



CITY OF DESIGN CHALLENGE

FROM
VISION
TO
IMPACT:

INCLUSIVE
DESIGN
IN DETROIT

DESIGN IS ALL AROUND US.

From the physical products we use, like the chair you're sitting in, to the digital products on our phones and computers, design permeates everything.

In Detroit, innovative design is all around us.

This is the city that gave us the Chevy Corvette, the assembly line, and Detroit style pizza.

Good design is harder to notice than bad design. It not only creates the best car you've ever set foot in, it serves its intended purpose. It saves time, delivers knowledge, and builds trust.

More often than not, good design is perceived to be reserved for those with the resources and the ability to demand it.

Bad design is easier to spot because it doesn't work. It steals time and causes us to make mistakes. At its best it's annoying, and at its worst it's down right dangerous.

It can look like garbage not getting picked up, poor transit options, or people living closer to areas of pollution without access to green space.

But good design isn't actually reserved for the elite, it's already happening in our communities through intentional, grassroots problem solving.

In this environment, we set out to explore what happens when problem solvers are equipped with inclusive design to address societal problems in their own neighborhoods.

Inclusive design makes products, services, or environments more accessible for those traditionally left out of the design process.

In plain language, it brings good design to those most likely to suffer the opposite.

In this work, we meet many community leaders and residents who help us see what is needed in their neighborhoods. We hear their feedback, stories, and dreams and allow that to guide this program.

Throughout this book we'll explain the tactics we use to keep our group strong and stay in commune with each other. Through events and workshops people stay connected and supportive.

It's not easy.

But armed with a community of advisers to guide the teams, and partners to support creative, the Challenge teams are having an impact.

The theme of the 2021 pilot program was addressing the digital divide. One team created Wi-Fi hotspots along a bus route. Another built a tech hub to train workers on construction technology skills.

In 2023, teams are focusing on community resiliency. One team is providing musicians with solar infrastructure to run their equipment. Another is building a DIY auto shop for Detroiters to repair their own vehicles.

We have seen how a design challenge can bring good design to individuals, their neighborhood, and their city.

Keep reading for a blueprint on how to equip talented folks with inclusive design to address societal problems. Then imagine how a program like this could work in your community.

DETROIT HAS LONG
BEEN AT THE FOREFRONT
OF INNOVATIVE DESIGN.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE DETROIT CITY OF DESIGN CHALLENGE

PROGRAMMATIC ELEMENTS

• CHOOSE A THEME.

Go directly to community members to ask them which problems need solutions.

• RECRUIT THE TEAM.

You'll need Challenge planners, community partners/organizations, advisers, workshop speakers, and design teams.

• SHARE THE KNOWLEDGE.

Workshops and guest speakers can train participants on inclusive design skills and inspire new ways of thinking and doing.

• COLLABORATE.

Hold social events so teams can learn from one another.

• SHOWCASE THE DESIGNS.

Provide a space for designers to present their projects and make connections with potential partners.

TIMELINE

We're sharing timelines that work for Detroit in the hopes it helps others have a better sense of what a Challenge might look like. In the spirit of inclusive design and customizing the Challenge, some of these decisions should be made with your community.

• PLANNING STAGES:

3-6 months

• CALL FOR APPLICATIONS, COMMUNITY INFORMATION, AND TEAM RECRUITMENT:

4-6 weeks

• COMMUNITY ADVISORY COUNCIL SELECTS TEAMS:

2 weeks

• PHASE ONE OF THE CHALLENGE:

3-6 months

• CHALLENGE SHOWCASE:

1 night at the culmination of Phase 1.

• PHASE TWO: Teams prototype and implement their designs. Next, they host a Month of Design event to present their work to the community; ongoing mentorship included.

THE CHALLENGE EXPERIENCE

• SEEK:

Submissions

• SELECT:

Community advisers

• INVITE:

Participating teams

• INCLUDE:

Community partner organizations

• FACILITATE:

Inclusive design training sessions

• HOST:

Design clinic - designers work with teams to prepare Showcase materials

• CONDUCT:

Events such as talks, workshops, and demonstrations

• COORDINATE:

Resources

• PLAN:

Social meetups, in-person tours, exhibitions

• EXHIBIT:

Challenge Showcase and events



CHOOSE THE CHALLENGE THEME

Communities know best what they need, so we asked people: **Who and what is working in your neighborhood to solve issues or challenges? What resources are needed to support those efforts?**

An inclusive Challenge means inviting community stakeholders to tell us about their top-of-mind concerns.

We start by researching, exploring, and organizing community engagement events and inviting the people most impacted to the conversation — residents, activists, students, and other stakeholders.

We want to understand the most pressing issues in the community. Then, we discuss how to narrow the topic to a specific theme that Challenge teams can address.

Each iteration of the Detroit City of Design Challenge has a new theme.

THE PEOPLE THAT MAKE THE CHALLENGE HAPPEN

It's fundamental to good design that the people being designed for know what it is they want. We strive to hear feedback from as many community members as possible who know better than us the needs of their community. These partners get paid for their expertise.

We **welcome applications from all community members** and we employ design solutions to improve Detroiters quality of life. While they may not be professional designers, they're utilizing design to address problems.

A program of this scale is a massive team effort. Partner organizations, individuals, activists, advisers, and design leaders have a role throughout the Challenge.

We host community information sessions called Building Community Connections, with a deliberate outreach strategy. This allows us to attract creative problem solvers, build trust, and inform the community about our intentions.

We allocate a **stipend** to the Community Advisory Council, workshop speakers, and participating teams because everyone's time and expertise are valuable.

Community partners are our feet on the ground. They are a liaison for resources and the connections our participants might need throughout the Challenge. Ways they can help:

- Identify projects
- Recruit teams
- Provide ongoing guidance and mentorship to teams and program organizers
- Support technical assistance and mentorship of Challenge participants

Partnerships are specific to the Challenge theme. The theme of 2021 was the digital divide, so we partnered with the City of Detroit Department of Innovation and Technology. In 2023, we're partnering with Community Development Advocates of Detroit and CultureSource. We're helping teams address community resiliency, exploring resident-driven ideas for unifying communities, and building neighborhood resiliency during unexpected circumstances.



THE COMMUNITY ADVISORY COUNCIL: EXPERTS, MENTORS, & STAKEHOLDERS

We invite community members to apply or nominate someone to be on the Community Advisory Council. The Council is a well-rounded group of leaders willing to mentor design teams throughout the Challenge.

"We want advisers who represent the community, who go through the program alongside the teams," Ellie Schneider said. "We want them to have a certain level of accountability and knowledge of the neighborhoods that they were selecting projects for."

The advisory council should include a wide variety of voices and perspectives. Some could be architects, social workers, and academics. Others could be city workers, librarians, and creatives. All are deeply invested in civic engagement. Some lead workshops, all help select and support teams and allocate grant funds as well as serve as resources and mentors throughout.

AN INCLUSIVE TRAINING PROCESS FROM START TO FINISH

The Detroit City of Design Challenge framework was developed by Cézanne Charles and John Marshall from rootoftwo, with consultation from Ellie Schneider, former Detroit City of Design Director.

The core of the Challenge Program is a holistic, inclusive design training series that equips practitioners with the tools and knowledge necessary for an inclusive and equitable design process. The intention is for teams to build muscles that allow repeated use of the shared tools and activities so they can adapt and respond to input, feedback and change from the community.

"It wasn't just focused on creating inclusive outcomes — it was about creating inclusive processes all the way along," Charles said.

INFORMATION-SHARING TALKS AND WORKSHOPS

Core to the program is a progression of **conversations and workshops** that are only open to the teams. Our process is to start with yourself and then grow outward.

We feel it's difficult to work with an underserved community without understanding and recognizing our own position, our own power dynamics, our own strengths, and our own areas for personal growth. So our Challenge starts there.

With that in mind, we select topics and speakers that are relevant to the Challenge theme and to the needs of the participants.

As a result, we examine:

- How do we interact with partners and collaborate within teams?
- How do we understand the broader ecosystem related to our work?
- How do we engage the public in a meaningful way with projects?

In the spirit of meeting Challenge teams where they are and providing the resources they need, other workshop topics might include **practical skills development** - for example, how to use Illustrator.

BUILDING COMMUNITY

The process included optional social events, tours, and opportunities so teams could collaborate with others and incorporate community feedback.

This allowed the cohort to build relationships with other designers and advocates, share ideas, and see examples of inclusive design outcomes throughout the city.

CHALLENGE SHOWCASE

Professional designers from the city of Detroit work with teams during an all-day **Design Clinic** to help prepare **Challenge Showcase** materials. This allows teams to be on a level playing field during the competitive portion of the Challenge. During the clinic, the designers assist with things like graphic design for storyboards and pitch decks, photography, and videography.

Teams need to know how to explain the value and impact of their projects when applying for funding from foundations or contacting government agencies for zoning requests. The Challenge Showcase allows teams to practice and refine their pitch. This way, they'll have the information, habits, skills, and resources to continue their projects after the Challenge ends.

IMPLEMENTATION

With the coursework behind them, the six teams gather and use community feedback to refine their original concepts. Each team presents some form of a virtual model to community stakeholders.

Based on the Showcase presentations, the Community Advisory Council determines how to distribute the Phase 2 grant funds among the teams. Projects are evaluated for the following:

- Transformative impact
- High potential for visibility
- Feasibility
- Applicants' commitment to developing their knowledge and use of inclusive design practices

The advisers selected three teams to receive additional funds to implement their concepts in the community. With ongoing support from Challenge mentors and advisers, they had one year to execute their idea and showcase their work during Detroit Month of Design.

THE 2021 DETROIT CITY
OF DESIGN CHALLENGE PILOT:
**USING DESIGN TO
CLOSE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE**

Never has the digital divide in Detroit been more clear than it was during the COVID-19 pandemic. As we were determining the theme for the Challenge pilot, community stakeholder engagement made it clear that access to digital tools and resources was vital.

In partnership with Connect 313 and the College for Creative Studies, Design Core's 2021 Detroit City of Design Challenge invited teams to develop community tech hubs to improve access and opportunity in Detroit neighborhoods.

This project was funded by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, with additional support from Lear Corporation, DPL Foundation, and Pophouse.

The digital divide is the gap between people with access to high-speed internet, appropriate devices, and skills to use them — and those without.

Data shows nearly 1 in 4 Detroiters don't have home internet access. It's even worse for people of color, indigenous people, households with low incomes, people with disabilities, and older adults.

About 1 in 5 Detroit parents reported that a lack of reliable internet service forced their children to complete schoolwork on public Wi-Fi or a cellphone during the pandemic, according to a 2022 report from Connect 313.¹

When people don't have access to information, connection, or each other, they don't have equal opportunities for jobs, education, housing, and full participation in our society.

They can't access telehealth services, online banking, remote learning, or remote working.

Over 170,000 Detroiters do not have a high-speed internet subscription at home, according to the most recent U.S. Census data.

Most agree that the internet should be viewed as a basic utility, just like electricity, water, or gas.

Detroiters decided to use this platform to do something about it.

40 Detroiters came forward with design ideas to better connect their neighborhood to technology and strengthen the connection to their communities at the same time.

¹ Connect 313. "2022 Detroit Internet Use Survey Data." Accessed May 5, 2023.
<https://connect313.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Detroit-Connect-3-1-3-05.25.22-2.pdf>.

INTRODUCING THE 2021 DETROIT CITY OF DESIGN CHALLENGE TEAMS

The Community Advisory Council selected six teams to participate in the 2021 Detroit City of Design Challenge from June to August 2021.

Each team that participated in Year One of the Challenge received:

- A \$3,000 stipend
- Training in inclusive design techniques
- Access to people, places, and resources to support their physical and digital design skills
- A full day design clinic with professional designers who developed assets to help teams communicate and present their projects for the Challenge Showcase, as well as to investors and stakeholders.

Upon completion of the Challenge Showcase, the Community Advisory Council evaluated presentations and awarded three teams additional grant money to prototype and test their projects in their communities. The second year of the Challenge culminated in each of the three teams sharing their work at Detroit Month of Design 2022.

During the 2021 Challenge, emphasis was placed on seeing 2-3 projects to implementation, and funds were allocated based on projects' potential impact, feasibility, and inclusive practices. However, based on participant feedback, this model is being re-evaluated for the 2023 Challenge to maximize collaboration and community amongst the teams and to support more teams in developing their projects further.

PHASE ONE

Six teams were chosen to participate in phase one of the 2021 Challenge. They brought a mix of creative talent and "get it done" attitude. Each team brought a unique background and approach to the digital divide that made for a year full of learning and growth.

What follows is a short description of each of the three teams that stayed with the Challenge for one year. Next, we'll go into more detail about the three teams that advanced to Phase Two.

Oakland Ave. Development (*North End*): Stafford House is building a mixed-use real estate development featuring 10 apartments and five commercial spaces. One space will be used as a technology training school to support workforce development in Detroit and will include input directly from stakeholders.

"Through Stafford House and our technology training programs, and the other amenities that we're building for the residents, their voices are being heard. They're going to be included. The people who live, and work, and play in the North End are a part of the development of their own community."

— PATRICIA DOCKERY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, STAFFORD HOUSE

CRD Community Technology Hub (*North East Side*):

This collaborative space serves as a library, maker space, and outdoor green space near Chalmers and Seymour on Detroit's East Side. Equipped with Wi-Fi, the space will have books, tablets, and laptops that can be checked out. This hub also has 3D printers, cameras, sewing machines, and volunteers teaching each application.

"There's a lot of access to technology in other places, but it just doesn't exist here. Here on the East Side is a place where it's easy to feel forgotten. A lot of money goes downtown or to the West Side. There's not a lot of money; there's not a lot of activity happening here. And so to say not only are we going to work together, we're going to follow the lead of the community, we're going to provide and work together to form the best."

— AMY FANTA, DIRECTOR, CRD

"We don't want to just come in and put things in place that the community doesn't want. We're happy that we're able to start with the garden and the maker space to be able to add more value to the community."

— SANQUISE POWELL, MINISTRY STAFF, CRD

Detroit Wind and Water at the Freedom Growers Farm

(*Lower East Side*): This project is a solution to community needs for improving food security, educating others about green energy opportunities, and enhancing environmental resilience. The design harnesses the power of a wind-and-solar microgrid. It is equipped with a Wi-Fi server in a unique community setting that brings together urban agriculture, placemaking, and civic education.

"My proposed project is a microgrid, low-level wind turbine, solar panel arrangement that will irrigate an urban farm, and also provide connectivity in an area where there is none."

— CARLOS NIELBACK, TEAM DESIGN LEAD

"Manistique is a street that's full of several urban farms. So I'm imagining if every urban farm on the street had a windmill that cycled water from the canal — what that could do. And how could that further turn into a large green stormwater infrastructure project in the Jefferson Chalmers neighborhood? I'm excited that even though this is just a small piece, it turns into something larger."

— RUKIYA COLVIN, COMMUNITY LEAD



CROSTOWN CONNECTION:

BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE IN MORNINGSIDE



CROSTOWN
CONNECTION

"Access to the internet is an equalizer. It's a way for everyone to be on a similar playing field."

— IAN KLIPA,
FABRICATOR AT DONUT SHOP,
PARTNER WITH CROSTOWN CONNECTION

"We will take all of the feedback and implement that into the design so it's more of a collaborative project. It's not just Ian, Jake, and I being the designers — it's the whole Morningside community being the designers."

— DATRICE CLARK,
"DETROIT'S HANDYWOMAN" AND CROSTOWN
CONNECTION LEAD

When Datrice Clark was a young girl in the early 2000s, she walked a mile to the Thomas Jefferson Branch of the Detroit Public Library to access the internet because, like so many Detroit residents, she didn't have Wi-Fi in her home.

Two decades later, 70% of Detroit's school-age children do not have home internet access.²

This means that almost three quarters of Detroit Public School students don't have the ability to sit at a computer and research a paper, or look up the definition of a word, or download a class syllabus.

It means that parents can't make bank transactions, look up a recipe, or even apply for jobs.

In an underserved neighborhood like Morningside, the library Clark used as a child is still the only solution for many Detroiters to access the internet.

During the pandemic, the library extended its Wi-Fi to 24 hours a day and people sat outside on the grass to access it.

That someone would sit on the hard ground outside of a building simply to access the internet says all you need to know about the digital divide and the impact it has on people.

THE SOLUTION

Living the digital divide in the 2000s, and then seeing it still plague her community 20 years later, inspired Clark to use her design skills to help bridge the gap in Morningside. The Community Advisory Council agreed and she was awarded a \$12,000 grant in Phase 2 to develop a prototype. Clark partnered with Jacob Saphier and Ian Klipa of Donut Shop on design and fabrication.

The project — Crosstown Connection — is named in honor of the bus route that once ran from East to West

As people travel through neighborhoods along the route, they encounter a range of economic privileges and disadvantages. Using hot spots that offer Wi-Fi and a charging station, Clark's goal was to help make that route a bit easier to travel.

² Peñarroyo, Cyrus. "Mapping Detroit's Digital Divide." University of Michigan, n.d., Accessed March 17, 2023. <https://www.urbanlab.umich.edu/project/mapping-detroit-digital-divide/>

DATRICE CLARK

HOW THE CHALLENGE TAUGHT INCLUSIVE, COLLABORATIVE DESIGN

The Challenge training helped Clark talk directly with community members so she could implement their feedback and create a collaborative project.

"You don't want to just build something and drop it into a community," Clark said. "You actually want to have community feedback and input along the way."

Designers tend to think about the end project the most, she said.

“THE WORKSHOPS DID A GREAT JOB OF MAKING US ZOOM OUT A BIT AND LOOK AT WHAT WOULD BE MOST HELPFUL FOR WHAT THE COMMUNITY NEEDED.”

FROM A TECH HUB TO SOLAR-POWERED KIOSKS

Initially, Clark planned a tech hub near the library to serve as an extension of library services. But after speaking with community members and library staff, she realized a different design would serve more people. Instead of creating something that required travel to access, she could place it in a spot that fit their daily commute.

So, she shifted the details of the plan based on neighbor feed-back.

"You design with the minority in mind, and it's always going to serve the majority," Clark said. "It's inclusive design that way. You solve the problems, and it's going to be easier for everyone."

Now, her prototype is for solar-powered kiosks near bus stops along East Warren Avenue.

These hot spots will offer thousands of Detroiters free, convenient access to services — Wi-Fi and phone charging ports — in easily accessible places that fit their daily commute and lifestyle.

She has also created open source plans and hosted workshops in the community to teach kids how to fabricate. She believes that if she exposes the youth in her neighborhood to design, they can use the tools and equipment available through the East Warren Tool Library to build these kiosks on their own as needed in the future.

THE CROSSTOWN CONNECTION DESIGN:

- Free public Wi-Fi 24/7
- Charging stations
- Solar-powered
- Constructed with accessible materials
- Open-source plans so community members and the Tool Library can use the building and installation of the hubs as workshop opportunities

WHAT'S NEXT FOR CROSSTOWN CONNECTION

Clark developed a trajectory for 2023 and a three-year business plan. She is in talks with the Detroit Public Library Foundation to secure additional funding to implement the design.

Clark wants to do more community-based projects to make a lasting difference, especially in Morningside, where she grew up.

"It feels more fulfilling when it has a greater impact," she said. "Something that lives on is really cool."



18TH STREET DESIGN-BUILD TECH HUB:

PRESERVING STORIES, BUILDING CAREERS



"True innovation already exists in our neighborhood. Having resources and access to different platforms makes a world of difference. Seeing what our peers were doing across the city — they're doing it! And they're doing it without. Having an organization that has access to resources and a platform to elevate that work made a significant difference for all of us."

— TANYA SALDIVAR-ALI,
AGI CONSTRUCTION, DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS

The Hub is an incubator space for minority contractors and a think tank where locals can engage in the development process within their neighborhood.

This inclusive environment will create access to industry-specific technical training. And the mentorship will help others grow and scale for the future.

SKILL BUILDING UPLIFTS THE ENTIRE CITY

Detroit's District 6 is slated for over \$900M in investments during the next five to 10 years. This investment in infrastructure projects is expected to attract 5,000 new residents to the area.

With such a strong financial investment comes an opportunity — not only for the neighborhood, but also for locals — to learn trades in the construction industry. More than just jobs, this creates career pathways into liveable wages.

That's where Saldivar-Ali and Ali come in.

Through the 18th Street Design-Build Tech Hub, people can access the information they need to benefit economically from the development happening in their neighborhood.

WHAT THEY LEARNED FROM DESIGN CHALLENGE TRAINING

"The formal training around inclusive design gave us context to be able to verbalize and formalize what we were doing," Saldivar-Ali said. She learned more about the steps involved in inclusive design and building.

True inclusiveness means looking at all sides, Ali said.

"How do we advocate for the people who have been here?" he said. "You have to interact. You have to create relationships. You've got to build trust. And we have to listen to each other in both directions."

Some of the newcomers to the neighborhood have different ideas about the direction the neighborhood should take, Saldivar-Ali said. The workshops helped her understand those interactions and move forward.

When Tanya Saldivar-Ali grew up in southwest Detroit in the 1990s, developers didn't talk to her or her neighbors about the projects they were working on. She wanted to ask the community how they felt about her construction company using the 18th Street Tech Hub as an office space. Now you see her on the porch of her Queen Anne house and every neighbor knows her. They smile and wave and chat about the flowers and how the work is coming.

The disconnect between community needs and developer projects often displaces residents and local businesses. It can erase community culture.

So when she bought a Queen Anne house in the Hubbard Richard neighborhood on Detroit's southwest side in 2017, she knocked on doors. She wanted to know how the community felt about her construction company using that space as an office.

"It's important for us to stay rooted in the community," Saldivar-Ali said. She and her husband, Luis Ali, co-own the general contracting firm AGI Construction. They prioritize working with schools, churches, nonprofits, and small business owners.

They began a multi-year engagement with the residents, asking them about the kind of support they needed so they could grow as their business grew.

That's why they created the 18th Street Design-Build Tech Hub and submitted their project to the 2021 Detroit City of Design Challenge. In addition to their participation stipend, The Community Advisory Council awarded their team \$30,000 in Phase 2 to prototype and implement their design.

TANYA SALDIVAR-ALI

"We were actually experiencing some pushback from some of the new neighbors that had been here for maybe five years," she said.

"They were claiming stake and ground, like 'We don't really want you here. This is a housing community, and we don't want a business, and we don't want a bunch of construction workers around'."

Inclusiveness means closing the gap between the old and the new and listening to everyone, Ali said.

"If we're going to be a bridge, then that means working with people who are newcomers," Saldivar-Ali said. "Everybody's looking to share with others about what they're doing. And so, how can I show you what I'm doing to help you get further along? Part of what we do in our space is storytelling."

STORYTELLING PRESERVES HISTORY AND COMMUNITY CULTURE

The history in the neighborhoods would get erased if we didn't find a way to preserve the storytelling, Ali said.

"We asked community members to come out and share their stories," Ali said. "You've been here for 30, 40 years — what have you seen? What was your experience like? How did you get here?"

The design Challenge equipped them with resources necessary to narrate both those stories and their own story throughout the project.

"Not only are we engaging in creating local pipelines — we're also preserving neighborhood history and culture so that we can share that story about the people that have been holding down these communities for decades," Saldivar-Ali said.

"THE HUB EMBODIES THAT MESSAGE. SO, IT'S NOT ABOUT THE BRICK-AND-MORTAR — IT'S ABOUT PEOPLE AND ACCESS."

WHAT'S NEXT?

Saldivar-Ali and Ali began a pilot program of a group of contractors renovating the Tech Hub building. They taught them to install Hardie board siding and other sustainable construction practices.

They've also exposed the contractors to business development and how to grow their business capacity. The building is nearing completion, and the grand opening is slated for 2023.

CONSTRUCTION MEETS TECHNOLOGY

The 18th Street Design-Build Tech Hub includes a community tech lab portal with in-person and virtual training. It provides access to design-build learning resources and tools through an interactive, easy-to-access platform.

It aims to address the digital divide and local barriers to the development process.

Here are some ways the Hub is using technology to help others learn about construction.

Virtual reality web portal — "If These Walls Could Talk" is an exhibit at the hub which celebrates and preserves local stories and culture in the face of rapid development.

Photospheres use 360-degree photos to allow a sense of space.

Matterport scans use a 3D camera to turn the space into an accurate, immersive digital twin.

3D goggles and virtual reality allow people to see a project in an immersive environment before the project is completed.

Demonstrations (recorded and added to Tech Lab Portal)

- Drones – live demonstration to understand the condition of the roof, windows, and insulation
- 3D printing & green infrastructure practice on-site
- Solar panel installation
- Detroit Month of Design: Live mural exhibition and light show using projection mapping
- Host Panel: How to Build for the Next Generation?

SOME VIRTUAL ASPECTS OF THE HUB ARE ONLINE AT DETROIT-DESIGNBUILDGREENHUB.COM/



UNDERGROUND MUSIC ACADEMY: BRINGING TECHNO BACK TO ITS ROOTS



"We've learned the power of the griot, and the power of our stories, and the power of our communities. We've also learned that if you move those on the margins to the center, and we address their concerns, we address the concerns of the whole."

— ROBERT "WAAJEED" O'BRYANT,
DIRECTOR, UMA

Robert "Waaheed" O'Bryant will never forget where he came from or those who helped him succeed as a music artist. Growing up on Detroit's East Side in the 1990s, musician Amp Fiddler influenced and mentored him.

"He taught us how to use drum machines," Waaheed said. "Not just myself, but like Dilla and the rest of my friends. But bigger than that, he set the ethos for a greater level of dignity and a greater level of respect towards the craftsmanship of music."

Waaheed later applied those lessons from Amp and others to build his career as a musician and producer.

PAYING IT FORWARD TO THE NEXT GENERATION

After achieving genre-defying success and working alongside some of the biggest names in Detroit music, Waaheed created the Underground Music Academy (UMA) to reach back and uplift aspiring musicians from his community through training and mentorship.

"What Amp did for us is something that I can never replace or even level up to," Waaheed said. "But what I can do is offer that same opportunity to someone else."

"There's a bigger responsibility than just making cool songs and flying around. There's a bigger responsibility to our community and also to ourselves as a duty to serve the folks that we love and want to protect."

With that in mind, he submitted his project to the 2021 Detroit City of Design Challenge to boost the UMA's impact and improve accessibility. In addition to the participation stipend, the Community Advisory Council awarded UMA an \$18,000 Phase 2 grant to build out the studio and test Waaheed's plan for the Academy in the community.

The UMA is a community hub with an innovative approach to music education and community engagement that aims to solve several problems in the music industry.

One challenge the industry faces is that many kids don't even get to try music in the first place. Parents don't understand that, if done properly, music can sustain your life.

ROBERT "WAAJEED" O'BRYANT

"Most people think that if you're not Beyoncé then you're not in the music business", Waajeed said. "You can survive. And you can prosper. And you can do well. You can raise your kids. You can buy property. You can pay your taxes by being an underground musician."

A larger challenge facing Detroit music is the issue of attribution.

"In my business, there's a big conversation, especially surrounding techno, about erasure," he said. "Most people you encounter have no idea that Detroit is the birthplace of techno."

Through their online and in-person classes, UMA will teach not only the art of deejaying, music production, and business know-how — they are creating an inclusive global dance community that's more aware of its Detroit Black electronic music roots.

"We teach you how to use drum machines, but our core is social justice," he said.

PRESERVING DETROIT'S MUSICAL LEGACY

So in 2015, Waajeed and "Mad" Mike Banks bought the former NAACP headquarters building on the city's North End to serve as a home base for UMA. It's down the street from the Motown Museum and near Exhibit 3000, the world's first techno museum.

"A lot of us as entertainers have invested so much time in teaching other people's children the value of what Detroit has to offer, but we have not spent as much time teaching our own the value of what we do," he said.

"Detroit is the only place to start this conversation because we're at the birthplace of a lot of these things that the world is profiting from."

WHAT HE LEARNED FROM THE DESIGN CHALLENGE

UMA's participation in the Challenge was instrumental in refining how they communicate their vision and in obtaining more funding.

"It heightened our awareness of what was out there," Waajeed said. "It also made us more donation-worthy. We found ways to highlight our best points and develop our weaker points."

THE UMA PLAN

The Underground Music Academy's vision of electronic music realigns the values of originality, quality, and diversity closer to the genre's origin. Their goal is to provide accessible and affordable music education in production and deejaying to residents of Detroit and, ultimately, the world.

Step 1: Develop a social justice-rooted electronic music curriculum with feedback and collaboration

Step 2: Facilitate electronic music curriculum (through a social justice framework) online

Step 3: Launch in-person fellowships with Detroiters

Step 4: Form an alumni network and connect participants with internships and performances globally

Step 5: Cultivate a Detroit-led global network of Black, Brown, and Indigenous people in the electronic music field, building power together

FOR MORE, VISIT [UNDERGROUND-MUSICACADEMY.COM/](https://underground-musicacademy.com/)

ACCESSIBLE DESIGNS INVITE EVERYONE TO THE CONVERSATION

The Challenge taught Waajeed new ways to make the space and curriculum more accessible to people — like making restrooms accessible and accommodating people who are unable to come onsite.

"It's the bigger conversation about 'Who's available to come inside of this space? And how do we provide that opportunity for them to do that?'" Waajeed said.

He reflected on the importance of including others in shared experiences.

"Music is meant to be shared and enjoyed in groups," he said. "You can enjoy it alone, but it's a different conversation when you're sharing that music with 5,000 people. It's the universal language."

WHAT'S NEXT FOR UMA?

UMA opened its studio at the end of March 2023. They're developing their online curriculum and are currently working through a plan to launch.



UNDERSTAND THE COMMITMENT REQUIRED.

Running a Challenge at this scale is ambitious and requires dedicated staff and resources on the part of the organizers and partners, plus a two-year commitment from the teams and the advisory council.

BE SPECIFIC ABOUT THE SELECTION PROCESS.

Top criteria include the teams' commitment to participation, willingness to deploy inclusive design tactics, potential for impact, etc.

- Community advisers score written submissions.
- The council collectively discusses top scoring teams.
- Finalists are interviewed by the council.

ANTICIPATE CHALLENGES AND CREATE CONTINGENCY PLANS, BUT REMAIN FLEXIBLE AND WILLING TO ADAPT AND CHANGE AS THE PROGRAM UNFOLDS.

Nothing is decided before you ask for community input, so it's impossible to make strict decisions about plans or schedule in advance. There's a balance between having a plan and being ready to execute a large undertaking like the Challenge. So use a plan as a loose outline and adjust it along the way in response to participant input.

STAY ORGANIZED.

A program like this is packed with documents — applications, workshops, designs-in-progress, and event details. Store your files in the cloud and organize them. In the case of staff transition, you will rest easy knowing where to find information.

MAKE TIME TO REFLECT ON FEEDBACK AND LESSONS LEARNED AND ADAPT ACCORDINGLY.

Determine the best ways to implement those lessons. Due to staffing changes, we were still assessing the 2021 Challenge when we launched the 2023 Challenge. This overlap meant we didn't properly adapt the program based on feedback.

DEFINE CRITERIA FOR DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDS IN PHASE TWO.

Our original intent was to distribute the funds for Phase Two based on which teams had the greatest potential for exposure and impact, which were most feasible, and which were dedicated to using inclusive design to further their work. One way to do this would be to give all of the teams the same amount of funds. Another would be to vary the amounts based on need, impact and stage of project.

DEFINE CLEAR EXPECTATIONS.

Clear expectations engage the teams and allow them to bring their best efforts and energy to the work. At the end of the 2021 Challenge, we heard participants say that they didn't understand meeting requirements. At the start of the 2023 Challenge, two teams thought acceptance included free design services. Make time to check for understanding and clarify any discrepancies.

DON'T OVERLOAD PEOPLE.

The 2021 Challenge included over 50 optional events, lectures, and workshops, plus seven inclusive design training sessions—on top of the countless hours teams were spending on the actual project they were launching. This proved to be too time-consuming, and the result was an overwhelmed cohort and organizers.

FIND THE BALANCE BETWEEN COOPERATION AND COMPETITION.

Much of the Challenge is focused on cooperation as teams work together to raise the collective level of design on each of their projects and in the city as a whole. Hosting events, socials, and after hours gatherings all have the intention to bring people together and to build lasting relationships that grow even after the Challenge has ended. And yet, distribution of funds at the end is competitive by nature.

USE PROFESSIONALLY TRAINED FACILITATORS.

Facilitators should understand the curriculum and have the capacity and ability to prepare for each session. In 2023, new facilitators were brought in at the 11th hour due to unexpected turnover. This proved challenging for the presenting organization and the teams. Having a backup or contingency plan in place in advance is critical for continuity.





WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE DETROIT CITY OF DESIGN CHALLENGE?

As of publication, the 2023 Detroit City of Design Challenge is underway. Like the 2021 Challenge, the program intends to invest in people and showcase the power of design.

After facilitating an engagement event to seek input from community stakeholders, the 2023 Challenge question emerged: How might we unify our neighbors to build resiliency and help communities respond effectively to social, economic, health or environmental shocks?

Once again, we'll explore the Challenge theme by uplifting the people and projects already working on inclusive and equitable solutions to this problem. No one knows better than the folks living and working there what a community's needs are and which solutions are likely to be enacted or adopted for long-term impact.

The Community Advisory Council reviewed 27 applications for the 2023 Challenge. Seven teams with proposals for existing or emerging community resiliency concepts were selected to participate.

We invited them to explore how good inclusive, participatory design can make community places and services even more accessible, effective, and impactful.

We expect to prove that when it's easier for residents to communicate, find safe spaces to gather, and move through the city, they'll become more connected to each other and the neighborhood. The community as a whole will be better able to respond to unexpected events, like economic downturns, public health crises, floods and storms, or social unrest.

The better connected our community is, the stronger we become.

“DESIGN ISN'T SO MUCH A NOUN AS IT IS A VERB IN DETROIT.” – CÉZANNE CHARLES

This is the idea that propelled us to create a Challenge aimed at exploring what happens when designers are equipped to use inclusive design to address problems in their communities.

We facilitated the building of a music school where young students not only learn how to play drums, but also build a living in the industry and help to preserve its legacy.

We helped build a prototype for a kiosk that will empower a neighborhood to provide its own access to Wi-Fi.

We played a role in the development of an office and a community space that supports a neighborhood, creating jobs and solidifying its legacy as the world around it shifts rapidly.

These were small steps that turned into big events, all propelled by inclusive design.

We've seen first hand how the design process can bring quality places, programs, and policies to individuals, their communities, and their city.

Historically, design has been perceived as an output or object. But truly, design is a process, and when it's done intentionally and inclusively, the outcome is more equitable. Furthermore, when this work is led by and within the community it serves, the output is also better received and more sustainable.

We found that these projects will transform their communities. By doing so, we believe they can transform Detroit. And if they can change Detroit, maybe they can change the world.

VISIT [DESIGNCORE.ORG](https://designcore.org)
FOR MORE ON THE
DETROIT CITY OF
DESIGN CHALLENGE.

DETROIT CITY OF DESIGN CHALLENGE

DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING COMMUNITY-DRIVEN
SOLUTIONS IN DETROIT

Neighborhood residents are the experts on their community's needs. This Program provides a framework for residents, activists, community leaders, and civic organizations to design and implement solutions that effectively address challenges in their neighborhoods.

Over the last few years, The Detroit City of Design Challenge has supported an array of local initiatives to bridge the digital divide, boost workforce development, preserve culture, address climate challenges, and enhance community resilience. These solutions, driven by local voices, are well-suited to tackle urgent issues and create lasting positive change throughout the city.

