Creating More Just Communities
through Intentional Partnerships Between Anchor Institutions and Black and Brown Business Leaders:

A Quality Improvement Project for the St. Louis Anchor Action Network

by Ashley Hemmy, Chrystine Kern, and Paul Umbach, Ed.D candidates

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VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY

ST. LOUIS ANCHOR ACTION NETWORK

Launched in October 2021, the St. Louis Anchor Action Network ("the Network") is a coalition of 17 regional anchor institutions across education, healthcare, nonprofit, and public and private sectors focused on addressing the long history of systemic racial and spatial inequities within north St. Louis city and county. Anchor institutions are large, place-based organizations—such as universities, hospitals, and other large employers—that are tethered to, or anchored in, their local communities.

Today, the Network's members include:

CO-LEAD	CO-LEAD
UMSL	Edward Jones

Ameren	BJC HealthCare	Christian hospital	EQUIFAX	Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis
Great Rivers Greenway	Harris-Stowe State University	Mercy	Missouri Botanical Garden	Saint Louis University
Saint Louis Zoo Animals Always	SSM Health	St. Louis Community College	Washington University in St. Louis	Webster University

As a coalition of anchor institutions who are major players within the St. Louis (socio)economic ecosystem, the Network has considerable collective power to impact social determinants of health, community wealth, quality of life, and small business success by generating and leveraging social capital and network resources to improve racial and spatial equity across the St. Louis region–and for generations to come.

Mapping Racial and Spatial Injustice in St. Louis

More than a century of historical disinvestment, uneven development, and unequal distribution of resources–all driven by systemic racism–defines the St. Louis landscape. Home to Missouri's wealthiest and most impoverished zip codes, St. Louis embodies stark spatial injustices, as areas of affluence juxtapose neighborhoods of concentrated poverty, extreme unemployment, limited educational opportunities, and substandard housing. The "Delmar Divide," a prominent east-west boulevard that cuts through the city, demarcates north St. Louis from the wealthier, predominantly white neighborhoods south of the divide.

This pattern of injustice not only reinforces cycles of racial disparities but also yields outcomes that are detrimental to community quality of life and social determinants of health for St. Louis as a whole. As the University of Missouri–St. Louis (UMSL) aptly put it in its grant proposal to launch the Network through funding from the Missouri Foundation for Health:

"When the population in one part of the metropolitan area has been systematically marginalized, it does not just hold back those individuals and families – it holds back the entire region."

22 Zip Codes

Responding to the long history of racial divisions, structural inequities, and economic disinvestment in north St. Louis, the St. Louis Anchor Action Network exists to remove barriers and increase access to positive socioeconomic outcomes for Black and Brown community members through intentional hiring, purchasing, and community investment. The Network is focused first on the 22 zip codes of greatest need in north St. Louis city and county.

St. Louis Anchor Action Network Focus Geography
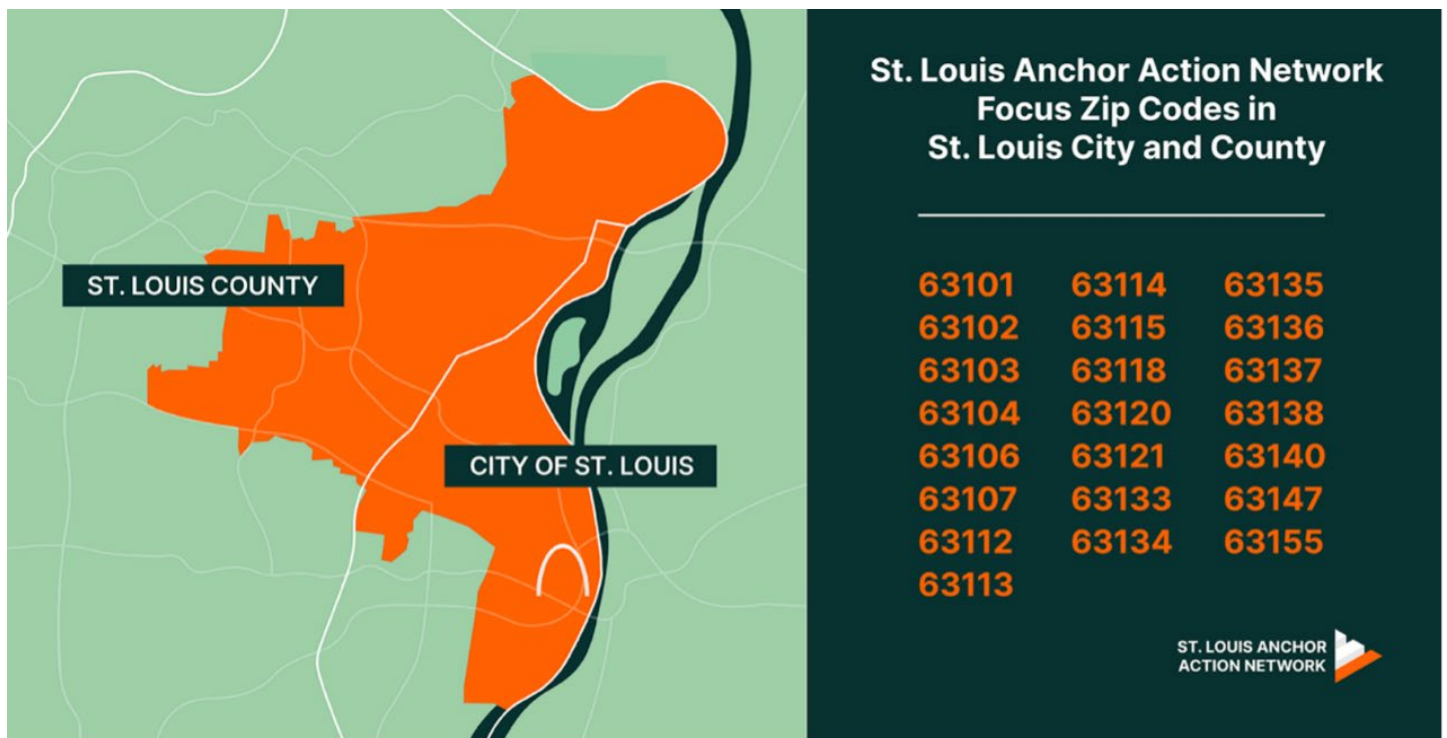
U.S. Census data from 2019 show that 24.1% of the population within the Network's 22 zip code focus geography live below the poverty line–more than double the 11.3% living below the poverty line in the St. Louis Metropolitan Area as a whole. With over 332,000 residents and about 13,325 businesses, the 22 zip code footprint is 70% Black and is home to 50% of the region's unemployed Black residents. For the per capita income of Black residents within the footprint to match that of the broader region, the income for every Black resident within the footprint would have to be nearly doubled. To close this gap, the St. Louis Anchor Action Network would have to introduce roughly **$4.3 billion in annual income** for residents within the footprint.

By the end of 2023, its second full year of operating, **the St. Louis Anchor Action Network has set a collective goal to increase employment and purchasing within the 22 zip codes by 10%.** This collective 10% would equate to **an anticipated $50 million increase in direct investment in the focus geography.**

Area of Inquiry

Within its first two years of operating, the St. Louis Anchor Action Network has taken steps toward increasing collective spending and employment within the 22 zip code area. In 2021, the Network conducted five listening sessions and five informational interviews with over 125 community partners and stakeholders–including residents, local businesses, and nonprofits–to understand the community's needs and develop its initial action plan. To date, the Network has established an online, searchable Community Business Tool to promote the discovery of local Black and Brown-owned businesses; hired at least 50 applicants and run multiple career expos to connect residents with anchor member employment opportunities; and opened doors for at least 50 small businesses to bid on contracts with Network members.

As the Network looks toward maturing its business model and implementing its strategic plan over the next three years, our project seeks to understand the extent to which the St. Louis Anchor Action Network removes barriers and expands access for Black and Brown business leaders in north St. Louis in the following key areas:

- **Spending, procurement, and investment of resources.**

- **Creating contracting and employment opportunities that promote community wealth-building and wage growth.**

- **Facilitating connections that advance the professional networks and social capital of Black and Brown business leaders.**

- **Building capacity through mentoring, training, and other learning opportunities.**

- **Partnering with Black and Brown business leaders to serve the broader needs of the St. Louis community.**

Investing in these leaders is a vital lever for change as their organizations have the potential not only to expand the Network's reach but also to bring more wealth into the community, create essential jobs for residents, and increase access to products and services that the community needs to live and thrive.

Research Questions

We centered our research on the following questions:

1 **To what extent are the activities of the Anchor Network meeting the socioeconomic needs of Black and Brown business leaders within the 22 zip code focus geography of north St. Louis?**

2 **How might the Anchor Network maximize its community impact in service of Black and Brown business leaders within the 22 zip code focus geography of north St. Louis?**

Conceptual Framework

Building on our literature review, we developed a concept map to illustrate the primary strategies anchor collaboratives employ to invest in their surrounding communities and to what effect. As anchors intentionally invest to improve community wealth, social determinants of health, quality of life, and small business success, communities that have historically been disinvested in can begin to survive and thrive—along with the anchors themselves.

Concept Map
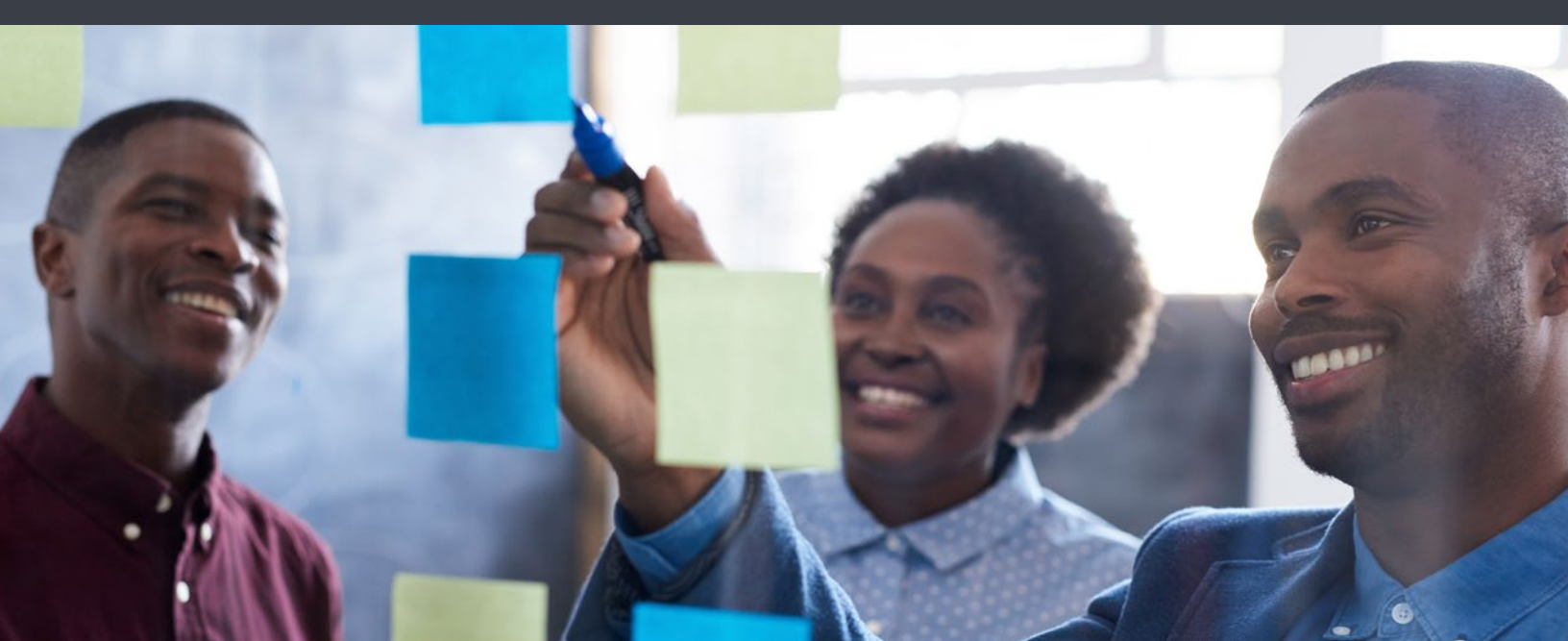
Focusing on the St. Louis Anchor Action Network's goal of intentional purchasing as the single most effective anchor strategy for community wealth-building, our project aims to elevate the voices of Black and Brown business leaders in north St. Louis. To co-design the future of the community in a way that creates more racially and spatially just systems, we advocate for anchors and anchor networks to center the voices of the community they seek to serve and to adopt the Design Justice framework.

Design Justice Principles (Design Justice Network, 2021)
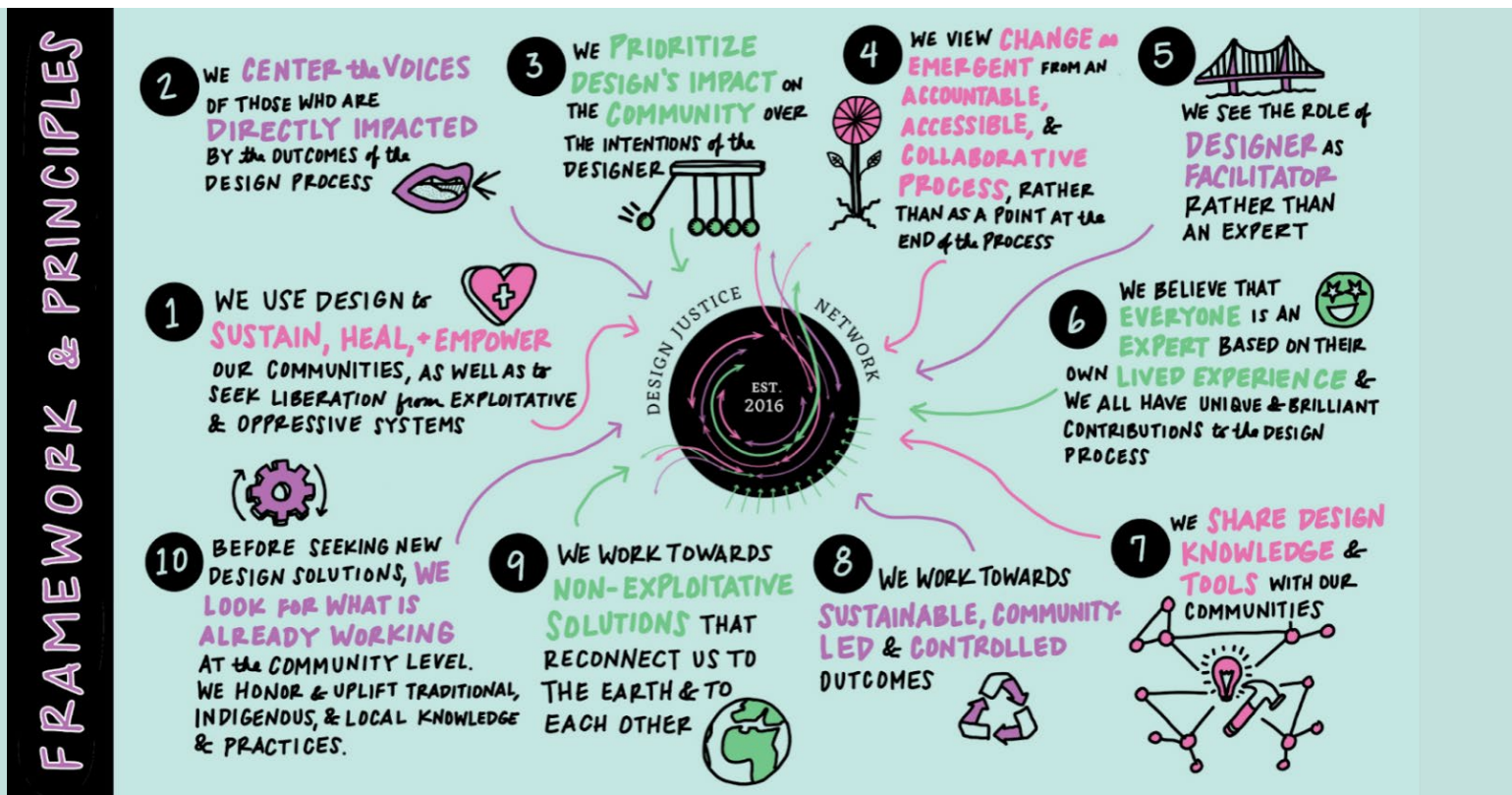
Project Design

The goal of our quality improvement project is to provide UMSL and the Network with a list of recommendations to improve its impact while centering community voices throughout the process. We approached UMSL with the opportunity to collaborate because of the importance of the St. Louis Anchor Action Network's mission and its potential to grow beyond its initial incubation phase. As a team, we decided to take a qualitative approach to this project because qualitative research allows for a deeper understanding of the "how" and "why" of our research questions by listening to different experiences. A qualitative methodology supports the Design Justice principles in our work; we aimed to select sources that would allow us to listen to and center the voices of Black and Brown business leaders (Design Justice Principle 3), and we viewed ourselves as facilitators instead of experts in uncovering the answers to our research questions (Design Justice Principle 5).

Our data collection and analysis involved three primary parts:

1. document collection and analysis to describe the Network's activities.

2. interviews with 15 Black and Brown business owners and leaders in the 22 zip code focus geography to identify needs, barriers, and opportunities.

3. two focus groups with Black and Brown business leaders to formulate recommendations for improvement.

Document Analysis
Reviewed **10+ documents** and media articles on the Network

Interviews
Contacted **600+ business leaders**, which led to **15 interviews** conducted

Focus Groups
7 Black and Brown business leaders participated in focus groups

Key Findings

Research Question 1. **To what extent are the activities of the Anchor Network meeting the socioeconomic needs of Black and Brown business leaders within the 22 zip code focus geography of north St. Louis?**

Finding 1: The Network has started to see some positive outcomes, but there is still work to do. The Network has reported little progress against its goal of increasing hiring and spending in the 22 zip codes by 10%.

> *"I think there's different priorities, right? Sometimes it's a lack of realization because it becomes not a core priority area for a business. And so I don't think a lot of this is from maliciousness by any means. I think it is very much just the nature of the anchor institutions built, the way they are and the dynamics of where they currently are."*
>
> *"So it's like how do we get to that core change to ensure that is actually happening. And like with the large contracting, too, there's a huge status quo bias."*

Finding 2: There continues to be systemic needs, issues, and barriers that impede the Network. Participants highlighted other areas of need, including housing, infrastructure, education, and the criminal justice system.

> *"St. Louis is very segregated. Segregated, and it's cliquish...St. Louis is the type of city that until the big person knows you, that's when everybody kind of falls around you."*
>
> *"So oftentimes we get assigned to do the dirty work of race as something that we didn't even create, right? So I think that in terms of accountability, this might sound a little off-hand a little bit, but I think that we just really need to address what it really means to find a level of repair for a group of individuals who've been for families or ancestors, who've been through slavery, been through oppression for 400 plus years, and then go through Black Codes, go through Jim Crow, then go through the injustice system itself that was not set up for our protection or our favor. And so when you're talking about the root of these issues. A lot of these companies were founded by folks who have participated in or have benefited from slavery. Right? And so now we're trying to repair something that's taken 400 plus years to create."*

Finding 3: It is unclear how Black and Brown Leaders can access Network resources. Out of the 15 leaders we interviewed, only 3 had heard of the Network. None could describe its mission.

> *"It's surprising because when I saw [your outreach email] and I saw the name, St. Louis Anchor Action Network, I thought what in the world? I need to know more about it... I had never heard of it... and I asked others before my interview and they had never heard of it."*

Research Question 2. How might the Anchor Network maximize its community impact in service of Black and Brown business leaders within the 22 zip code focus geography of north St. Louis?

Finding 1: Leverage and elevate the expertise and networks of Black and Brown leaders. Black and Brown business leaders understand business and community needs related to their positionality, and such knowledge represents a valued asset to the Network. The Network should tap into the expertise of these leaders to broaden their reach and impact.

Finding 2: Invest more in Black and Brown business leaders. In both the interviews and focus groups, participants expressed a strong desire for increased opportunities for personal and professional growth.

Finding 3: Prioritize accountability and transparency in implementation. The Network should place a high priority on measuring the impact of both its anchor members and the external sharing of such impact.

Recommendations

1. **Increase awareness and participation in the Network through marketing and partnerships.**

   - Maintain **up-to-date lists of Black and Brown-led businesses** within the Network's purview and continually update the Community Business Tool to identify enterprises within the St. Louis area and their leadership.

   - Invest in **a focused marketing and outreach campaign** specifically tailored to reach Black and Brown business leaders. The Network could engage the services of a local media firm owned by Black and Brown individuals in the 22 zip code area on a contractual basis to fulfill this crucial role.

   - **Appoint and compensate community ambassadors.** These ambassadors would serve as intermediaries between anchor institutions and the Black and Brown communities, offering invaluable insights into these communities' specific needs and aspirations.

   "[You've got to] put the right people in the right spaces. Let us help you to have difficult conversations. I'm a black woman. I can help you construct a conversation or dialogue to approach that type of language or verbiage or whatever to engage with minorities further. I think a lot of [the challenges to outreach] is fear [for the anchors] on how to approach minorities. But engage the minorities to let them help you do that. I'm not afraid of those tough conversations."

2. **Engage Black and Brown voices in developing programs that invest in Black and Brown business leaders.**

- **Support Black and Brown business leaders' personal and professional growth.** By offering tailored support—including mentorship, workshops, and business accelerator programs—the Network can bridge the opportunity gap for Black and Brown business leaders and build capacity for their businesses to contract with anchor members. Instead of creating new programs, the Network could partner with community members that provide those services.

- Establish a continuous schedule of **listening sessions and town hall meetings** to gain a deeper understanding of the needs and concerns of the north St. Louis community. These different engagements will serve a dual purpose: gathering valuable feedback and fostering ownership, involvement, and connection among community members.

- Launch an inclusive **advisory board** composed of local Black and Brown business owners, community leaders, and residents.

"Be intentional about creating a small business connect resource[...] And [through this program] we could learn what a lot of different businesses are doing[...] You can connect folks to each other and [business leaders] do the heavy lifting of supporting each other."

3. **Prioritize accountability measures for anchor members.**

- Currently, there exists no requirement for **anchor members to disclose data to the Network,** resulting in inconsistent practices. We recommend that beyond merely gaining favorable public relations, the anchors who choose to join the Network must not only be seen as actively engaged in their stated objectives but must genuinely fulfill the commitments they make.

"This is where we have the challenge of they do not want to buy in if they are then held accountable... But then you get this badge of honor of being like, oh I'm in the Network, right?"

- Create **a publicly accessible system that tracks and shares data on hires, contracts, and other relevant measures.** This high level of transparency will promote trust and accountability among the anchor institutions by making their missions and responsibilities public knowledge.

- Develop an **online directory of job openings** across the anchor partners and other large businesses for residents to search for jobs and **an online directory of contract opportunities** for small businesses to apply to or bid on.

"So if there is a way [the Network can] connect [each anchor member] with us...we have workshops every month, and what we are looking for is somebody to come and speak to us about what they're doing, what business opportunities, resources they have on how they want to connect to our community."

Looking toward a more inclusive future for St. Louis...

Through discussions with the Network team, it became evident that there was a pressing need for a study specifically identifying the needs and goals of Black and Brown businesses in the region. Leveraging our team of researchers with diverse backgrounds encompassing community engagement, secondary and postsecondary education, governmental affairs, nonprofit leadership, and workforce development, we recognized an opportunity to collectively apply our expertise to enhance the Network's support for Black and Brown business leaders.

According to our findings, although the Network had engaged hundreds of residents, most of our study participants had not heard of it. Even among those familiar with the St. Louis Anchor Action Network by name, they were unaware of the Network's mission. Upon learning about the Network's mission, every participant strongly desired to get involved.

We interviewed a dynamic, inspiring group of well-connected business leaders and experts in their industries. Our participants shared about the impactful work that different business associations and community groups are engaged in already in the community. The Network should elevate the expertise in the region and serve as a connector between residents, local businesses, and anchor partners.

As we approached the conclusion of this project, a new conceptual framework for anchor networks began to emerge from our research. While our initial concept map emphasized the anchor network as the primary driver and actor on the community, we discovered this model was incomplete as it depicted only a part of a larger picture. Our original concept map zoomed in on what anchors do *to* or *for* their community, when true transformation lies in what anchors create *with* their community. Instead of focusing on the anchor network as the primary actor, we found that anchors, residents, and Black and Brown business leaders must come together to co-create the community where they want to live. Through this process of connection, co-action, and co-creation, anchors, residents, and business leaders both shape and are shaped by one another as they form their *community*, with all possible meanings of the word–from physical place and space to shared group identity and metaphorical "place" where one belongs.

Just as anchors leverage strategies to invest in the community, so Black and Brown business leaders and residents can use their voices to hold anchors accountable, (re)focus their efforts, and prompt needed changes to anchor systems, processes, and practices. When this dialogue occurs within the context of antiracism, spatial justice, and design justice, anchors, residents, and business leaders can begin to "sustain, heal, and empower" their communities (Design Justice Principle 1). Through building stronger place-based partnerships with Black and Brown business leaders and elevating their voices, the St. Louis Anchor Action Network will be able to co-create *with* them a renewed St. Louis community where all residents, from every race and zip code, can live and thrive.

Our hope is that other anchor collaboratives can also leverage our research and this new conceptual framework to analyze their own operating models and design more community-focused events and supports. While each anchor collaborative is situated in its own region with unique challenges, centering the voices of those most impacted by their work can, and should, be prioritized. As one interview participant shared:

"*I would love to hear what someone else [anchors and other small business owners] says. I thought I was the only one doing this work because every door I knocked at is being closed. I'm all like, okay, well, maybe my vision is not for everyone[...] But if I can connect to someone, maybe someone can give me some advice, and I can give them some advice. I'm on board for it, man. I am. Yeah. That'll be a great opportunity for both of us. Because what I think a lot of times, people, the bigger companies, they're so out of touch with reality because they're in a big office, and even though they have the money to trickle it down to make a difference, they allocate certain dollars. But if you can't communicate with the community that needs it, then it's no good. And if they are trying to figure out how to get into our community, they have to ask us. Because, I'll tell you: they'll put announcements up, and then the people, they come because they live there and they want to know what's going on and how they can help improve our community.*"

Creating More Just Communities through Intentional Partnerships Between Anchor

Institutions and Black and Brown Business Leaders:

A Quality Improvement Project for the St. Louis Anchor Action Network

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Ashley Hemmy, Chrystine Kern, and Paul Umbach

Vanderbilt University

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Acknowledgements

Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

PART I: INTRODUCTION

On August 9, 2014, the fatal shooting and killing of 18-year-old Michael Brown, an unarmed,

Black teenager, at the hands of a white, St. Louis County police officer sparked profound civil unrest

across Ferguson, Missouri, the greater St. Louis region, and the rest of the country. As riots and protests

unfolded in their backyard of Ferguson, less than a mile away, leaders at the University of Missouri–St.

Louis (UMSL) renewed their resolve to take action to heal the neighboring communities within a two-

mile radius of campus (Guenther et al., 2019; UMSL, 2020). Nearly seven years later, UMSL's ongoing

commitment to mend a community torn apart by centuries of entrenched racial divisions and disparities

gave rise to the St. Louis Anchor Action Network.

Launched in October 2021, the St. Louis Anchor Action Network ("the Network") is a coalition of

17 local anchor institutions focused on addressing the long history of systemic racial and spatial

inequities within north St. Louis city and county. Anchor institutions are large, place-based

organizations—such as universities and hospitals (nicknamed "eds and meds") and other major

employers—that are tethered to, or *anchored* in, their local communities. Because of their enduring

nature and considerable economic power, these anchors play a critical role in shaping the development

and socioeconomic outcomes of their surrounding neighborhoods, often across many generations. Over

the past several decades, communities throughout the United States and globally have gathered

multiple anchor institutions in education, healthcare, nonprofits, and public and private sectors to work

in close collaboration to address systemic social and societal issues—such as health and wealth

inequities—too deep-seated for a single institution operating alone to address.

We selected UMSL as our capstone partner organization because of its leadership, staffing, and

initiation of the St. Louis Anchor Action Network through matched grant funding from the Missouri

Foundation for Health. As it enters its third full year of operating in 2024, the Network represents a

tangible example of an urban-serving research university engaging with multiple anchor institutions and

community partners to effect positive, regional-level outcomes for a historically underserved, majority Black and Brown area. Composed of anchors from higher education, healthcare, and the public and private sectors, the St. Louis Anchor Action Network (2022a) exists to drive local, sustained investments in "people and places" through "intentional hiring and career development, intentional purchasing, and community investment," all with the goal to create a more equitable, inclusive future for St. Louis.

Mapping Racial and Spatial Injustice in St. Louis

More than a century of historical disinvestment, uneven development, and unequal distribution of resources–all driven by systemic racism–defines the St. Louis landscape. Home to Missouri's wealthiest and most impoverished zip codes, St. Louis embodies stark spatial injustices, as areas of affluence juxtapose neighborhoods of concentrated poverty, extreme unemployment, limited educational opportunities, and substandard housing (Konczal, 2019; Soja, 2010). Mapping the city by these injustices shows north St. Louis, the area with the highest concentration of residents living below the poverty line, is also the area with the highest concentration of Black residents (Pahls, 2022). Underscoring the vast racial and spatial disparities, Black residents are over three times more likely than white residents to live in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty (City of St. Louis, 2023).

The "Delmar Divide," a prominent east-west boulevard that cuts through the city, demarcates north St. Louis from the wealthier, predominantly white neighborhoods south of the divide (see Figure 1). Decades of discriminatory public policy and business practices have shaped the "Northside," beginning with Jim Crow-era segregation ordinances in the early 1900s and deliberate redlining by lending institutions in the 1930s. With *Shelley v. Kraemer* in the late 1940s, the Supreme Court's decision to deem racially restrictive housing covenants as unenforceable precipitated enmasse white flight from north of Delmar to newly developed subdivisions on the "Southside" (Ruff, 2021). Even as the Shelley House, the center of the 1948 Supreme Court case, still stands in The Ville neighborhood of north St. Louis, segregation and disparate access persist north of Delmar along racial lines. Neighborhoods on the

Northside lack proximity to essential services in the Central Corridor, south of Delmar, "where the city's

major universities, medical centers, and downtown are located" (Mallach, 2018).
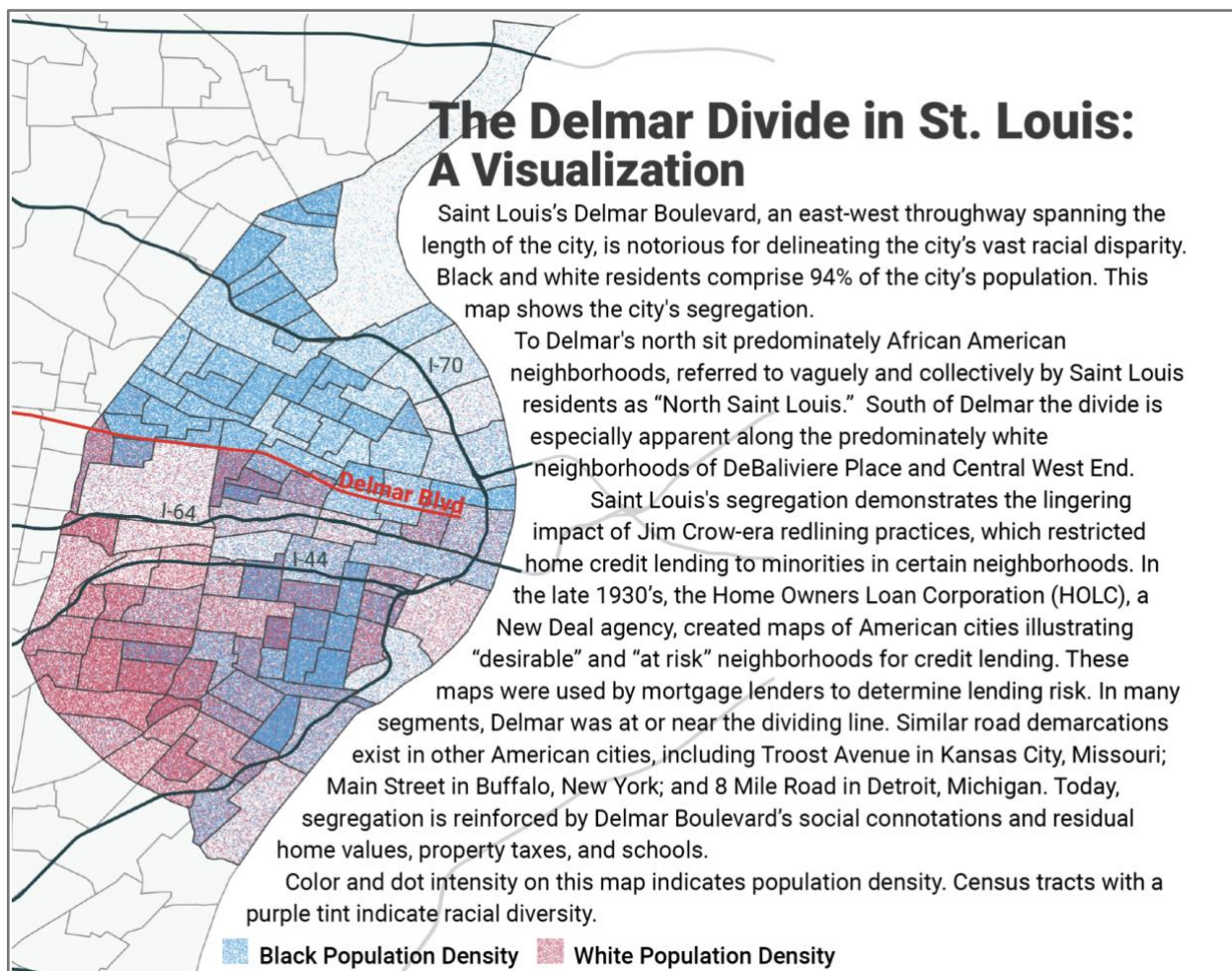
Figure 1. *Visualization of the Delmar Divide (Campbell, n.d.)*

Today, St. Louis remains one of the top *hyper*segregated cities in the United States, with its

austere isolation and clustering of Black residents within relatively compact physical space and areas of

concentrated poverty (Massey & Tannen, 2015). Majority-Black communities in St. Louis face higher

vacancy rates; report more illegal dumping; and lack equal access to home loans, healthy food,

educational opportunities, and employment (City of St. Louis, 2023; Kneebone et al., 2011). These

inequities compound to further hinder community wealth-building, discourage private-sector

investment, raise prices of goods and services, elevate costs for government services, heighten crime

rates, and degrade physical and mental health (Kneebone et al., 2011). This pattern of injustice not only reinforces cycles of racial disparities but also yields outcomes that are detrimental to community quality of life and social determinants of health for St. Louis as a whole. As UMSL aptly put it in its grant application to the Missouri Foundation for Health: "*When the population in one part of the metropolitan area has been systematically marginalized, it does not just hold back those individuals and families – it holds back the entire region*" (personal communication, October 2022).

St. Louis Anchor Action Network Mission and Evolution

Responding to the long history of racial divisions, structural inequities, and economic disinvestment in north St. Louis, the St. Louis Anchor Action Network exists to remove barriers and increase access to positive socioeconomic outcomes for Black and Brown community members through intentional hiring, purchasing, and community investment. To this end, the Network consists of six committees–executive, implementation, hiring, purchasing, communications, and research–as well as two community member groups focused on workforce and business development (St. Louis Anchor Action Network, 2022a). With the exception of the two community member groups–composed of smaller nonprofits and community-serving organizations–the Network's committees consist of representatives almost solely from member anchor institutions.

Currently, both the University of Missouri–St. Louis and Edward Jones, a leading financial services firm headquartered in St. Louis, provide the primary leadership, staffing, and resourcing for the Network to operate. At its founding, 10 other anchor institutions–all major names in the St. Louis community–joined UMSL and Edward Jones in this work: BJC HealthCare, Christian Hospital, Harris-Stowe State University, Mercy Health, Saint Louis University, Saint Louis Zoo, SSM Health, St. Louis Community College, Washington University in St. Louis, and Webster University. Since UMSL first spearheaded and secured initial grant funding from the Missouri Foundation for Health in 2021, the Network has gained five new anchor members: Ameren, Equifax, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis,

Great Rivers Greenway, and the Missouri Botanical Garden (St. Louis Anchor Action Network, 2022a).

To reverse the patterns of systemic racism and spatial injustice, the Network is focused first on intentionally hiring, purchasing, and investing in the 22 zip codes of greatest need in north St. Louis city and county (see Figure 2). Three of the 22 zip codes–63106, 63107, and 63133–fall in the bottom five poorest in the state of Missouri, with the zip code for north St. Louis city (63106) ranking as the poorest in the whole state (Konczal, 2019). At least nine of the 17 St. Louis Anchor Action Network members are located within the 22 zip code footprint: UMSL, Edward Jones, Christian Hospital, Harris-Stowe State University, Mercy Health, Saint Louis University, SSM Health, Ameren, and Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis.
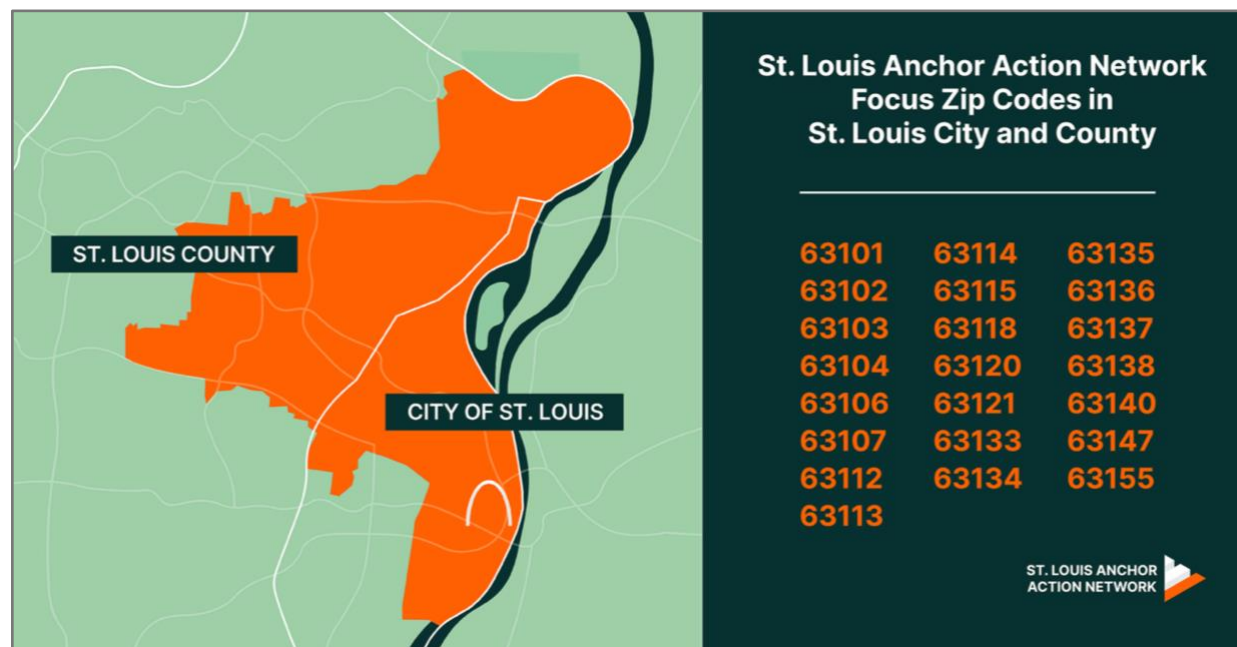
Figure 2. *22 Zip Code Focus Geography (St. Louis Anchor Action Network, 2022b)*

U.S. Census data show that 24.1% of the population within the 22 zip codes live below the poverty line–more than double the 11.3% living below the poverty line in the St. Louis Metropolitan Area as a whole (see Figure 3; UMSL, personal communication, October 2022). With over 332,000 residents and about 13,325 businesses, the 22 zip code footprint is 70% Black and is home to 50% of the region's unemployed Black residents (Drew, 2022; UMSL, personal communication, October 2022). For

the per capita income of Black residents within the footprint to match that of the broader region, "the

income for every Black resident [within the footprint] would have to be increased by $17,407," nearly

doubling their current income levels (Robinson-Jacobs, 2021; see Figure 3). To close this gap, the St.

Louis Anchor Action Network would have to introduce an additional "**estimated $4.3 billion in annual**

income" for residents within the footprint (UMSL, personal communication, October 2022).
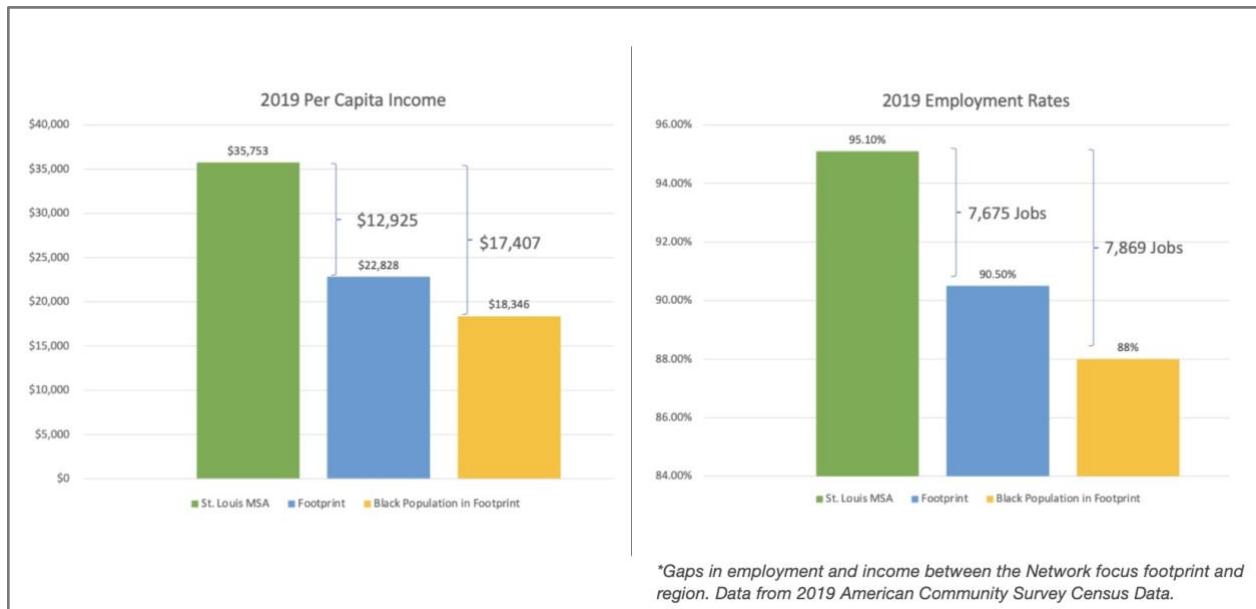
Figure 3. *2019 Baseline: Income and Employment Gaps between 22 Zip Codes and St. Louis Metropolitan Area (St. Louis Anchor Action Network, 2021)*

By the end of 2023, its second full year of operating, the St. Louis Anchor Action Network has set

a collective goal to increase employment and purchasing within the 22 zip codes by 10%. This collective

10% would equate to "a projected $50 million increase in direct investment" in the focus geography

(UMSL Daily, 2022). As anchor members committed to improving their hiring and purchasing practices to

achieve this goal, the St. Louis Anchor Action Network partnered with PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) to

analyze its current operating model and develop strategies for long-term scalability and sustainability.

The PwC project resulted in a strategic plan for the next phase of the Network–and "revealed the

[Network's] need for greater independence" from its anchors (Walentik, 2023, August 3).

In August 2023, the James S. McDonnell Foundation awarded UMSL and the St. Louis Anchor

Action Network a $2.4 million grant to sustain and scale the Network over the next three years

(Walentik, 2023, August 3). The funding will allow the Network to "increase personnel, expand data

analysis, [and] build out real-time dashboards on [anchor] member progress" (Walentik, 2023, August

3). Heading into 2024, the Network also plans to extend its workforce development and business

development programs by hosting additional career readiness events, hiring expos, and business forums

for network members to engage with local business owners (Walentik, 2023, August 3).

Problem of Practice

Within its first two years of operating, the St. Louis Anchor Action Network has ostensibly taken

steps toward accomplishing its goal to increase collective spending and employment within the 22 zip

code footprint by 10%. In 2021, the Network conducted five listening sessions and five informational

interviews with over 125 community partners and stakeholders–including residents, local businesses,

and nonprofits–to understand the community's needs and develop its initial action plan (St. Louis

Anchor Action Network, 2021). To date, the Network has established an online, searchable Community

Business Tool to promote the discovery of over 13,000 local businesses; hired at least 50 applicants and

run multiple career expos to connect residents with anchor member employment opportunities; and

opened doors for at least 50 small businesses to bid on contracts with Network members (UMSL Daily,

2022; St. Louis Anchor Action Network, 2022a).

In addition to engaging with residents and local businesses, the Network has taken concerted

action to mature itself as a community of practice for inclusive hiring, spending, community investment,

and anchor movement leadership. In 2022, it established an online resource portal for network

members, hosted five lunch and learns, and launched a Conscious Conversations video series to educate

members on diverse small businesses within the focus footprint. In partnership with Edward Jones, the

Network also hosted leaders from across St. Louis in The Ville neighborhood for a three-part Executive

Learning Experience, wherein they focused on the purpose behind the anchor movement, the history of

disinvestment and racial inequities in the region, and the needs and lived experiences of community members and business owners within the 22 zip codes (St. Louis Anchor Action Network, 2022a).

As the Network strives to mature and scale beyond this initial startup stage, we anticipate at least two fundamental obstacles it will need to overcome to deliver the intended benefit to Black and Brown residents and business owners within north St. Louis. ***First, the goals and interests of even the best-of-intentioned anchor institutions will inevitably compete, or even conflict, at times with the needs and best interests of the community the Network was formed to serve.*** In building its initial action plan, the St. Louis Anchor Action Network (2021) heard from community partners and stakeholders that: "Improvement in community-level outcomes should be the ultimate goal *not just improvement in individual or institutional outcomes*" (emphasis added).

In its 2022 Year in Review, the St. Louis Anchor Action Network (2022a) highlighted *resources*, *accountability*, *partnership*, and *justice* as the four key focus areas that define how the Network will accomplish its mission to improve community-level outcomes (see Figure 4). In sum, these focus areas affirm the Network's express commitment to investing tangible resources rather than making empty promises, reporting transparently rather than avoiding accountability, and partnering with the community rather than relying on its own knowledge and expertise to rebuild a stronger, more equitable St. Louis. Despite the affirmation of these four focus areas, however, not all anchors within the Network have openly reported on their spending and employment numbers within the focus geography. When the Network released its 2019-2020 baseline numbers (St. Louis Anchor Action Network, 2021), only nine of 11 anchors reported the total wages for their employees living within the 22 zip codes ($359,775,430 for 9,280 employees), and only seven of 11 anchors reported their level of spending with businesses in the footprint ($137,933,894, of which only $22,889,014 was spent with certified minority-owned businesses). If the Network has released updated numbers since its 2019-2020 baseline, this information was not shared with our team.

WE WILL GET THERE BY FOCUSING ON FOUR KEY AREAS:

Resources	Accountability	Partnership	Justice
Our efforts reflect the dedication of anchor institutions that recognize both the social and economic value of investing in equity. The Network works in alignment with Greater St. Louis Inc.'s 2030 Jobs Plan.	We understand that real change requires sustained commitment, which is why we will set clear, measurable goals and commit to transparent reporting against them.	We are committed to partnering with, listening to, and learning from community members and all others seeking to advance equitable opportunity across our region.	We seek to address more than a century of systemic racial and spatial inequities to support people, rejuvenate neighborhoods and build a stronger community for all.

Figure 4. *Network Focus Areas: Resources, Accountability, Partnership, and Justice (St. Louis Anchor Action Network, 2022a)*

We point out this apparent discrepancy because it raises questions about who benefits from the existence and activities of the Network and about how the anchors plan to take both internal and external accountability for following through on their commitments. If meaningful metrics and other concrete details remain unshared, these questions could pose a risk to the Network's legitimacy, erode trust from community members, and impede progress against the goals the anchors set out to achieve. Within the Network, anchor members will have no way to fully measure their impact to determine whether or not they are collectively moving the needle toward justice. Outside the Network, members of the community may question whose goals the anchors are serving and whether or not the Network is acting in the community's best interest.

Beyond generating positive public relations for themselves, the anchors who sign up to join the Network must not only be perceived as doing the work but must actually be doing the work they say they are going to do. As power imbalances weigh largely in favor of the anchors over the community, decisions the Network makes absent transparency and the voice of the community risk falling flat as merely performative or–worse–may cause unintended harm to the community meant to benefit from them. For this reason, ***community partners must "be engaged in thought partnership, co-design of***

strategies, and implementation" alongside the Network for community-level outcomes to be achieved
(St. Louis Anchor Action Network, 2021).

     Second, we anticipate the Network will run up against some deeply entrenched barriers as it works to reverse the patterns of racial and spatial inequities that took more than a century to create. As UMSL acknowledged in its initial grant application to establish the Network: "It took decades to generate these racial, economic, and spatial inequities, and it will take years of sustained work to undo them" (personal communication, October 2022). Although the Network would need to add approximately *$4.3 billion* in annual income to close the per capita income gap for residents in the 22 zip codes, the anchors' collective 10% goal–while a start–would introduce only *$50 million* into the footprint. In addition to confronting this and other steep resource disparities, the Network will very likely face barriers to regaining trust with the community, "as *many promises have been made to the community in the past and then [were] broken*" (St. Louis Anchor Action Network, 2021, emphasis added).

     Beyond increasing hiring and purchasing, then, the Network must mature its workforce and business development model quickly to prioritize rebuilding trust and building capacity within the community. As we cited earlier, less than 17%–only $22,889,014 out of $137,933,894–of the Network's spending with footprint businesses in 2019-2020 went to certified minority-owned businesses. While the Network primarily leverages a contract model to partner with locally owned businesses, many Black- and Brown-owned businesses within the 22 zip codes either do not have current capacity or do not offer products and services that align with the procurement needs of anchor members. To meaningfully advance its investment in the community, *the St. Louis Anchor Action Network must look beyond traditional procurement and think more expansively and creatively about investing in Black and Brown business leaders within the focus footprint.*

As the Network looks toward maturing its business model and implementing its strategic plan over the next three years, our capstone project focuses on reengaging with the voices of Black and Brown business leaders within north St. Louis. We believe investing in these leaders is a vital lever for change as their organizations have the potential not only to expand the Network's reach but also to bring more wealth into the community, create essential jobs for residents, and increase access to products and services that the community needs to live and thrive. While this project centers on Black and Brown business owners, leaders, and entrepreneurs in north St. Louis, future projects may aim to support the St. Louis Anchor Action Network in accelerating its workforce development and employment efforts within the 22 zip code focus geography.

Area of Inquiry

Building on broader research on relationships between public urban-serving universities, anchor institutions, and community partners focused on health, education, community building, and economic development, we seek to understand the extent to which the St. Louis Anchor Action Network removes barriers and expands access for Black and Brown business leaders in north St. Louis in the following key areas:

- Spending, procurement, and investment of resources;
- Creating contracting and employment opportunities that promote community wealth-building and wage growth;
- Facilitating connections that advance the professional networks and social capital of Black and Brown business leaders;
- Building capacity through mentoring, training, and other learning opportunities; and, finally,
- Partnering with Black and Brown business leaders to serve the broader needs of the St. Louis community.

In exploring this area of inquiry, we strive to understand business leaders' needs and goals in the above

five areas and the extent to which the Network's activities are aligned to meet those needs. Researching

this topic from the lens of Critical and Design Justice theories, we seek to highlight areas where the

Network is effectively serving Black and Brown business leaders, investigate potential avenues to

strengthen and broaden partnerships, and identify opportunities to maximize the Network's collective

impact for the benefit of business leaders and residents within the 22 zip code footprint.

We will center our research on the following questions: (1) *To what extent are the activities of*

the Anchor Network meeting the socioeconomic needs of Black and Brown business leaders within the 22

zip code focus geography of north St. Louis? and (2) *In which ways might the Anchor Network maximize*

its community impact in service of Black and Brown business leaders within the 22 zip code focus

geography of north St. Louis?

Our project aims to contribute to the growing body of literature regarding anchor institutions

and collaboratives across the United States and the globe. Our intent is that the findings and

recommendations resulting from this project will support the St. Louis Anchor Action Network in

building stronger place-based partnerships with Black and Brown business leaders and in co-creating a

renewed St. Louis community where all residents, from every race and zip code, can live and thrive. This

project may also benefit other anchor institutions and anchor collaboratives as they seek to counter the

disparate, adverse impacts of systemic racial and spatial injustices within similar urban contexts.

Positionality

Before we close this introduction and move into the body of our report, we must acknowledge

our positionality as three white researchers seeking to understand the perspectives and lived

experiences of Black and Brown business leaders in St. Louis. As white researchers all currently living

outside of the St. Louis community, we most likely have not asked the same questions that Black or

Brown researchers living within the community would have asked. It is equally likely our participants

responded to us in a manner different from how they would have responded to Black or Brown

researchers within their community. One of our researchers grew up in St. Louis in the 1960s and 1970s and experienced some of the historical context, and all three members of the team have personal and professional connections to the area. Nonetheless, we approached this work with open minds and hearts full of hope for a more equitable future for St. Louis. We cannot emphasize enough our gratitude to the Black and Brown business leaders who shared their time, insights, and dreams for a better, stronger, more prosperous St. Louis with us, and thank them for all they are already doing for the St. Louis community.

PART II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Our capstone seeks to provide recommendations for quality improvement to the University of Missouri–St. Louis (UMSL), an urban-serving, public research university acting as the catalyst for the St. Louis Anchor Action Network ("the Network"). As a coalition of anchor institutions who are major players within the St. Louis (socio)economic ecosystem, the Network has considerable collective power to impact social determinants of health, community wealth, quality of life, and small business success by generating and leveraging social capital and network resources to improve racial and spatial equity across the 22 zip code focus geography–and for generations to come. As we synthesize the literature, we define "social capital" as economic and societal value added to a community or individual stemming from collaboration and partnerships.

We do not attempt to quantitatively measure the economic and social impact created thus far through UMSL's leadership of the Network, which includes multiple institutions of higher education, healthcare, and the public and private sectors. Instead, our goal is to uncover the needs and challenges faced by Black and Brown business leaders within the historically under-resourced Northside of St. Louis, ascertain the extent to which the Network's activities meet their needs and mitigate challenges, and illuminate ways in which the Network might achieve maximum collective impact in service of these business leaders. While our research focuses on Black and Brown business leaders within the 22 zip

codes, our findings have direct implications for improving the economic and social well-being of other residents within the Network's defined geography of focus.

Researching the role of anchors and anchor networks from the lens of Critical and Design Justice theories, we sought to understand the needs and barriers to access faced by Black and Brown business owners as a result of Eurocentrism and whiteness. To address the injustices and inequities resulting from systemic racism in the United States, we must first acknowledge and destabilize worldviews that shape and perpetuate these systems and make known how they are experienced by those they seek to harm, marginalize, and "other." From this starting point, several questions guided our resulting review of the literature:

- In what ways can anchors and anchor networks be more engaged and in tune with the needs and desires of the Black and Brown community?

- What barriers and challenges do Black and Brown business leaders face as they interface with large anchor institutions?

- What tensions arise from power differentials among urban universities, anchor institutions, community members and neighborhood groups?

- How might power differentials be minimized to gain the greatest potential impact for the Black and Brown community?

- In which ways do sense of community and engagement with Black and Brown business leaders underpin successful community anchor networks?

- What models exist for achieving scalable and sustainable community development through university and anchor institution partnerships?

- How should anchor networks operate and evolve over time to best respond to the needs of Black and Brown community members and business leaders?

Our literature review is thus organized into four main parts: (1) how whiteness and

Eurocentricm construct barriers for Black and Brown business owners, (2) power dynamics and tensions,

(3) sense of community and social capital, and (4) sustainable anchor models for community

development. Building from these contextual relationships and key constructs, our conceptual

framework details five primary strategies anchors and anchor networks leverage to benefit and

revitalize their communities, as well as strengthen their own viability as "anchors" tethered to a

particular space and place. To accomplish this work in ways that build more just, equitable communities,

we argue that anchor networks must take an antiracist, Design Justice approach that seeks to fight

actively against racism in all of its forms and to empower and uplift the voices of the community they

seek to serve.

How Whiteness and Eurocentrism Construct Barriers for Black and Brown Business Owners

Many Americans choose entrepreneurship as a pathway to economic freedom and wealth-

building. However, the success rate for self-started businesses varies. As compared with their

counterparts of color, white business leaders are significantly more likely to see success in their first

year, hire more staff, and access the necessary financial and social resources to launch their business

(Kim et al., 2021). Multiple factors–such as generational wealth, social capital, education, and family

experiences in business–underpin the varying success rates. Ultimately, however, many of the

challenges Black and Brown entrepreneurs face can be attributed to having to navigate a capitalistic

society and business structure that were not built for them, or for racial equity, but, rather, were built

on Eurocentrism and whiteness (Walton, 2021; Wallerstein, 1996).

Whiteness can be described as a set of cultural dispositions, systems, and norms that arise

from institutionalized privilege in service to white empowerment and domination (Walton, 2021).

Shaping American society, and much of the world, "colorblind" whiteness normalizes white as the

standard by which all other racialized identity groups are compared and seen as abnormal and

inferior (National Museum of African American History and Culture, n.d.-a). Whiteness "others" Black

and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) in covert, and not so covert, ways.

Closely related to whiteness, Eurocentrism furthers the de-familiarization and erasure of BIPOC racial and cultural identities and achievements by centering predominantly white Western European norms, systems, accomplishments, and productions of knowledge as superior, eternal, and universal (Wallerstein, 1996). Viewing all other ways of knowing, being, and doing as strange, primitive, or barbaric, Eurocentrism holds as its "essential ideological argument" the normalization and universality of capitalism (Wallerstein, 1996). As a way of viewing, navigating, and constructing the world, whiteness and Eurocentrism attempt to de-familiarize and diminish BIPOC ways of knowing, being, and doing in the world and, thus, (re)produce the conditions necessary for systemic racism in the United States to endure.

Stemming from whiteness and Eurocentric ideologies, racial injustice pervades every aspect of American society–housing, education, healthcare, policy and law, and business (Costanza-Chock, 2020). As Black and Brown entrepreneurs navigate these unjust systems, they encounter barriers to access, rooted in systemic racism, unparalleled in the experience of their white counterparts. Entrepreneurs need access to networks and social capital to secure resources and generate support for their business endeavors (Santarelli & Tran, 2015; Tabiri, 2022). However, as a result of racial biases, discriminatory practices, whiteness, and Eurocentric mindsets about which businesses to value, Black and Brown business owners have unequal access to social capital, financial resources, and critical information and awareness about partnership and contracting opportunities (Fairlie et al., 2020; Dayanim, 2011; Tabiri, 2022). These barriers often impact certified minority women-owned businesses most acutely, underscoring the importance of understanding the intersectionality of race, gender, and other social identities while examining barriers and opportunities for Black- and Brown-owned businesses (Ervin-Brown, 2022; Crenshaw, 1989).

Racial and spatial injustices can compound to exacerbate social and economic exclusion for

Black and Brown businesses located within majority-Black neighborhoods. Studying geographically uneven, neighborhood-level procurement patterns within Philadelphia, Dayanim (2011) discovered that the perceived "character" of a place influenced whether or not businesses within the area were able to secure contracts. Majority Black and Brown neighborhoods in areas of concentrated poverty became "stigmatized" as areas to be both socially and economically excluded. This geographic disadvantage reinforced place-based "poverty pockets," as Black and Brown businesses within these areas struggled to make business connections and secure contracts outside of their neighborhoods (Van Kempen, 2002, as cited in Dayanim, 2011). Notably, spatial barriers persisted even after these businesses completed the steps to become certified minority-owned businesses (Dayanim, 2011). This pattern highlights the need for large organizations such as anchors to take intentional, place-based approaches to investing in Black and Brown businesses.

Anchors and other large institutions can support Black and Brown businesses by streamlining their procurement processes, implementing supplier diversity programs, and improving access to information about certification requirements and contracting opportunities. To invest more directly, anchors and anchor networks can focus their collective efforts on capacity-building by providing Black and Brown entrepreneurs with opportunities for networking, mentorship, focused training, and other key resources that will open doors for social connections and economic advancement. Because barriers arise predominantly from embedded forms of structural and institutional racism, we advocate for anchors to adopt a decidedly antiracist approach in changing their culture and business practices to strengthen partnerships with Black and Brown business owners, leaders, and entrepreneurs (National Museum of African American History and Culture, n.d.-b).

Power Dynamics and Tensions

A growing body of literature over the past five decades shows how universities and other institutions of higher education have begun to "[denounce] the ivory tower" to address larger social and

societal problems within their communities (Bok, 1982, & Boyer, 1996, as cited in Fisher et al., 2004). As anchors within their neighborhoods, universities engage with their surrounding communities and the larger political economy through community and civic engagement efforts (Fisher et al., 2004). Throughout the country, anchor institutions, particularly healthcare and universities, collectively wield an annual expenditure that surpasses $1 trillion, while employing over 9 million people (Porter et. al, 2019). This often positions them as the primary purchasers and employers within their respective regions. Holding immense power, anchor institutions frequently find themselves exacerbating a community's issues through coexistence rather than meaningful engagement with that community (Cantor et al., 2013).

Anchor organizations must serve their surrounding neighborhoods in order to meet their own self-interests for growth and survival; at the same time, communities need these institutions to meet economic, social, and cultural challenges (Feld, 1998). Because anchors in urban environments tend to be significantly impacted by the strength of their communities, they increasingly seek to enhance community building efforts to meet physical, environmental, social, and economic needs (Feld, 1998). Suburban regions, such as the two-mile vicinity surrounding the University of Missouri-St. Louis, typically face a dearth of governmental or nonprofit resources available to their urban counterparts, thereby emphasizing the crucial significance of the anchor institution's role as well as the community's impact on its work (Guenther et al., 2019).

As an added mutual benefit to collaboration, engagement with the community allows anchors, specifically universities, to enrich their educational programming as they develop curricula that respond to the demands and interests of local residents (Fisher et al., 2004; Feld, 1998). Moreover, communities offer universities a chance to propel the intellectual and practical education of their students and faculty, thus serving as inherent testing grounds for conducting both fundamental and practical research.

Two primary problems are embedded within university-community partnerships: (1) the question of university research agendas, which can often conflict with the needs and interests of the community, and (2) inherent power imbalances between the university and the community (Fisher et al., 2004). Universities tend to have greater institutional, political, and economic power than the communities they are anchored in. As communities and universities work together, these power imbalances present a risk that local voices, especially those within traditionally underserved or vulnerable groups, will be overpowered and not heard.

Successful anchor-community partnerships shift practices beyond the "ivory tower" model and instead facilitate coalitions or communities of residential experts to inform anchor practices (Cantor et al., 2013). These models emphasize community members as valuable assets and active collaborators. Consequently, anchor institutions alter their perspective on community involvement, shifting from the traditional notion of anchors doing good for the community to a collaborative approach where the anchor and community jointly strive to bring about change (Cantor et al., 2013).

Sense of Community and Social Capital

University urban extension development programs, and collaborative efforts such as the St. Louis Anchor Action Network, are critical for effecting changes in communities' physical, social, and economic conditions (Schwebel et al., 1976). Traditionally, universities have conferred degrees to program graduates for specific jobs or professions. However, societies face larger, systemic concerns and "complex social forces"–such as crime, poverty, health, and mental health– that professionals are not ready or positioned to mitigate (Schwebel et al., 1976, p. 206). This dilemma signals the need for new university programs that can address social and societal concerns (Schwebel et al., 1976). Traditional university cooperative extension programs allow faculty members to work with communities to facilitate learning initiatives that center community voice in solution design (Schwebel et al., 1976, p. 208). To successfully address community needs, universities must understand community concerns,

encourage residents to participate in making improvements, and allow the community to evaluate and shape university programs (Schwebel et al., 1976, p. 214).

Chavis and Wandersman (1990) tested and confirmed a model for social programs wherein a "sense of community" catalyzes voluntary local action to solve problems. Community can be conceptualized as a *place*, as *relationships*, and as *collective political power* (Gusfield, 1975; Heller, 1989; Suttles, 1972; as cited in Chavis & Wandersman, 1990). Processes for improving the lives of communities include community development, community building, and community organization, with citizen participation as central to improving physical and social conditions (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990).

Three components influence voluntary participation in improving communities and are mobilized by a greater sense of community: (1) perception of the environment, (2) one's social relations, and (3) one's perceived control and empowerment within the community (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990). A positive relationship exists between a "sense of community" and community members' perceived ability to impact their environment. As community members' sense of community increases, so too does their perceived ability to impact their environment (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990, p. 56).

By testing and validating a multivariate model in a real neighborhood, this study contributes to our empirical understanding of the relationship between a sense of community and voluntary participation in community improvements (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990). In the context of our project, this article suggests that building a "sense of community" would be necessary to mobilize the St. Louis Anchor Action Network's community development programs, maintain cohesion across Network members and partners, and empower community members to take an active role in change efforts. Importantly, it also points out that Network members must have developed the skills—and, we would add, have access to the resources—necessary to effect desired changes in their communities. One potential limitation of the model offered in this study is that it measured community members' perceptions of empowerment rather than measuring outcomes or results against the community's goals

(Chavis & Wandersman, 1990). Furthermore, this study focused on universities acting alone and did not include discussions related to an expanded, collaborative network of anchor institutions.

In addition to sense of community, social capital plays a key role in community improvement initiatives and development. CONSCISE, a three-year research project funded by the European Union, developed socioeconomic profiles for eight locations across Europe using data points on population, unemployment, economics, crime, and health (Kay, 2006). A social audit was conducted based on qualitative and quantitative data on social capital objectives and the performance of the organization against the agreed-upon goals and values.

The CONSCISE project synthesized existing literature to conceptualize social capital as follows:

Social capital consists of resources within communities, which are created through the presence of high values of trust, reciprocity and mutuality, shared norms of behavior, shared commitment and belonging, both formal and informal social networks, and effective information channels, which may be used productively by individuals and groups to facilitate actions to benefit individuals, groups and the community more generally. (Kay, 2006, pp. 162-163)

The study exposed a hierarchy of the six elements of social capital, with "trust" as the most important, followed by "reciprocity and mutuality" then "shared norms of behavior," "shared commitment and belonging," "both formal and informal social networks," and finally "effective information channels'' (Kay, 2006, p. 163).

History and context are important factors for understanding social capital within communities. The failure of one initiative or turnover of social enterprise staff can break trust and negatively impact partnerships or relationships (Kay, 2006). "Old boy networks," which rely on generational or longstanding partnerships, can further deteriorate trust and inclusion practices (Kay, 2006). Notably, the breakdown of social capital within a community adversely impacts the overall level of health,

accessibility, and opportunity within the community. "Social enterprises generate social capital in their area, mostly by using social capital" (Kay, 2006, p. 168). Social enterprises, such as anchor collaboratives, should take a community development rather than a business development approach and combine social capital resources with economic, cultural, and environmental factors (Kay, 2006). The difficulty of measuring social capital, however, leads to implementation obstacles for individual anchor institutions or networks focused on centering relationships in their community development efforts.

Sustainable Anchor Models for Community Development

A growing number of anchor institutions have launched community development programs or coalesced with other anchors to promote equitable and inclusive economic development. Large anchors, specifically universities and healthcare institutions, spend more than $1 trillion and hire more than 9 million people annually (Porter et al., 2019). As some of the largest organizations in their community, anchor institutions have immense spending and hiring power. Anchor institutions can act individually or collectively to improve inequitable systems by investing in hiring and spending within the communities where they live.

It is essential for anchor institutions and collaboratives to understand, test, and scale sustainable models for community development as they work to transform the lives, prosperity, and well-being of individuals and families and, thereby, improve community-level outcomes. While successful anchor models will respond and adapt to the unique context and needs of their community, we examine two examples of successful and sustainable models in the sections that follow: one in Cameroon and the other in Milwaukee. At the heart of both models, and that of other successful anchor models we examined, is the need for anchors to actively engage with the wisdom and honor the desires of local voices to co-create solutions that will truly benefit those living within the community.

University in Cameroon

Mbah (2019) provides an in-depth case study of a university in Cameroon, illuminating how

African universities and universities in other contexts might support sustainable local community development agendas. The case study revealed three primary themes for a sustainable community development model: (1) "acknowledging local community voices and their potential to convey relevant knowledge," (2) "engaging the local community in co-creating a relevant knowledge base," and (3) "collaborative engagement as an operational disposition to maximize local knowledge" (Mbah, 2019, p. 15). The study also highlights potential tensions with universities being run like profit-driven corporations rather than institutions that must work with (and for) local communities. It emphasizes the need for universities to engage local voices to create sustainable community outcomes. According to Mbah (2019), institutions of higher education (IHEs) must serve their surrounding communities to meet their self-interests; at the same time, communities need IHEs to meet their economic, social, and cultural challenges.

This case study of a model in Cameroon provides a balanced perspective of how university-community partnerships can mutually benefit urban neighborhoods and the universities that partner with them. It also shares background and context, dating back to the early 1990s, of universities establishing programs and projects for community partnerships. While the article has these strengths, it does not appear to examine these university-community partnerships from a Critical perspective that acknowledges power imbalances. It also falls short of analyzing models where multiple anchor institutions work together collaboratively. Although the article points out that IHEs often experience more economic affluence than the cities in which they are located, it does not explore in depth the tensions that may arise from this power imbalance, especially in multianchor models wherein many large public and private players are engaged in community-building activities.

Multianchor Collaboration in Milwaukee

After a surge of reported crime and public safety incidents in Milwaukee's Near West Side, five anchor institutions, including Marquette University, came together to launch the Promoting Assets and

Reducing Crime (PARC) initiative to address neighborhood challenges (Kennelly et al., 2021). The

anchors, in collaboration with city officials, nonprofit leaders, and residents, developed a 4.5-year

strategic plan with defined goals including establishing new grocery stores and restaurants, renovating

outdated streets, increasing housing ownership, and improving residential associations (Kennelly et al.,

2021). Housed at Marquette University, PARC provided numerous experiential learning opportunities to

both Marquetee's college students and Milwaukee residents. Central to the PARC's work was a cohesive

data collection, analysis, and implementation plan (see Figure 5).
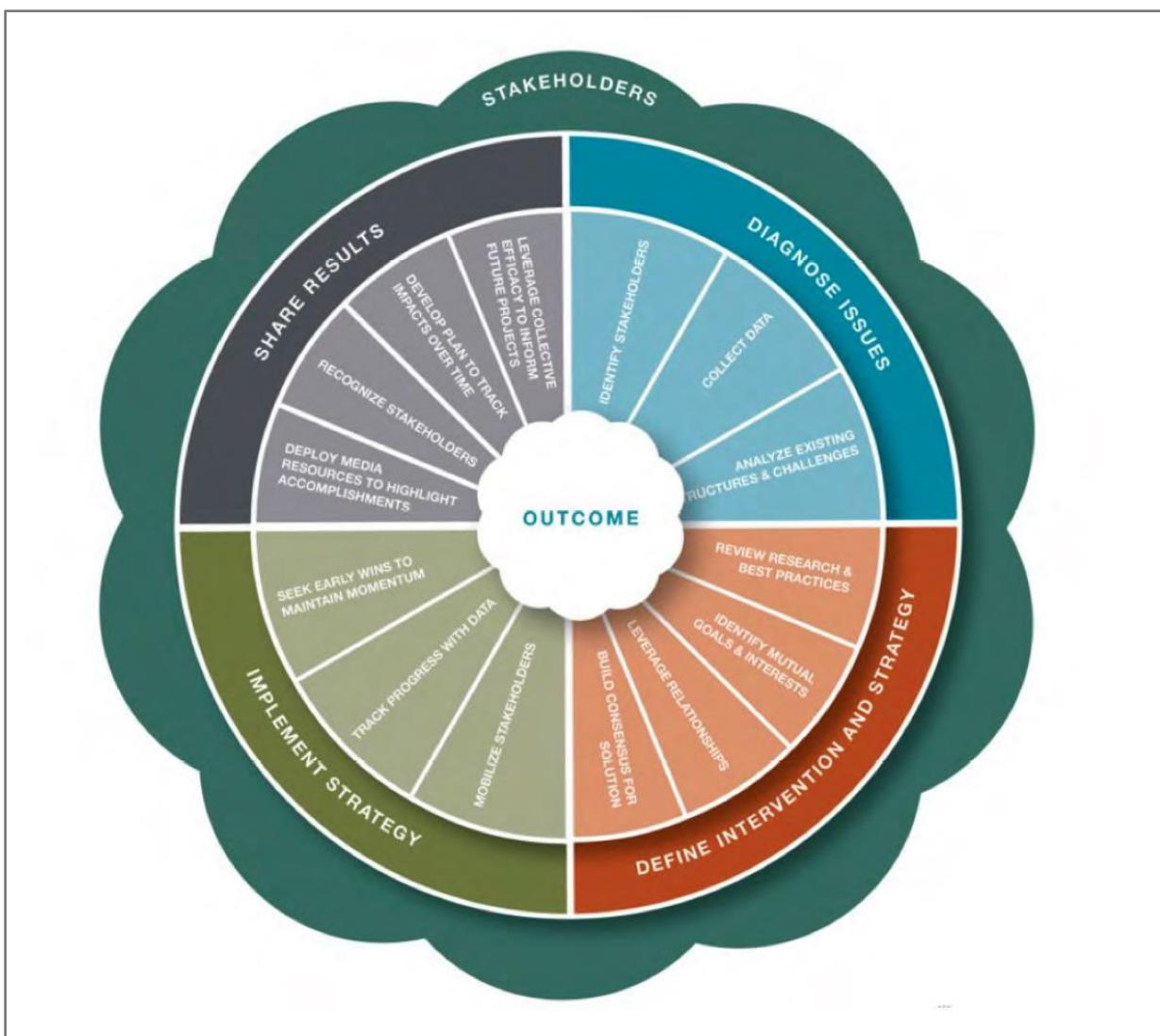
Figure 5. *PARC Model for Data Collection, Synthesization, and Integration (Kennelly et al., 2021)*

The PARC model was designed to create a way to holistically understand the neighborhood's

challenges and to ensure that community stakeholders were included in every part of PARC's process.

Three years after the initial launch of PARC, the collaborative of anchors reported more than a dozen

new neighborhood interventions, including housing resource fairs, housing incentives, a crime

prevention unit, neighborhood cleanups, and public awareness campaigns (Kennelly et al., 2021).

The PARC initiative is a multianchor model focused on community voice and involvement. Its

success can be connected to not just buy-in and funding from all involved anchor institutions, but also

daily operational involvement that includes all anchors (Kennelly et al., 2021). Many successful anchor

interventions have traditionally focused on public safety and housing security, rather than the economic

development goals the St. Louis Anchor Action Network is working on. Nonetheless, the PARC model is

an exemplar of how to listen to and engage with the community in all areas of neighborhood

improvement and revitalization.

Conceptual Framework

Building on our review of the literature, we developed a concept map to illustrate the primary

strategies anchor collaboratives employ to invest in their surrounding communities and to what effect

(see Figure 6). Underlying the mechanics of this anchor network model is the idea that communities act

and react as ecosystems. Therefore, as the St. Louis Anchor Action Network affects positive

(socio)economic outcomes for individuals, families, and business leaders of color in north St. Louis

through intentional, place-based "Hire Local, Buy Local, Live Local, Connect" strategies (UMSL, personal

communication, October 2022), we hypothesize social outcomes at the community level will also

improve as increased levels of social capital and network resources are invested in the region. Because

these anchor institutions are inextricably linked (or "anchored") within their communities, improved

community-level outcomes will, in turn, benefit the institutions themselves. In short, as the community

survives and thrives, anchor institutions will begin to see returns on their investments by becoming

providers of choice, strengthening their reputations as responsible corporate citizens and bolstering

their profitability, viability, and long-term survival in the neighborhood.
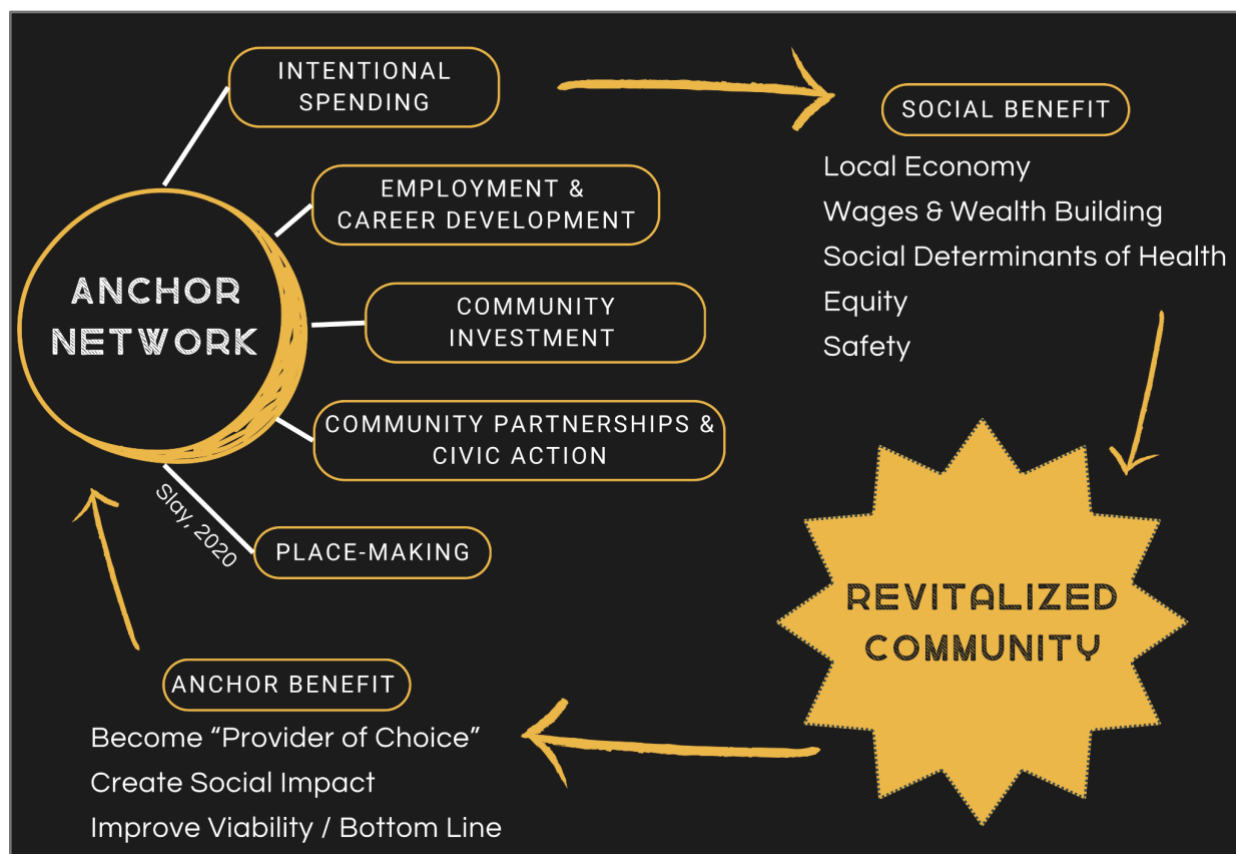
Figure 6. *Concept Map*

Anchor Strategies

Anchors and networks of anchors leverage five main strategies to transform and revitalize their communities: (1) spending; (2) employment and skills development; (3) community investment; (4) civic action, community engagement and partnerships; and (5) place-making (Slay, 2020). Even as we describe each strategy individually, it is important to note the strategies are not mutually exclusive and often overlap. Depending on the unique context and needs of the community, anchors can, and often do, adapt strategies and employ multiple strategies in tandem.

Intentional Spending. Anchors can leverage their spending power to drive as many dollars as possible into the local economy. To enact this strategy effectively, anchors must analyze their current contracts and spend to determine how much funding they have available to redirect to local businesses.

Anchors must also have a clear picture of what small businesses in the area can offer and their capacity to provide products and services. For a more hands-on approach, anchors can engage in capacity-building with local businesses or incubate new community-owned businesses. For example, in 2008, the two major hospital systems in Cleveland, Ohio, secured seed funding from the Cleveland Foundation to launch the Evergreen Cooperative, a worker-owned laundry service that now contracts with the hospital systems for about $15 million per year (Slay, 2020).

Employment and Career Development. As the largest employers in town, anchor institutions can increase wages and build wealth in the community by creating pathways for recruitment, hiring, and advancement of local residents. To get started, anchors analyze their current workforce data to understand the proportion of their employees who live locally and their levels of compensation. Next, anchors can set goals for local recruitment, hiring, and advancement, as well as encourage or require vendors they contract with to hire residents. For a more proactive approach, anchors can partner with schools, universities, and pre-employment workforce development organizations to grow pipelines to hire local talent. For example, New Bridge College has well-established pre-employment programs to train and upskill residents of Cleveland's most underserved communities for high-in-demand jobs with local health anchor institutions (Slay, 2020). New Bridge's partnerships with Cleveland's health anchors allow residents who would normally be disqualified for roles on the basis of previous drug usage to have another chance for livable wages and quality employment. The anchors mutually benefit as the partnerships allow them to recruit and retain qualified employees who wish to remain in the city.

Community Investment. Anchors can invest their substantial financial assets to meet community needs and positively affect social determinants of health, which the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (n.d.) groups into the following five domains: "(1) economic stability, (2) education access and quality, (3) health care access and quality, (4) neighborhood and built environment, and (5) social and community context." Responding uniquely to the needs of the local

context, community investment could range from awarding grants to investing in infrastructure or education. Headquartered in Oakland, California, Kaiser Permanente implemented a common anchor strategy by investing in affordable housing and establishing a home equity fund to prevent homelessness and improve the overall health of local residents (Slay, 2020).

Community Partnerships and Civic Action. Leveraging their high degree of social capital, anchors can build community partnerships, participate in civic engagement and advocacy, and build capacity for residents to take civic action that will benefit the community. In 2013, California State University in Los Angeles launched their "Civic U" initiative in partnership with the mayor (Slay, 2020). Through this initiative, the university engages with residents to build their capacity to influence public officials and effect policy changes. California State University has also conducted wide-reaching voter registration drives in the surrounding communities and visited local schools to get young people involved in civic action.

Place-Making. Often closely tied to the community investment strategy, place-making describes the role anchors play in "shaping the places and spaces" of the local community (Slay, 2020). Anchors can physically transform their neighborhoods through investing in new developments or utilizing existing space and physical assets differently to better benefit the community. For example, anchors may repurpose existing buildings as multi-use community centers or develop new parks or urban farms to address food scarcity in urban deserts. When Duke University found the decline of Durham's neighborhoods in the 1980s impeded their ability to attract and retain students and staff, they partnered with other local universities to reinvigorate Durham as "Medicine City" (Slay, 2020). Their efforts resulted in major capital investments and transformed the city "into a hub of over 300 [health companies]" (Slay, 2020).

Benefits to Anchors and the Economy

Intentional spending and employment are typically the two largest, most common, and most

direct strategies for change anchor institutions can employ to benefit the community and stimulate the local economy (Slay, 2020). With anchor networks across the United States and abroad, intentional spending has also proven to be the most effective strategy for community wealth-building (Slay, 2020). When anchor institutions buy locally, they boost the regional economy in at least three ways: (1) direct spending and procurement with the local vendor; (2) indirect impact from the local vendor, purchasing from other local vendors, or creating new jobs for residents to deliver on contract; and (3) "increased salaries and wages of residents, who, in turn, spend their earnings within the local community" (Office of the Controller, City of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 2014).

As the spending power of residents and local businesses increases, the regional economy improves, and anchor institutions reap both social and financial benefits. At the most fundamental level, the very viability and existence of anchor institutions hinge upon the survival of the neighborhoods and communities where they live. By tangibly and purposefully investing in their neighborhoods, anchors invest not only in the survival and vitality of their communities but also in their own, as they attract new clients and become "providers of choice" for those they serve (Khandros, 2019). As anchors remain committed to reinvesting these returns back into their communities, they have the potential to generate a virtuous cycle of positive social impacts for the community and enduring reputations for themselves as responsible corporate citizens–all while improving their own long-term viability and bottom line.

Creating More Just, Equitable Communities

Approaching this research from the lens of Critical Race and other Critical theories, we recognize the work of anchor networks, and the anchors that comprise them, is intrinsically and unavoidably laden with power. Therefore, anchors and anchor networks must take an intentional, antiracist approach to overturn and reverse the effects of inherently racist and exploitative systems. As anchors use any of the five strategies for change in their communities, they are also often guided by their own interests and objectives, including "meeting [their] community-engagement goals, [...] increasing the number of

competitive RFP bids[,] introducing flexibility into supply chains [and fulfilling] the diversity and inclusion requirements of certain federal grants" (Khandros, 2019). If anchors elevate their own best interests over those of the community, however, their efforts risk becoming, at best, performative and, at worst, exploitative and harmful. Such efforts only serve to reinforce racial and spatial disparities and unjust systems of oppression.

To transform their community in a way that creates more racially and spatially just systems, anchor networks must center the voices of the community they seek to serve. To co-design the future of their community with humility and intention, we advocate for anchors and anchor networks to adopt the Design Justice framework. Pursuing the power of the collective rather than exploitative power, the framework's set of 10 principles focuses on "sustainable, community-led and -controlled outcomes'' that center the voices of members of the community who will be impacted by designed solutions (Constanza-Chock, 2020; see Figure 7).
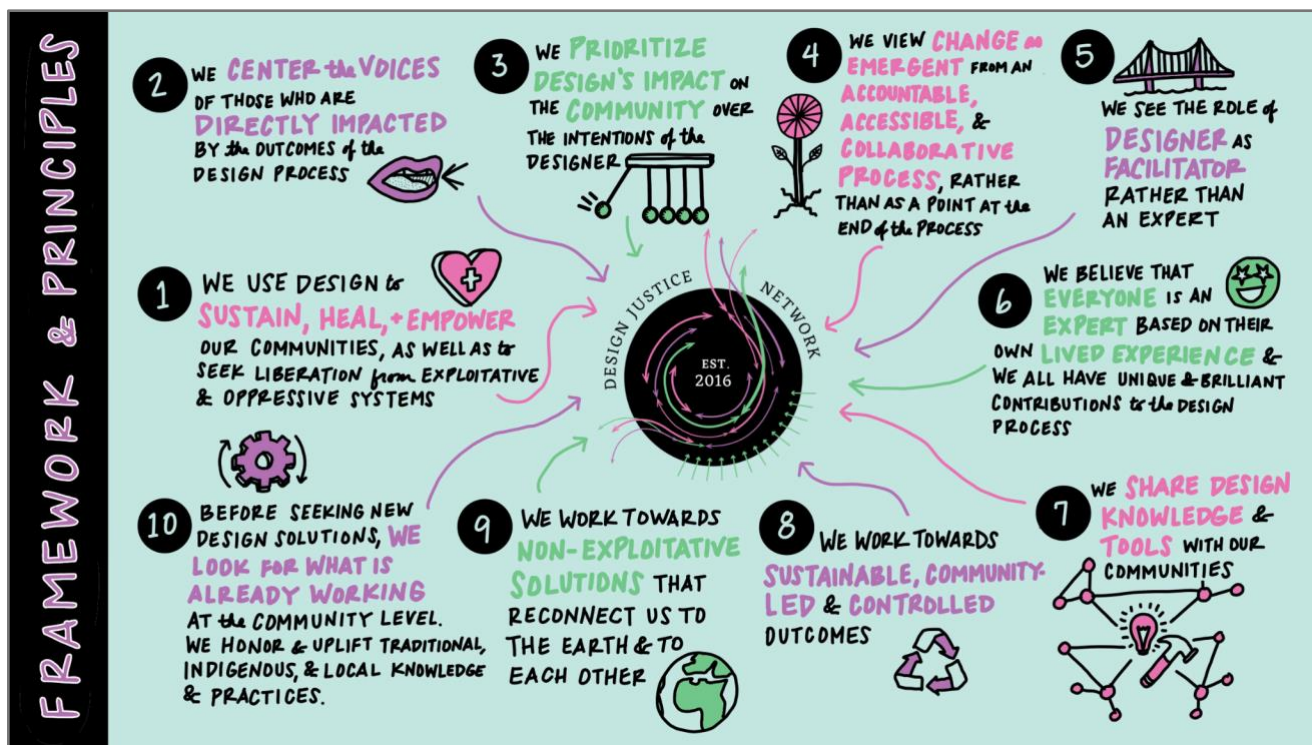
Figure 7. *Design Justice Principles (Design Justice Network, 2021)*

In a collaborative, Design Justice environment, the St. Louis Anchor Action Network would seek

to co-create systems and solutions for hiring, workforce development, procurement, and community development through intentional partnerships with Black and Brown residents and business leaders within its geographic area of focus. Only by centering the voices of Black and Brown residents and business leaders can the Network begin to "sustain, heal, and empower" a community that has faced centuries of systemic racial and spatial injustices and historical disinvestment (Design Justice Network, 2021). Elevating Black and Brown voices through ongoing, co-creative action and dialogue, the Network can and will begin to address social determinants of health; build community wealth; and improve quality of life, safety, and racial equity in the region (Khandros, 2019). With purposeful effort over time, this antiracist, Design Justice approach will create more equitable and just systems that have the potential to transform the areas of greatest need within north St. Louis and create a more just, equitable St. Louis region.

Research Questions

Focusing on the St. Louis Anchor Action Network's goal of "intentional purchasing" as the single most effective strategy for community wealth-building (Slay, 2020), our research aims to elevate the voices of Black and Brown business leaders in north St. Louis city and county. To support the St. Louis Anchor Action Network in better understanding and addressing the needs and barriers to access faced by these business leaders, we designed our project around the following research questions:

(1) To what extent are the activities of the Anchor Network meeting the socioeconomic needs of Black and Brown business leaders within the 22 zip code focus geography of north St. Louis?

(2) In which ways might the Anchor Network maximize its community impact in service of Black and Brown business leaders within the 22 zip code focus geography of north St. Louis?

PART III: METHODOLOGY

Project Design

We reached out to UMSL to propose a collaboration due to the significant mission of the St. Louis Anchor Action Network and its potential to expand beyond its initial incubation phase. Members of our research team have both personal and professional ties to UMSL and the St. Louis region, and we recognized the ways in which a successful and enduring anchor collaborative could greatly benefit the community. Our overarching objective with this quality improvement project is to offer UMSL and the Network a set of recommendations aimed at enhancing their impact while prioritizing Black and Brown community voices throughout the entire process.

Our data collection and analysis involved three primary parts: (1) document collection and analysis to describe the Network's activities; (2) interviews with Black and Brown business owners and leaders in the 22 zip code focus geography to identify needs, barriers, and opportunities; and (3) two focus groups with Black and Brown business leaders to formulate recommendations for improvement. As an ongoing component of our project, we consulted the growing literature on anchor institutions across the country to identify best practices of successful anchor networks and problems to avoid.

Our first research question aims to assess the extent to which the activities of the Anchor Network meet the socioeconomic needs of Black and Brown business owners in the 22 zip code area of focus. To answer this question, we utilized a qualitative approach, beginning with a literature review drawing from existing research on the needs and barriers faced by Black- and Brown-led businesses as a result of whiteness, Eurocentrism, and systemic racism. We then collected data from various sources, including documents detailing the Anchor Network's activities, such as grant proposals and media releases. Additionally, we conducted interviews with business owners to gather firsthand insights. Data analysis involved deductive and inductive coding of interview transcripts and thematic analysis of the

documents to identify key themes and messages regarding the Anchor Network's goals and accomplishments.

Our second research question focuses on how the Network can enhance its community impact in support of Black and Brown business owners in the 22 zip code area. We again referred to existing literature to address this question, exploring best practices and lessons learned from other anchor collaboratives across the U.S. and abroad. We also gathered input from business owners through interviews and focus groups. Our data analysis involved synthesizing findings from the literature review to formulate recommendations, analyzing interview transcripts to identify key findings and recommendations, and engaging focus group participants to gather additional insights and recommendations for the Anchor Network's improvement. This approach combined research, community engagement, and data analysis to provide comprehensive recommendations to maximize the Network's impact.

Participant Recruitment

To recruit participants for our interviews, which were conducted virtually over Zoom, we contacted approximately 600 Black and Brown business leaders in the St. Louis area through email or Linkedin. To identify potential participants, we first used the Community Business Tool on the St. Louis Anchor Action Network website and filtered businesses by diversity status keywords. This yielded about 275 potential participants. After researching each of the 275 potential participants, we found only 77 who had contact information available and appeared to meet the criteria of being a Black or Brown business leader. Next, we discovered an online North St. Louis County Chamber of Commerce business directory that helped us identify approximately 400 potential participants; although the directory did not allow us to filter by diversity status keywords, the language in our recruitment email specified our intent to interview Black and Brown business leaders (see Appendix). This language allowed individuals to self-select out of the interview if they did not meet the criteria. During interviews, we asked

participants if there were other Black or Brown business leaders they would recommend for us to meet with, and we received another 14 participant contacts that way. To incentivize potential participants, we offered a $75 Visa gift card to those who completed an interview.

In total, we interviewed 15 Black and Brown business leaders from a variety of different industries. About six had headquarters in zip codes outside of the 22; however, all were in neighboring zip codes within north St. Louis, and their organizations provided products and services to residents living within the 22 zip codes. Additionally, two white leaders showed up for interviews. Although the team held interviews with them, we removed their data from our analysis as their inputs as white business leaders did not pertain directly to our research questions. Our recruitment email, pre-interview email, interview protocol and questions can be found at the Appendix.

To recruit focus group participants, we invited those we interviewed. At the end of each interview, we mentioned the focus group opportunity to gauge interest. Two weeks before the focus group, we emailed interview participants a Google Form to sign up for a focus group, which resulted in 8 signups and 7 total attending the focus groups. Two members of the research team traveled to St. Louis to hold focus groups in person. Focus group participants were provided lunch or dinner and were incentivized with a $100 Visa gift card. The focus group email invitation, protocol, and questions can be found in the Appendix.

Data Collection

As a team, we decided to take a qualitative approach to this project because qualitative research allows for a deeper understanding of the "how" and "why" of our research questions by listening to different experiences. A qualitative methodology supports the Design Justice principles in our work; we aimed to select sources that would allow us to listen to and center the voices of Black and Brown business leaders (Design Justice Principle 3), and we viewed ourselves as facilitators instead of experts in uncovering the answers to our research questions (Design Justice Principle 5) (Costanza-

Chock, 2020). Every choice we made in both the collection and analysis of data was with the north St. Louis community in mind.

Data collection took place between July and September 2023, starting with document analysis of the Network's impact reports and documents, press releases, and media mentions, following with interviews with Black and Brown business leaders, and finishing with focus groups with the leaders who were interviewed. We had initially planned to use dashboard data about hiring and purchasing from the Network, but the Network was unable to share up-to-date data with us.

Document Collection

Through document analysis, we sought to understand the Network's successes and challenges since its launch in 2021, the collaborations and partnerships it has curated in the community, and how it has been portrayed by various media entities. UMSL provided the team with a variety of documentation: the initial grant proposal UMSL submitted to the Missouri Foundation for Health, a research slidedeck summarizing the Network's work through fall 2022, and year-in-review reports for 2021 and 2022. We requested a copy of the report PricewaterhouseCoopers conducted for the Network in early spring 2023; however, the Network made the decision to keep that report internal. In addition to reviewing what the Network was able to provide, we analyzed its official website and collected media mentions and press releases shared on the Network's website. To supplement the documents provided and collected by the Network itself, we completed a media and research scan to identify any other articles we may have missed.

Interviews

Through interviews, the research team hoped to connect with Black and Brown business leaders in the 22 zip code area of north St. Louis. We designed interview questions and protocol using context from the literature review (see Appendix). Our goal was to listen to and prioritize the lived experiences of Black and Brown business leaders in the St. Louis community (Design Justice Principle 6), and to

leverage those experiences to shape the recommendations for UMSL and the Network (Costanza-Chock, 2020). Thus, we designed the interview questions to follow a natural progression that covered a number of areas, specifically: participant's background and connection to the community; the history of the participant's career and business; business successes, challenges, and needs; familiarity with and understanding of the Network's work; relationships with Network members, and potential interest in working with the Network moving forward. Throughout the interviews, participants' lived experiences within the St. Louis community and lived experiences as Black or Brown residents and business leaders were at the center of the conversation.

To recruit participants, we sent an email invitation to all the contacts collected from the Community Business Tool and the Greater North St. Louis Chamber of Commerce directory, which included a link to Google Calendar's Scheduling Tool, where participants could sign up for an interview slot. Once signed up, both the participant and research team received a calendar invite for the interview as well as information to log into the Zoom call. All Zoom interviews were recorded and the team used Fireflies.ai to develop interview transcripts and summaries for each interview.

After initially using the Network's Community Business Tool for outreach, the research team had only five signups, with four showing up to the interviews. Upon learning from a member of the UMSL team that the database was outdated by more than a year, the research team had to pivot to another option—the Greater North St. Louis Chamber of Commerce directory—for participant outreach. After using the directory, and participant recommendations, we had 26 potential participants sign up. Of those 26 signups, 17 showed up for and participated in an interview. Two of those 17 participants were white business leaders, and their interviews were removed from the data analysis since their input was not relevant to the research questions.

All interviews were conducted with the presence of two members from the research team, ensuring consistency throughout. One specific team member was present for 14 out of the 15

interviews, assuming the role of the primary interviewer in most cases, while the second team member served as an observer and posed follow-up questions as needed. The third team member who was not present watched the recording and read the transcripts after each interview was conducted. Interview participants were provided a $75 Visa gift card for their participation after completing the interview.

At the start of each interview, participants were informed that the interview was being recorded and that their name, business, and other identifying information would remain confidential. We reassured participants that their responses would remain anonymous, emphasizing our commitment to safeguarding their comfort and allaying concerns about potential repercussions for their involvement and honest responses in the research. Furthermore, we extended an invitation to participants to join focus groups after the interview, should they wish to provide additional insights in a group setting alongside other interviewees.

Focus Groups

In our continued efforts to amplify the voices of the Black and Brown business leaders this research would impact, we elected to hold two focus groups to determine business needs and recommendations for the Network to address these needs. We decided to design these focus groups using a Participatory Action Research approach, in which participants are able to see and analyze data while providing further insights (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Our goal was to gain a deeper understanding to refine our preliminary findings and recommendations while also learning from the experience and expertise of the focus group participants.

To continue the dialogue initiated in the interviews, we exclusively extended invitations to the 15 Black and Brown business leaders who had previously met with us for an interview. We mentioned the focus group opportunity at the culmination of each interview to gauge interest, answer questions, or gain feedback about next steps for the focus groups. In order to have organic, rich dialogue, we decided to hold the focus groups in person in St. Louis. Two weeks and then again one week before the focus

groups, we emailed the interview participants with an invitation and Google Form to sign up (see Appendix). We then sent follow-up emails to the participants who signed up during the week of and day before the focus groups. Participants had two focus groups to choose from, one held around noon on one day and one held at 5 p.m. the next day. Focus groups were held in a meeting room at the Angad Arts Hotel in St. Louis, and food was catered. To incentivize attendance, participants were provided with a $100 Visa gift card.

Following a thorough review and coding of the interview data, we crafted the focus group questions and protocol (see Appendix). During the focus group sessions, we began with introductions to allow participants to learn about each other's work and share their most pressing business needs over the coming 12 months. We then presented participants with printouts of our preliminary findings and recommendations, prompting them with a series of questions regarding any gaps, queries, or areas they wished to elaborate on. Participants were also encouraged to discuss the root causes behind the findings and suggest recommendations for the Network's improvement.

For the first focus group, five participants signed up, and for the second, three participants signed up. Ultimately, five attendees participated in the first focus group, while two joined the second, resulting in a total of seven focus group participants. Two members of our research team traveled to St. Louis to facilitate these sessions. In both focus groups, one team member led the discussion, while the other served as a notetaker and posed follow-up questions, as needed. In addition to taking notes, the team member recorded the focus groups on Zoom and employed Fireflies.ai to create transcripts and summaries for each session. The focus group sessions lasted approximately 90 minutes each.

During our initial interviews, many participants mentioned they would appreciate the opportunity to connect with and collaborate with other research participants. They also shared that they were interested in the Network having access to their contact information for future opportunities to meet and collaborate. In response to this feedback, we shared a sign-in sheet that gave the option for

participants to select whether they wanted their contact information shared with the other focus group

participants or the Network. All seven participants opted to have their contact information shared with

the focus group participants and the Network. While individual responses still remain anonymous, we

shared a list of contact names and emails with the other participants and the Network to support

opportunities for future collaboration and partnerships.

Data Analysis

The team initiated data analysis concurrently with each stage of our data collection–from

gathering documents to conducting interviews and focus groups–to guide subsequent data collection

methods and procedures. Through analysis, our aim was to be intentional and integrative. We analyzed

data individually and cohesively to identify patterns in our research. With a team of three researchers,

we were able engage in an immersive approach to data analysis through document analysis, interviews,

and focus groups.

Research Validity

In following recommendations to strengthen validity (Ravitch & Carl, 2021), we employed a

number of validity strategies throughout our project. These strategies, such as method sequencing and

data triangulation, were employed to establish a comprehensive and holistic approach to comprehend

the progress, limitations, context, and contributing factors to the success of the Network, as well as

areas for improvement and ongoing business needs of Black and Brown business owners.

Through strategic sequencing of methods, we crafted a robust research design and utilized

diverse methods to address our two research questions. We took a comprehensive approach to review

the initial grant proposal, Network year-in-review reports, and press releases to understand the

background and initial impact of the St. Louis Anchor Action Network's work. This created a robust

methodology and approach that drove our understanding of this critical topic. Our initial literature

review and document analysis informed the development of interview questions and protocols, while follow-up focus groups allowed us to finetune our inquiries.

In an effort to triangulate our data, we leveraged multiple strategies. This research team is composed of three researchers with diverse experiences and connections to the research questions and the St. Louis community. Throughout the research process, all three researchers jointly reviewed our project design, analyzed data, and collectively derived findings, fostering continuous dialogue and the potential for more intricate data and findings (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Since we took on a broad outreach method, we were able to implement some perspectival triangulation to our participant selection. Along with executive directors and chief executive officers, our interview pool also included managers, directors, and other employees to diversify the range of experiences and business needs shared. The participant pool also ranged across many industries in the St. Louis area including nonprofits, construction companies, beauty supply stores, health organizations, and print shops. This diversity of industries introduced nuance and complexity to our interviews and focus groups, resulting in a more extensive set of recommendations.

By delving into multiple theories and anchor collaborative examples in our literature review and conceptual framework, we began to frame our research in both context and complexity, especially focusing on the history and current environment of north St. Louis. Our extensive exploration of numerous theories enabled us to intentionally design a research project rooted in a multitude of intricate areas: race, power dynamics, community development, spatial justice, anchor collaboratives, and the specific needs of Black and Brown business owners.

Document Analysis

After collecting documents on the Network—including the St. Louis Anchor Action Network website, grant proposal, year-in-reviews, and press releases and media mentions—we initiated a robust, multistep process to analyze the data. Ultimately, we aimed to supplement our literature with specific

context about St. Louis and the Network while also using themes we found in the document analysis to design our interview and focus group questions and protocol. The range of documents we collected also provides context to answer our research questions–specifically, to what extent the Network is meeting the needs of Black and Brown business leaders in the 22 zip code footprint in St. Louis.

Our team consolidated all these documents within a single Google folder and embarked on multiple rounds of readings and pre-coding activities. This involved the systematic identification of initial background information and context, as well as the identification of potential themes and codes for subsequent analysis. Taking multiple passes to read and analyze the documents, our team highlighted phrases and quotations as well as identified key words. This process led to in-depth discussions regarding the Network's achievements and challenges, as well as a comparison between how the Network presents itself and how it is portrayed by external media sources.

Following these readings and discussions, our team compiled an initial list of key themes from press releases and media coverage of the Network. To validate themes and identify patterns, we leveraged ChatGPT to extract key descriptions, words, and phrases from the documents. Once we uploaded all the publicly available documents and media articles we had access to, we proceeded to ask ChatGPT to review and elucidate the key themes it recognized across our sources. Subsequently, ChatGPT presented a list of these key themes along with their respective frequencies of mention (OpenAI, 2023). To enhance the validity of our findings, we conducted a cross-reference between the themes identified by ChatGPT and those we had initially pinpointed. Considering the variations in patterns and the different types of documents at our disposal, we categorized the identified themes into two groups: those originating from documents in which the Network speaks about itself (such as proposals, year-in-reviews, press releases, and its official website) and those reflecting how external media outlets portray the Network's work.

The key themes from documents created by the Network (website, grant proposal, press releases, etc.) revolve around the goal of creating an equitable and inclusive future for St. Louis through community investment, economic development, and collaborative efforts to address historical inequities. Table 1 summarizes the key themes in order of their frequency of mention.

Theme	Description	Document Example
Racial Equity and Inclusion	Documents emphasize the commitment to advancing racial equity and removing barriers to economic opportunity in the St. Louis region. The St. Louis Anchor Action Network aims to address systemic racial and spatial inequities that have marginalized certain communities.	"The group has established an initial focus area of 22 zip codes in St. Louis city and county that have long suffered from the results of systemic racial and spatial inequities, resulting in 24.1% of the population currently living below the poverty line" (UMSL Daily, 2022).
Community Investment and Thriving	The primary aim of the Network is to promote continued investment in the people and localities of St. Louis, fostering a more inclusive regional community that facilitates prosperity for all.	"Over the last year, we've convened events and activities to support our community and advance our work, including our Career Expo and Hiring Events and Conscious Conversations video series dedicated to highlighting small businesses in the 22 zip codes" (St. Louis Anchor Action Network, 2022a).
Economic Development and Employment	The Network works to foster intentional hiring, career development, and workforce partnerships to increase access to high-quality careers and job opportunities in the 22 zip codes.	"From career expos to lunch-and-learn events, we have engaged with hundreds of community residents and small business owners, and we're starting to see those actions pay off in job placements and increased investments" (UMSL Daily, 2022).
Collaboration and Partnerships	The initiative's success relies on collaboration with anchor institutions, local businesses, and community partners. It also engages with various stakeholders to develop and implement wealth-building strategies.	"'I am very appreciative of this honor and really excited to work with our business partners and be able to continue to invest in a disinvested area of our community,' St. Louis Anchor Action Network Executive Director Stefani Weeden-Smith said. 'We're really seeking an aligned mindset. We are seeking coalition-building, accountability for our

Theme	Description	Document Example
		anchor institutions to community, and pooling our resources to be able to support community in a way that hasn't been'" (Walentik, 2023, April 24).
Systemic Impact and Disinvestment	Documents acknowledge historical racial and economic segregation patterns in St. Louis. The Network seeks to be a catalyst for overcoming systemic issues caused by racism and disinvestment.	"We seek to address more than a century of systemic racial and spatial inequities to support people, rejuvenate neighborhoods and build a stronger community for all" (St. Louis Anchor Action Network, 2022a).
Transparent Reporting and Accountability	The Network sets clear, measurable goals and commits to transparent progress reporting. The focus is on tangible, sustained change and positive collective impact.	"We understand that real change requires sustained commitment, which is why we will set clear, measurable goals and commit to transparent reporting against them"(St. Louis Anchor Action Network, 2022a).
Purchasing and Business Opportunities	The Network seeks to leverage intentional purchasing across institutions and companies to support businesses in the footprint. The Network strives to enhance connections between footprint businesses and procurement leaders.	"In the past year, [the Network] has held three career expos and hiring events, helping members of the community get their foot in the door with some of the leading employers throughout the region. More than 340 registered for those events, and more than 50 job applicants have been hired through those and other initiatives, with more applicants in the pipeline" (Walentik, 2023, April 24).
Data and Metrics	The text provides various data points and metrics to illustrate the current state of the community within the focus geography and the potential impact of the Network's efforts.	"The Network has developed a searchable community business tool that includes more than 13,000 area businesses to help Network members broaden and diversify their purchasing. At least 50 small businesses have connected with Network members about opportunities to bid for contracts"(Walentik, 2023, April 24).

Table 1. *Themes from Documents Created by the Network*

While documents created by the Network illustrated a more complete picture of its overall

purpose, mission, vision, goals, partnerships, processes, and values, external media sources tended to emphasize the Network's goals and intended long-term impact. Table 2 summarizes the key themes from media coverage external to the Network.

Theme	Description	Document Example
Racial inequities in the St. Louis Community	News articles focus on the efforts and initiatives taking place in the St. Louis region to address economic and racial inequities.	"The network, made up mostly of area academic and health care institutions, aims to rewrite statistics brought on by years of disinvestment in 22 local zip codes covering communities including Ferguson and Jennings and in St. Louis neighborhoods including Penrose, O'Fallon, and The Ville" (Robinson-Jacobs, 2021).
Economic Opportunity	The Network's goal is to enhance economic opportunity and prosperity in communities that have faced disinvestment, with a specific focus on hiring, career development, purchasing, and community investment.	"The network's members have set a goal of increasing the amount they spend next year on payroll and procurement in those areas by 10%. Payroll is for Black and Hispanic residents and procurement for businesses owned by people of color. If that goal is met, it would represent a projected $50 million increase in direct investment, said Stefani Weeden-Smith, director of the Anchor Action Network'" (Drew, 2022).
Collaboration and Partnerships	The Network emphasizes the importance of collaboration, coalition-building, and pooling resources among anchor institutions, businesses, and community partners to achieve collective goals and create a more inclusive regional economy.	"'WEPOWER can work to lower barriers to entry for entrepreneurs by working with our partners from the St Louis Anchor Action Network, Greater St Louis Inc, city officials, and anchor institution procurement professionals by coordinating our efforts to connect businesses to procurement opportunities, holistic services, advising, and access to capital,' says Yoni Blumberg, WEPOWER Director of Strategic Initiatives for

Theme	Description	Document Example
		Community Wealth-Building" (National League of Cities, 2023).
Hiring, Purchasing, and Procurement	The Network focuses on increasing employment and purchasing opportunities within the 22 zip code footprint, intending to support businesses owned by people of color and to improve economic conditions.	"Some of the largest anchors in St. Louis, like BJC HealthCare, and Washington University in St. Louis, come together through regular meetings focused on collaboration and strategy development, and they have goals focused on inclusive procurement for anchors. STLAAN, WEPOWER, and others have come together to create a network business directory to increase available information about small businesses in St. Louis" (National League of Cities, 2023).
Community Engagement and Listening	The Network actively engages with residents, organizations, and community leaders through various initiatives, including career expos, hiring events, listening sessions, and community impact programs.	"Weeden-Smith said the start-up phase of the network has involved building stronger relationships with community groups and learning how the network can reach its goals" (Drew, 2022).
Data tracking and accountability	The network aims to establish a standardized data tracking system to monitor their efforts and ensure measurable accountability in achieving their goals.	"'We really are working towards a measured accountability,' Weeden-Smith said. 'Really taking those looks at their organizations, …really looking at where they are and, you know, hopefully, to continue to get to a place that does show more diversity. Some places may already be closer to that than others. And so, we want to have some mechanism [in which individual network members] are able to be accountable for themselves and to the community' (Robinson-Jacobs, 2021).
Sustainable Change and Long-Term Impact	The Network's work is driven by a commitment to creating sustainable changes in the region and addressing the	"For Stefani Weeden-Smith, a just-announced push to boost employment and spending in a

Theme	Description	Document Example
	long-standing challenges of inequity and economic disparities.	low-income stretch of northern St. Louis County and city is personal. 'I'm a native St. Louisan,' Weeden-Smith, the newly minted director of the recently formed St. Louis Anchor Action Network, said. 'I grew up in Ferguson, Missouri. So, it's a very personal story for me to be able to come full circle and to be able to give back to this community'"(Robinson-Jacobs, 2021).

Table 2. *Themes from Media Articles*

Our examination and analysis of media articles revealed numerous parallels with the descriptions of the St. Louis Action Network and its mission in documents created by UMSL. While the UMSL documents primarily emphasized the Network's immediate objectives, media articles provided overarching portrayals of the Network and generally highlighted its long-term impact on the region. Both UMSL-generated documents and media articles addressed the systemic challenges that the Network seeks to address, but the former placed greater emphasis on outlining the specific measures the Network intends to implement in addressing these issues.

As we went through these initial analysis processes, it was clear key themes were emerging, but they seemed disparate from each other. It was apparent we needed to connect our findings and relate them to our research questions. As a result, for the concluding phase of our document analysis, we composed a memorandum to condense our discoveries from all the documents. This allowed us to extract pertinent themes and specific details to address our research questions. This phase of the process proved valuable in pinpointing gaps in our preliminary findings and guiding us in formulating interview questions, especially with regard to the perceptions and understanding of the Network among Black and Brown business leaders.

Interviews

Our objective in conducting interviews with Black and Brown business leaders was to address gaps in our research, amplify the voices of those affected by the Network, and listen to the lived experiences of participants to inform our findings and recommendations. We intentionally developed our questions and protocol based on what we learned from the literature review and document analysis. Once interviews were recorded, and transcripts and summaries were generated with Fireflies.ai, we stored the materials in a shared Google folder accessible only by members of the research team.

As the interviews unfolded and while reviewing the interview recordings and transcripts, the team performed preliminary coding to identify emerging patterns and themes. Noteworthy points made by participants were highlighted, and any remaining questions were documented. When participants shared particularly intriguing insights, we made a deliberate effort to explore these topics in subsequent interviews. This approach enabled us to discern significant trends and ideas, as well as recognize any distinctive or outlier experiences in our interviews. One example of a change made was the addition of a question focused on any previous experiences with a specific Network member. In one interview, a participant mentioned a previous experience where they had tried to work with a Network member and were unsuccessful. We then asked the question in subsequent interviews and learned that other participants had similar experiences of unsuccessful collaboration attempts.

When coding the data from the interviews, we adopted both a deductive and inductive approach. Using a shared Google Sheet, we listed out codes that we identified from the literature review and document analysis. As our coding progressed, additional codes emerged and were added to our codebook, allowing us not only to capture codes from the literature but also to identify consistent patterns across interviews. Codes were developed for only our initial seven questions, which focused on lived experiences, business needs, successes, and challenges. For the seven questions that we coded for,

many participants had answers that fell under multiple codes. For example, they may have described

marketing, new clients, and a new facility as business needs, so we tallied multiple codes to fully reflect

their response. The final questions of the interviews focused on participants' interest in collaborating

with the Network and their suggested recommendations. Responses to these questions were collected

on separate tabs in the Google Sheet, which we later analyzed to create a preliminary list of findings and

recommendations.

Interviews were split up evenly between the three team members to code. Once we had some

initial coding for all 15 interviews, the team adopted a dialogic engagement approach to revisit and

further analyze the data. We collectively reviewed our coding and engaged in discussions about the

interpretation of different codes and how team members approached coding specific portions of the

transcripts. Through this dialogic engagement, we addressed questions raised by team members; shared

diverse perspectives during data review; and identified additional patterns, outliers, and

recommendations. After thorough discussions and review of all interviews, one team member

conducted a final review to compile all codes and responses, as shown in Table 3 below.

Question	Code	Response	# of Participants
Q1. Can you describe your company/organization and its background?	1	Retail	4
	2	Professional Services	5
	3	Food and Beverage	1
	4	Community Organization	9
	5	Government	1
	6	Consulting	5
	7	Other	3

Question	Code	Response	# of Participants
Q2. Can you describe your connection to the St. Louis area?	1	Lifelong resident	5
	2	Born and left and came back	6
	3	Newcomer	1
	4	Not born there but been there 10 years or more	3
Q3. What are some successes your company/organization has achieved?	1	Own their own facility	5
	2	Growth/expansion	6
	3	Social benefit	12
	4	Personal growth & freedom	5
	5	New skills	6
	6	Partnerships	10
	7	Other	4
Q4. What challenges has your company/organization faced?	1	Funding/grant assistance	6
	2	Staffing	6
	3	Discriminatory practices/discrimination	7
	4	Partnerships/clients	10
	5	Resources/training/space	11
	6	COVID/economy challenges	5
	7	Marketing/advertising	6

Question	Code	Response	# of Participants
	8	Safety	3
	9	Other	5
Q5. What are your current business needs and/or goals?	1	Partnerships/clients	12
	2	Expansion/growth	11
	3	Increase funding	5
	4	Increase staffing	5
	5	Social good	10
	6	New skills/training	5
	7	Other	5
Q6. What relationships or partnerships does your business have in place?	1	Friends/family	9
	2	Anchor institutions	5
	3	Large organizations/corporations	7
	4	Nonprofits	7
	5	School Districts	8
	6	Consultants/business associations	4
	7	Police department	3
	8	Local chamber of commerce	5
	9	The city where they work	7

Question	Code	Response	# of Participants
	10	Other	9
Q7. Have you heard about the St. Louis Anchor Action Network?	1	No	12
	2	Yes, but no awareness of the purpose or function of the Network	3
	3	Yes, and familiar with the organization	0

Table 3. *Codes and Results from Interviews*

The 15 participants who participated in the interviews represented a diverse array of industries, spanning from nonprofits with various mission focuses to marketing firms, construction companies, and notary businesses. Their extensive life experiences enriched our discussions as they candidly shared the unique challenges they encountered. Almost all (14) of the participants had deep roots in the community. Some had spent their entire lives in the St. Louis area, while others were originally from St. Louis, ventured to other states for a period, and then returned to their community. A few were not native to St. Louis but had been living in the area for at least a decade, with one participant being a relative newcomer, having resided in St. Louis for less than five years.

Through their longstanding ties to the community and their accomplishments as business leaders, the participants revealed the breadth of their networks and partnerships, which ranged from local school districts and business associations to members of the Network. They described intricate personal and professional connections with other Black and Brown business leaders, local community centers such as churches and fraternities, as well as institutions such as the local chamber of commerce, police departments, and city government offices. For most participants, their work encompassed multiple objectives, including increasing financial prosperity and funding, expanding their organization's influence, and investing in their communities.

For most of the interview participants, the business successes they shared were also some of their top challenges or business needs. Participants shared areas that they were proud of and were focused on continually improving those areas moving forward. One of the key areas where business successes, challenges, and needs converged was in creating partnerships with various entities, and most participants highlighted partnerships in all three categories. For example, one participant, the co-owner of a beauty supply store, mentioned that some of their most significant successes since opening during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 were the partnerships they forged with the local chamber of commerce, city government office, and police department. These partnerships resulted in increased visibility, marketing opportunities, and a growing clientele. The participant also emphasized that pursuing further partnerships remained a priority, not only to foster business growth but also to make a positive impact on their community. They discussed aspirations of partnering with school districts to hire new employees, citing successful experiences with high school students they had employed, and offering training programs for students as young as middle school to learn about the profession. However, they encountered challenges due to the bureaucracy of school districts and the lack of funding for training initiatives. They also expressed another business need, which was securing funding and resources for partnerships with juvenile centers and homeless shelters, as detailed below:

> *"Yeah, business needs, I think, are to have those partnerships[…]with the juvenile detention center and even extending over to our homeless shelters because what we've identified [is that] the demographics are very high for African-American males to be in the juvenile detention center. A lot of them have locks, they have braids, and so they're going in front of the judges with their hair just all over the place. Well, that brings a lack of confidence immediately because we know if you're looking at this person, they just look disheveled. Then you're already having some type of thoughts and you feel that energy. And so what they asked is if I could kind of start coming in and helping to maybe do the kids' hair. And so we've done that a couple of times. I've*

gotten some stylists together. We went in, we've done some of the kids' hair and the confidence

booster that they have, just feeling good about themselves[…]We're just looking at how we can

benefit these children in a way where they never come back to this place again."

The participant outlined ongoing challenges in establishing partnerships with youth organizations and

institutions, including issues related to funding, recruitment, and establishing connections with higher

education institutions and large organizations capable of offering resources and financial support to

amplify their impact.

Most organizations shared that their commitment to social good for the community was both a

success and a continued need—they aspired to continue to do more good within the community. Other

important needs for participants included resources, training, and funding to move their organization

forward. Notably, a significant impediment to their work was the existence of discriminatory practices

and racial discrimination, with participants sharing instances of how they were subjected to such

treatment, leading to limited opportunities and the perpetuation of unjust systems.

One participant, the chief executive officer of an education nonprofit, recounted the challenges

they faced in securing funding. They observed that larger nonprofits received the lion's share of funding

and had established connections with both local and national foundations. This often resulted in these

foundations and established nonprofits acting as gatekeepers, preventing smaller nonprofits from

gaining access to funding and networking opportunities, thereby perpetuating an imbalanced

distribution of power:

"Some of our biggest challenges are, I would know, just the culture of how African-American

nonprofits, or even CEOs in general, are just treated and seen[…]specifically in St. Louis, there's a

lot of intra-racial conflict and classism[…][Foundations and large nonprofits] determine who gets

the funding, and they're kind of like gatekeepers. So for organizations like myself, I have to

scramble and scrape. To compete with those people and to try and collaborate with them is a

challenge oftentimes[…] And some of the obstacles that I have to face, I just have to be extra

prepared. I have to be more, my impacts have to be stronger and I have to work harder. And

that's difficult when there's less funding and there's less availability for infrastructure

development and things like that and more."

Out of the 15 interview participants, 12 had no prior knowledge of the St. Louis Anchor Action

Network before our invitation to interview. The remaining three participants had some awareness of the

Network's existence but were not familiar with its mission or objectives. None of the participants

possessed sufficient knowledge about the Network to provide a description of its mission and activities.

During the interviews, some participants voiced confusion about not hearing about the Network at all.

Several participants were actively engaged in their local chamber of commerce and the broader

community, with some even collaborating with anchor members of the Network. Upon learning about

the Network and its goals, all 15 participants expressed enthusiasm for the potential it held in the

realms of hiring and career development, procurement, and community investment. They also offered

recommendations for enhancement, which are elaborated upon in the Findings and Recommendations

section.

Focus Groups

Following the completion of the two focus groups, all the related materials, including

recordings, transcripts, summaries, and typed notes, were centralized within a Google folder accessible

only by our team. Subsequently, the research team initiated a multistep analysis process. The team first

watched the focus group recordings and reviewed the transcripts to precode for themes identified from

the literature review, document analysis, and interviews, as well as other themes or quotes that did not

fit in any of the pre-identified themes. Next, the team again reviewed the focus group transcripts and

highlighted quotes and evidence that fit into the themes. A third review led to a summary of key

themes, which a team member drafted in a research memorandum.

The two focus group discussions, led by our research team, delved into various themes related to the interactions among community members, Black and Brown business leaders, and large organizations and anchor institutions in the St. Louis area. These conversations shed light on the prevalent power imbalances, lack of engagement, and racial and systemic issues affecting Black and Brown business leaders in their relationships with larger organizations and anchor institutions. Participants called for intentional, inclusive actions and open dialogue, emphasizing the importance of community engagement and genuine efforts to bridge existing gaps. Additionally, the discussions explored community needs, institutional responsibilities, and potential avenues for change. The participants emphasized the urgent need for transformative solutions to systemic issues, underscoring the importance of accountability, transparency, community investment, and equitable representation in decision-making processes. The dialogue reflected a collective aspiration for sustainable development, inclusivity, and social justice within communities and institutions. Table 4 shows the key themes, supported by evidence from the focus groups, below.

Theme	Description	Focus Group Quote
Engagement and Outreach	Engagement, outreach, and communication is critical to improving the connection of Black- and Brown-owned business leaders with anchor institutions.	*"I think it's just so many different layers of that right there that can go in to help have accountability. Like, what are we really doing? And now we need to advocate for it. Now, we need to communicate. This is what we're doing. Vocalize it to make people aware. Because if we're leaving it up to the powers that be, it won't happen. It's just not going to happen."*
Power Dynamics	Participants believe that anchors are disconnected from Black and Brown business leaders and their communities. In addition, power dynamics between small Black- and	*"I think that it's called disruptive nature or disruptive culture for a reason. If we keep allowing ourselves to go on with the status quo, nothing's going to change. Right. But if we are*

Theme	Description	Focus Group Quote
	Brown-owned businesses and large anchor institutions limit trust and economic opportunity.	*really setting ourselves up to be disruptors, if you will, in the industry, then we have to make some people uncomfortable."*
Accountability and Transparency	Anchor institutions need to demonstrate greater accountability and transparency to improve trust and engagement with the community.	*"I think there's different priorities, right? Sometimes it's a lack of realization because it becomes not a core priority area for a business. And so I don't think a lot of this is from maliciousness by any means. I think it is very much just the nature of the anchor institutions built, the way they are and the dynamics of where they currently are."*
Racial Justice	Political and civic action is necessary to ensure commitment to racial justice.	*"Anchors currently gain a 'badge of honor' without necessarily fulfilling their end of the bargain."*
Network Structure and Representation	The current structure of the St. Louis Anchor Action Network was questioned, and suggestions included restructuring the Network and ensuring representatives are genuine volunteers who have a vision and interest in community growth. The Network should also be a standalone entity, unaffiliated with any single institution, to avoid bias and conflicts of interest.	*"So this is where we have the challenge of they do not want to buy in if they are then held accountable… But then you get this badge of honor of being like, oh I'm in the Network, right? And that's something they're able to say."*
Open Conversations	Participants highlighted the need for more inclusive conversations and decision-making, along with the need to address people's apprehensions in discussing race and diversity. Engaging Black and Brown residents to facilitate these	*"If an anchor does not want to be transparent, doesn't want to be held accountable, and does not want to be present in our communities, not only should I think that they should not be a part of it, but I also think that it should be noted that this is the*

Theme	Description	Focus Group Quote
	conversations can start to bridge these topics.	*reason why they're not a part of it. Right. Because everybody hates bad publicity, especially when it comes to diversity inclusion issues. And so it would just be that for me."*

Table 4. *Themes from Focus Groups*

Themes from the focus groups echoed as well as built upon those identified by the team in document analysis and interviews. All three sources of data emphasized the imperative for the Network to actively involve the community through attentive listening and collaborative efforts. Moreover, all data sources shed light on how deeply ingrained racial inequities, which have endured for generations, remain central to the ongoing challenges in St. Louis. In both the interviews and focus groups, participants underscored the significance of including Black and Brown residents in the Network's strategic planning and events without imposing an undue burden on these residents. As one participant in a focus group expressed:

> *"So oftentimes we get assigned to do the dirty work of race as something that we didn't even create, right? So I think that in terms of accountability, this might sound a little off-hand a little bit, but I think that we just really need to address what it really means to find a level of repair for a group of individuals who've been for families or ancestors, who've been through slavery, been through oppression for 400 plus years, and then go through Black Codes, go through Jim Crow, then go through the injustice system itself that was not set up for our protection or our favor. And so when you're talking about the root of these issues. A lot of these companies were founded by folks who have participated in or have benefited from slavery. Right? And so now we're trying to repair something that's taken 400 plus years to create."*

As was evident throughout the earlier interviews, the enthusiasm for change and the initiatives undertaken by the St. Louis Anchor Action Network persisted during the focus groups. Participants built

on each other to uncover underlying causes and propose recommendations to enhance the Network's

efforts. This feedback is encapsulated in the next section, as we discuss our culminating findings and

recommendations.

PART IV: FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Shifting from planning into implementation, the St. Louis Anchor Action Network has

accomplished an admirable amount of work coalescing various stakeholders, launching events and

workshops, and conducting community outreach. Through an iterative and immersive data collection

and analysis process, the team has identified six key findings for our two research questions:

(1) To what extent are the activities of the Anchor Network meeting the socioeconomic needs of

Black and Brown business leaders within the 22 zip code focus geography of north St. Louis?

(2) In which ways might the Anchor Network maximize its community impact in service of Black and

Brown business leaders within the 22 zip code focus geography of north St. Louis?

In addition to identifying these findings, we have developed three key recommendation areas along with

a number of specific opportunities for the Network to improve support for Black and Brown business

leaders. As it continues to mature and build momentum, the Network has immense potential to improve

economic mobility outcomes across the 22 zip codes and the greater St. Louis region.

Limitations and Critique

Ultimately, our aim for this project was to share recommendations with the St. Louis Anchor

Action Network to better support Black and Brown business leaders in north St. Louis. Employees at the

Network took the time to connect with us and thoughtfully answer questions on a monthly basis and

through email. As we started this study, we requested specific information from the Network, which

included spending and hiring data on each anchor member and the Network as a whole, a list of Black

and Brown business leaders who have been connected with or benefitted from the Network, and the

PricewaterhouseCoopers report that was completed toward the start of our study. We were not granted

access to this data, however, so the team had to rely on cold outreach to business leaders to recruit

participants.. The initial plan was to send out a survey, but without a focused list of contacts connected

to the Network, we anticipated the response rate would be too low or unreliable for a survey to render

meaningful results. Although we initially used the Community Business Tool on the Network's website to

contact businesses within the 22 zip codes, we learned from an UMSL employee that the tool had not

been updated in approximately two years. Upon learning this, the team shifted to using the Greater

North St. Louis Chamber of Commerce directory to cold email potential participants. Some of the

participants who responded to our email to the broader directory did not live in the 22 zip codes;

however, we did not discover this until after the interviews.

Without being able to access data and outcomes, the research team had to make some

assumptions based on the information we had. Specifically, we had to rely primarily on publicly

accessible information, such as media articles and press releases, to glean a level of insight into Network

spending and hiring within the 22 zip codes. We also could not answer specific questions or make

recommendations related to Network spending or support without prior data. We learned that the

anchor members offer differing levels of participation to the Network and that some anchor members

elected not to share hiring and spending data; for the Network's 2019-2020 baseline numbers, for

example, only 9 out of 11 anchors reported their employment and spending numbers (St. Louis Anchor

Action Network, 2021). As a result, many of our requests for information could not be fulfilled because

the Network did not have access to the relevant data. While each anchor member has the benefits and

visibility of participating in the Network, sharing hiring and spending data is not a requirement to join

the Network or to remain a member. Without cohesive data, it is difficult to determine the extent of the

Network's impact or to the degree to which individual anchor members are fulfilling their commitments.

Instead of analyzing the impact and participation of individual anchors, then, the team took an

inductive, qualitative approach to our research, grounded in the needs and perspectives of business

leaders within north St. Louis.

Lastly, we acknowledge three white researchers from outside the St. Louis area will not get everything right. Our positionality most likely limited us from asking the right questions and inevitably influenced the ways in which our participants responded to us. Nonetheless, we hope these findings and recommendations will support the St. Louis Anchor Action Network, other anchor collaboratives like it, and–most importantly–the Black and Brown business leaders (both current and aspiring) of north St. Louis. We saw ourselves as facilitators of this research and made an intentional effort to directly engage and amplify Black and Brown voices. There is still more work to be done.

Findings

Research Question 1: To what extent are the activities of the Anchor Network meeting the socioeconomic needs of Black and Brown business leaders within the 22 zip code focus geography of north St. Louis?

Finding 1: The St. Louis Anchor Action Network has launched an award-winning model that is starting to see some positive outcomes, but there is still work to do.

In 2021, the University of Missouri–St. Louis (UMSL), in collaboration with Edward Jones and 10 other local anchor institutions, launched the St. Louis Anchor Action Network. This cohort of anchor institutions came together to increase support in three key areas: hiring and workforce development, spending and procurement, and community investment (St. Louis Anchor Action Network, 2021). The Network set the goal of a collective 10% increase in hiring and purchasing in the 22 zip code footprint by the end of 2023, which could lead to a direct investment of $50 million (St. Louis Anchor Action Network, 2022a). Now a collaboration across 17 anchor institutions, including UMSL and Edward Jones as co-leads, the Network has taken some clear strides toward its goals.

As a participant in the Anchor Learning Network, led by the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities, UMSL has centered place-based hyperlocal engagements and collaborations in its effort to

launch and implement the St. Louis Anchor Action Network ("Anchor Learning Network," n.d.). The

Network's commitment to the 22 zip code footprint indicates their adoption of a place-based approach.

By concentrating on these specific areas, the Network recognizes that Black and Brown businesses

within these zip codes, which may have the most significant needs, could be otherwise overlooked

(Dayanim, 2011). Critical to place-based engagements are the relationships built with other anchors,

nonprofits, employers, and small businesses. In addition to the collaboration among the 17 Network

members, the Network also works with Greater St. Louis Inc., the Regional Business Council, and

STL.works (Walentik, 2023, April 24). Employees of the 17 anchors make up various planning

committees including hiring, purchasing, research, and communications. Community members from

organizations like Beyond Housing, WEPOWER, and Employment Connections participate in two

community committees focused on workforce development and business development (St. Louis Anchor

Action Network, 2022a). Through these collaborations and efforts to bring more voices into the

decision-making process, UMSL is focused on understanding community needs and improving Network

outcomes.

The St. Louis Anchor Action Network has generated positive buzz across the region. In spring

2023, the Network was one of four recipients for the St. Louis Business Journal's 2023 Innovation in

Philanthropy Awards, which celebrates local initiatives that center partnerships and philanthropic

efforts in innovative ways (Walentik, 2023, April 24). This award was received at the culmination of

initial planning and implementation, as the Network continues toward its 2023 goals. Successes include:

- The Network has hosted three career expo and hiring events where more than 340

  registered to attend and more than 50 were hired, with additional applicants in career

  pipelines (Walentik, 2023, April 24).

- More than 500 area residents have been connected with Network members to discuss job

  opportunities (St. Louis Anchor Action Network, 2022a).

- In a searchable Community Business Tool created by the Network, over 13,000 local

  businesses are listed to help Network members expand their purchasing power. At least 50

  businesses have been connected with Network members to bid for contracts (Walentik,

  2023, April 24).

- The Network has prioritized expanding its reach through learning experiences. In 2022, it

  launched an Executive Learning Series to inform members about national anchor

  collaboratives, and the Network presented its work at a national conference (St. Louis

  Anchor Action Network, 2022a).

- When developing its action plan, the Network engaged more than 125 community partners

  (UMSL Daily, 2022).

The Network focused on planning during most of 2022 then shifted to implementation to try to reach

the goal of a 10% increase in hiring and purchasing by the end of 2023. Though its activities show the

Network has made some progress toward those goals, it is unclear to the team how close the Network is

to a 10% increase. Regarding the types of events initiated thus far, the Network is on the right track, as

these events are cultivating connections among Black and Brown business leaders and anchor members.

When the team requested additional materials and information from the Network, we were not

granted access to data on collective or individual anchor member hiring and spending. As demonstrated

by the successes listed above, the Network has made progress in formal partnerships and events held.

However, the reported data leaves some questions unanswered:

- How many new hires and contracts would equate to a 10% collective increase for Network

  members?

- Of the 500+ residents connected to members, how many led to positive outcomes?

- Which anchors are doing most of the hiring and purchasing?

- What measurable goals and milestones has each individual anchor member committed to in

order to help the Network achieve the collective 10% increase?

For 17 anchor institutions, 50 hires and 50 contract bids do not constitute a significant number, and this would almost certainly fall well below the 10% goal. Additionally, when we reviewed the searchable Community Business Tool for interview outreach, many of the contacts and businesses were about two years old, according to an UMSL employee. This limits the number of businesses that Network members reach out to for contracting opportunities. More consistent and transparent data reporting from anchor members is necessary as the Network continues to expand and improve. In summer 2023, the James S. McDonnell Foundation awarded the Network a $2.4 million grant to continue to expand its efforts (Walentik, 2023, August 3). The additional funding opens up new potential for the Network to continue supporting Black and Brown business leaders.

Finding 2: There continue to be systemic needs, issues, and barriers that impede on the Network's process or that the Network does not currently address.

St. Louis has a complex history marked by racial tensions and disparities that have profoundly influenced the well-being of its residents, their economic prospects, and overall quality of life. These inequities persist in various aspects of society, including housing, infrastructure, education, politics, employment, and the criminal justice system. The culmination of these challenges has given rise to periods of civil unrest and fostered a deep sense of distrust among the city's population (Source: St. Louis-mo.gov, 2020). The St. Louis Anchor Action Network's formation in the early 2020s comes at a point of national turmoil and civil frustration, and the goals of the Network are focused and clear: to develop a collaborative of anchor institutions to support residents in the 22 zip code footprint through hiring and development, purchasing and procurement, and community investment. The Network's mission is not intended to "fix" all of the systemic challenges that exist in St. Louis, but it has been established to harness the substantial influence and resources of local anchor institutions to bring about positive change. Although obstacles persist during the implementation phase, there remain systemic

issues that the Network can either directly or indirectly tackle.

The Network continually reevaluates its processes, methodology, and impact as it broadens its reach across the St. Louis region (St. Louis Anchor Action Network, 2022a). Design Justice Principle 4 states, "We view change as emergent from an accountable, accessible, and collaborative process, rather than as a point at the end of a process" (Costanza-Chock, 2020, p. 7). Various committee work that includes either Network members or community leaders helps the Network keep a pulse on what is going on in the community. While what the Network is doing so far is a start, there is still more to do.

Across the interviews and focus groups, participants shared that they did not know much about the Network but also did not trust the individual anchor institutions or their motivations. This distrust existed for a variety of reasons, some being complex and systemic. Participants frequently mentioned previous negative interactions or expressed a sense that anchor institutions were overseen by individuals who were not originally from St. Louis or who had never resided in the 22 zip code footprint. These leaders were predominantly white and, as a result, were perceived as lacking a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by Black and Brown business leaders and residents. One participant shared in the focus groups:

> "[The Network is made up of] all of the really large employers in St. Louis. And so it's about a dozen yeah, 17 total companies. There is a complete disconnect. You talk about not living in the community, but also not even engaging in the community. So in everyday life, these same people are not engaging in the community, so they would have no knowledge or connection. I think[...]the reality is that with respect to wanting to create additional opportunities for minority business owners, there isn't a real[…] appetite. People don't necessarily want to do it. That's just the reality[…]because when we talk about race, of course they don't want to help. The other reality is that the way [the anchors] currently work is easier because it's the way they've been doing it. You're asking them to change and you're asking them to do more work for something

that they don't really necessarily care about at a foundational level."

This distrust as to why anchor institutions were engaging in the Network were echoed in both interviews and focus groups. Some participants shared that they believe that anchor institutions joined the Network not because they are interested in positive change, but because it made them look good. And as the participant quoted above stated, it is easier for a large organization or anchor institution to continue with the status quo and with what has worked for them before, instead of making systematic changes. Ultimately, it is easier for an anchor organization to sign up for a positive effort like the Network and to reap the benefits without doing anything to change. The distrust many Black and Brown business leaders feel toward anchor institutions will continue to be a challenge the Network will need to address as it attempts to broaden its reach.

As participants learned about the Network's goals to leverage local anchor institutions to enact change, they had follow-up questions about how the Network and its anchor members will increase efforts in hiring, development, and community investment in particular. Some brought up the opportunity for the Network to direct their efforts to residents who may need more support: primary and secondary students in school districts, locals experiencing homelessness, and residents reentering society after serving time in the criminal justice system could all benefit from tailored events and resources that local anchor institutions can provide. During interviews, one participant discussed their practice of recruiting and hiring individuals with prior drug-related convictions to give them a second chance after serving prison sentences. Participants also suggested anchors or collaborating small businesses could provide resource lists to highlight options for housing, therapy, and other community needs. Another participant shared their efforts to establish connections with local high schools to hire high school students for part-time paid employment. They noted the challenges they face in competing with more structured internship programs to hire and train these young workers. In a separate interview, a participant who leads a nonprofit supporting recent immigrants to the United States

highlighted the difficulties these newcomers encounter in navigating the job application and interview process:

> *"[Many of those we support] think that they can go to [a large organization or anchor institute's] website and apply, but I found it has been hard for them to even get an interview to begin with. So now, some of them just don't even try anymore. But if [our organization] had a way to connect with [anchors] directly, we can connect them to people who would be the best for the job."*

UMSL and the St. Louis Anchor Action Network have access to a wide array of contacts and resources through this work, and the Network may effect even greater change by designing events, supports, and resources for those who need it most. To meet community needs in a way that builds genuine trust, the Network will need to continually evolve its efforts by actively listening to and partnering with Black and Brown business leaders and residents within the footprint.

Finding 3: It is unclear who has access to Network resources.

Over the last two years, the Network has engaged hundreds of community residents and business leaders (UMSL Daily, 2022; Walentik, 2023, April 24; St. Louis Anchor Action Network, 2022a). Yet, out of the 15 study participants the team interviewed, most (12) had not heard of the Network at all. Only three participants had heard of the Network, and none of the participants could share exactly what the Network did or why it existed. As the team conducted outreach for interviews, about another dozen who did not participate mentioned in email communication that they did not know what the Network was. The interview and focus group participants who engaged in this study worked in an impressively wide range of industries and organizations, with each individual possessing an extensive network of contacts across the St. Louis region. The team found it surprising that so few of those we connected with knew much about the Network. This observation raises our third and final finding for this research question: it is unclear, to us, who is able to access Network resources and what outreach

methods the Network is engaging in.

The Network has launched a Community Business Tool of 13,000 local businesses, which was highlighted in every media article and press release the team reviewed. Upon further conversations with the Network team, we learned the database had not been thoroughly updated in at least two years. The team resorted to using different contact lists from the Greater North St. Louis Chamber of Commerce for our own outreach efforts, which connected us with Black and Brown business leaders not in the Network's database. Participants we interviewed introduced us to additional community leaders and shared information about the various business associations and community groups they are a part of. As one interview participant, who is well connected with Black community leaders across St. Louis, shared:

> "It's surprising because when I saw [your outreach email] and I saw the name, St. Louis Anchor Action Network, I thought what in the world? I need to know more about it[…] I had never heard of it[…] and I asked others before my interview and they had never heard of it[…] it's just surprising because they need to market more."

By conducting these interviews and focus groups over a two-month span, the research team has met and interacted with inspirational, well-connected Black and Brown community leaders who are eager to get involved. Community outreach is often complex, costly, and time-consuming, but there is abundant opportunity and knowledge across the region that the Network has yet to tap into.

According to the St. Louis Anchor Action Network's 2022 Year-in-Review report, about 25 community members from 20 organizations engage with the Network as part of two committees: one on workforce development and one on business development (St. Louis Anchor Action Network, 2022a). These community leaders are experts in the areas, such as workforce development and education, that the Network is interested in improving. Although one participant we interviewed is a leader at a community organization that is represented on a committee, she shared that she was not familiar with the Network, which means not all committee members are sharing what the Network does internally

across their organization. Each community member and anchor member has access to their own wide range of personal and professional networks and could leverage their involvement to promote the Network further.

Often, a follow-up question from study participants was: "how can I get involved?" This inquiry aligns with an observation the Network highlighted in its 2021 Year in Review. The report noted that community members often experienced challenges in connecting with anchor members and emphasized the need for improved organization and coordination among the anchor members to alleviate barriers (St. Louis Anchor Action Network, 2021).

The Network's website does not provide options or next steps for business leaders to get involved, even to simply be added to a mailing list. This puts the power and opportunity to get involved in the Network's hands instead of those who are impacted by the work. Participants suggested a toolkit or resource list for different groups of stakeholders to get involved. Some participants also recommended an opportunity, such as listening sessions or implementing an advisory board, for Black and Brown business leaders to share their individual perspectives. One participant in a focus group shared:

> *"[You've got to] put the right people in the right spaces. Let us help you to have difficult conversations. I'm a black woman. I can help you construct a conversation or dialogue to approach that type of language or verbiage or whatever to engage with minorities further. I think a lot of [the challenges to outreach] is fear [for the anchors] on how to approach minorities. But engage the minorities to let them help you do that. I'm not afraid of those tough conversations."*

By bringing more voices into the decision-making space, the Network will be able to expand its partnerships and make a broader impact on the community it seeks to serve.

Research Question 2: In which ways might the Anchor Network maximize its community

impact in service of Black and Brown business leaders within the 22 zip code focus geography of north St. Louis?

Finding 1: Leverage and elevate the expertise and networks of Black and Brown leaders in the St. Louis area.

Over the last two years since its inception, the St. Louis Anchor Action Network has engaged hundreds of stakeholders who are connected to this work, including anchor members, community partners, other anchor collaboratives from across the country, local businesses, and residents. Combined, these connections bring a wide array of experiences and "funds of knowledge" that the Network can tap into (González et al., 2005). The UMSL team working on this anchor collaborative boasts decades of expertise in economic mobility, community development, and anchor collaboratives. The team, currently made up of two employees specifically hired to work for the Network, hold all of that expertise as well as lived experiences and connections to the St. Louis community. The Network can, and should, continue to broaden the connections they engage in this work. As the Network's team grows with the additional grant funding from the James S. McDonnell Foundation, our team recommends the Network prioritize expanding the ways in which it engages Black and Brown voices from the community.

Our research finds that Black and Brown business leaders understand business and community needs related to their positionality and that such knowledge represents a valued asset to the Network. Study participants represented a wide array of industries and were deeply connected to St. Louis. They shared about the impactful work that organizations, associations, and community spaces were already doing to support Black and Brown residents. The Design Justice Principles focus on highlighting, honoring, and elevating what people are already doing for the community. Specifically, Design Justice Principle 6 acknowledges that everyone is an expert as a result of their own lived experiences, and Principle 10 affirms that "before seeking new design solutions, we [must] look for what is already

working at the community level" (Costanza-Chock, 2020, p. 7). The St. Louis Anchor Action Network has access to immense power and resources by being housed at the University of Missouri–St. Louis and by collaborating with 17 of the region's largest organizations. Part of that power and work can certainly be focused on including anchor members in decision-making, which the Network already does in numerous ways. However, as the connector of these anchor institutions, the Network has an opportunity to shift power into community hands.

Our findings suggest that the Network can build upon existing initiatives, partnerships, and collaborations instead of relying mostly on building its own. This approach can lead to more effective and efficient engagement. Participants shared different organizations and initiatives that are doing meaningful work in this space and have supported them, their employees, or their clients. Additionally, community centers and associations convene large groups of Black and Brown residents and provide communal support. Churches, fraternities, YMCAs, and cultural centers all provide opportunities for the Network to connect with the community.

Study participants also offered various ways in which they or their own connections can support the Network's mission. Community business leaders have their own extensive personal and professional networks, skill sets, and experiences that could prove beneficial to the Network. Many participants expressed their ability to connect the Network and its anchor members with St. Louis residents for engagement and potential employment opportunities, or to connect them with small businesses for potential contracts. One participant, who leads a nonprofit supporting immigrants in the St. Louis area, highlighted their organization's support for thousands of immigrants annually, all of whom bring a diverse range of educational and professional experiences to the table. As the participant stated:

> *"So if there is a way [the Network can] connect [each anchor member] with us[…] we have*
> *workshops every month, and what we are looking for is somebody to come and speak to us*
> *about what they're doing, what business opportunities, resources they have on how they want to*

connect to our community."

Another participant leads a nonprofit that educates female St. Louis residents on public safety. They shared that hundreds of young women come to their programs every year, many of whom are looking for jobs or connections to scale their small businesses. This participant, and a few others, shared how difficult job hunting is currently and how hard it is to simply get an interview or conversation with a potential employer. Many business leaders, especially those working in nonprofit or consulting spaces, are focused on career education for their clients. The Network could serve as a strong connector for these smaller organizations and the anchor partners looking to expand their hiring pools.

In addition to bringing wide networks that can be leveraged for workforce development initiatives and hiring opportunities, Black and Brown business leaders bring on-the-ground expertise in a variety of industries and areas, as well as connections to other Black and Brown business leaders. Participants shared how, beyond their day-to-day work, they mentor and train other professionals in the community. One study participant with a deep background in organizational development and a doctorate in organizational leadership provides workshops and training sessions to Black and Brown residents interested in launching or expanding their businesses. Another participant who works in auto detailing trains and mentors residents trying to get into the field. Other areas of expertise across our study participant pool include business development, education across all traditional sectors, marketing, notarizing, community mediation, and community health. As the Network continues to build out its offerings, it can tap on Black and Brown business leaders to lead and guide these training efforts. Their personal and professional experiences would be a valuable asset to community investment, small business capacity building, and workforce development efforts.

The Network should elevate experienced Black and Brown business leaders into mentor and trainer roles to continue supporting the growth of business leaders and residents across St. Louis. Another way to leverage the expertise and lived experiences of Black and Brown business leader voices

is to create more spaces for them to come to the table. Consistently scheduled listening sessions,

working groups, or town halls provide ways for Black and Brown business leaders to engage with the

Network and its anchor members. As more residents and business leaders become aware of the

Network, participation and attendance at these events would increase. These offerings would bring

more members of the community into the planning and implementation work while also giving the

Network a larger group of people to connect with for additional conversations, planning sessions, or

surveys. Lastly, the launch of an advisory board of Black and Brown business owners could provide

leadership opportunities for community members and additional perspective and insight for the

Network. Bringing too many voices to the table can have its own challenges, which is why the research

team suggests a strategic plan for intentional community engagement events and offerings.

Finding 2: Invest more in Black and Brown business leaders.

Throughout the past two years, the St. Louis Anchor Action Network has channeled its resources

into uplifting the local community, business leaders, and anchor members through various initiatives,

such as business fairs, a video series highlighting small businesses within the area, informative lunch and

learn sessions, workshops, and an Executive Learning Experience tailored to anchor members seeking to

enhance their understanding of anchor collaboratives and augment their impact (St. Louis Anchor Action

Network, 2022a). These endeavors were strategically designed not only to expand the Network's

outreach but also to underscore community investment and foster the personal development of

community members.

According to both the Network's 2021 and 2022 Years-in-Review reports, as well as our media

analysis, Network events were met with a positive response and were deemed successful (St. Louis

Anchor Action Network, 2021; 2022a). Building on these encouraging outcomes, our research suggests

that the Network should persist in offering these support mechanisms while concurrently introducing

new programs geared specifically toward empowering Black and Brown business leaders.

In both the interviews and focus groups, study participants expressed a strong desire for increased opportunities for personal and professional growth. These participants represented a diverse spectrum of experiences, with some having recently launched their businesses and others being associated with long-established organizations. Despite the varying lifespans of their businesses, participants shared common growth objectives, such as expanding their professional networks, pitching themselves in important conversations, securing funding and resources, and scaling their enterprises. Drawing from these insights, our research team believes that proactive initiatives, such as mentorship programs and business accelerator programs tailored to small business leaders, can empower entrepreneurs and improve their access to valuable resources.

Mentorship programs hold significant promise for Black and Brown small business owners, as they can help address persistent disparities and challenges frequently encountered by these entrepreneurs. Mentors who are experienced Black and Brown business leaders within the community can offer valuable guidance in navigating the intricacies of the St. Louis business landscape, accessing capital, and understanding market dynamics. Additionally, mentorship plays a crucial role in providing essential emotional support and motivation through helping Black and Brown small business owners overcome challenges, boost their self-confidence, and unlock their maximum potential. The Network can play a pivotal role as a facilitator by connecting mentors with mentees. In one of the focus groups, one participant offered:

> *"Maybe create a mentorship program[…] be intentional about creating a small business connect resource. To me, that puts the obligation on me to say, okay, maybe I want to sign up for this. And [through this program] we could learn what a lot of different businesses are doing[…] It's something so easy to just put in place. You connect folks to each other and [business leaders] do the heavy lifting of supporting each other."*

Other larger organizations or anchor members could also serve in a mentorship role, leading to deeper

connections between different organizations.

A business accelerator program, spearheaded by the Network and specifically tailored for Black and Brown business leaders, could help address some of the challenges they face. This program would offer invaluable access to crucial resources, mentorship, and capital that might otherwise remain out of reach for these entrepreneurs. The participants cited successful instances of business accelerator programs to highlight their effectiveness. For instance, Target has established a program that serves as a conduit for ambitious entrepreneurs, aiding in the enhancement of their product strategies and facilitating the placement of their products on Target's shelves.

Local organizations such as St. Louis–SCORE and WEPOWER, the latter of which actively participates in the Network's community partner committees, currently provide a range of workshops, events, and accelerator programs aimed at aspiring Black and Brown entrepreneurs. Rather than creating a wholly separate program, the Network can collaborate with these local organizations to jointly develop and launch an accelerator program with the potential to lead to contracts or partnerships with anchor members. Such a program would engage the Network's diverse array of stakeholders, collectively working toward the aspiration of inspiring and nurturing the city's Black and Brown business leaders.

Finding 3: Prioritize accountability and transparency in implementation.

Currently, the St. Louis Anchor Action Network operates with a relatively informal structure. The Network team, composed of only two employees, is situated within the University of Missouri–St. Louis, and these employees are considered UMSL staff members. When anchor institutions join as members, they are not required to share their data or outcomes with the Network as a condition for membership. These anchor members can continue to follow their individual practices and protocols while enjoying the benefits of Network membership, all without following any established mechanisms of accountability. The uneven sharing of data among anchor members presents an obstacle for the

Network in assessing the effectiveness and advancement of its initiatives.

In a previous finding, we addressed the prevailing sense of distrust among study participants toward larger organizations, including anchor members. Through interviews and focus group discussions, participants expressed their belief that these influential organizations, possessing significant power and capital, are less motivated to change. To address this issue, the Network should place a high priority on measuring the impact of its anchor members and sharing the impact externally. By offering more transparent and readily accessible reports, the community's trust in these institutions can be bolstered.

Additionally, it is essential to make the missions and responsibilities of anchor institutions involved in the Network publicly available. This transparency enables stakeholders to hold these institutions accountable for their actions and commitments. Study participants advocated for establishing explicit expectations for each anchor institution's engagement and resource sharing, ensuring their active participation in achieving the Network's objectives. Clear metrics and reporting mechanisms must be put in place to assess progress toward diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) goals. While this might discourage some anchor institutions from joining the Network or staying involved, participants emphasized the importance of transparently communicating the expectations and roles of anchor institutions to maintain trust and collective commitment to the Network's goals.

Having successfully demonstrated its viability and impact over the past two years, the Network is now at a juncture where it should consider transitioning into an independent nonprofit organization. Consistent with PwC's recommendation for greater independence, this transition would effectively disentangle UMSL's individual objectives from those of the Network, granting the Network team greater autonomy in both strategic planning and execution. As the Network team formulates strategies for securing funding and long-term sustainability, it can hire additional employees to place a heightened emphasis on impact assessment, development initiatives, and relationship management.

To ensure that the Network remains firmly community-oriented, the establishment of a board consisting of representatives from anchor institutions, small businesses, and community member organizations is recommended. This board will play a pivotal role in holding the Network accountable, thereby safeguarding the alignment of its strategic plan and goals with the community's needs and aspirations. As an independent nonprofit entity, the Network will also be better equipped to implement and enforce accountability measures for all its members, with reduced political pressure compared to its association with an anchor institution.

Chicago Anchors for a Strong Economy (CASE)

Creating a data-focused, centralized anchor collaborative is a complex and difficult process. During our literature review, we identified exemplar anchor networks, many of which have been highlighted thus far. One successful initiative that reflects the mission of the St. Louis Anchor Action Network as well as some of the challenges it has faced is the Chicago Anchors for a Strong Economy (CASE). World Business Chicago (WBC), a nonprofit public-private partnership, united 16 anchor institutions representing both Chicago's public and private sectors to establish CASE (apolitical, 2017). The primary objective of CASE is to make a positive impact in four key areas: procurement, workforce development, business growth, and neighborhood revitalization. WBC employs a data-driven approach to pinpoint opportunities for redirecting the expenditures of these anchor institutions toward local businesses.

CASE assessed supply and demand for each anchor institution and the community, the procurement policies of the anchor institutions, and the capacity and capabilities of local businesses. When feasible, WBC facilitates the connection between anchors and local businesses, providing guidance to small businesses on how to collaborate with larger organizations. In addition, CASE extends strategic guidance and support programs to local businesses that may not have the necessary capacity to serve as suppliers to these institutions at this time (apolitical, 2017). As a result of CASE's efforts, its

anchor members have entered into nearly 50 multi-year contracts valued at $51.6 million with small, local businesses, leading to the creation of 180 new job opportunities (apolitical, 2017). Additionally, CASE has provided support to 368 small businesses that were not initially prepared to serve as suppliers to anchor institutions (apolitical, 2017).

Similar to that of the St. Louis Anchor Action Network, the diversity among anchor institutions involved in the CASE initiative, while advantageous in many ways, presented its own set of challenges to planning and implementation. Each institution operates with its distinct priorities, and on occasion, these priorities may not coincide with other anchors. Furthermore, in certain instances, several anchors find themselves competing within the marketplace. As a result, it has proven to be a complex task to harmonize these differing priorities in pursuit of the shared objective of enhancing Chicago's welfare. Different levels of comfort about sharing data amongst anchors posed another challenge, making full buy-in difficult. The CASE team had to commit to a significant amount of coaching and support to anchors to ultimately lead them to a full commitment to the network (apolitical, 2017).

The CASE initiative places a significant emphasis on the network itself acting as the pivotal link between various operational systems, with a core focus on the role of data in forging these connections. The active involvement of anchor institutions in data collection is what empowers CASE to make impactful decisions and facilitate meaningful connections between anchor institutions and small businesses. Without anchor buy-in, the CASE team would not have been able to access procurement and hiring data from each individual anchor, and the 50 multi-year contracts for local businesses would most likely not have been possible. The St. Louis Anchor Action Network is currently grappling with the challenge of obtaining commitment from its anchor members to share data, which, in turn, hinders the accurate assessment of progress toward its objectives. Until the Network team begins to establish clear accountability measures for its anchor members, the Network is likely to persist in facing these same obstacles.

Recommendations

Despite the St. Louis Anchor Action Network's positive strides thus far, the research team does not have sufficient information to conclude the Network will have achieved its objective to increase collective purchasing and hiring within the 22 zip code area by 10% by the end of this calendar year. In the absence of additional data sharing or public reporting, we cannot fully measure or determine how close the Network has come to reaching this goal. A significant factor contributing to this challenge is the uneven sharing of data among anchor members, primarily because anchors do not have mandatory reporting requirements when they join the Network.

Our recommendations for the Network are laser-focused on enhancements that not only amplify its impact but also cater to the needs of Black and Brown business leaders. Through a comprehensive analysis of documents, along with interviews and focus groups involving Black and Brown business leaders who are actively serving the community, our team has identified a set of recommendations that give prominence to their perspectives. By implementing these recommendations, the Network can foster deeper community engagement and champion inclusivity, thereby setting the stage for a more equitable future for Black and Brown residents of St. Louis.

Through our research, it is clear that there are many stakeholders with the same priorities as the Network. These stakeholders include anchor institutions, community organizations and nonprofits, small business owners, business associations, and residents. Remarkable efforts are currently under way in the community to empower residents seeking employment opportunities and to assist entrepreneurs in expanding their businesses and bolstering their social networks.

The St. Louis Anchor Action Network could serve a pivotal role as a facilitator, bridging the gap between these diverse stakeholders. Rather than extensively developing its own programs, the Network's resources and efforts would be best utilized by connecting residents with suitable programs and career opportunities while also linking anchor members with the right businesses to fulfill their

procurement requirements. To underscore the Network's function as a connector, our recommendations revolve around a keen understanding of community needs and placing relationships at the forefront.

Recommendation 1: Increase awareness and participation in the Network through outreach and partnerships.

As the Network advances in its mission, it faces a growing imperative to raise community awareness and bolster the visibility of its programs and resources. This is crucial for establishing partnerships, improving accessibility, and augmenting the Network's overall impact. It is worth noting that none of the 15 individuals interviewed in our study reported active engagement with the Network. While we acknowledge that this finding may be influenced by factors such as small sample size and other limitations, it reinforces the need to enhance outreach efforts.

To begin with, the Network must gain a deep understanding of its intended audience and beneficiaries for increased spending and procurement, particularly Black and Brown business owners. It is essential to maintain up-to-date lists of businesses within the Network's purview, as well as continually updating the Community Business Tool to identify enterprises within the St. Louis area and their leadership. This ongoing monitoring of businesses that the Network seeks to engage with can be achieved through collaborative efforts with local Chambers of Commerce, business associations, and community centers. One study participant highlighted that the Greater North St. Louis Chamber of Commerce shares announcements about new businesses and leadership changes. Without a thorough understanding of the Black and Brown business community, the Network will continue to face challenges in raising awareness and increasing participation in its activities.

To build upon the Network's achievements and amplify the positive work it has already undertaken, both the research team and the participants of this study recommend that the Network consider investing in a focused marketing campaign specifically tailored to reach Black and Brown

business leaders. This campaign could encompass various elements such as social media advertising, community partnerships, and coverage by local media. Crafting compelling narratives highlighting the Network's favorable impact in north St. Louis with Black and Brown business owners is likely to boost participation rates within this demographic. We acknowledge that maintaining up-to-date information on the Network's website and social media channels to inform the Black and Brown community about Network initiatives and accomplishments demands time and resources. To combat this, the Network could engage the services of a local media firm owned by Black and Brown individuals in the 22 zip code area on a contractual basis to fulfill this crucial role.

Additionally, establishing collaborations with other organizations, associations, and nonprofits in St. Louis that have extensive Black and Brown community networks would expand the Network's reach and visibility. We recommend leveraging the resources of multiple partner organizations to reach a wider audience through strategic partnerships. Joint events, co-marketing efforts, and shared initiatives can significantly enhance visibility and impact. Furthermore, actively involving residents and stakeholders in dialogue and decision-making processes will further promote inclusivity. By proactively engaging with various organizations to disseminate the Network's mission, broader awareness and collaboration opportunities can be fostered.

We acknowledge that implementing these recommendations will require a substantial investment of time and resources. As a viable solution derived from our research, we propose that the Network appoint and compensate community ambassadors. These ambassadors would serve as intermediaries between anchor institutions and Black and Brown communities, offering invaluable insights into the specific needs and aspirations of these communities. Their role would be essential in helping institutions tailor their initiatives and outreach efforts effectively. Furthermore, these ambassadors could extend the Network's professional staff, enabling focused outreach that aligns with the Network's objectives and aspirations.

Recommendation 2: Engage Black and Brown voices and develop programs that invest in

Black and Brown business leaders.

Throughout the interviews and focus groups, participants consistently expressed a strong interest in three key areas: personal and professional growth opportunities, avenues for fostering social connections and networks, and the chance to actively engage in the Network's planning and decision-making processes. According to Design Justice Principle 1, for the Network to genuinely prioritize community well-being, it should center its efforts on crafting initiatives that nurture, rejuvenate, and uplift the community (Costanza-Chock, 2020).

Actively investing in Black and Brown business leaders within the 22 zip code footprint is crucial for maintaining a lasting impact on the community, especially given the influence of anchor members' purchasing and procurement decisions. The Network should focus on proactive investment strategies that retain these business leaders within the local area, preventing them from seeking opportunities elsewhere. A participant highlighted the challenges of connecting with large organizations in St. Louis; they shared that they were contemplating a move out of state to find better support for small business leaders. Another individual, who had relocated to St. Louis in the past decade, was considering a move due to the difficulty in networking compared to other cities they had lived in. To genuinely revitalize the St. Louis community, the Network must invest in and support the growth of these business leaders while ensuring that St. Louis remains an attractive and supportive environment for them to live and thrive.

Engaging the voices of Black and Brown business leaders in the St. Louis community will help to ensure that the Network's strategies and initiatives are reflective of the diverse businesses and residents the Network aims to serve. These leaders bring firsthand knowledge of the unique challenges and opportunities within their communities, allowing for more nuanced and effective solutions that address systemic disparities. Moreover, their involvement helps to build trust and legitimacy for the Network, fostering a sense of ownership and empowerment that is instrumental in driving sustainable economic

mobility.

The Network should establish a continuous schedule of listening sessions and town hall meetings to gain a deeper understanding of the needs and concerns of the north St. Louis community. In addition to these in-person events, the implementation of an online platform tailored for Black and Brown business leaders to connect and collaborate should be considered. These different engagements will serve a dual purpose: gathering valuable feedback and fostering ownership, involvement, and connection among community members. The insights gathered from these interactions can then be used to refine strategies and priorities.

By creating regular community events and networking opportunities, well-publicized gatherings can serve as platforms for sharing success stories, building relationships, and inspiring collaboration. These events can also highlight the Network's positive impact within the community. One study participant shared that the Network could consider hosting an "Open Innovation Day" where local small businesses, particularly those representing the Black and Brown community, can pitch their offerings to anchor institutions. This event not only enhances awareness but also encourages collaboration.

In addition to one-off opportunities to participate, we strongly recommend that the Network establish an inclusive advisory board composed of local Black and Brown business leaders, community leaders, and residents. The primary aim is to ensure a comprehensive representation of the community, which will be instrumental in offering valuable guidance and diverse perspectives on the Network's activities and priorities. It is imperative that the advisory board is structured to remain dynamic and avoid stagnation or insularity. This can be achieved by implementing regular term limits for advisory board members, allowing for the inclusion of new voices and fresh perspectives.

By establishing links with Black and Brown business leaders, the Network has the opportunity to extend its focus beyond conventional procurement practices. By focusing also on capacity building, the Network can invest in collaborative efforts with Black and Brown businesses to develop innovative ways

to serve the community. Recognizing that businesses within the footprint may not necessarily cater to the specific needs of the anchors, the Network should explore avenues, including financial investment, to bolster these businesses. This strategic investment can play a pivotal role in fortifying these businesses, contributing significantly to the transformation of the footprint. Actively engaging with Black and Brown business leaders allows the Network to gain a comprehensive understanding of the offerings of various local businesses, enabling them to identify additional resources and programs that can be provided to offer substantial support.

In addition to elevating Black and Brown business leaders in decision-making, the Network should also focus on supporting the personal and professional growth of these leaders. By offering tailored support, including mentorship, workshops, and business accelerator programs, the Network can help bridge the opportunity gap for Black and Brown business leaders and help businesses build their capacity to take on a contract with an anchor member. These initiatives will not only empower Black and Brown business leaders to improve their business but will also contribute to a more diverse and inclusive economic landscape for the anchor members to contract with.

Through mentorship programs, the Network could connect Black and Brown business leaders with experienced mentors, anchor members, or other business leaders, who can offer guidance, share industry-specific knowledge, and facilitate access to critical networks and resources. Mentors can assist in navigating the complexities of entrepreneurship, addressing challenges, and making informed decisions. Business accelerator programs can help Black and Brown business leaders learn how to enhance and scale their businesses, ultimately supporting them in preparing to bid for a contract with an anchor member. Instead of creating new programs, the Network could partner with community members that already provide these services.

Recommendation 3: Prioritize accountability measures for anchor members and public

databases for business leaders and residents.

Our research involving Black and Brown business leaders highlights the crucial need to enhance accountability within the Network. Currently, there exists no requirement for anchor members to disclose data to the Network, resulting in inconsistent practices. Beyond merely gaining favorable public relations, the anchors who choose to join the Network must not only be perceived as actively engaged in their stated objectives but must genuinely fulfill the commitments they make.

Given the history of distrust and prevailing power imbalances that heavily favor the anchors over the community, Network decisions made without transparency and community input can be seen as performative or even harmful. The Network is currently unable to fully evaluate whether it has achieved its goals of a 10% increase in community hiring and procurement because it lacks comprehensive information on all anchor member hiring and spending data. Our study participants suggested that the Network must establish clear metrics and reporting mechanisms to assess progress toward diversity, equity, and inclusion objectives.

Conducting regular assessments and maintaining transparent communication will help foster trust within the Black and Brown community, ensuring that the Network remains responsive and dedicated to its mission. Feedback from interviews and focus groups also emphasized the importance of holding anchor institutions accountable for their active involvement within the Network. Participants recommended establishing explicit expectations for each anchor member's engagement and resource-sharing, ensuring that each anchor institution actively contributes to achieving the Network's objectives. A crucial element in transforming the Network, as our research suggests, is the creation of a publicly accessible system that tracks and shares data on hires, contracts, and other relevant measures. This high level of transparency will promote trust and accountability among the anchor institutions by making their missions and responsibilities public knowledge.

Currently, the Network has one searchable Community Business Tool that holds the information

of more than 13,000 businesses. This tool will be useful, once updated, for large organizations or anchor partners to identify local businesses they could work with. In addition to this business tool, a directory of job openings across the anchor members and other large businesses would be incredibly useful for residents, nonprofits, and business associations. By combining all opportunities into one directory, the Network would streamline the process for residents seeking work in an already tumultuous job landscape. Business and community leaders can use the tool to help connect their network to the right opportunities. With both a directory of job opportunities and connections with Black and Brown leaders, the Network would be able to increase the applicant pool for anchor members seeking employees.

Our study participants recommend that the Network continue its efforts to develop the Community Business Tool as an impartial, user-friendly platform that facilitates anchor institutions' access to a diverse range of resources and vendors within north St. Louis. This platform should prioritize DEI in its design and operation. Anchor institutions should be encouraged to engage with community resources in the Black and Brown community by acknowledging their efforts to collaborate with a broader spectrum of local entities, rather than relying solely on familiar partners. In addition to empowering anchor institutions through the Community Business Tool, a directory of contract opportunities for small businesses to bid on could empower these businesses by improving access to information and giving them more control over their decision-making processes.

One participant suggests enlisting a third-party nonprofit to analyze anchor institutions' needs and provide vendor recommendations to enhance procurement diversity. Another participant suggested that the Network establish an advisory board of Black and Brown business leaders to help streamline guidelines and best practices for contracting with anchor institutions, promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion.

PART V: CONCLUSION

Our research team was drawn to collaborating with the University of Missouri–St. Louis due to

the tremendous potential that arises from uniting a coalition of initially 12, now 17, major anchor institutions under the shared mission of advancing racial and spatial justice and economic mobility. While this endeavor holds significance nationwide, it takes on particular urgency in a region like St. Louis, marked by a history of racial injustice and violence.

UMSL, in conjunction with its co-leader, Edward Jones, has demonstrated commendable efforts in formulating the St. Louis Anchor Action Network framework and objectives, and their dedication continues with the recent receipt of a $2.4 million grant from the James S. McDonnell Foundation. Over the course of two years, the Network has made significant strides and expanded its impact.

Through conversations with the Network team, it became evident that there was a pressing need for a study specifically addressing the needs of Black and Brown businesses in the region. Leveraging our team of researchers with diverse backgrounds encompassing community engagement, secondary and postsecondary education, governmental affairs, nonprofit leadership, and workforce development, we recognized an opportunity to collectively apply our expertise to enhance the Network's support for Black and Brown business leaders.

We designed a research study based on multiple frameworks involving racial, spatial, and design justice. As three white researchers not currently living in the St. Louis area, we saw ourselves as facilitators of this study as we aimed to center the voices of those who will be impacted by the St. Louis Anchor Action Network. Drawing from their lived experiences steeped in St. Louis history, the study participants were considered the foremost experts on how the Network could enhance its support. To explore this, we opted for a qualitative research approach, focusing on evaluating the extent to which the Network had catered to the needs of Black and Brown business leaders thus far and how it could further improve. Our research methodology involved a combination of document analysis, interviews, and focus groups to shape and refine our recommendations.

We learned that the Network has done impressive work in its initial two years, as it moved from

the planning to implementation phase. The Network has hosted a variety of events, including career expos, workshops and trainings, and networking opportunities (Walentik, 2023, April 24). The Network's Community Business Tool was launched, containing more than 13,000 local business contacts (Walentik, 2023, April 24), and more than 125 community partners were involved with action planning (UMSL Daily, 2022). Such efforts culminated in the Network receiving a regional philanthropy award for its endeavors.

Despite this promising start, the Network faced some challenges in its implementation. Our study participants conveyed their apprehension toward anchor members due to past experiences and persisting power dynamics. Establishing trust through intentional community engagement and relationship-building is proving to be a complex and time-consuming but essential endeavor for the Network's success. According to our research findings, although the Network had engaged hundreds of residents, the majority of our study participants had not heard of it. Even among those familiar with the St. Louis Anchor Action Network by name, they were unaware of the Network's mission. Upon learning about the Network's mission, every participant expressed a strong desire to get involved.

With the exception of the 2019-2020 baseline data that some of the anchors previously reported, the team did not have access to Network data on hiring, spending, or previous connections with Black and Brown business leaders; when we requested this information, we were informed the Network could not provide us with the data. We also discovered that the Network lacked access to individual anchor member data because members were not obligated to share such information. This essentially allowed anchor institutions to participate in the Network and benefit from the positive visibility generated by their involvement without necessarily being held accountable for specific outcomes.

Based on our research, we established that the Network had engaged hundreds of residents, business leaders, and community partners over the past two years, resulting in at least 50 new hires and

50 contract bidding opportunities for local businesses. However, if these numbers accurately represent the Network's results, it suggests that the Network has probably not yet achieved its objective of a 10% increase in hiring and purchasing within the 22 zip code geography.

As for what the Network can do to improve supports for Black and Brown business leaders, we recommend developing a framework of data collection and accountability for Network members, as well as looking into the Network becoming its own independent nonprofit. This could increase accountability, transparency, and investment across the Network's members. The Network should also expand its outreach and networking opportunities to reach Black and Brown business leaders.

We interviewed a dynamic, inspiring group of business leaders who are well-connected and experts in their industries. Study participants shared about the impactful work that different business associations and community groups are engaged in already in the community. The Network should elevate the expertise in the region and serve as a connector between residents, local businesses, and anchor partners. They can do this by launching updated directories geared toward hiring and purchasing and resource kits that residents and business leaders can access. Through offerings like listening sessions, town halls, mentorship programs, and advisory boards, the Network can intentionally include more Black and Brown voices in the decision-making process.

Lastly, the Network can design programs and supports that are specific to those in the region who may need it most, like students, immigrants, or residents experiencing homelessness. Specific hiring and workforce development workshops and events for different groups of people could have immense benefits for all stakeholders: residents, local business, and the anchor members themselves. By purposefully collaborating with business leaders and community organizations, the Network can maximize the impact of its programs.

The findings and recommendations the team provides are expansive and require a great deal of planning to implement. We recommend the St Louis Anchor Action Network identify a few priorities to

implement in 2024 and beyond. At the forefront of our research, and what we suggest to the Network, is to prioritize Network and anchor member transparency and accountability along with greater engagement of Black and Brown voices. Some combination of these two areas can improve trust with business leaders and residents as well as create greater outcomes for the Network to meet its goals.

While the primary focus of this project is on Black and Brown business owners, leaders, and entrepreneurs in north St. Louis, future research endeavors may seek to assist the St. Louis Anchor Action Network in expediting its workforce development and employment initiatives within the designated 22 zip code focus area. With more access to quantitative data, a quantitative economic impact study could also be conducted. Additionally, hiring researchers with a different positionality from our team's would bring different perspectives that could benefit the future direction of the Network.

As we approached the conclusion of this project, a new conceptual framework for anchor networks began to emerge from our research (see Figure 8). While our initial concept map emphasized the anchor network as the primary driver and actor *on* the community (see Figure 6), we discovered this model was incomplete as it depicted only a part of a larger picture. Our original concept map zoomed in on what anchors do *to* or *for* their community, when true transformation lies in what anchors create *with* their community. Instead of focusing on the anchor network as the primary actor, we found that anchors, residents, and Black and Brown business leaders must come together to co-create the community where they want to live. Through this dynamic process of connection, co-action, and co-creation, anchors, residents, and business leaders both shape and are shaped by one another as they form their *community*, with all possible meanings of the word–from physical place and space to shared group identity and metaphorical "place" where one belongs.

Just as anchors leverage strategies to invest in the community, so Black and Brown business leaders and residents can use their voices to hold anchors accountable, (re)focus their efforts, and prompt needed changes to anchor systems, processes, and practices. When this dialogue occurs within

the context of Antiracism, Spatial Justice, and Design Justice, anchors, residents, and business leaders can begin to "sustain, heal, and empower" their communities (Design Justice Principle 1). Through building stronger place-based partnerships with Black and Brown business leaders and elevating their voices, the St. Louis Anchor Action Network will be able to co-create *with* them a renewed St. Louis community where all residents, from every race and zip code, can live and thrive.

Figure 8. *A New Conceptual Framework for Anchor Networks*

Our hope is that other anchor collaboratives can also leverage our research and this new conceptual framework to analyze their own operating models and design more community-focused events and supports. While each anchor collaborative is situated in its own region with unique challenges, centering the voices of those most impacted by their work can, and should, be prioritized. As

one interview participant shared:

> *"I would love to hear what someone else [anchors and other small business owners] has to say. I thought I was the only one doing this work, because every door I knock at is being closed. I'm all like, okay, well, maybe my vision is not for everyone[…] But if I can connect to someone, maybe someone can give me some advice and I can give them some advice. I'm on board for it, man. I am. Yeah. That'll be a great opportunity for the both of us. Because what I think a lot of times, people, the bigger companies, they're so out of touch with reality because they're in a big office, and even though they have the money to trickle it down to make a difference, they allocate certain dollars. But if you can't communicate with the community that needs it, then it's no good. And if they are trying to figure out how to get into our community, they just have to ask us. Because, I'll tell you: they'll put announcements up, and then the people, they come because they live there and they want to know what's going on and how they can help improve our community."*

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Appendix: Instruments

Recruitment Email for Interviews

Dear [Name],

We hope this email finds you well. We are writing to invite you to participate in a quality improvement project we are working on in cooperation with the University of Missouri–St. Louis. The purpose of our project is to identify opportunities to improve the ways in which large companies and organizations located in and around north St. Louis collaborate with Black and Brown businesses in the area. Your unique insights and experiences as a business leader in the community would greatly contribute to our understanding of the needs and challenges faced by local businesses.

We are inviting you to participate in an interview with our team. The interview is anticipated to take no more than 45 minutes. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and your identity as a participant will remain anonymous both during and after the project. Only our project team will have access to the transcript from the interview, and our findings will be reported in a manner that ensures your confidentiality, with all identifying details removed or altered. We aim to complete 15 to 20 interviews during the month of August. Participants will be compensated with a $75 Visa gift card.

If you have questions or would like to participate, please sign up for a meeting time using [this link]. If there are no times available that work for you, please let us know what will work and we will move our schedules around.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,
Ashley Hemmy, Chrystine Kern, and Paul Umbach
Doctoral Students
Vanderbilt University Peabody College

_____

Pre-Interview Email with Questions

Thank you for your willingness to meet with us. To help prepare for the interview, we've included our key questions below.

- Can you describe your company/organization and its background?
- Can you describe your connection to the St. Louis area?
- What are some successes your company/organization has achieved?
- What challenges has your company/organization faced?
- What are your current business needs and/or goals? Please describe any barriers and/or support that you have in meeting these needs/goals.
- What relationships or partnerships does your business have in place?

- Are you aware of the St. Louis Anchor Action Network? If yes, can you describe your relationship with the St. Louis Anchor Action Network?

We look forward to meeting with you on [date/time in CT/Zoom link].
_____

Interview Protocol

We invited you to meet with us today because we are interested in understanding your perspective as a business leader of color in the St. Louis area. Our project is focused on improving the ways in which large companies and organizations within St. Louis–so-called "anchor institutions"–collaborate with smaller, diverse businesses in the area. We are conducting a series of interviews with other business leaders like yourself with the goal of understanding your needs and identifying areas for improved partnerships and greater community impact.

We are Vanderbilt University students not affiliated with the University of Missouri–St. Louis or the St. Louis Anchor Action Network. However, data will be shared with UMSL and the Network once our project is complete.

We have planned this interview to last for 45 minutes. To help with our notetaking, may we have your permission to record our conversations today?

Your identity as a participant in our project will be held confidential; we will include only overall themes and key findings in our final project report. Thank you for agreeing to participate.

Interview Questions

- Can you describe your company/organization, and how long you have worked there/the organization has existed?
- How long have you been in the St. Louis area? Can you describe your connection to St. Louis? (*Goal is to understand interviewee's connection to the community*)
- What are some successes your company/organization has achieved? What challenges have you/your business faced? How did being in St. Louis contribute to these successes/challenges? (*Goal is to understand the regional context and what successes and/or challenges may be specific to St. Louis/the 22 zip codes*)
- What are your current business needs? (*These could be related to visibility/marketing, partnerships/connections, location, lack of information/awareness of opportunities, discrimination, hiring, regulation, capital, funding, mentorship, resources, complex procurement practices, etc.*)
  - What goals are you currently pursuing? Where do you see your business going?
  - What are the barriers?
  - What has been your biggest support?
  - What other support do you need?

- What relationships or partnerships does your business have in place? (What relationships or partnerships do you have in the local St. Louis area?)
  - In what ways have these been helpful or valuable to you?
  - In which ways could they be more helpful or valuable?
  - What types of new partnerships or relationships would be most valuable to you? (What value would they provide? What barriers would they help you overcome?)
- Are you aware of the St. Louis Anchor Action Network?
  - If no…
    - Potential follow-up: Can you describe your relationship with higher education institutions, healthcare, and large corporations?
    - Explain what the St. Louis Anchor Action Network is*
    - Potential follow-up: Do you have interest in working with/collaborating with the Network?
    - How do you see the Network helping with your needs or your business needs?
  - If yes…
    - Can you describe your relationship with the St. Louis Anchor Action Network?
    - Potential follow-up: How would you describe your communications and interactions with the Network?
    - To what extent are the activities of the Anchor Network meeting your needs or your business needs?
    - How could the Network better accommodate your needs or your business needs?
- Do you have anything else you would like to add, or is there anything we didn't ask you about that we should have?
- Is there anyone else you recommend that we talk with?
- Conclusion:
  - Thank you for your time. You have been incredible, and your insights are so valuable to us.
  - As a next step in our project, we are planning to host focus groups with other regional business leaders like yourself in the coming weeks. Would you be interested in joining us for a focus group to continue this conversation with other business leaders?
  - Thank you again. Please feel free to contact us if there is anything else you think of that you'd like to add to what we talked about today.
  - Mention gift cards

*Explanation of the St. Louis Anchor Action Network (from the Network's website: stlaan.org)

The St. Louis Anchor Action Network is a coalition of local anchor institutions – large companies and organizations that serve as pillars of the regional economy – working to leverage their economic and organizational resources to collectively advance:
- Intentional Hiring and Career Development
- Intentional Purchasing

● Community Investment

The Anchor Network is focusing first on 22 zip codes in St. Louis city and county with majority Black and Brown communities that have been impacted by more than a century of systemic racial and spatial inequities.

Current Anchor Network members include 17 regional anchor institutions:
● University of Missouri–St. Louis (Co-Lead)
● Edward Jones (Co-Lead)
● Ameren
● BJC HealthCare
● Christian Hospital
● Equifax
● Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis
● Great Rivers Greenway
● Harris-Stowe State University
● Mercy
● Missouri Botanical Garden
● Saint Louis University
● Saint Louis Zoo
● SSM Health
● St. Louis Community College
● Washington University in St. Louis
● Webster University

The 22 focus zip codes are:
● 63101, 63102, 63103, 63104, 63106, 63107
● 63112, 63113, 63114, 63115, 63118
● 63120, 63121
● 63133, 63134, 63135, 63136, 63137, 63138
● 63140, 63147
● 63155

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Recruitment Email for Focus Groups

Our Vanderbilt research team enjoyed speaking with you via Zoom over the past month. Your input on how large anchor institutions in St. Louis can better collaborate with small businesses in north St. Louis was extremely valuable.

As we mentioned during our conversations, our team is holding two in-person focus group sessions in St Louis. The groups will be held at the Angad Arts Hotel at 3550 Samuel Shepard Drive – across the street from the Fox Theater and next to Powell Hall near St. Louis University.

The focus groups will be held in the Library room at the hotel on the registration floor. One of our team will be in the lobby to meet you and show you the way. It would be great if you could arrive at least 20 minutes early.

The two focus groups will be held on:

Wednesday, September 27th from 5 pm – 6:30 pm
Thursday, September 28th from noon – 1:30 pm

We would like you to attend and share your individual and collective recommendations to large St. Louis organizations. Again, we value your time and will provide an additional $100 gift card to compensate you for your time if you attend. We will also provide food!

Thank you for letting us know that you will be attending one of the two groups by completing the following RSVP link: [link to Google form]

Again, we look forward to seeing you at one of the groups. Please feel free to email me with any questions.
_____

Focus Group Discussion Guide

Welcome and Overview
- Introduce each member of the research team.
- Thank them for attending and sharing how important this research is to helping Black and Brown businesses in north St. Louis. Share how much we appreciated and enjoyed our interviews with them, and we look forward to learning more through this session.
- Remind them that we are an independent team of Vanderbilt University doctoral students and are not affiliated with UMSL or other institutions in the St. Louis Anchor Action Network.
- Remind the group that all comments they make during the group will be recorded for our research purposes. However, our report will not attribute any comments to an individual in our notes or final report, as all comments will be held strictly confidential.
- We invite everyone to share freely (no need to raise your hand or go in order around the table), but to respect your fellow participants and wait until each speaker is finished before sharing.
- Remind them that a focus group is different from an interview, as they should feel free to engage in dialogue on issues among themselves and build on ideas and recommendations shared by others.

Introductions of Participants. Invite each focus group participant to introduce themselves, describe what they do in a few words, and share with the group their number one business need or goal over the next 12 months.

Discussion

- Research team will provide printouts of preliminary findings and recommendations to each participant (see graphic below).
- Explain that these preliminary findings came out of our initial interviews, and each of the recommendations listed below the findings came directly from at least one interview participant.
- Provide an overview of the preliminary findings and recommendations, as well as add relevant contextual information from the document analysis and literature review.
- Welcome the group to share openly and honestly their feedback on preliminary key findings and recommendations. (e.g., What did we miss that should be included? What would you change? What would you expand on?)
- As dialogue unfolds, ask follow-up questions to facilitate and refine recommendations as well as address root causes. (e.g., What is one next right step that could be taken to address this issue? What is needed to make this change?)

Preliminary Findings & Recommendations

Finding 1: Little awareness of the network
- Increase outreach & marketing efforts
- Engage with associations and organizations with large networks

Finding 2: Excitement about the Network's potential
- Leverage the knowledge and connections of business leaders
- Host focus groups and/or a town hall to gain further insight and engagement

Finding 3: How to Engage?
- Host events and networking opportunities for the community
- Create a directory of job openings in the network for residents to apply to and a directory of small businesses that anchors can use to identify vendors

Finding 4: Power Dynamics are a barrier to engagement
- Launch an advisory board composed of local business owners for comprehensive community representation
- Enhance/expand on work already being done in the community

Finding 5: Previous and current challenges with anchors hinder trust
- Prioritize policies and practices for contracting that participating anchors can incorporate
- Identify the ROI for anchors and work with them to ensure they are invested to change and adapt

Final question: How could large institutions working together best meet your needs? (Invite all participants to share their closing thoughts/recommendations.)

Wrap-up

- Thank everyone for their time and remind them they will receive a $100 electronic gift card.
- Welcome them to stay in touch with everyone in the group and our research team.