

CHALLENGE *DETROIT*

2024-2025 ANNUAL REPORT



Developing diverse, innovative,
community-minded leaders
through intellectual giving since 2012.

www.challengedetroit.org



CONNECTION • COMMUNITY • IMPACT

From the first day this cohort convened, we knew it would be a special year. The bonds – instantaneous. The friendships – meaningful. The impact – great.

When the year kicked off on the top floor of Huntington Tower in the heart of downtown Detroit, we saw connections between fellows begin to flourish immediately. While fellows joined us from Detroit, the metro area, across the state and even other parts of the country with different backgrounds, skills and experiences, they all came together with a like-minded mission to contribute in Detroit. Over the course of the program year, those powerful relationships made for incredible teams that impacted the nonprofits we served and, ultimately the overall community, in a big way.

During the 2024-2025 program year, fellows supported four nonprofits with projects focused on black entrepreneurship support with Black Leaders Detroit, transit and community with the Detroit People Mover, youth mentorship with Center for Success Network and community engagement with Give Merit. For about a month and a half per project, fellows dove deep into understanding the mission areas of each nonprofit working diligently with leadership and stakeholders to create solutions to pressing issues and opportunities facing these organizations.

When fellows weren't immersed in the projects or programmed leadership development, they were learning and contributing at their host companies. The host companies are leaders in their industries and believe in the importance of retaining and attracting innovative, multi-disciplinary entrepreneurial top talent. They also are community-minded supporting fellows as they embarked on the challenge projects over the course of the program year.

Whether at work or at challenge, this year's class of fellows was called to connection, community and impact. Read on to learn more about who they are and how they did it.





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“Challenge Detroit is an incredible platform that pushes you to grow, learn, and give with intention—not just to the city, but also to yourself and every space you occupy. If you remain open to the process, it becomes an opportunity to live and give boldly in ways that are unimaginable.”

TATIANA HULL, 2024-2025 FELLOW



HOW WE MAKE AN IMPACT

WHAT WE DO

- Attract and retain innovative talent by giving selected individuals a chance to learn and make an impact alongside longtime Detroiters.
- Portray Detroit and the surrounding region as a place people can live, work, play, give, and lead.
- Make incremental impact in the community throughout the year by addressing the issues and opportunities facing the city while building awareness of the momentum in Detroit to support the economy, culture and innovation as we develop the next generation of leaders, thinkers and doers through learning and leading by doing.

HOW WE DO IT

- Launch a local and national recruitment effort and robust application process raising awareness of Challenge Detroit and the impactful opportunities the city offers.
- Act as a platform to share balanced and positive messages about Detroit by showcasing the Fellows, companies and nonprofit partners that bring the program to life.
- Support job placement and stimulate the economy by partnering with top companies to serve as hosts to Challenge Detroit's Fellows.
- Further work with these companies to build partnerships that ultimately support the development of the local workforce while contributing positively to community impact efforts.
- Spearhead a robust leadership program centered around innovation and design thinking to support ongoing skill development that helps Fellows both in their jobs and also in their work with Challenge Detroit's nonprofit partners.
- Design multi-week team challenge projects to leverage the creativity, resources and intellectual capital of Fellows to positively impact operations, fundraising, programming, marketing and other critical functions of the nonprofits we serve.

THE 2024-2025 / YEAR 13 FELLOWS

Challenge Detroit attracts talent from Detroit and across the United States with a diversity of skills, experiences, and backgrounds. Together, they share a passion for the community and making an impact. Learn more about the cohort overall and the 26 Fellows here:

HOMETOWNS

23%
DETROIT

14%
DETROIT &
ANOTHER CITY

45%
IN MICHIGAN

14%
OUT-OF-STATE

COHORT STATS

AREAS OF EXPERIENCE & EXPERTISE

Accounting, Advertising, Architecture, Art & Design, Business, Communications, Computer Science, Criminal Justice, Data Analytics, Entrepreneurship, Finance, Gender & Women's Studies, History, Journalism, Leadership, Marketing, Nonprofit Management, Political Science, Public Management, Public Policy, Sociology, Urban Studies, Sustainability, Youth and Human Service

79% Identify as Racially /
Ethnically Diverse

~80%

of Fellows stayed
in Detroit
following their
program year

THE 2024-2025 / YEAR 13 FELLOWS



**ANA
ALVAREZ**



**AYLA
HOERMANN**



BRIANNA JACKSON



**CLAUDIA
FLORES BERUMEN**



**CHANALE
GREER**



**D'ANGELO
ROBINSON**



**DAPHNE
DONIGAN**



**DANA
ANDERSON**



**EMAN
AZRAK**



**JACOB
DIROFF**



**JESSICA
AHO**



**KADEN
YATES**



**KALEEYSE
MARTINEZ**



**LYNNE
ABELGAS**



**MANDOLYN
HANSON**



**MAYA
MORSE**



**NIA
GOINS**



**NICK
WINGFIELD**



**REEM
RIZK**



**REU'EL
RICHARDSON**



**TATIANA
HULL**



**ZAHRA
BASHA**





IN THEIR OWN WORDS / FELLOW REFLECTIONS



“Challenge Detroit is a one-of-a-kind experience that has propelled me into more opportunities and connections than I could've ever imagined.”

JESSICA AHO
FELLOW



“Personally and professionally, I’m walking away more trusting, equipped, and knowledgeable. This experience stretched me in the best ways — from trusting the process to aligning me with people who share the same love I have for the city. And I got to use that love to uplift, build, and create.”

BRIANNA JACKSON
FELLOW



“This program is an incredible and unique opportunity to grow personally and professionally. You get to contribute your time and effort into meaningful projects with wonderful organizations in Detroit while meeting incredible people and growing your network.”

REEM RIZIK
FELLOW





IN THEIR OWN WORDS / FELLOW REFLECTIONS



"You build meaningful relationships with other fellows and also have the opportunity to discover the unique qualities of each partner organization. Your network grows significantly, and you gain a boost of confidence."

CHANALE GREER
FELLOW



"Challenge Detroit allows you to develop a deep relationship with the city, connect with other fellows, and elevate your career."

KADEN YATES
FELLOW



"Challenge Detroit is a truly special program—one that goes beyond professional development. It nurtures your aspirations, supports your whole self, and surrounds you with a community that believes in your potential even before you fully believe in it yourself. Trying to sum up the impact it's had on us feels impossible—it's bigger than words."

LYNNE ABELGAS
FELLOW



2024-2025 HOST COMPANIES

Host companies commit to hiring and hosting a Fellow for one year - working at their organization each week, Monday through Thursday, and providing them a chance to contribute in the community through intellectual service every Friday with Challenge Detroit. Participating companies are in a variety of industries, and range from small businesses to nonprofits to large corporations. These companies reflect the diverse Detroit business marketplace, and hold belief in the importance of retaining and attracting innovative, community-minded, entrepreneurial thinkers. Along with the Fellows they employ, they're committed to philanthropic initiatives and being part of moving Detroit forward.





2024-2025 CHALLENGE PROJECTS

Impact through Collaborative Projects

The heart of the Challenge Detroit program and a key driver of successfully attracting talent and impacting the community are the challenge projects. Every Friday, Fellows come together working in teams to generate innovative and meaningful solutions to pressing challenges and opportunities facing our nonprofit partners and the communities they serve.

2024-2025 Fellows participated in four cohort challenge projects in partnership with Detroit nonprofit organizations to help further their missions. These projects focused on issues including black entrepreneurship and support, community and transit, youth mentorship and community engagement. The Fellows contributed their unique perspectives, skill sets, and innovative ideas to produce implementable recommendations and tangible, ready-to-go work products for the nonprofits. Our Fellows successfully delivered high quality work products and continued to add value for our partners. The projects build nonprofit organizational capacity by offering intellectual service and collaboration with top talent at no cost to the nonprofit.

Strategic Project Design and Effective Collaboration

Challenge Detroit has developed a robust needs assessment used to design projects that will most effectively leverage Fellows' talent while achieving optimal impact for a nonprofit. As part of their orientation, Fellows learn about Detroit's neighborhoods, history and the policies that shaped the City to gain context. Fellows are then trained in the design thinking framework - a human-centered, creative, problem-solving approach, along with other skill training to prepare to work on projects together.

At the beginning of a project, Fellows participate in empathy based activities to understand the needs of the partner organization, individuals and community they are serving through each project. Fellows work in small teams and use the design thinking framework and project management skills to execute their work, and collaborate with the nonprofit partner throughout the project. Challenge Detroit has refined the process, tools, and frameworks used to deliver on innovative team challenge projects.

Ready-to-go Deliverables

At the end of each project, the nonprofit partner is provided with a comprehensive set of ready-to-go deliverables ranging from marketing and fundraising campaigns to organizational strategies and assessments and beyond. The nonprofits then leverage and integrate these deliverables both internally and externally to move their work forward.



**Black Entrepreneurship
Support**



Transit & Community



Youth Mentorship



**Community Engagement
(Merit Park)**



CHALLENGE #1: BLACK LEADERS DETROIT

BLACK ENTREPRENEUR SUPPORT



About Our Partner:

Black Leaders Detroit (BLD), a nonprofit that provides no-interest loans and grants for Black-led businesses and organizations located in Detroit.



Design Question:

How might we turn awareness into action for increasing equitable funding for Detroit Black entrepreneurs through the 2025 Ride for Equity?



Project Partner Team:

Dwan Dandridge
Sharea Ayers
Tiana London-Harris

Carrie Smith
Jarod Pratt
Larenz Studavent



About the Project:

Five teams of Fellows created recommendations and tangible work products to support the volunteer recruitment, volunteer engagement, in-person rider recruitment, "ride-your-own-way" recruitment and membership recruitment for the 2025 Ride for Equity, a five-week fundraising ride taking place late May to early July.

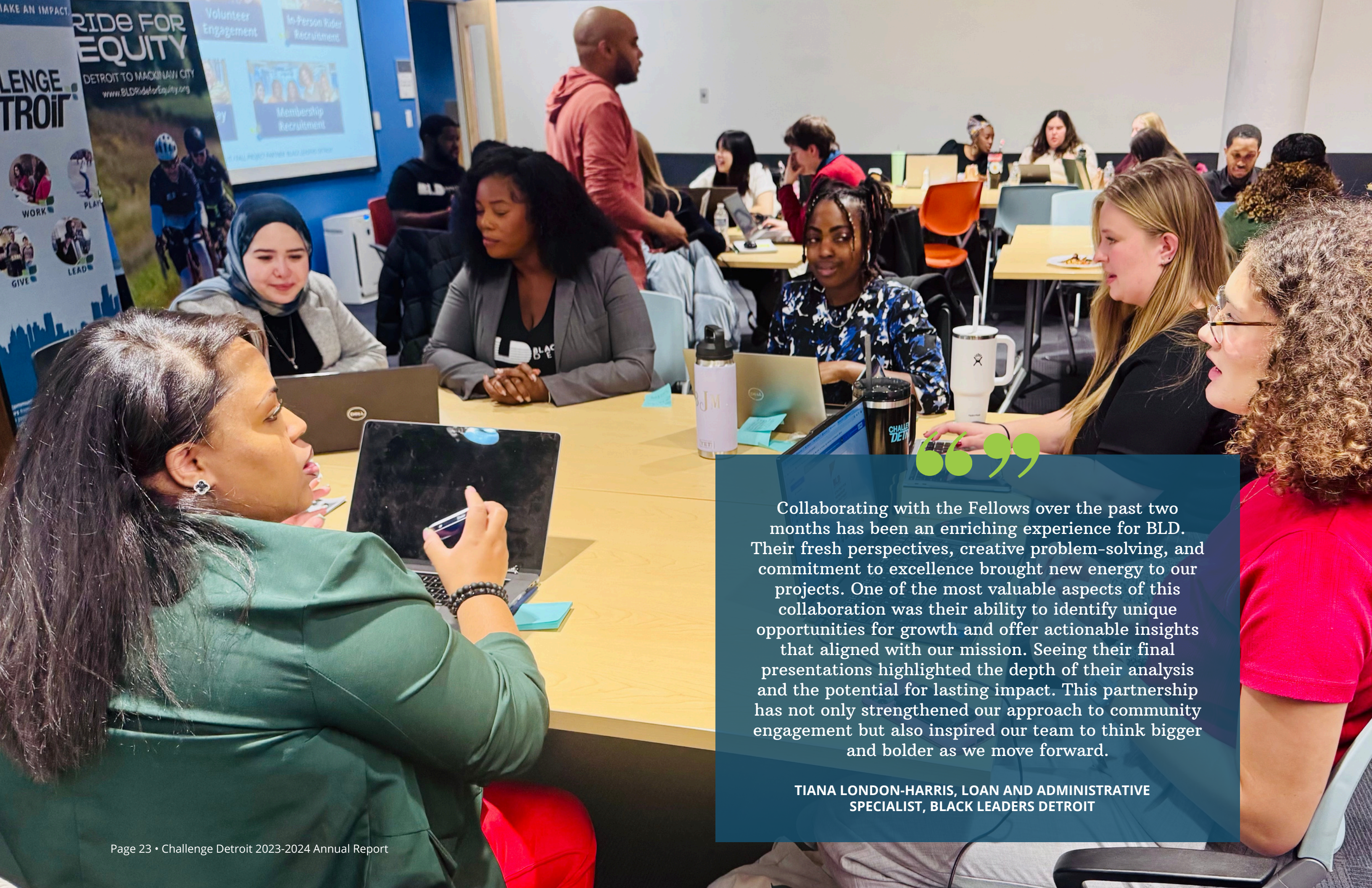


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Our collaboration with the Fellows over the past two months has been both inspiring and impactful for Black Leaders Detroit. Shelley's exceptional organization and consistency provided a solid foundation, ensuring the project stayed on track and exceeded expectations. The Fellows' desire, passion, and execution of their work were truly energizing, as they brought fresh perspectives and unwavering commitment to every aspect of the project. Beyond the work itself, bonding with the Fellows and witnessing the unique personalities within each group fostered meaningful connections and a sense of shared purpose. This experience not only advanced our mission but also enriched our team with lasting relationships and invaluable insights.

SHAREA AYERS, CHIEF OPERATIONS OFFICER,
BLACK LEADERS DETROIT





“ ”

Collaborating with the Fellows over the past two months has been an enriching experience for BLD. Their fresh perspectives, creative problem-solving, and commitment to excellence brought new energy to our projects. One of the most valuable aspects of this collaboration was their ability to identify unique opportunities for growth and offer actionable insights that aligned with our mission. Seeing their final presentations highlighted the depth of their analysis and the potential for lasting impact. This partnership has not only strengthened our approach to community engagement but also inspired our team to think bigger and bolder as we move forward.

TIANA LONDON-HARRIS, LOAN AND ADMINISTRATIVE SPECIALIST, BLACK LEADERS DETROIT





CHALLENGE #2: DETROIT PEOPLE MOVER

TRANSIT & COMMUNITY



About Our Partner:

The Detroit People Mover (DPM) is an enhanced public transit service which provides transportation that affects not only the image of the city, but also plays a role in the attraction of conventions and tourism, businesses and entertainment to downtown Detroit.



Design Question:

How might we enable Detroit neighborhood residents to be more informed about and connected to the People Mover?



Project Partner Team:

Robert Cramer	Tony Vinson
Madonna VanFossen	Chrisaun Stanton
Ericka Alexander	Tiauna West



About the Project:

Teams of Fellows created recommendations and tangible work products to build awareness about the Detroit People Mover and increase new ridership by Detroit residents, including neighborhood seniors and families as well as Detroit school partnerships. Fellows worked alongside Detroit People Mover staff and engaged with stakeholders from across Detroit neighborhoods.



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"The People Mover is one of Detroit's biggest assets – it has people, history, art, ease of access, elevated views of downtown. The Challenge Detroit Fellows helped us to showcase all of this and more!"

MADONNA VAN FOSSEN, MANAGER - MARKETING & ADVERTISING, DETROIT PEOPLE MOVER





“ ”

"As someone who has been in public transit for 25 years, working with the Fellows gave me, and us, fresh perspectives on this work. They did a fantastic job."

TONY VINSON, DIRECTOR OF SERVICE, OPERATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT, DETROIT PEOPLE MOVER





CHALLENGE #3: CENTER FOR SUCCESS NETWORK

YOUTH MENTORSHIP



About Our Partner:

The Center for Success Network (CFSN) is a nonprofit that unites literacy and community to empower students on their educational journey through mentoring by a diverse group of committed individuals and partnerships that provide hands-on learning experiences connected to students' lives and interests.



Design Question:

How might we expand engagement of local mentors to strengthen literacy support for Detroit youth?



Project Partner Team:

Andrea Meyer
Heidi Miller
Ingrid White
Maddie Toro

Shanelle Mitchell
Tina Perkins
Adrienne Jackson



About the Project:

Teams of Fellows created recommendations and tangible work products to expand mentorship through different aspects of the mentorship process from mentor recruitment to mentor onboarding and engagement as well as appreciation and retention efforts. Fellows worked alongside the Center for Success Network engaging with stakeholders, including mentors, board members, caregivers and youth.



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Working with the Challenge Detroit team offered new perspective, intentional strategy, and collective focus on a critical aspect of our programming. The passion, thoughtfulness, and dedication of the Fellows deeply moved us, and their work will leave a lasting and meaningful impact on our mentors, our program, and the students we serve.”

ANDREA MEYER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
CENTER FOR SUCCESS NETWORK





“ ”

Reflecting on our two-month collaboration, one of the most valuable aspects of working with the Fellows was their fresh perspective and thoughtful approach to problem-solving. They brought curiosity, professionalism, and a genuine desire to understand our mission at the Center for Success Network... Every Friday was inspiring to our team, and really energized. The first Friday our team was in tears because we felt so excited, inspired, seen, and energized by the passion and thoughtfulness of the Fellows. It was especially impactful to see how quickly the Fellows connected with our values and the communities we serve.

HEIDI MILLER, SENIOR DIRECTOR OF LEARNING,
CENTER FOR SUCCESS NETWORK





CHALLENGE #4: GIVE MERIT

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT (FOR MERIT PARK)



About Our Partner:

Give Merit is a nonprofit that removes barriers to success through individually-focused programs, products, and places that transform mindsets and skills.



Design Question:

How might we grow awareness and foster long-term engagement with Merit Park 48204 neighborhood stakeholders?



Project Partner Team:

Tanisha Streeter
Kuhu Saha
David Merritt



About the Project:

This project offered the opportunity to support the efforts to open Merit Park, a park in 48204 where Detroit youth will come to learn, explore career opportunities, aspire, connect—and have fun. Teams of Fellows looked at ways to engage the community, focusing on older adults, school partnerships, teens and families.



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"The fellows truly are stars. They ask thoughtful questions, think outside the box, respond positively to feedback, and truly work collaboratively. Through this project, they've met with vital stakeholders to the Merit Park project and they've approached the task with kindness, patience, and openness. Through their work, they've ideated how we live out Give Merit's core values at Merit Park, specifically ensuring our community is at the center."

KUHU SAHA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
GIVE MERIT





“ ”

"I was excited and impressed by the diversity of thought that [came] with working with the fellows. [They brought a] brilliant combination of different life experiences and unique perspectives from working at different Detroit based organizations, all coming together for our mission."

TANISHA STREETER, VICE PRESIDENT, MERIT PARK





LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

A cornerstone of the program is lead, specifically leading and learning by doing. Fellows have the chance to hold leadership roles on challenge project teams, and also participate in leadership development programming. After each project, Challenge Detroit hosts a Leadership Friday, consisting of speaker presentations from various roles, industries and leadership positions, interactive panels and workshops, and bonding and skill development activities, as well as sessions focused on Detroit history, racial equity, culture and more.

This year's Leadership Friday programming included opportunities for reflection and personal development, bringing in alumni Fellows to speak on a variety of topics, visits to several community spaces to learn and meet with leaders on-site, as well as our signature annual executive mentorship morning, along with team-collaboration activities and continued skill-building.





THE CHALLENGE DETROIT TEAM

LEADERSHIP TEAM



DEIRDRE GROVES
Executive Director



SHELLEY DANNER
Program Director



PAULETTE BOLOFER - FULKERSON
Talent & Engagement Manager

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**Denotes alumni*



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