



# *The Fierce Urgency of Now*

## **MetroMorphosis in 2020**

## Friends & Colleagues,

This has been a turbulent year for our community, the country, and the world as a whole, but the events of 2020 have been especially profound for Black Americans. The inequities woven into the fabric of our society have been laid bare for all to see. Pre-existing medical disparities, an increased likelihood of working low-wage 'essential' jobs, and housing policies that have forced greater proximity in Black neighborhoods, all worked together to magnify the impact of COVID 19 in Black communities.

In East Baton Rouge Parish, Black citizens account for 60% of deaths related to COVID 19 even though we make up only 46% of the total population. The unemployment crisis has also hit Black communities especially hard. The unemployment rate for Black Americans has tripled since the crisis began and 44% of African-American households report a wage or job loss due to the recent crisis. This impact extends to business owners as well. Structural flaws with the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) and a history of inequitable policies towards Black businesses by financial institutions have disproportionately excluded Black business owners from the PPP. Some surveys suggest that up to half of Black owned businesses will be forced to close by the end of the year.

In the midst of these unprecedented crises, our communities have also been galvanized by the largest and most diverse racial justice movement our country has ever seen. Unlike the health and economic crises described above, the killings that sparked this movement are not new or unexpected. But their quick succession, and the brutality of the images that captured them, have made clear that the dehumanization of Black bodies that our country was built on has never truly disappeared.

**At MetroMorphosis we find ourselves in a time of great consequence.** Each of the disruptions that have come to define 2020 speaks directly to work that we have been doing for years, but in light of these new disruptions, can no longer continue doing this work in the same way. Fortunately, we have also spent years creating internal systems that allow us to quickly adapt to the changing needs around us. By grounding our work in *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, the book that is the centerpiece of our Urban Leadership Development Initiative, we were able to pivot to be more responsive to this unexpected year. This report details how we have adapted our work and how our work related to health, business development, and narrative change will look moving forward.

*- Raymond Jetson*

## In 2020...

### Previous Work: Early 2020

### Adaptive Leadership: March-June 2020

### New Vision: July-December 2020

#### Health Disparities

- **Launched** 'Hair & Health' initiative to address issue of heart disease being the number one cause of death for African-American men by repurposing barbershops as blood pressure testing sites
- **Participation** from over 200 men across 11 barbershops.
- **Over** 70% of men saw a decrease in blood pressure through regular participation

- **Check-in** calls with partners to assess needs
- **Hosted** virtual event attended by 70 people focused on understanding the disparate impact of COVID-19 on black communities
- **Distributed** PPE to barbers and other partners
- **Led** workshops for barbershops and beauty salons focused on safety practices prior to reopening

- **Launch** expanded 'Hair & Health' initiative focused on beauty salons as well and barbershops
- **Expand** beyond blood pressure checks to barber and beauty shops as community hubs for information related to COVID-19 and other health priorities
- **Regularly** share information and resources related to the disparate impact on the black community

#### Economic Disparities

- **LaunchBR** business development initiatives focused on range of strategies from shifting procurement policies to individual coaching for disadvantaged business owners.
- **Over** \$2 million dollars in procurement contracts going to DBEs
- **Increased** access to resources and opportunities for hundreds of vetted businesses

- **Check-in** calls with businesses to assess questions and needs
- **Support** and workshops for businesses focused on taking advantage of PPP and other relief policies
- **Ongoing** capacity building work for both small businesses and large procurers to increase contracts going to DBEs

- **Expand** city government procurement policy work to two new municipalities
- **Use** data from bids and interviews with large procurers to inform coaching for small businesses applying for bids
- **Continue** to increase competitiveness of DBEs by offering coaching on implementation of new technology

#### Structural Racism

- **Hosted** 'Disrupting Dehumanization' workshop with Dr. Rhonda Bryant. Participation from dozens of community organizations including the BRPD
- **Hosted** 'Radical Healing' workshop with Dr. Shawn Ginwright
- **Regular** strategy work on narrative change focused on amplifying positive stories of black citizens and leaders

- **Ongoing** systems level work around re-entry, education, urban leadership, and recently the foster care system
- **Hosted** 'Mental Health Matters' event with over 100+ attendees to help people cope with the psychological toll of 2020
- **Renewed** emphasis on narrative change, with particular focus on community level leadership

- **Use** the 6 Conditions of Systems Change to guide the thinking of policy makers and community leaders
- **Strategic** efforts focused on shifting mindsets through asset-based narratives
- **Demonstrate** position as a trusted source of leadership in matters of racial equity and justice

## Conclusion

It has become popular these past few months for organizations to emphasize the opportunities that can emerge from periods of great disruption. But organizations that have not been deliberately preparing for these opportunities may find it harder to capitalize on this moment than they imagine. **At MetroMorphosis we are uniquely positioned and prepared to lead in these times.** The priorities that have suddenly found themselves on the front pages of newspapers and plastered across our social media feeds are the same priorities that MetroMorphosis has been working on for years.

We have spent the past decade emphasizing the fact that sustainable change requires a movement. We are excited and emboldened to hear so many others begin to assert this word 'movement' as well. We have each felt great pain these past few months, but we are also filled with great hope. This is not the year we would have asked for, but we are proud of our capacity to rise to the challenge. This is the time that we have been preparing for. The next 6 months are set to frame the most important work that we have ever done.

