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# THE STRENGTH OF OUR COMMUNITY

A report on the impact and evolution of

**MetroMorphosis**<sup>®</sup>

*Transforming Urban Communities from Within*





# MISSION:

Transform urban communities from within.

# VISION:

A critical mass of engaged people equipped to transform their own communities.

# APPROACH:

- Mobilize citizens
- Form catalytic partnerships
- Re-Activate assets
- Lead narrative change

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## CELEBRATING SUCCESS

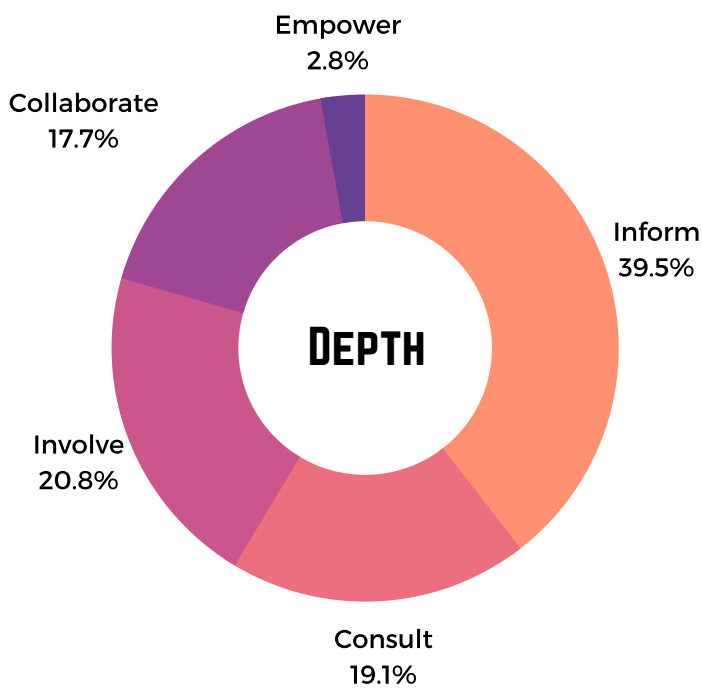
Over the past three years, MetroMorphosis has played a powerful role in strengthening urban communities across Baton Rouge. We have **mobilized thousands of citizens**, given them opportunities to share insights on a new direction for Baton Rouge, and supported them in acting toward change. We have **formed systems-level collective action networks** to; improve the reentry process and reduce recidivism, strengthen the partnership between families and schools, and co-design new procurement systems with our region's largest purchasers to create a more equitable landscape for opportunity. Our **emphasis on community assets** has allowed us to repurpose barber shops and beauty salons into blood pressure testing sites and hubs of community resources, identify and develop dozens of future community leaders, and provide intensive coaching and support to entrepreneurs who have historically been excluded from the established pathways to opportunity. In all of this work, we have prioritized

systems for **strategic learning and continuous improvement**. This means that, each year, we are able to show a demonstrable increase in the impact of our work.

*"We are proud of...the hundreds of stories we can tell to show how communities are stronger now than they were before."*

We are proud of what we have been able to accomplish, the relationships we've developed, and the hundreds of stories we can tell to show how communities are stronger now than they were before. But the more we achieve, the more we know **the true potential of our work has only begun to be realized.**

# TOTAL MOBILIZED IN 2019 & 2020: 2,153



**Inform:** a person who attends a MetroMorphosis event or training

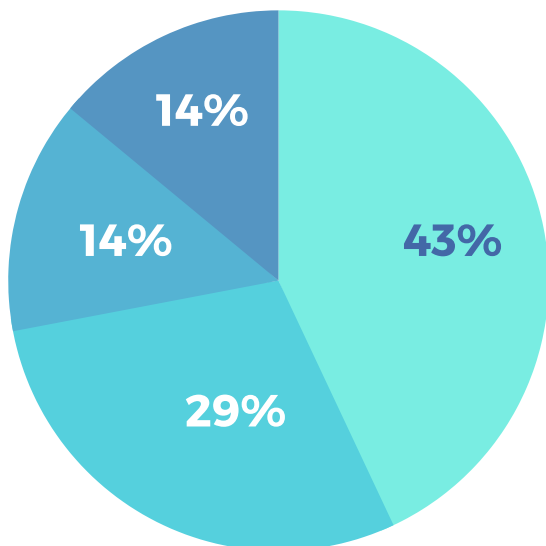
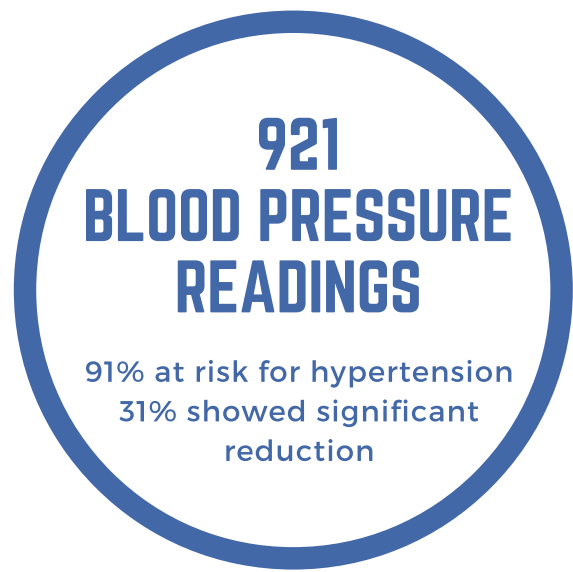
**Consult:** a person who attends a MetroMorphosis event or training AND contributes insights or feedback that can inform future work

**Involve:** a person who regularly participates in MetroMorphosis initiatives and helps to shape strategy

**Collaborate:** a person who does work between formal meetings to advance the strategies of MetroMorphosis

**Empower:** a person who has initiated independent work or advanced professionally because of their connection with MetroMorphosis

# IMPACT HIGHLIGHTS



## UDLI PARTICIPANTS: 67

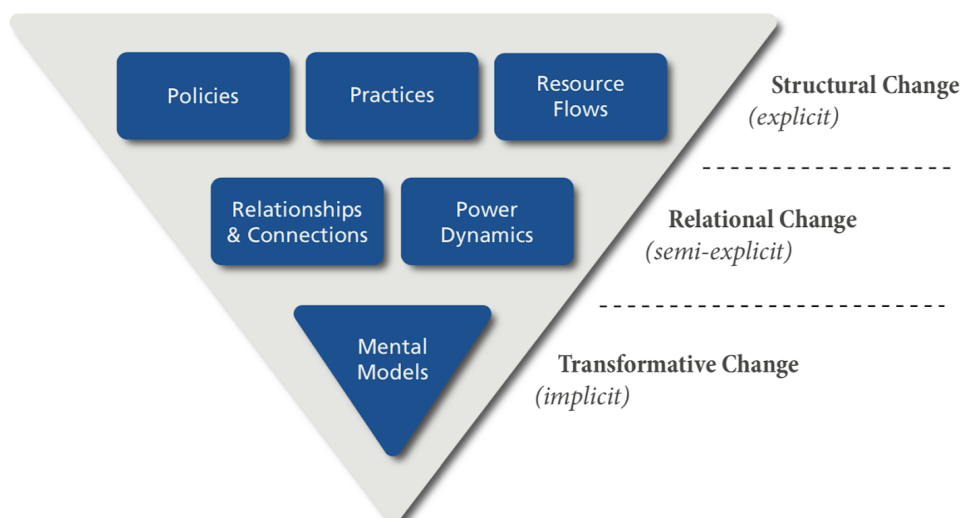
- PRIVATE INDUSTRY
- NON-PROFIT
- EDUCATION
- GOVERNMENT

# SYSTEMIC CHANGE & THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF FLEXIBLE SUPPORT

None of what MetroMorphosis has accomplished would have been possible without the generosity of our supporters and the flexibility it has afforded us. Unlike most non-profit organizations that are locked into pursuing narrow and predetermined programmatic outcomes, MetroMorphosis has been able to adapt to emergent opportunities and needs. This flexibility means that we are able to define our work in ways that gets to the heart of systemic change. **The ambition of MetroMorphosis is unparalleled in our community** and has encouraged us to study the nature and conditions of systemic change.

It is common to hear people talk about the ‘need for systemic change,’ but **it is much harder to find people or organizations who can describe exactly what ‘systemic change’ means.** Over the past 2 years, we have strengthened our relationship with national collective impact leaders and researchers focused on understanding the dynamics of systemic and sustainable change. Through these relationships we have come to understand that population level outcomes cannot be achieved only through scaling successful programs. Population level outcomes require deliberate action across all of the conditions of systemic change.

## Six Conditions of Systems Change



# FOUR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Because of our appreciation for the limits of programmatic solutions and our understanding of the need to take a more holistic approach to our work, we no longer describe our work purely in terms of the specific initiatives we are supporting at any given time. Instead **we frame all of our work according to four strategic objectives that motivate any particular initiative we are engaged in.**

## **Mobilize Citizens:**

Communities can only grow stronger when community members are actively involved in the transformation.

## **Form Catalytic Partnerships:**

Because the issues we address have systemic roots, we must partner with the organizations who define those systems to design more equitable processes.

## **Re-Activate Assets:**

Any sustainable change must be driven by strengthening the assets already in a community. We don't just invite people to the table, we help them create tables of their own.

## **Lead Narrative Change:**

Systemic change cannot truly occur without actively seeking to transform how people see their own potential, the potential of their communities, and how they are viewed by those outside their communities.



## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES ARE MORE THAN PROGRAMS

This approach, focused on strategic objectives rather than predetermined programs, is critical to achieving our mission of transforming urban communities from within. It is, however, also unconventional. **Most funders limit the flexibility of funds by prescribing specific actions before the work has even begun**, making it almost impossible to adapt to emerging opportunities. By contrast, the theory of change advanced by **MetroMorphosis depends on flexible**

**support** that allows us to **bring an entrepreneurial mindset to community development work**, empowering us to quickly respond to emergent needs and opportunities, invest more in strategies that are working and discard initiatives that struggle to gain traction. Through this approach, **we are creating a new model for how community organizations can prioritize continuous improvement and the principles of adaptive leadership.**



# CURRENT INITIATIVES BY STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

## MOBILIZATION

**Community conversations:** Convenings in congregations, barbershops and on Zoom to discuss and address community needs.

**Urban Elders Council:** Tapping into the wisdom of those with experience

**Trainings & Events:** Providing trainings and resources such as 'Mental Health Matters' and others

## RE-ACTIVATING ASSETS

**LaunchBR/Business Development:** helping small businesses develop the capacity to access new capital and contracts

**Barbers & Stylists as Community Navigators:** reimagining shops and salons as hubs of resources and opportunities

**Urban Leadership Development Initiative:** developing and building community amongst the next generation of leaders

## CATALYTIC PARTNERSHIPS

**Urban Congress on African- American Males:** connecting organizations and individuals to address critical issues impacting the lives of Black boys and men

**Procurement Council:** leveling the playing field to help small businesses access opportunities with large procurers

**Our Schools Our Excellence:** helping the school system develop strategies to strengthen relationships with families through true partnership around learning

**CAPARC & Reentry:** reducing recidivism through a more comprehensive and coherent vision for reentry

**I-CAN:** Community partners & EBR schools - organizing partners to assist the 13 schools in the Innovation network with family-school partnerships, culturally responsive teaching, and a stronger human capital pipeline

**Urban Leaders Roundtable:** key public and community organizations leveraging resources and increasing impact through partnership

## NARRATIVE CHANGE

**Black Media Group:** providing leadership around a new narrative for urban communities

**Disrupting Dehumanization:** workshops on dehumanization and strategies to respond to it.

**Robust Social Media Strategy:** creating a consistent and positive counter narrative

**Publishing articles & reports:** amplifying our ideas and the lessons we've learned

**Asset based messaging across all initiatives.**

# METROMORPHOSIS IN 2020

The compounding crises of this year have clearly exposed how **the structural inequities in our society are defined along lines of race**. In East Baton Rouge Parish, black people account for over 60% of deaths from COVID-19 even though black residents account for only 43% of the population. The unemployment rate for black Americans has tripled since February and 44% of black households report a loss of income. Nationally, black owned businesses have been twice as likely to close down during the pandemic. Black business owners are less likely to have strong relationships with their banks, were 25% less likely to apply for Paycheck Protection Program loans and 20% less likely to receive the loans if they did apply compared to white-owned businesses. Finally, while the violent treatment of black people at the hands of law enforcement is not a surprise to the black community, the brutality and

*These unprecedented and disruptive circumstances have sparked a fierce sense of urgency at MetroMorphosis.*

clarity of recent videos, and the national reckoning on racial justice that has followed, has **exerted an acute and severe mental toll** on many black citizens in Baton Rouge.

These unprecedented and disruptive circumstances have sparked a fierce sense of urgency at MetroMorphosis. Because of our focus on adaptive leadership and the fact that we organize our work by strategic objectives instead of specific programs, **we were well positioned to assess and respond to the emergent needs and opportunities in our community.**



## ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

Since March we have engaged in 1-1 calls with over 100 community leaders and small business owners, hosted a series of African-American male listening sessions, and convened more than 60 barbers and stylists to discuss the needs they've heard in their shops. Early on these conversations surfaced the fact that access to mental health resources was the number one concern in the community. In response, we hosted virtual "Mental Health Matters" events to equip people with tools and resources to manage their mental health. We also learned that there was a need for more guidance to help parents support their children's

learning at home so we accelerated our Family-School Partnership initiative with the East Baton Rouge School System. As the pandemic drags on and unemployment benefits are reduced, we are hearing an increased demand for support on finances. Interestingly, the most frequently cited need from our African-American male listening sessions has been around the notion of narrative change. We are currently developing partnerships and strategies to respond to this profound observation and work to lead the way in creating a new and more powerful narrative about our communities and the black men who call them home.

# FINDINGS FROM KEY ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVES

ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE	KEY CONCERNS	RESPONSE
<b>ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN WITH COMMUNITY LEADERS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental health</li> <li>• Education supports for families</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Held series of virtual events (mental health, resources, racial disparities)</li> </ul>
<b>AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALE LISTENING SESSIONS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Narrative change</li> <li>• Equitable distribution of resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish Black Media Group</li> </ul>
<b>COMMUNITY PARTNERS: BARBERS &amp; STYLISTS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finances</li> <li>• Health</li> <li>• Jobs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launched Community Navigators Initiative (barbers &amp; stylists)</li> </ul>

# UNIQUELY POSITIONED TO CATALYZE IMPOSSIBLE CHANGE

There is nothing inevitable about transformation. If the long arc of the moral universe bends toward justice, it is only because there are **passionate people of vision** who push it to do so.

*MetroMorphosis has emerged as a trusted partner with community members, service organizations, and systems level leaders.*

At MetroMorphosis, we have often spoken about the importance of framing our work as a 'movement' and not a 'moment'. We know that deep and sustainable change can only be achieved with persistent pressure. **Trust can only be achieved through consistency over time.** But we also recognize that sometimes there are moments that arise with the potential to dramatically accelerate change and transformation. These moments tend to favor those who have been preparing for them. These moments favor organizations like MetroMorphosis.

Over the past several years, we have nurtured strong relationships at every level of the systems we work to transform. MetroMorphosis has emerged as a trusted partner with community members, service organizations, and systems level leaders.

Because of these relationships, the ambition of our vision, the internal expertise we have cultivated around the dynamics of systemic change, and our ability to adapt to emergent opportunities, **MetroMorphosis is uniquely positioned to lead in this time of unprecedented disruption and possibility.**



# 2021 & BEYOND

By leveraging our relationships with community partners and building upon the trust we've forged with them, we will continue to execute each of the strategies previously described with a high-standard of excellence.

But it will also allow us to continue to adapt and create new opportunities to achieve our mission of strengthening urban communities from within. Our future work will deepen our presence in the community through the establishment of resource hubs in institutions that are indigenous to the communities we serve and equipping citizens to act as liaisons and navigators.

## Deepening Our Community Presence Establishing Community Hubs Elevating the Citizen Voice Providing consultancy services and training

We will also elevate the citizen voice through the use of inclusive engagement and data collection and analysis to influence decision making and resource allocation and encourage continuous citizen engagement.

We will support the efforts of our partner organizations through consultancy and strategic support services that build collaboration, identify effective practices and provide culturally-relevant training.

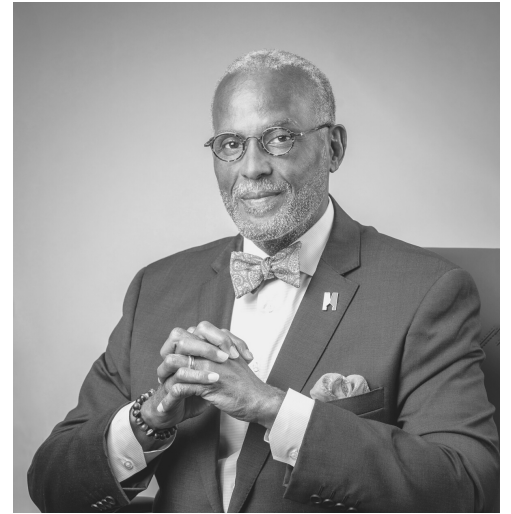
It is possible for our city to emerge from this period of crisis and unrest stronger than when it began. We are primed to galvanize our communities and the systems around them to realize this potential. Together we can build the structures that will allow all corners of our community to thrive.



# A LETTER FROM OUR CHIEF EXECUTIVE CATALYST

Dear Friends,

Thank you for your interest in MetroMorphosis. I hope this report has made clear that the way we view and approach our work is unique in the non-profit sector. This is because, at MetroMorphosis, we have embraced the audacity of a more ambitious vision of what is possible.



The impact of our approach is clear to see. People are being mobilized in the inner city in ways that will change education, health, and small business development for years to come. Organizations are being brought together to act collectively to leverage their respective resources like never before. Neglected and unrecognized assets are being activated and repurposed in neighborhoods in a manner that can be truthfully called transformative.

We are proud of the change and expanded opportunity our work has catalyzed, but we are humbled by the fact that this work would not have been possible without the commitment of financial supporters who share our vision.

We now find ourselves in a time of great disruption and possibility. A global pandemic and the resurgence of overt racism has created a tenuous environment in urban communities. Policies and practices that exacerbate disparities and obstruct opportunity make the work of MetroMorphosis more vital than it has ever been before. It is for this reason that, I am working to expand the support and resources that fuel the work of MetroMorphosis.

We have a vision of a more equitable and prosperous community and we know the path we need to take to achieve that vision. My sincere hope is that you will join us on this journey into a better future.

With sincere gratitude and appreciation,

Raymond