



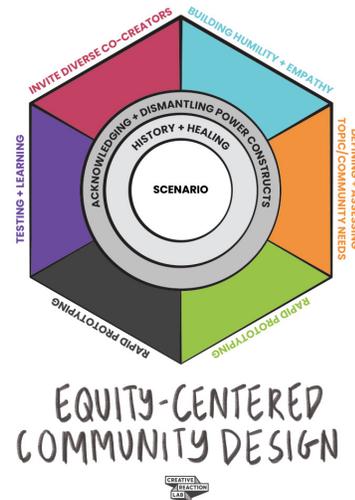
# Collective Impact Community Speaks

A recent addition to Learning and Engagement programs at the Museum is Collective Impact, a partnership between CAM and Creative Reaction Lab (CRXLAB), an educational organization that trains Black and Latinx youth as future civic leaders via Equity-Centered Community Design™. What began as an invitation for CRXLAB to design an interactive exhibition (*Collective Impact: A Sense of Home*) has grown into an ambitious community art partnership that includes residents and neighborhood organizations alike.

## “Nothing About Us Without Us”

Art museums commissioning artists to create work or present programs in public spaces is by no means a novel concept. In a common model, museums select a public space as a site for artistic intervention and then set parameters and a budget for the selected artist to work within. Depending on the site’s location, artists might consult with community members when designing the piece or program; however, the final authority over the project remained with the artist, and above them, the commissioning museum. In these cases, the artist and museum—perceived “experts”—hold the power and ultimately make decisions as to the nature of the artistic intervention. How can museums create artistic interventions that foreground connection with community members, especially in neighborhoods whose members are not museumgoers and do not feel comfortable or welcome? How can community members feel a sense of ownership and pride in art projects or programs? In this case, a different approach is necessary, and one that CAM and CRXLAB have undertaken for the second iteration of Collective Impact.

In Collective Impact, decisions from concept to the final say on design are in the hands of a cohort of community representatives. CAM and CRXLAB invited a group of community members that reside and work within the neighborhoods immediately surrounding our organizations: Covenant Blu/Grand Center, The Ville, and Vandeventer. Many of the cohort are active agents of change within their districts. Two students from Sumner are also members, representing youth



interests, and a few local artists share their artistic expertise to round out the “Collective,” as they are called. CRXLAB provides the group with exercises from their Equity-Centered Community Design™ curriculum to help ground all members in an awareness of their respective power and privilege as they consider how design can address their neighborhoods’ concerns and desires. This also primes the cohort to be as thoughtful as possible as they reach out to their fellow community members to gauge their neighborhoods’ greatest needs. As opposed to more traditional public art models, CAM staff step back into the roles of facilitators, providing the space and supplies for these meetings, but relinquish control and decision-making power to the cohort members.

While Collective Impact is an iterative process, this model is already bearing fruit. Collective members interviewed and surveyed their neighbors, colleagues,



## Audio Tour

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students, and family members in their neighborhoods to gather experiences and perspectives on their communities. The Collective then reviewed the responses for common themes, which led them to narrow the project's focus to the issue of "safety." After coming together on this theme, the Collective is considering how an art intervention might address an issue that weighs heavy upon community members' minds.

### Collective Impact and Beyond

*Collective Impact: Community Speaks* is an ongoing public art project. As of the opening of this exhibition, the Collective has put out an artist call. The next step will be to ask a shortlist of selected artists to submit proposals for the project. As part of the CAM exhibition, visitors will be able to see updates as the project progresses. Furthermore, Collective Impact is only in its first year. Next year, a cohort from the JeffVanderLou neighborhood will convene to design their own artistic intervention. The nature of this project is experimental and iterative. CAM and CRXLAB are well aware that the projects will inevitably change as we learn more from our community partners, with the understanding that change is a beneficial component to the process.

**The 2021–22 Collective includes:** Thomasina Clarke, Audrey Ellermann, L.M. Flowers, Melita Harry, Cynthia McCrea, Armenia Ratliffe, Jayvn Solomon, Simiya Sudduth, Aaron Williams, and Frankie Williams.

*Collective Impact: Community Speaks* is organized for the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis in partnership with Creative Reaction Lab's Cordell Billups, Program Coordinator; Antionette Carroll, Founder, President and CEO; and Ryan Page, Program Director alongside Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis's Michelle Dezember, Director of Learning and Engagement; and Miriam Ruiz, School and Community Partnership Manager.

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Courtesy José Rosa and Creative Reaction Lab



Collective Impact 2021–22



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