



A LETTER FROM DANI

From public education and transportation to affordable housing and philanthropy, we have had the privilege of working on some of the most important issues our communities face this year.

We have flipped the script on philanthropy, inviting women who know the struggles of poverty to use their expertise to select grant recipients. We have worked together with our bus system's new CEO to set-up a bus rider advisory board to improve day-to-day service. And as our region faces a housing crisis for those least able to afford it, we have helped catalyze and shape an effort to shift the paradigm.

We organize and build real relationships so that when the time comes, people who have never had an opportunity to engage with a decision maker can take their seat at the table for the first time. We facilitate meaningful brainstorming between leaders and the communities they serve, because we know that engagement is about more than feedback, it is about ideas generated through the wisdom of lived experience. One conversation at a time, we are deepening the collective trust in one another that we need to tackle the challenges we face.

I am so grateful to get to do this work alongside our small but mighty team, and for all of our Bridgebuilders and leaders whose commitment to their communities guides the way. Together, we are changing the way decisions are made by empowering the voices of the everyday experts.

Thank You,
Dani

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Our Impact in 2019

500

OVER 500
BRIDGEBUILDERS

50

50 COMMUNITY FOCUS
GROUPS AND ADVISORY BOARD
MEETINGS

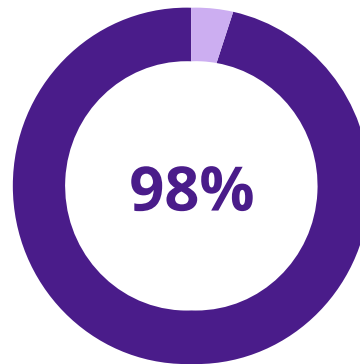
400

WITH OVER 400
EVERYDAY EXPERT
PARTICIPANTS

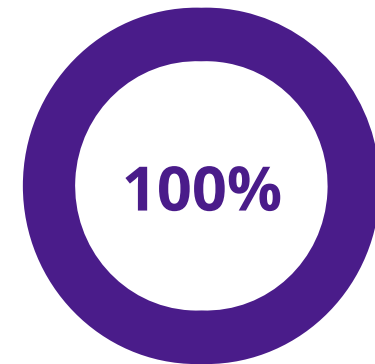
IGNITING RENEWED CIVIC PARTICIPATION:



SAID IT WAS THEIR
FIRST TIME EVER
JOINING A SIMILAR CIVIC
CONVERSATION



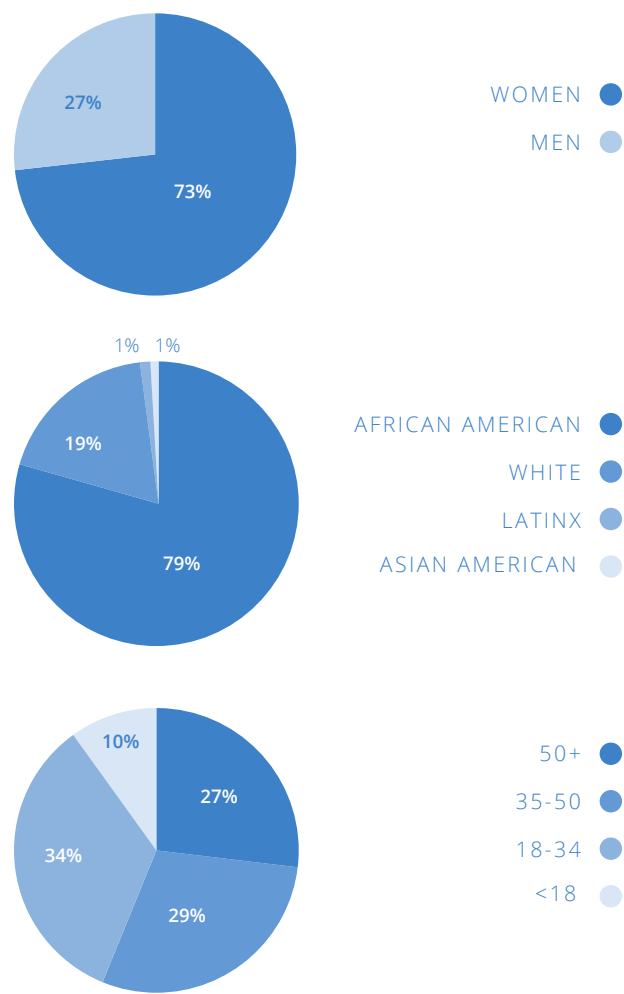
SAID IT WAS A VALUABLE
USE OF THEIR TIME AND
WOULD PARTICIPATE
AGAIN



BELIEVE THAT MORE
CONVERSATIONS LIKE THIS
ARE NEEDED

Impact

DEMOGRAPHICS BREAKDOWN OF EVERYDAY EXPERTS



This year we worked with decision makers from diverse sectors whose work touches almost every aspect of our community.

HEALTHCARE

UTILITY

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

HOUSING

COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

HIGHER EDUCATION

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

PUBLIC EDUCATION



Voices of the Housing Crisis

THE HOUSING CRISIS IN CINCINNATI, ACCORDING TO THE EVERYDAY EXPERTS

Cities all across the United States are facing an affordable housing crisis, and the City of Cincinnati and Hamilton County are not immune to the issue. This spring, we released a report as part of a pro bono effort we launched in late 2018 to bring the voices of the people who are living through the housing crisis to the table with a range of decision makers. Some of the key ideas from the report:

- New housing needs to be for families, even if those units are not quite as profitable as two bedrooms
- Displacement is about more than just an increase in rental prices, it is about the breakdown of social networks as people are priced out of entire regions of the city and forced to move far away from families and friends
- Residents in areas of historic disinvestment that are now seeing capital flood in should have the opportunity to join the “upside” of development.

The report was featured by both The Cincinnati Enquirer and WCPO Cincinnati and helped catalyze a larger, community-wide effort to develop a long-term housing strategy.



BRINGING THE VOICES AND IDEAS OF EVERYDAY EXPERTS TO THE COMMUNITY-WIDE HOUSING STRATEGY

If we are going to tackle a housing crisis where over 40,000 low-income families lack quality, affordable housing, we are going to need a comprehensive strategy. In partnership with LISC Greater Cincinnati & Northern Kentucky and the Greater Cincinnati Foundation, as well as a broad coalition of others, we are part of an effort to develop that strategy for Cincinnati. We're thankful to the policymakers and everyday experts we engaged this summer for showing up and brainstorming about the right policies and strategies to address the housing crisis. The insights and ideas that came from our work form part of the basis for the strategy that is being drafted.

"I'd say it's hard to find [affordable housing]. I can't get approved for subsidized housing. I'm paying market rate...I work two jobs and I still can't find something that's affordable for me. I'm paying the rent. I'm doing it. But it's taking everything I have. Everything is going to my rent and then maybe I have enough to pay my Duke bill."

Brittney, Walnut Hills Resident



SHAPING THE ROLE OF HEALTH SYSTEMS IN SUPPORTING HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

As an anchor institution in Bond Hill and Roselawn, Bons Secour Mercy Health believes it has a critical role to play in supporting the community and catalyzing positive change. According to Mercy, safe and quality housing is both an important social determinant of health as well as an opportunity to contribute to and support the neighborhoods. Every anchor institution should go through the reflection process Mercy went through before deciding on projects that will impact the neighborhood: Do residents want this? How would our neighbors want us to proceed, and how can we do that together? As we helped Mercy leadership engage with Bond Hill and Roselawn residents, we heard about the desire to participate in the financial development of the neighborhood, and the constant tension of trying to support renters while helping homeowners build wealth. We're eager to see how Mercy continues to lean on this partnership with residents as it moves forward.

"This is not about what Mercy wants. This is for you to tell us, if there is to be affordable housing in your community, what are your priorities?"

- Dr. Sam Ross, Chief Community Health Officer, Bons Secour Mercy Health

"I think when big companies come to the neighborhood, they have a duty to do something big for the neighborhood" - Mr. Casey, Bond Hill Resident

Powerful insights from everyday experts.



MAKING SCHOOLS A SAFER PLACE FOR KIDS

The rise in bullying and mental health issues is a national problem, and our district is rightly focused on developing strategies to respond more effectively. Working with Cincinnati Public Schools, we organized conversations with the everyday experts - students who had experienced bullying, and their parents, teachers, and administrators. The Cincinnati Federation of Teachers then supported an additional anti-bullying conversation exclusively with CPS teachers and staff. In May, CPS revamped their anti-bullying efforts based largely on the ideas generated by Cohear's engagement efforts.



A MORE ACCESSIBLE PATHWAY TO A 4-YEAR DEGREE AT CINCINNATI STATE

Cincinnati State represents an amazing pathway to a four-year degree, with higher retention rates and much lower overall costs for the same degree. Yet, not as many families as in other similar cities are taking advantage of this opportunity. Working with Cincinnati State, we have been organizing conversations with middle and working-class families to develop strategies for how Cincinnati State can be a more accessible and exciting option for their kids.

"What would have been better would have been 'I hear you, I'm with you'...just—recognition."

-Erin, parent of a student who experienced bullying.

"A lot of students are very concerned with going into debt to the point that can decide if they are going to try and do any secondary education after high school. Seeing things like how much Cincinnati State graduate can make with a two year degree, and at an affordable price is an incredible thing."

- Jessica, Forest Park Parent



IMPROVING COST-SAVINGS FOR CINCINNATI REGIONAL USA CHAMBER MEMBERS

The Chamber is always looking to add value for its members. We worked with Chamber leadership to gain insights and brainstorm ideas to identify new cost-savings opportunities and how the Chamber could be a more valuable resource for its members.



HELPING NONPROFIT AGENCIES THRIVE WITH UNITED WAY AND THE GREATER CINCINNATI FOUNDATION

In response to a new funding landscape for United Way partner agencies, United Way approached our team to work with them, The Greater Cincinnati Foundation and Ignite Philanthropy to explore efforts that could help nonprofit agencies adapt and thrive.

"The mission of the Chamber is to grow the vibrancy and economic prosperity of the region. To do that, we need to listen to our current and potential members about how the Chamber can be a positive force for their businesses."

John Bosse, Former VP of Membership, Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber.

"I love that you guys are getting nonprofits together to ask us what we need and what we want, because I feel like sometimes there's such a gap with that, because we're all doing our work and you're doing your work, and sometimes we don't get together and talk about what's going on."

Tara, nonprofit agency leader.

Making Neighborhood Schools a Winning Choice for Parents

As the needs of the children in the City of Cincinnati continue to grow, families have increasing choices about where they send their children to school. Recognizing that parents have options, Cincinnati Public Schools wants to be proactive about competing to be the best choice for families. Working with our team, CPS leadership met with parents to learn about how to make neighborhood schools an exciting and winning option for both parents and students in the district.

The ideas that emerged from the conversations included more abstract interventions like the district creating specific brand strategies to enhance school pride for each neighborhood school, as well as more concrete concepts like ensuring that students have better access to certain after-school programs like Drill Team and team sports.

When Lauren Worley, the Chief Communications, Enrollment, and Engagement Officer for CPS, described one of the conversations we organized as “the most powerful conversation” she has been a part of in



her role at CPS, it was a reminder of why this work matters. Lauren and CPS have demonstrated their commitment to not only listening to their community, but also to turning the ideas that they hear into concrete actions and policies.

We're looking forward to a continued powerful partnership with Cincinnati Public Schools!

“In 2018 and 2019, I listened to thousands of people in person on every issue...I heard input from even more people online and in surveys. Frankly, many times at these kind of sessions, the chairs are hard and listening to the criticism is even harder. Tonight I had the benefit of listening to the most powerful conversation I've been a part of in this role. I learned so much from the women who shared their experience and input with me..”

Lauren Worley, Chief Communications and Engagement Officer, CPS

Policy Pitch Night

“I can promise you this is going to be implemented at City Hall.”

Everyone has had that moment in their day, whether on their way to work or home from school, of thinking “Wouldn’t it be great if...” Policy Pitch Night is our way of capturing the wisdom that exists in each person’s conclusion of that sentence when they are thinking about our city. This summer was the second annual event, and it was a huge success.

Anyone in the city was invited to submit a policy idea, and then a panel of Bridgebuilders from the community evaluated and selected the five finalists. The 26 policy ideas were a testament to our community’s collective brilliance! Each finalist then “pitched” his or her idea in front of a public audience, and a panel of three City Councilmembers: P.G. Sittenfeld, our co-host, Greg Landsman, and Jeff Pastor. The five ideas were: breastfeeding rooms in city-owned buildings, eliminating city consideration of marijuana use in hiring, tax-abatement policies for housing, speed bumps near schools, and a right to legal counsel for residents facing eviction.

Everyone in attendance got one vote, and at the end of the evening the



winner idea was announced: Leon Washington’s policy for the city to stop considering marijuana use - past and present - as a factor in its hiring decisions. The basic premise? Since city no longer considers marijuana use a criminal act, it should no longer punish those who have prior convictions or are recreational users, especially because disparities in enforcement mean that those barriers end up being higher for black communities.

All five of the finalists received tremendous praise from the panelists, and at least two other ideas, in addition to Leon’s, are actively being pursued by City government.

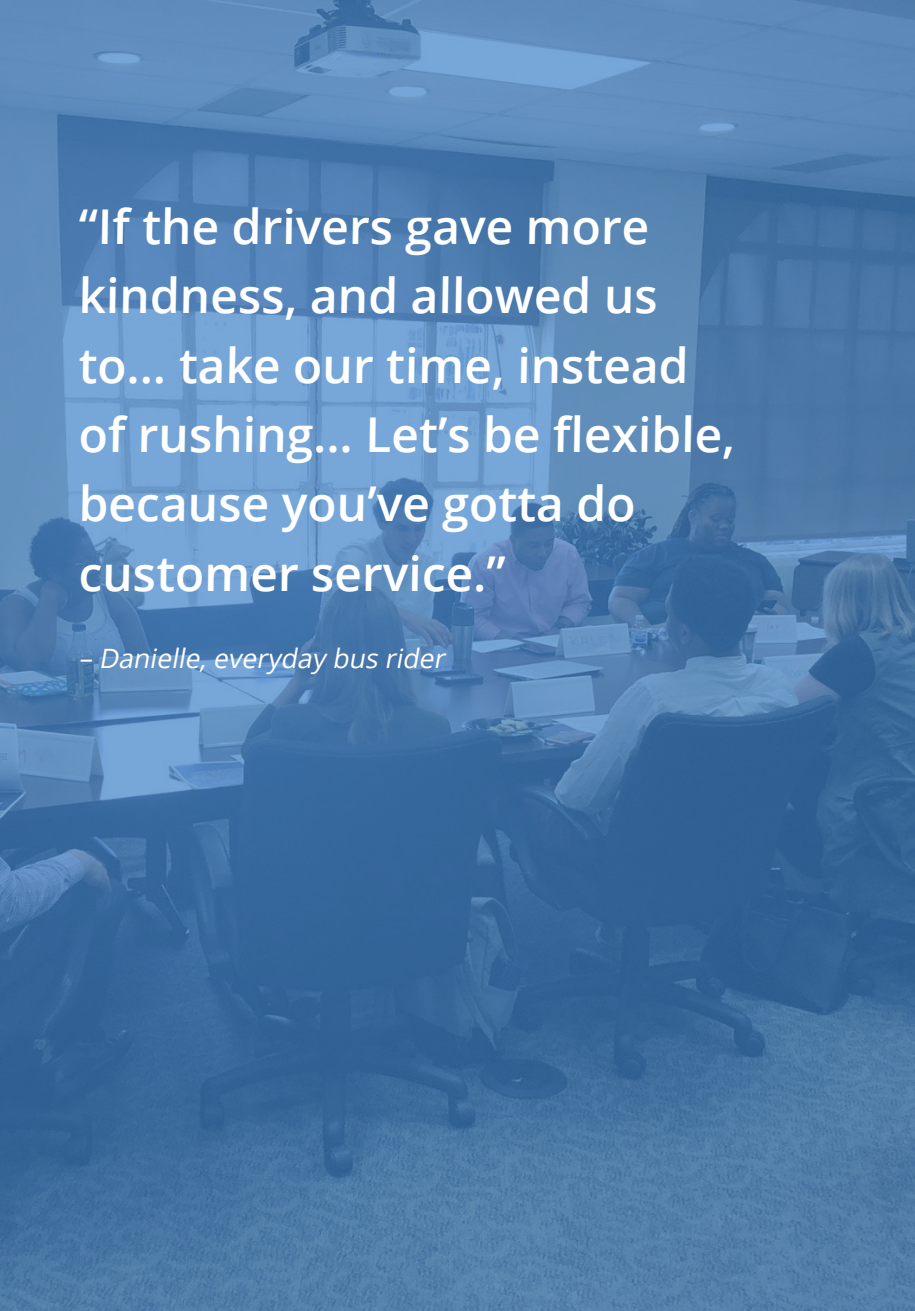


NEXT STEPS FOR THE WINNING POLICY: Councilmember P.G. Sittenfeld introduced a motion for the city to no longer consider prior marijuana misdemeanor convictions in its hiring process, and the legislation has been referred to committee by the Mayor. We are eager for Councilmember Smitherman to move it through committee so the full Council can vote!

WHY WE LOVE POLICY PITCH NIGHT: Cincinnati Enquirer columnist Byron McCauley said it well: "Empowering citizens to feel heard by their elected officials isn't always easy. Cohear is making strides to demystify that process."

Civic participation and policy making don't have to be knock-down, bloody knuckles fights every time. The more toxic policymaking is, the more public trust in our government erodes. For many issues, we can come together, debate the merits, eat some pizza, watch our kids play together, and then decide which policies to prioritize. If our public discourse could be more like Policy Pitch Night, and less like reality TV, things would be moving in the right direction!





"If the drivers gave more kindness, and allowed us to... take our time, instead of rushing... Let's be flexible, because you've gotta do customer service."

– Danielle, everyday bus rider

Building a Better Bus System For Riders

Who knows the bus system best? Bus riders, of course. Cincinnati Metro, with CEO Darryl Haley at the helm, is committed to doing everything possible to improve our bus system and provide the best transportation service to every current and potential rider. To help them do just that, Cohear organized and facilitated a series of focus group-style conversations between Mr. Haley and groups of "everyday experts" — both existing and potential riders — to help develop a pipeline of ideas for improvement. That process ultimately led to the development of an ongoing "Bus Rider Advisory Board" that met with Darryl and other Metro Leadership on a regular basis to inform current and potential ways to make the bus system better for all. Metro has already made many changes based on the insights they received, including:

- Changing the Fare Deal program to be more accessible for seniors and riders.
- Updating bus operator training curriculums to include more de-escalation and cultural competency training.
- Encouraging rider courtesy through a new series of fun and quirky signs.



Actionable Insights for Duke Energy

As Greater Cincinnati's largest energy supplier, Duke Energy has a fundamental impact on the day-to-day lives of adults, children and families throughout the area. Recognizing this, Duke's new President for Ohio and Kentucky, Amy Spiller, knows how important it is to provide quality customer service. Amy and her leadership team worked with us to learn first-hand from their customers ways in which they might be able to improve the services they provide. We worked to organize a series of focus group-style conversations with customers from the neighborhoods of Madisonville, Columbia Township, Pleasant Ridge, Reading, Norwood, Woodlawn, Lincoln Heights, Evanston, and Glendale as well as others, to gain insights into how Duke might be able to improve customer experiences and general services overall. The group provided powerful ideas that led to the creation of the

"Customer Insights Committee" (CIC), the first customer-only advisory group Duke has ever had in this region. This group works to provide valuable feedback to Duke Energy President Amy Spiller and her leadership team. The group has tackled topics such as:

- Improve communication tactics during power outages and regular service support.
- Developing a more transparent and neighborhood-friendly vegetation management (tree-trimming) plan.
- Creating more flexible payment options for low-income and immigrant families.

How Everyday Experts Advisory Boards Are Changing the Way Charitable Giving Works

As the Women's Fund of the Greater Cincinnati Foundation began planning their upcoming year of advocacy and grant making, they knew they wanted to implement more innovative strategies to better serve the community. One of those strategies involved taking a step back and working with us to listen to and implement the ideas of the women impacted most by the issues that they are committed to addressing.

We started by bringing together Women's Fund leadership for three conversations with 30 everyday experts, many of whom were women who had dealt with the challenges of transitioning away from public benefits, finding and maintaining quality employment, and joining public boards. Our big takeaway: In order to thrive, women need access to financial and social capital. Programmatic help may be necessary to help people transition out of poverty, but there's just no substitute for the framework of stability that a strong community provides.



The Women's Fund took the feedback and ideas offered to them and used them to inform the grant application process for organizations. But they didn't stop there. They brought together an Everyday Expert Advisory Board, built from the previous conversation participants, to evaluate the applications and select the grant recipients.

The Women's Fund not only revamped their process, but transferred power to the everyday experts. They trusted the expertise of lived experience and recognized that they could improve their grant making process and make better decisions by listening to the women most impacted by their work. That's real leadership, and we are excited about the ways that it could be a path for other charitable organizations to follow!



A look forward

CHANGING CHARITY: TAPPING INTO THE WISDOM OF LIVED EXPERIENCE TO HELP “MOVE THE NEEDLE”

Tens of millions of dollars are donated every year in Cincinnati to try and move the needle on poverty alleviation, food insecurity, lack of affordable housing, access to childcare, and many other issues. The model for how to allocate those funds has seen some innovation in recent years, but there are still tremendous opportunities to improve the role that the ultimate targets of the funds e.g. families in poverty, play in that process. Cohear is bringing everyday experts and major decision makers in this space to develop strategies aimed at “moving the needle” more effectively.

SETTING THE STRATEGY FOR THE CINCINNATI REGIONAL COALITION AGAINST HATE

After the Charlottesville rally, and a number of racist, xenophobic, and anti-semitic incidents in Cincinnati in 2017, a broad coalition of religious, ethnic, and race-based organizations came together to say: This is not who we are, and we must stand together to oppose hate. Over two years later, the need for collective action and intentional resilience remains, and we are excited to be partnering with local firm 17a to help the coalition develop a strategy for how to fight back against the forces of hate in our region.

Our work is made possible
thanks to our incredible
partners and bridgebuilders.

We appreciate their support and recognize their
commitment to our community. Together, we changing
the culture of decision making in Greater Cincinnati
and beyond.

CINCINNATI FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

CINCINNATI PUBLIC SCHOOLS

CINCINNATI USA REGIONAL CHAMBER

CINCINNATI STATE

DUKE ENERGY

GREATER CINCINNATI FOUNDATION

THE KROGER CO. ZERO HUNGER | ZERO
WASTE FOUNDATION

LISC

MERCY HEALTH

SOUTHWEST OHIO REGIONAL TRANSIT
AUTHORITY

UNITED WAY OF GREATER CINCINNATI

WOMEN'S FUND OF THE GREATER
CINCINNATI FOUNDATION



ANNUAL REPORT 2019

Transforming how
decisions are made
in our city, together



TRUSTING LIVED EXPERIENCE

Living an issue every day makes
someone an Everyday Expert.

RELATIONSHIP-DRIVEN GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING

We utilize community organizing
strategies to build a network of
“Bridgebuilders.” Deep relationships drive
more effective, idea-driven engagement.



PEOPLE-CENTERED DECISION MAKING

Leaders will make better decisions
when they incorporate the wisdom
of lived experience.