gap may be reticent to support actions that they perceive would threaten their current and future wealth and influence. Those on the lower end of the wealth gap who may be more concerned with day-to-day survival could not connect to the phrase either, as it does not appear to reflect their present circumstances. In the end, it is often a divisive topic, pushing both sides farther away from their common goals.

Still, describing neighborhood conditions and disparities through the lens of the racial wealth gap continues to gain momentum nationally. It remains a powerful way to describe the structural inequities a community faces in clear, valid, and actionable ways. Despite the semantic dissonance "wealth" carries, the wealth gap fundamentally describes differentiated access to the basic resources required to live and advance in today's economic context and to have agency within that context to make reasonable decisions on behalf of your family. To avoid limiting the utility of the work, it is important to redefine our connection to the word wealth. Furthermore, addressing the racial wealth gap isn't merely a redistributive exercise, it results in overall wealthier and healthier communities.

To realize the potential of this framing we can define wealth - *as a measure of one's ability to thrive* – to weather emergencies and health shocks, to give your family the ability to succeed through stable housing and educational opportunities, to pursue investment and business opportunities as they arise, then to pass down resources and assets to future generations. In turn, having greater wealth means that neighborhoods are also well-resourced, and that one "bad break" doesn't spiral residents toward poverty. This basic definition of wealth makes people and neighborhoods more stable, enduring, and prosperous.

Also using this definition of wealth, the economic elements which undergird it can be easily tied to historical decisions, policies, and laws, which makes the solutions to the wealth gap easier to discover and act upon. Though many of these economic elements have been impacted by decisions rooted in racist public policies and discriminatory private practices and while that reality worked to ensure disadvantage for Black individuals and stripped Black communities of wealth, undoing these past inequities creates stronger neighborhoods that offer higher quality of life for all.

Identifying antecedents to the racial wealth gap provides opportunities for data to serve as an important tool to support building Black wealth. Data can be used to understand and quantify the drivers of wealth and wealth extraction and to inform the variety, design, and implementation of

innovative solutions. Unfortunately, data on the wealth gap, and its drivers at the local level is hard to come by. This leaves ample opportunity for rigorous research and exploration.

The purpose of this session is to ground NNIP partners in understanding of wealth and share examples of how data can be used to support Black wealth building efforts to inspire more partners to engage on this issue.

This session will begin with a 35-minute moderated discussion between panelists followed by 10 minutes of Q & A for the panelists. **Ashley Clark**, vice president and director of the Center for Equity, Engagement and Research at Detroit Future City, and NNIP alumna will moderate the discussion. The panelists:

- **Lamar Gardere** is the executive director of The Data Center and has been part of the steering committee for the [SEE CHANGE Collective](#), which aims to close the wealth gap for Blacks, Hispanics, and Latinos in the Greater New Orleans region.
- **Carolyn Johnson** CEO of the [Black Cultural Zone](#) – a collaborative of residents, government agencies, churches, and grassroots organizing and community groups, dedicated to ensuring Black residents and culture can remain in East Oakland. They are one of the leaders in the [RiseEast Oakland](#) collective impact initiative to build a thriving East Oakland where Black children and families are thriving.

Following the moderated discussion will have table talk for 10-12 minutes and wrap up the session with plenary discussion.

Questions for Table Talk:

- Thinking about the historical and social context of your community, what might be impacting wealth creation and wealth loss? How could data help inform that understanding?
- This panel focuses on Black wealth, but strategies to build wealth for other groups may vary to account for different drivers and cultural context. What wealth gaps are important to focus on in your community?
- What challenges with data or collaborating have you encountered on this topic locally?
- In what ways could NNIP support you to engage on this topic?
- What is one thing you think NNIP collectively could contribute to conversations on this topic nationally?

NNIP Strategic Framework Connections:

- Goal: Local actors adopt data-informed policies and practices to distribute resources more fairly and equitably across neighborhoods.

- Strategies: Harness the power of the network by expanding the roles and engagement opportunities of NNIP Network members; increase visibility and understanding of the network's values, approach, and insights among our target audiences.

Resources:

[Advancing Black Wealth through Local Data and Engagement](#) | NNIP cross-site project

[Black Wealth Data Center](#)

[Building A Beloved Economy: A Baseline and Framework for Building Black Wealth in Atlanta](#) | Atlanta Wealth Building Initiative

[Racial Wealth Equity Resource Center](#) | Boston Indicators

[Small Dollar Mortgages](#) and [Black Homebuyer Demand](#) | Data Driven Detroit and Detroit Future City

[Financial Health and Wealth Dashboard](#) | Urban Institute

[Debt in America Tool](#) | Urban Institute