



# 180 DAYS OF LISTENING LEARNING

THE INDIANAPOLIS FOUNDATION

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JANUARY 2024

# A Message from the President

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**As fellow residents of the Indianapolis and Marion County community, we share a deep love for this place we call home and the diversity of people who make this such a special place to live, work, and play.**

As I complete my first six months as President of The Indianapolis Foundation, my paramount obligations remain consistent—to keep the needs of our community top-of-mind, to understand what matters to you, honor the trust you place in The Indianapolis Foundation, and respect the contributions of those who came before me – and whose generosity continues to benefit our community.

**My commitment to our community may be best explained through the three P’s:**

## **PURPOSE.**

I commit to remain focused on our shared mission to create communities where all individuals have equitable opportunities to reach their full potential—no matter their place, race, economic circumstance, or identity.

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## **PEOPLE.**

I commit to keeping people—those throughout our community and those within our organization— at the center of everything we do.

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## **PROGRESS.**

I commit to increasing our collective momentum toward meaningful progress and powerful impact at The Indianapolis Foundation, and I pledge to approach our work with a sense of urgency.

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In this report, I share with you how I have approached my first six months in the position, what I have learned, and what I will focus on immediately and in the coming months.

**LISTEN.  
LEARN.  
LEAD.**

From the start of my tenure, I promised to engage in active, reflective, and empathic listening through one-on-one discussions, focus groups, and community meetings. I did this to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for the wonderful history of The Indianapolis Foundation and the dreams, desires, and aspirations of our community. Insights from these conversations will help set our direction and chart our course for meaningful action and impact.

This year, I will hold regular Community Leaders Roundtables around the City to remain in dialogue and facilitate collaboration with others who share our vision of a stronger and more vibrant Indianapolis and Marion County.

**THEMES**

In this Report, I communicate and reflect on conversations with constituents and share the common themes I heard from all stakeholders, including grantees, donors, employees, community and civic leaders, business leaders, youth and young adults, and many others.

This input has informed my leadership commitments, which include a continued and expanded focus on racial equity and economic opportunity.

**LOOKING  
FORWARD**

I conclude with five commitments detailing how The Indianapolis Foundation will work to improve the quality of life and ensure that economic prosperity is broadly shared by all who call Indianapolis and Marion County home.

In early 2024, we will begin developing a strategic plan and timeline in collaboration with our community. I plan to announce key financial co-investments to support our strategic goals soon.

I am privileged to work with you and our team to help write the next chapter of this iconic institution, founded one hundred and seven years ago by a group of visionary Indianapolis leaders to serve the most pressing needs of their fellow residents. They planted this sturdy tree whose shade we enjoy today. I welcome your partnership, feedback, and engagement in our work. Please feel free to contact me with questions or ideas at [TIFPresident@cicf.org](mailto:TIFPresident@cicf.org).



**With Indy Love,**

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lorenzo L. Esters".

**Dr. Lorenzo L. Esters, President  
The Indianapolis Foundation**

# Listen. Learn. Lead.

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**In my earliest meetings with the Board of Directors and Staff, I outlined three priorities for my first 180 days on the job.**

## **LISTEN.**

**Met over 500 individuals through one-on-one meetings, listen & learn sessions and focus groups including:**

- Community, civic, education, and business leaders
- Grantees, partners, and donors of all races and backgrounds including immigrants and communities of color
- The Indianapolis Foundation staff and Board members
- Leadership of Central Indiana Community Foundation (CICF), Women's Fund of Central Indiana, and Hamilton County Community Foundation
- Many other key stakeholders

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## **LEARN.**

- Hosted a community Meet & Greet with over 400 registrants.
- Conducted community visits and tours with K-12 partners, government, civic, business, industry and healthcare leaders.
- Participated in more than twenty community events and professional development conferences to better understand the hopes, dreams, and aspirations for philanthropy in Indianapolis and Marion County.
- Planned and attended a retreat with Board members and staff to begin to identify organizational strengths, weaknesses, risks and opportunities.
- Assessed staff structure and grant processes.
- Worked with The Indianapolis Foundation and The Central Indiana Community Foundation staffs to understand budget and organizational structures.

## **LEAD.**

- Outlined the timeline and process for the development of the strategic plan and guiding team comprising Board members, community ambassadors, civic and community leaders, youth, and others.
- Implemented a new operational structure to improve efficiencies in operations and grantmaking and to elevate impact.  
*This will go into effect on February 1, 2024.*
  - Established monthly Indianapolis Foundation All-staff meetings.
  - Initiated a process to integrate communications, marketing and evaluation with grantmaking and community leadership.
- Established 2024 organizational goals and operational budget aligned with the new organizational structure.
- Prepared for the 2024 launch of a new initiative focused on racial equity and economic opportunity and a community-focused marketing campaign to showcase our impact and connection.
- Developed a first-ever shared services agreement between The Indianapolis Foundation and The Central Indiana Community Foundation.

# 180-Day Data Narrative

Several facts hit home throughout the listening and learning tour, underscoring your concerns about equity and opportunity. This sampling of data points, and many more – indicating Marion County residents continue to experience significant disparities in health, quality of life, and economic opportunity – will be central considerations during our strategic planning to identify effective means to close these gaps and improve our overall quality of life and well-being.

Top three things... there's a gulf between mental health, housing, and education... How do you enact change on these huge broad issues?

– Focus Group Participant



According to County Health Rankings, Marion County ranks 86<sup>th</sup> of 92 Indiana counties on health outcomes.



Black residents earn only 71% of the average personal income in Marion County and own only 4% of businesses despite being 29% of the local population.



To meet the expected population growth in the Indianapolis metropolitan area over the next five years and close the housing deficit gap, between 66,000 and 115,000 affordable units will need to be built.



According to the Community Mental Health Needs Assessment Report for Marion County, researchers estimated that in Marion County in 2022:

- Over 58,000 adults had an alcohol and/or illicit drug use disorder.
- Over 163,000 adults had some type of mental illness.



Between 2007 (a baseline year before the 2008 financial crisis) and 2021 (the latest year metropolitan area data is available), per capita real GDP grew 14% in the U.S., 7% in Indiana, and 1% in the Indianapolis metropolitan area.

Peer metropolitan area growth was:

24% in Nashville

17% in Denver

14% in Columbus

8% in Charlotte

## Sources

- Powell, Phil and Zipper, Riley. 2023 (September). "Making the Indianapolis workforce more competitive"
- County Health Rankings & Roadmaps is a program of the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute. [www.countyhealthrankings.org/explore-health-rankings/indiana?year=2023&tab=1&measure=Health+Outcomes](http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/explore-health-rankings/indiana?year=2023&tab=1&measure=Health+Outcomes)
- Steven L. Byers, Ph.D. 2023 (January). "Indianapolis Metropolitan Area Housing Affordability Report: The Data on Boone, Hamilton, Hancock, Hendricks, Johnson, Madison, Marion, Morgan, Putnam, and Shelby Counties" <https://commonsenseinstitute.org/indianapolis-metropolitan-area-housing-affordability/#:~:text=The%20housing%20deficit%20in%202022,will%20need%20to%20be%20built.>

- Indiana Business Review 98(3).
- U.S. Census Bureau. 2021. "Mean Income in the Past 12 Months (In 2019 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars)", American Community Survey, TableID: S1902.
- Next Street and Common Future. 2020. Indianapolis Small Business Ecosystem Assessment.
- Shearer, Chad, Shah, Isha, and Muro, Mark. 2018 (December). Advancing Opportunity in Central Indiana. Metropolitan Policy Program at Brookings.

# Themes

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Through this process of listening and learning and prioritizing how we can focus our work going forward, five fundamental themes emerged.

- 1** | Leverage legacy and accelerate mission-driven impact
- 2** | Amplify community voices especially youth and young adults
- 3** | Lead with vision and invest in strategically aligned partnerships
- 4** | Build the distinctive brand and distinguish our unique contributions
- 5** | Drive and sustain racial equity and economic opportunity

# Theme 1

## LEVERAGE LEGACY & ACCELERATE MISSION-DRIVEN IMPACT

**FOUNDED  
IN 1916**

**The Indianapolis Foundation is one of the first community foundations in the United States and one of the oldest community foundations in the world.**

Since its founding, The Indianapolis Foundation has provided civic leadership supported by grantmaking made possible through the generosity of countless Indianapolis donors.

Most individuals with whom I've met appreciate the storied history of success of The Indianapolis Foundation, its track record of community benefit, and forward-looking vision for a better future for all.

You confirmed that our mission still matters and remains timely, relevant, and urgent, and strongly suggested that The Indianapolis Foundation work without hesitation or reservation to extend grantee support and community reach in all facets of its work to accelerate collective impact.

You affirmed how the Foundation continues to adapt to the changing nature of the City, while holding steadfast to its founding principles of community leadership and service. This includes seeking and seizing opportunities to improve the quality of life and economic prosperity throughout Marion County by tackling challenging issues and embracing innovative solutions in collaboration with community partners and donors. For example, in 2018, the Foundation refined its mission to mobilize people, ideas, and investments to make Indianapolis a community where all individuals have equitable opportunities to reach their full potential—no matter their place, race, or identity. At that time, the Foundation asserted its belief that dismantling systemic racism is key to achieving this mission and we remain committed to this work. Count on us to not only stay the course but continue to improve for the benefit of those we serve!



**As a mission-driven, solution-finding organization with a local, hands-on, community approach, your input will inspire our thinking and strategic priorities for the pathway ahead – pursuing creative and systemic approaches to address key priorities that were elevated over the past six months.**

**Below is a sample of your sentiments highlighting this theme:**



**Indianapolis Foundation walks the walk and talks the talk.**



**We have to stay the course because it's going to take a generation or more to really move the needle on the systemic issues in this city.**



**You've mapped out what the problems are. *Now let's put this energy into the solutions.***

# WHAT WE WILL DO

## COMMITMENT #1

Launch the 2024-2026 strategic planning process for the Foundation to achieve impact and accelerate progress on key areas of focus.

# Theme 2 | AMPLIFY COMMUNITY VOICES ESPECIALLY YOUTH & YOUNG ADULTS

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**The communities and residents that The Indianapolis Foundation serves are at the forefront of what we do.** Our greatest contribution and legacy are to strengthen the bonds we have with each other as a people inextricably linked with a shared future. The essence of these bonds is love and service. To love and serve our communities, we actively and passionately listen to their critical needs, learn about solutions that will make a difference, and embrace these recommendations to achieve our most ambitious and meaningful impact. That is our “how.”

During my listening tour, I heard your clarion call for more direct and ongoing connection, engagement, and interaction between the Foundation and those in the community doing the work. Additionally, you shared that, at times, you have felt that your voices have not been heard or taken seriously. It was strongly suggested that this “Listen and Learn” tour be continued on a regular basis—and that is something that I promise to do. Honoring your request for ongoing and meaningful engagement will lead to building greater trust, mutual respect, and progress through collaboration.

You challenged us to listen to all community voices and strongly recommended that we prioritize and center youth and young adults. We agree that young people are our pathway forward and hear your concerns that the critical challenges that they face (i.e., educational access and success, lack of leadership opportunities and cultural exposure, housing and food insecurities, perplexing family dynamics, bullying, violence, and mental health, etc.) must be understood deeply and fully. For example, in 2021 27.7% of Indiana youth seriously considered suicide while 15.2% were cyberbullied and 14.8% of them were bullied on school property. A total of 14.8% of youth saw someone get physically attacked, beaten, stabbed, or shot in their neighborhood.

Moving forward, we will prioritize the voices of youth and young adults. Dr. Mary McCleod Bethune once stated, *“The world around us really belongs to youth, for youth will take over its future management. Our children must never lose their zeal for building a better world. They must not be discouraged from aspiring toward greatness, for they are to be the leaders of tomorrow... and we must have the courage to change old ideas and practices so that we may direct their power toward good ends.”*

Source: High School YRBS, Indiana 2021 results: [nccd.cdc.gov/youthonline](https://nccd.cdc.gov/youthonline)

Below is a sample of your sentiments highlighting this theme:

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Our biggest problem right now is being heard.

“

When I say love, I know that's so broad. Something in our hearts. We don't love each other. We don't care. We've got to do something about that.

“

[It] bothers me that I don't see kids [being invited to share their thoughts]. We're assuming what they need instead of asking them what they need.

“

Not only do [young people] need more exposure to things, but somebody closer to them to talk to them and be able to tell them the opportunities that are available.

## WHAT WE WILL DO

### COMMITMENT #2

Create programming and efforts that prioritize youth and young adult challenges, opportunities, and pathways for leadership, including strategies that encourage them to offer perspectives and recommendations for solution-finding.

# Theme 3 | LEAD WITH VISION AND INVEST IN STRATEGICALLY ALIGNED PARTNERSHIPS

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**You shared your eager hope for transformational change through mission-driven initiatives that address and rectify persistent racial and economic inequities. You have a burning desire to be partners-in-progress to address our most pressing challenges as a community.**

You also noted that there are many duplicative, even competing, efforts across the City that are not aligned to achieve the impact you seek. You would like the Foundation to build more partnerships with local and state government, secondary and post-secondary education, leaders from business, civic, and religious organizations, and other grantmakers to achieve systemic transformation. This will require an intentional focus on expanding and broadening our network of partners who are willing to work, create opportunities and co-invest on aligned goals.

To foster more impactful outcomes, we must engage all types of partners—from local community grassroots advocates, long-standing leaders, and cultural community griots to new nonprofits, intriguing start-ups, and nationally recognized subject matter experts. Through such expansive engagement and bold, visionary leadership, we will “press forward and fear nothing” as we focus on delivering progress with impact.

The Indianapolis Foundation will continue to serve as a major civic anchor and redouble our efforts to solidify current relationships while building the meaningful and “bonafide” new strategic partnerships required to achieve greater equity and opportunities for all.

**Below is a sample of your sentiments highlighting this theme:**



How do we [develop the appropriate] metrics around outcomes?

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We need [a] trusted, neutral arbiter that brings those voices together and identifies the common goals that they share.

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Unless we bring people together including the institutions, the government, we're not going to raise enough money to fix [the issues] in Indianapolis.

## WHAT WE WILL DO

### COMMITMENT #3

Develop deep and meaningful partnerships and co-investment opportunities to produce systemic and impactful change.

# Theme 4 | BUILD THE DISTINCTIVE BRAND AND DISTINGUISH OUR UNIQUE CONTRIBUTIONS

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**In 1997, The Central Indiana Community Foundation and The Indianapolis Foundation were conjoined and led by a single leader. In 2022, the Boards of both Foundations determined that community interests could be better served by enabling The Indianapolis Foundation to focus more intentionally on the needs of the residents of Indianapolis and Marion County, prioritizing grantmaking, community leadership, and fundraising for The Indianapolis Foundation. This decision to uncouple The Indianapolis Foundation from The Central Indiana Community Foundation is what led to my appointment in June 2023.**

You shared that there is confusion about the two organizations and the roles they play in helping improve the quality of life for all in our community.

You also recommended that we review our grantmaking process, as it can be difficult to understand, including timeline and procedures that lead to successful funding.

You shared that one of the things that makes us unique as a community foundation is our approach to grantmaking. You value that we understand that we do not have all the answers and instead believe and respect that the community has the ideas and solutions to our issues and problems.

You also encouraged us to better leverage our inspiring story to motivate others to contribute to the betterment of our shared future.

Public relations, marketing, and media (local, regional, statewide, and nationally) all matter because that is how we inform the community about the resources/grants we make available. It is also how we build greater awareness of and confidence in the important work we support.

Establishing the clear identity of The Indianapolis Foundation moving forward is one of my top priorities to address in 2024.

Below is a sample of your sentiments highlighting this theme:



I'm not sure of the overall structure [of CICF and The Indianapolis Foundation].



[There is a need for] quick and clear differentiation between CICF and The Indianapolis Foundation.



Make sure your website and materials are in other languages for those who do not speak or read English.



Really talk to community members to find out what's there and what the assets are in those communities and how those can be leveraged and grown by The Indianapolis Foundation.

## WHAT WE WILL DO

### COMMITMENT #4

Build the Foundation's identity as one that makes a powerful and meaningful contribution while also prioritizing operational excellence

# Theme 5 | DRIVE AND SUSTAIN RACIAL EQUITY AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

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**Since its founding, The Foundation has sought to make the people and places of Indianapolis and Marion County better through:**

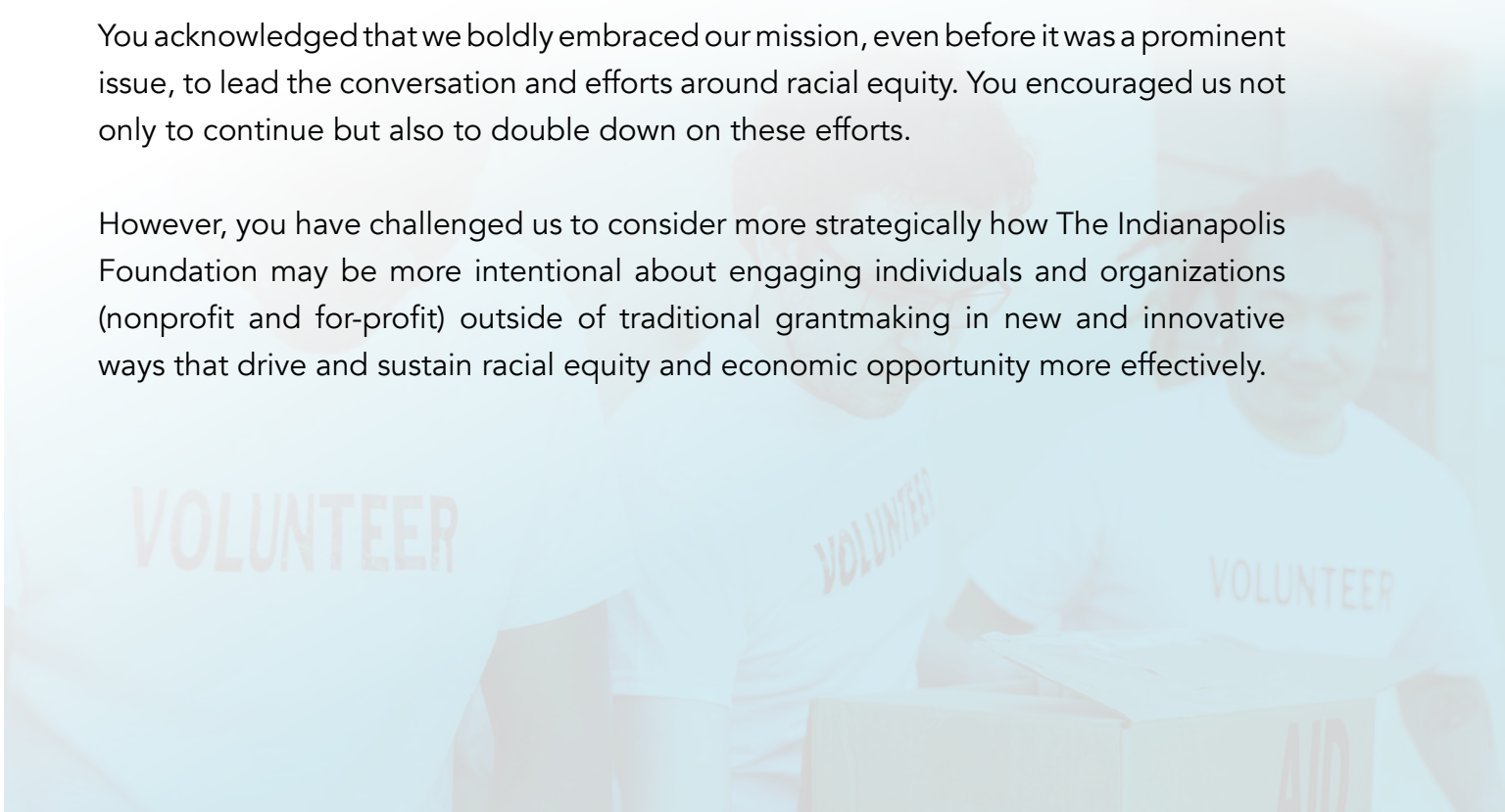
- **Grantmaking to not-for-profits**
- **Charitable advising to individuals, families and, businesses**
- **Leading community initiatives to activate social change**

From our first grant in 1918 to ensure home healthcare nurses were available to visit “the infirmed” to now partnering with the City of Indianapolis to distribute \$45 million in support of neighborhood-based solutions to violence and crime, The Indianapolis Foundation has been and continues to be one of our community’s most prolific grantmakers.

We take on projects and initiatives that may not be addressed or able to be scaled by others. In addition, we help guide and support over 500 individuals, families, and businesses who have donor-advised, scholarship, and other funds, as well as family foundations.

You acknowledged that we boldly embraced our mission, even before it was a prominent issue, to lead the conversation and efforts around racial equity. You encouraged us not only to continue but also to double down on these efforts.

However, you have challenged us to consider more strategically how The Indianapolis Foundation may be more intentional about engaging individuals and organizations (nonprofit and for-profit) outside of traditional grantmaking in new and innovative ways that drive and sustain racial equity and economic opportunity more effectively.





Below is a sample of your sentiments highlighting this theme:



...the racial equity institute has been helpful for nonprofits coming back after the pandemic and trying to find their space in equity...



[What I] would hate to see get lost in the future [is The Indianapolis Foundation's] intentional approach to the community and to seeing where work is being done on the ground and continuing to find those creative ways for small organizations to get up and running and get access to funding to keep doing the work they do.

# WHAT WE WILL DO

## COMMITMENT #5

Advance racial equity and economic opportunity for all through a new center that will focus on systemic transformation using an ecosystems approach.

# Looking Ahead

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## Join us in doing the work.

One of my favorite quotes is from the poet Kahil Gibran –  
“Work is love made visible.”

It is through our work together that we demonstrate our love for community. Moving forward, The Indianapolis Foundation will build and scale an ecosystem that will support racial equity and economic opportunity for all. To do this, we need your help. Here are five ways you can join us in this vital work:

1

### **Participate in our strategic planning process.**

We begin the development of a new strategic plan starting in January 2024, with plans to finalize and launch it by the end of the second quarter of 2024. We will have various committees to lead this work, and we will conduct surveys and focus groups to gain your thoughts.

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2

### **Celebrate stories of love and hope.**

Starting in the first quarter of 2024, we will launch a marketing and social media campaign to elevate visibility and the impact of The Indianapolis Foundation. Watch for these inspiring stories from community leaders, donors, and grantees demonstrating what it means to love in partnership with the Foundation.

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3

### **Participate in donor and grantee surveys**

In the coming weeks, we will disseminate surveys to current and former donors and grantees about their experiences with The Indianapolis Foundation. Please respond to the surveys as they will continue to inform grantee and donors process improvements for the Foundation.

# 4

## **Invest in our work**

Consider investing in The Indianapolis Foundation's unrestricted endowment – Endowment for Indianapolis – which ensures that our staff will have the resources to make grant investments that address the current needs of our communities and provide leadership to make Indianapolis and Marion County a better, more beautiful, more equitable community. If you are interested in learning more about how to invest, you may email me at [TIFPresident@cicf.org](mailto:TIFPresident@cicf.org).

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# 5

## **Continue to communicate with me**

Throughout this year, I will continue to participate in key events and will host targeted meetings throughout each community in Marion County. I hope to see you there, get to know you better, and explore potential partnerships and collaborations. I encourage you to continue to provide feedback and ideas to us because your voice matters.

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**Finally, I would like to thank the approximately 500 individuals who spoke with me one-on-one or joined one of our listening & learning sessions over the past six months.**

There are many of you with whom I have not yet met, but rest assured, the listening tour doesn't end here. I look forward to meeting and speaking with more of you in the future.

While much work is ahead of us, I am enlivened, encouraged, and inspired by your deep commitment to and support of our mission. I stand with you – shoulder to shoulder – in this critical work, moving forward with unshakable commitment and responsibility and always with love and a belief in the hopefulness of our shared future together.



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THE INDIANAPOLIS FOUNDATION

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