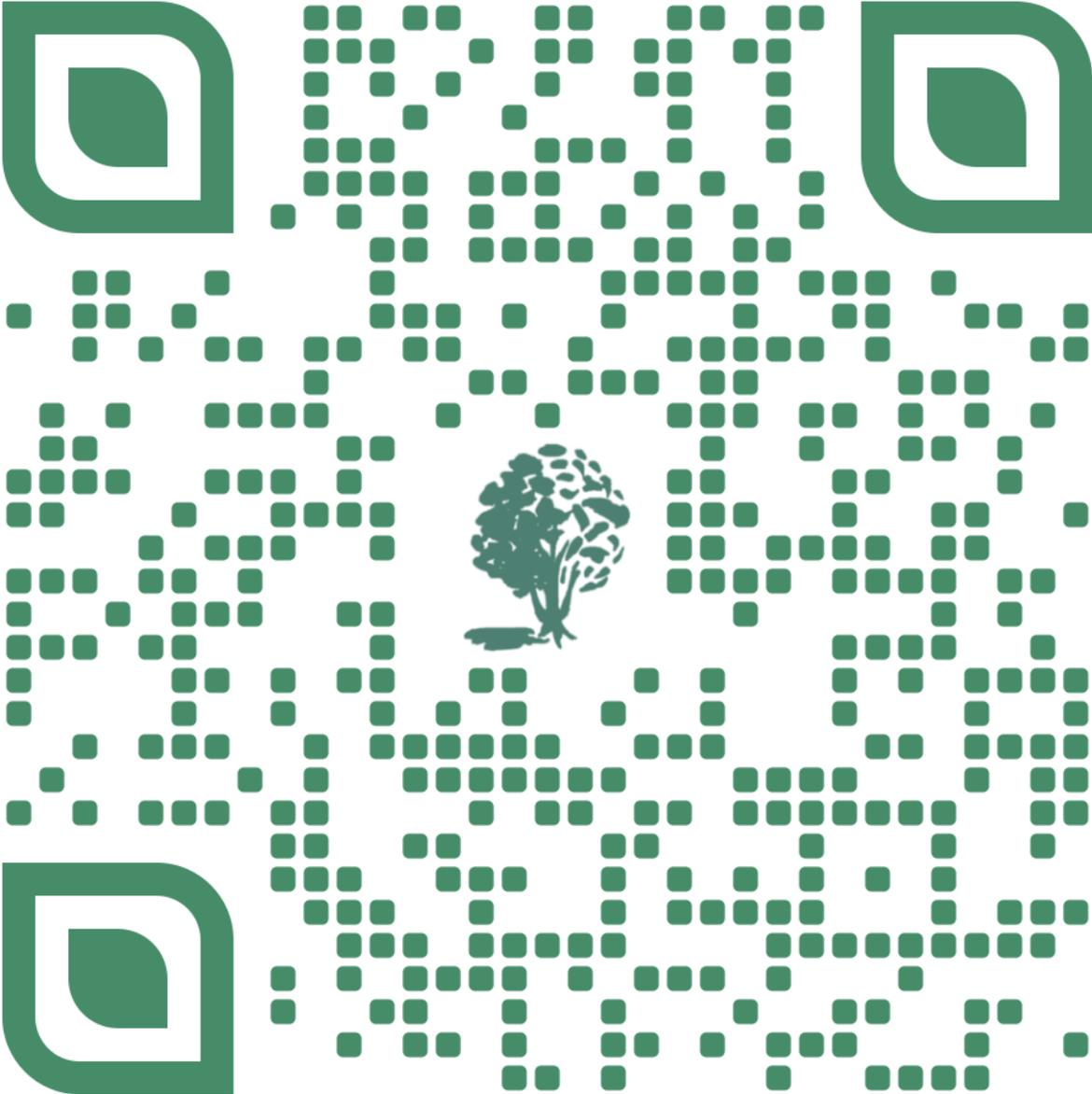


**Belonging-Centered Modernization
for Akron's Nonprofit Sector**

**Agenda &
Presentation
Links**



AKRON
COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION
ENRICHING LIVES SINCE 1955

Powered by Huntington-Akron Foundation





John F. Garofalo
President & CEO
Akron Community Foundation



Belonging-Centered Modernization for Akron's Nonprofit Sector

A strategic framework for aligning capital, capacity, and community power ensuring modernization serves those closest to the need.

Prepared by Fred Brown for Akron's civic leaders, funders, and nonprofit executives committed to building a more belonging-centered infrastructure for community change.

Why This Conversation Matters Now

- **Funding models are shifting**
Philanthropic priorities are evolving faster than most nonprofits can adapt, leaving smaller organizations behind.
- **Technology is outpacing belonging**
New tools promise efficiency, but without intentional design, they replicate existing disparities in access and power.
- **Community trust is fragile**
Decades of disinvestment have eroded confidence. The sector must earn credibility through transparency and shared governance.
- **Akron sits at a crossroads**
With new federal dollars, demographic shifts, and civic momentum, the choices made now will define the next generation of impact.



The Capital Reality

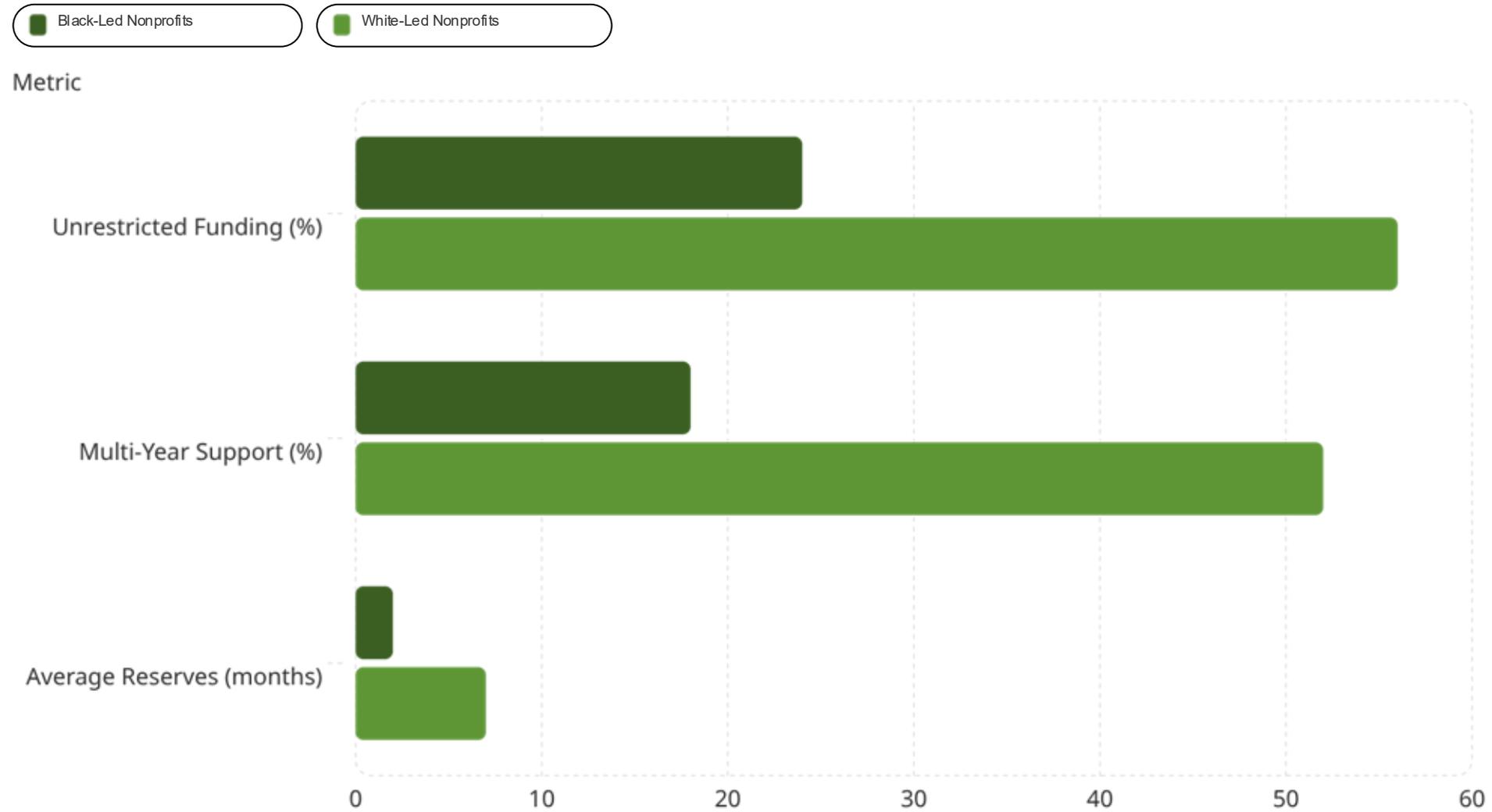
Akron's nonprofit ecosystem operates within three interconnected forces — yet the connections between them remain fragile, inconsistent, and often broken. When capital flows without accountability, or impact is measured without adequate investment, the system fails the communities it claims to serve.

Until capital, impact, and accountability operate as one system — not three silos — belonging remains aspirational, not operational.



The Belonging Gap

Nationally, Black-led nonprofits receive significantly fewer unrestricted dollars, less multi-year support, and maintain smaller financial reserves than their white-led counterparts — despite often serving communities with greater need. The data is stark, and Akron is no exception.



These disparities are not incidental — they are structural. Addressing them requires intentional shifts in how capital is allocated, who makes those decisions, and what benchmarks define success.

Socioeconomic Stratification in Akron

In Akron, ZIP code remains one of the strongest predictors of life outcomes. Wealth concentration in select corridors coexists with deep disinvestment just blocks away. The geography of opportunity is not neutral it is shaped by decades of policy, lending practices, and resource allocation.



Housing Instability

Neighborhoods in 44306 and 44307 face eviction rates three times the city average, driving instability across families and school systems.



Mental Health Access

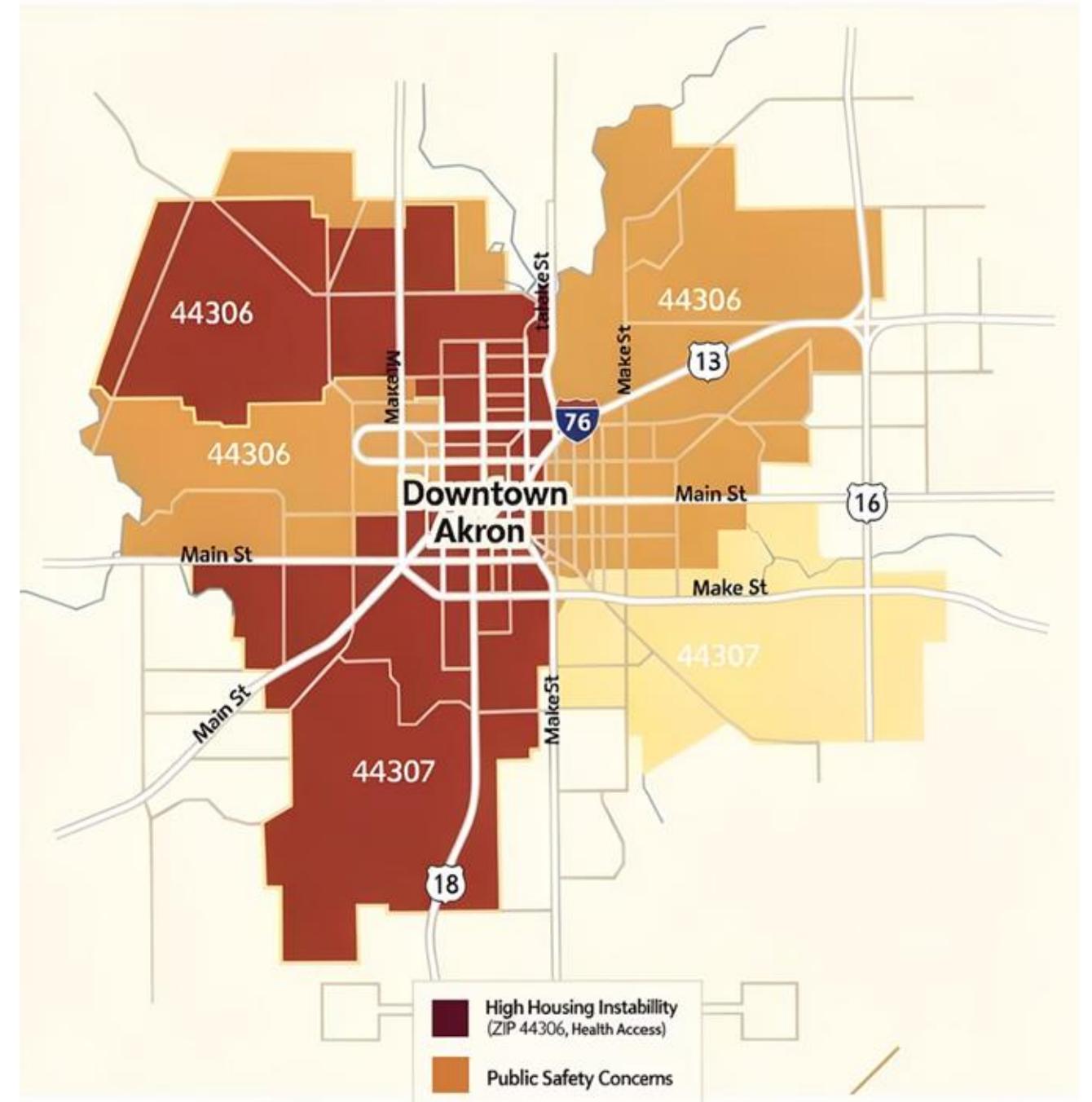
Low-income ZIP clusters have fewer than half the behavioral health providers per capita compared to affluent areas of Summit County.



Public Safety

Communities with the fewest resources bear the highest exposure to violence yet receive the least investment in prevention infrastructure.

Geography matters. Modernization strategies that ignore spatial inequality will deepen the very divides they aim to resolve.



Modernization Without Guardrails

New tools from AI-powered grant management to real-time impact dashboards promise unprecedented efficiency. But without intentional design, these same tools accelerate advantage for those already well-resourced while leaving smaller, community-rooted organizations further behind.

Modernization Tools

- Artificial intelligence for grant writing and reporting
- Integrated CRM and donor management dashboards
- Cloud-based operating systems and finance platforms
- Automated compliance and outcomes tracking

The Divergence Risk

Without belonging guardrails, modernization creates a two-track system:

Resourced Institutions

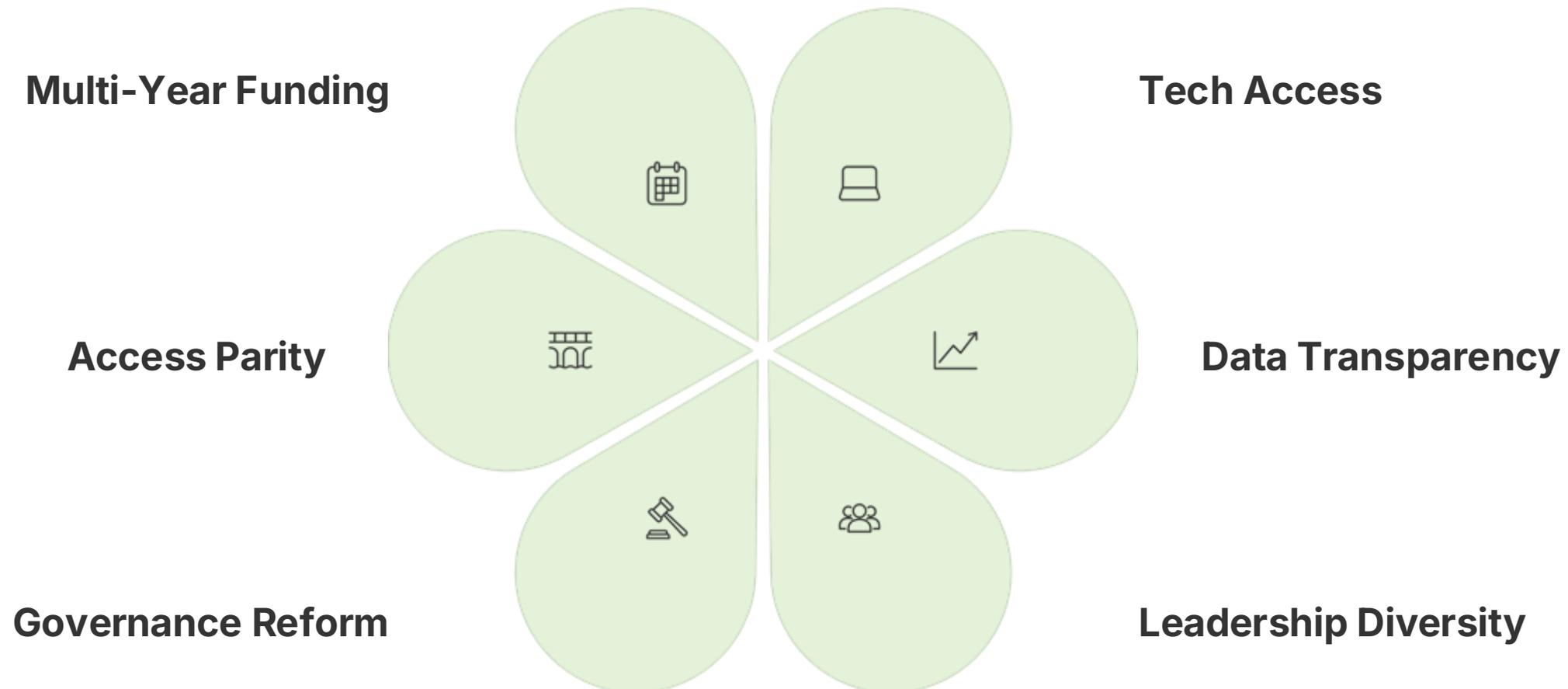
Accelerate capacity, attract more funding, compound advantage year over year.

Under-Resourced Institutions

Fall further behind, lose competitive position, risk irrelevance despite deep community trust.

Belonging Guardrails for Modernization

Modernization must be governed by principles that prevent the concentration of advantage. These six guardrails ensure that innovation lifts the entire ecosystem — not just those with existing capacity.



At the center of these guardrails is a single commitment: **Modernization with Fairness**. Every technology investment, every reporting requirement, and every capacity-building initiative must be evaluated through this lens.

Systems Change Requires Power Analysis

Belonging work cannot be separated from an honest examination of who holds power, who controls resources, and whose voice shapes decisions. In the nonprofit ecosystem, power and impact often flow in opposite directions.



Impact flows down. Power flows up. Until this dynamic is confronted and restructured, modernization will reinforce the status quo rather than transform it.

The Role of Community Foundations

Community foundations occupy a unique position in the civic ecosystem trusted by donors, connected to nonprofits, respected by government, and accountable to the public. This convening power makes them the natural hub for belonging-centered modernization.

When community foundations lead with belonging, they shift from being passive intermediaries to becoming active architects of systemic change coordinating resources, setting standards, and holding the ecosystem accountable.



From Control to Co-Power

Unlocking Collaborative Transformation

- Akron Community Foundation invites nonprofits, funders, and partners.
- Explore actionable strategies for our ecosystem.
- Transition from traditional control to dynamic co-power.
- Drive impactful change for Akron.





Why This Conversation, Why Now

Akron's nonprofits face unprecedented demands: do more with less amidst growing uncertainty. Traditional approaches are failing, making this conversation critical.

Funding Instability

Unpredictable funding and rising needs create unsustainable burdens.

Fragmented Efforts

Isolated efforts hinder collective impact and duplicate resources.

Outdated Planning

Outdated strategic models fail to adapt to rapid change.

The challenge isn't effort; it's outdated strategy models.

Traditional Power Models: Hindering Innovation and Impact

Traditional hierarchical power structures and centralized funding in the nonprofit sector hinder innovation and adaptation.

1

Centralized Funding, Limited

Insight

Centralized funding lacks community input, leading to misaligned priorities.

2

Compliance Over

Community

Compliance to strict funder rules diverts resources from community needs.

3

Innovation Stifled

Risk aversion and rigid reporting stifle creative problem-solving.



A Critical Truth: Control-based models slow learning and diminish system-wide impact.

Co-Power: Unlocking Collective Impact

What Is Co-Power?

- Collaborative model: funders, nonprofits, communities co-create strategies.
- Focus on collective intelligence for optimal solutions.

Co-Power Is...

- Shared Vision & Problem Solving
- Decentralized Leadership
- Collective Accountability

Co-Power Is Not...

- Abdicating Responsibility
- Equal Funding for All
- Lack of Rigor or Strategy

ACF's Strategic Power in a Co-Power Model

ACF strategically deploys its power to foster collective success, evolving its role within the nonprofit ecosystem.

 **Ecosystem Steward**
Cultivates vital connections to fortify the nonprofit network.

 **Trust Builder**
Creates safe spaces for honest dialogue and partnership.

 **Learning Partner**
Champions continuous learning, reflection, and adaptive growth.

 **Risk Absorber**
Leverages resources to fuel innovation and safeguard investments.

The Essential Shift: ACF isn't relinquishing power it's wielding it differently to amplify impact across Akron.

Lock 3 Donor Reception and Ribbon-Cutting

Saturday, November 23, 2024



Lock 3 Drone Photo courtesy of Kenmore Construction





Unlocking Co-Power: The Strategic Doing Advantage

Strategic Doing fuels co-power collaboration, enabling nimble action

1

Navigate Ambiguity

Progress despite ambiguity, not paralysis.

2

Leverage Strengths

Build on existing assets and capabilities.

3

Accelerate Learning

Fast, iterative learning in 30-90 day cycles.

4

Empower Leaders

Decentralize decisions to those closest to the work.

Key Insight: Strategic Doing transforms strategy into a continuous, action-oriented practice, driven by short, shared endeavors.

Strategic Doing: The Cycle of Continuous Progress

Strategic Doing transforms strategy into a dynamic, continuous cycle: Discover, Mobilize, Launch, Learn. This iterative process builds momentum and adaptive capacity.

Discover Opportunities

What bold endeavors can we pursue together that are impossible alone?

Accelerate Learning

What did these actions teach us, and how does that shape our next move?



Mobilize Assets

What unique strengths, relationships, and resources can we deploy?

Launch Actions

What specific, tangible steps will we take in the next 30–90 days?

This continuous cycle transforms organizational culture, driving adaptive results.



Charting a New Course: The Co-Power + Strategic Doing Pathway

This clear, phased approach transforms Akron's nonprofit ecosystem. It builds capacity, tests new ideas, and scales successes, offering direction and adaptability.



Phase 1: Align & Envision

Partners unite to define shared opportunities and collective goals.



Phase 2: Act & Experiment

Launch pathfinder projects to test new approaches and build momentum for ecosystem change.



Phase 3: Adapt & Scale

Learn from results, measure impact, and adapt based on evidence for effective strategy.

"Strategy is a dynamic habit, woven into collaborative work and achievement."

Phase 1: Forge a Shared

Vision
The Align phase: co-powered collaboration to define compelling community opportunities, not predefined solutions.

Aligning Akron: Key Actions

- Funders & nonprofits define critical opportunities.
- Shift focus to holistic community impact.
- Diverse voices shape challenges & possibilities.
- Asset mapping reveals collaborative strengths.



Convene Stakeholders

Unite cross-sector leaders for transformation.



Frame Opportunities

Jointly articulate inspiring opportunities.



Cultivate Trust

Foster open dialogue on challenges & possibilities.



ACF's Role: The Foundation convenes to create conditions for authentic alignment, empowering partners without dictating outcomes.

Technology as an Enabler of Co-Power

In the co-power model, technology is not just a tool; it's a foundational element that scales collaboration, transparency, and collective impact across Akron's nonprofit ecosystem.

Breaks Down Silos

Connects diverse organizations, fostering shared understanding and unified action.



Enables Real-Time Communication

Facilitates immediate information exchange and adaptive responses.

Democratizes Data Access

Provides transparent insights, empowering data-driven decisions at all levels.



Supports Rapid Iteration

Tools for quick feedback loops accelerate learning and strategic adjustments.



Learning from Leaders: skilly and Forbes Funds

Skilly and Forbes Funds are at the forefront of a paradigm shift, demonstrating how collaborative funding and technology can amplify community impact through a co-power approach.



Collaborative Funding Models

Pioneering models like "Power Together" foster deep partnerships between funders and communities.



Technology-Enabled Ecosystems

Leveraging digital platforms to enhance transparency, communication, and collective decision-making.



Community-Driven Impact

Their work actively shifts power to local leaders, aligning with true co-power principles.



AI Is Creating Strategic Capacity for the Nonprofit Sector

Demand for services is rising. Funding and staffing remain constrained. Administrative burdens are growing. And the policy and technology environments are shifting faster than ever. Yet within these pressures lies a profound opportunity — one that is already delivering results across Southwestern Pennsylvania.

The Challenge

- **Rising Demand**
Community needs are outpacing organizational capacity at every level.
- **Constrained Resources**
Funding gaps and staffing shortages limit what nonprofits can deliver.
- **Growing Burden**
Administrative overhead consumes time that should go to mission work.
- **Shifting Landscape**
Rapid changes in policy and technology demand constant adaptation.

Early Results: SW Pennsylvania

172

Leaders Trained
Through AI for Social Impact
Cohorts

70

Nonprofits Participating
Active organizations in the cohort

20hrs

Saved Per Week
Per organization, on average

\$1M+

Repurposed Capacity
In organizational value annually

☐ AI is not replacing nonprofit staff — it is creating strategic capacity so organizations can focus on mission-critical work.

The Emergence of "Digital Employees" in Nonprofits

Through the AI for Social Impact Cohorts, participating organizations are designing their first AI-powered digital assistants — tools that function like dedicated entry-level staff support, available around the clock and at a fraction of the cost of additional headcount.

What Digital Employees Can Do



Community Q&A

Answer questions using your organization's own knowledge base, 24/7.



Donor Outreach

Support development efforts with personalized communications and follow-up.



Program Navigation

Guide community members to the right programs, services, and resources.



Collaboration Mapping

Surface insights and identify partnership opportunities across the ecosystem.

Regional Impact

35+

Nonprofits have deployed AI assistants across the region

24/7/365

Support capacity now available without added payroll

Why This Matters: Small nonprofit teams can now extend their reach and serve more community members *without increasing payroll costs*. AI becomes a capacity multiplier for mission-driven work — not a replacement for the people who do it.

The Real Opportunity: Networked AI for Social Impact

The next phase of nonprofit innovation is not individual AI adoption — it is ecosystem adoption. When organizations share intelligence, coordinate tools, and advocate together, technology becomes infrastructure for equity.

Greater Pittsburgh Nonprofit Partnership

690

Organizations Connected

Across the Pittsburgh region

300

Active Members

Nonprofit organizations engaged

400

Anchor Partners

Institutions and strategic allies

Emerging Priorities

AI-Powered Service Navigation

Community members guided to housing, health, workforce, and food access resources in real time.

Shared Intelligence

Nonprofits pooling data and insights to strengthen coordinated community response.

Coordinated Advocacy

Unified voice across the sector on critical issues affecting the region's most vulnerable residents.

- ☐ Nonprofits already understand community needs better than anyone. The opportunity is ensuring they have the tools, the networks, and the capacity to act on that knowledge at scale — so technology becomes a driver of **equity, access, and community impact**.

Akron's Opportunity: Building on Proven Models

Akron can leverage the successes of Skill and Forbes Funds to cultivate a more collaborative and technology-enabled co-power ecosystem. This approach integrates lessons learned with our Strategic Doing

framework, driving tangible, community-led change.

Implement Shared Digital Infrastructure

Adopt platforms that facilitate transparent communication, data sharing, and collective decision-making across all partners.

Co-Design Funding Strategies

Shift towards collaborative funding models where community partners actively co-create solutions and share ownership of outcomes.

Strengthen Community-Led Initiatives

Prioritize and empower local leaders, ensuring that strategies are deeply rooted in the community's lived experiences and specific needs.

Embed Strategic Doing Principles

Integrate the Discover, Mobilize, Launch, Learn cycle into every collaborative effort to foster adaptive, iterative, and impactful progress.

By learning from these established models, Akron can accelerate its journey towards impactful, co-powered collective action.



Akron's Future: A Path of Co-Powered Collaboration

Akron is reimagining nonprofit collaboration for lasting community impact.



Iterate & Accelerate

Start small with shared opportunities, then iterate and scale.



Trust Through Shared Action

Build trust by creating tangible value together.



Learn & Evolve

Guide collaboration with continuous learning and insights.

Explore the transformative power of co-power. Join the Akron Community Foundation to build a responsive, interconnected, and impactful nonprofit ecosystem.

Afternoon Breakout Sessions

**Candid Insights:
Building Strategy
Before the Ask**
Conference Room A
(Lower Level)



Dave Holmes
Educational Programming
Manager, Candid

Making the Ask
Conference Room B
(Lower Level)



Laura Lederer
Vice President and
Chief Development
Officer, Akron
Community
Foundation

**Building Executive
Presence Through
Behavioral Insight**
Board Room
(Lower Level)



Paris Lampkins
Senior Management
Consultant, PRADCO

**Marketing Truths: What
You Need to Know But
May
Not Want to Hear**
Ballroom (Main Level)



Amy Wong
President,
Dot Org Solutions