



LEGACY MOMENT 2020

A LARGER STORY & A LONGER MOVEMENT

Across America and beyond, we aspire to become thriving people in a thriving world. In 2020, that quest grew much more difficult. Right now, amidst profound losses, we are scrambling to stem the tide of mounting affliction. We are also questioning what it takes to renew our lives together.

I draw hope from knowing that in my DNA, **I was built to survive.** ...People of Color were built to endure in this nation...I came into this world having to learn how to adapt to an environment that was hostile. ...**I draw hope from knowing that my people are strong people.**

MICHAEL MCAFEE, POLICYLINK

Throughout history, communities across the country have endured many forms of sweeping adversity: war, economic collapse, enslavement, terrorism, trails of tears, climate catastrophes, rising chronic disease, gun violence, drunk driving, diseases of despair, even pandemics. Time and again, through tragedy after tragedy, we have found resilience. And in a few historic moments, we have even transformed adversity into advantage, taking dramatic strides toward wider well-being and justice.

American innovators expanded people's freedoms to thrive through impressive efforts to secure some of the vital conditions that make prosperity possible. Thanks to successes such as sanitation, smallpox eradication, stronger starts for kids, smoking cessation, Social Security, and scores of other achievements, our predecessors helped people live longer, better lives. They also expanded the circle of America's caring and concern to protect children, once forced to work in sweatshops; to recognize women, once denied the right to vote; and to dignify previously enslaved people, once legally devalued as less than fully human.

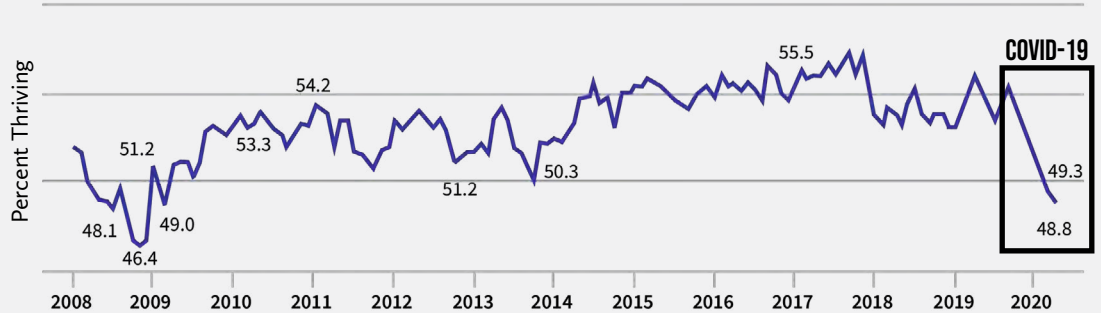
While the road to inclusion has not been straight or steady, we have sometimes managed to find the strength in our nation to move toward justice.

In 2020, our resilience and humanity are once again being tested.

In a year unlike any our nation has previously faced, 2020 began by taking us at whiplash speed through a series of connected, compounding crises—any one of which could take years to recover from. And while no single measure can possibly capture how we are experiencing these crises, one reliable indicator begins to tell the story.

In April, Gallup recorded a startling drop in the percentage of Americans who feel that they are thriving, along with a corresponding surge of people struggling and suffering. There is no mystery about the cause: Weeks before, the coronavirus pandemic had forced nearly everyone on Earth to experience what life is like under assault from an invisible threat.

Overall Life Evaluation of US Adults, Adapted From Gallup



MEASURING WELL-BEING

Our single best measure of well-being is Cantril's Ladder. This simple two question scale asks people to rate their well-being on a ladder from 0 (worst possible life) to 10 (best possible life), both now and in five years. When combined, those ratings reveal who feels they are **thriving, struggling, or suffering**. This measure is routinely tracked both across the US and around the world by groups such as Gallup, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and the World Happiness Report, which enables standardized comparisons over time and geography. Gallup alone has polled more than 3 million people over the last decade.

Living through a pandemic and its sweeping consequences delivers endless lessons in fragility and loss. We have seen familiar patterns and treasured rhythms obliterated with dizzying speed, from sports, worship, and work, to graduations, weddings, and travel. Almost overnight, careers have ended and paychecks have disappeared. Schools have closed. Items and pleasures once taken for granted have become scarce. Individuals have been forced to isolate from their own families. Once-healthy people have gasped for air and died alone.

Even if you have weathered the pandemic in relative safety and comfort, your life's vulnerabilities and the world's fault lines have been exposed. And if you entered the pandemic on the bottom of America's hierarchy of dignity and opportunity, COVID-19 has greatly amplified your all-too-familiar experience of constant adversity and injustice.

Much of the anxiety in this moment can be traced to the sense that we are not experiencing a crisis event but a crisis trend: a steadily worsening series of threats and disasters. The last decade alone has brought a spectacular series of fires, heat waves, mass shootings, government shutdowns, and other kinds of calamity. COVID-19 is not merely another bad storm we need to put up with until the sun comes out again—it is the most extreme example yet of the multiplying dangers that threaten our lives and livelihoods. Moreover, we are not only ill-equipped to avert and manage these largely preventable phenomena, it seems many of our own actions are making matters worse. That is why, even before the pandemic, Americans' confidence in the future was in decline.

While the US has a guide known as the National Disaster Recovery Framework for dealing with the aftermath of disasters, the coronavirus pandemic overwhelms its scope. Currently, there is no national plan for recovery from this pandemic.

SAMANTHA MONTANO, 2020

A Projected 75,000 ‘Deaths Of Despair’ Could Result From Coronavirus Pandemic Impact

Two Crises Convulse a Nation: A Pandemic and Police Violence

Emotions were already raw over the toll of a pandemic that has killed more than 100,000 people across the country and cost millions of jobs.

State of Emergency: End the War on Black people!

UP FRONT

Housing hardships reach unprecedented heights during the COVID-19 pandemic

Americans Say COVID-19 Hurting Mental Health Most

Coronavirus school closures could cause epic slide in math and literacy skills

Opioid Crisis Is Engulfed By Pandemic, Leaving Many Vulnerable To Overdose, Relapse

RACE

COVID-19 and the Color Line

Black Americans are dying of COVID-19 at much higher rates than whites, and nowhere more so than in St. Louis. This is the result of racist policies which collapsed the social safety net while setting blacks in the path of danger.

IN BRIEF

A Double Pandemic: Domestic Violence in the Age of COVID-19

Food insecurity set to become the bigger pandemic

Over 40 million Americans have filed for unemployment during the pandemic—real jobless rate over 23.9%

TANGLED THREATS

There is more to the story of 2020 than one pandemic. Look no further than the headlines to appreciate the sheer size and scope of the tangled threats that are spreading across the country.

Our challenge now is to heed the lessons from this wakeup call about our fragility and fragmentation. The escalating crises we face are not confined to a single sector, place, or class; nor do they stem from the failures of a single group or belief system. What we face now is an intergenerational, multifaceted spiral of adversity—sweeping through not only communities that have been historically designed to concentrate affliction, but every place and social stratum.

Vital conditions for well-being are eroding, raising the odds that there will be darker days ahead. It is easy to see a gloomy future of disappearing or dead-end jobs, dwindling wages and escalating debt, insidious addiction and spiraling deaths of despair, deepening sexism and racism, increasing health care costs and worsening health, disinformation and demagogues undermining democracy—all on top of looming environmental catastrophes that none of us will escape.

In this toxic situation, the hopes we have for ourselves and for our children are fragile and fading. We must act now to change course and renew the system that imperils us. Fortunately, there is reason for hope and even optimism.

Our country still has an immense reservoir of energy, courage, and imagination. Health care workers are risking their lives to care for fellow Americans, often to the point of exhaustion. Millions of people are filling streets in nonviolent calls for equal justice. When damage follows, ordinary people are showing up with brooms, buckets, and the will to help neighbors recover economically and emotionally. Mayors and governors, both red and blue, are rebuilding trust through honest, empathic leadership. Corporate CEOs are speaking out, guided by newfound connections between purpose and profit. Nonprofit organizations are reshaping themselves on the fly. Philanthropies and faith organizations are shifting from generosity to justice. Journalists are telling stories about solutions rather than scandals. Tribal Nations are defending, developing, and decolonizing cherished traditions. And families are creatively finding new ways to function and support one another.

These promising trends are not mature enough to make a systemic difference unto themselves. Most are quietly gathering momentum on the margins and have yet to reach the mainstream. However, they are all hopeful, adaptive responses to a world out of balance.

AS SYSTEMS COLLAPSE, PEOPLE RISE

Otto Scharmer famously observed that, “as systems collapse, people rise.” This single dynamic explains how people with a just cause, animated by a new mindset, can transform failing systems for the better. Our conventional categories and rehearsed routines are not built to handle compounding crises simultaneously. Nor are those crises truly separate. They are symptoms of a system designed long ago that we must now leave in the past. To thrive in today’s interconnected world, we must operate, not as narrowly focused problem fixers, but as a network of system-focused stewards and multisolvers.

Our best hope for escaping the adversity spiral and changing course is to organize local and nationwide action around a single unifying and measurable expectation: **All people and places thriving—no exceptions.**

This is our north star. It conveys our commitment to create communities where all people have a fair chance to participate, prosper, and reach their full potential. It also raises many questions.

- *How can we change course to rapidly increase the number of thriving people and places?*
- *Which pivotal moves must we make right now?*
- *What can we do to bend the big trends that shape our lives?*
- *Which measures matter most as we learn together?*

As this movement continues, 2020 will be remembered as the year when an invisible virus, an inequitable economy, an ailing democracy, and indelible images of police brutality exposed America’s staggering contradictions: our fates are intertwined, yet we continue to inflict inhumane, self-defeating harm on each other, and on the environment. For those who care about well-being and justice, this is a legacy moment. **With 20/20 vision, we see a way forward toward wider well-being, and we are eager to join with others in the work ahead.**



BECOMING MULTISOLVERS

System stewards increasingly recognize that it is not possible to counter systemic threats by delivering more and more services to growing groups of people in need. In fact, our tendency to over-rely on expert-led, technocratic responses often disempowers people, squanders resources, and is itself part of the problem.

Instead, we must become multisolvers: more likely to look through a macroscope than a microscope, to connect rather than go solo, and to solve for many goals at once rather than switch from one crisis to another. When stewards move beyond the limits of a service marketplace, they often find new ways to work across differences, expanding the belonging and civic muscle we need to shape a more vibrant, thriving commonwealth.

VITAL CONDITIONS & LEGACIES FOR LIVING TOGETHER

To find a way forward, we need more than hope. We need a plan and a framework for decisive action. That plan starts with understanding, at a practical level, how we can assess and evaluate where we are as a nation.

It helps to distinguish two related ways of viewing well-being:

Personal Experiences

Individual perspectives and experiences that affect how we think, feel, and function, as well as how we evaluate our lives as a whole.

Vital Conditions

Properties of places and institutions that we all depend on to reach our potential.

Our freedom to thrive depends on having a consistent set of vital conditions, such as clean air, fair pay, humane housing, early education, routine health care, and other pragmatic necessities. Personal experiences may rise and fall from birth to death. However, vital conditions persist over generations. They shape the exposures, choices, opportunities, and adversities that we each encounter throughout our lives.

Each vital condition is distinct and indispensable. Together, they form an interdependent system that shapes opportunities for people and places to thrive.

If any vital condition is denied or otherwise unfulfilled—or if there is a sudden shock, such as the emergence of a novel pathogen—serious adversity can accumulate, revealing itself in excess rates of illness, unemployment, housing distress, food insecurity, loneliness, and more. Mounting adversity, in turn, drives the demand for urgent services, such as acute care for illness or injury, addiction treatment, crime response, environmental cleanup, homeless services, unemployment support, and food assistance.

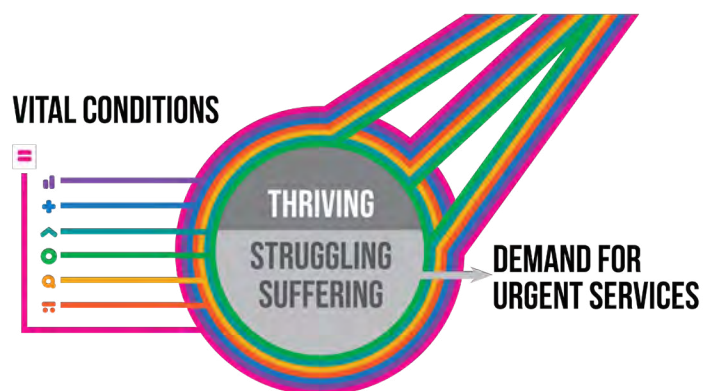
Urgent services are necessary for alleviating short-term suffering. But temporary efforts to help people in crisis cannot increase the experience of thriving. Nor could those services counter an entrenched adversity spiral that is fueled by inadequate vital conditions and ongoing legacies of trauma and exclusion. To change course toward the goal of thriving people and places, we

must first step back and see the system that shapes our ability to move in a new direction. It is a system designed long ago, with ever-present effects that can support or diminish our freedom to thrive. Those are what we call our legacies for living together.

Many of those legacies confer extraordinary benefits. They must be celebrated and sustained. But not all legacies are like that. Some are rooted in unjust, unwise, unsustainable, or racist ideas that are manifestly harmful. Those legacies, which greatly hinder our ability to thrive, can't be erased. But they can be reckoned with and replaced. Not in some distant future but now. The work at hand is to define the imperatives that will shape legacies for the next generation—the legacies that will prepare us for future crises and determine our identity as a people.

We really need to have this concept of children in all policies. What do you see the future like for your children? When we have housing policies we need to consider children. When we talk about education policy, transportation policy, economic policies—all of these things have to include our children.

MICHAEL BRUMAGE
WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY



Vital Conditions



THRIVING NATURAL WORLD

Sustainable resources, contact with nature, freedom from hazards

Clean air, water, soil; healthy ecosystems able to sustainably provide necessary resources; accessible natural spaces; freedom from extreme heat, flooding, wind, radiation, earthquakes, pathogens



BASIC NEEDS FOR HEALTH & SAFETY

Basic requirements for health and safety

Nutritious food, safe drinking water; fresh air; sufficient sleep; routine physical activity; safe, satisfying sexuality and reproduction; freedom from trauma, violence, addiction, and crime; routine care for physical and mental health



HUMANE HOUSING

Humane, consistent housing

Adequate space per person; safe structures; affordable costs; diverse neighborhoods (without gentrification, segregation, concentrated poverty); close to work, school, food, recreation and nature



MEANINGFUL WORK & WEALTH

Rewarding work, careers, and standards of living

Job training/retraining; good-paying and fulfilling jobs; family and community wealth; savings and limited debt



LIFELONG LEARNING

Continuous learning, education, and literacy

Continuous development of cognitive, social, emotional abilities; early childhood experiences; elementary, high school, and higher education; career and adult education



RELIABLE TRANSPORTATION

Reliable, safe, and accessible transportation

Close to work, school, food, leisure; safe transport; active transport; efficient energy use; few environmental hazards



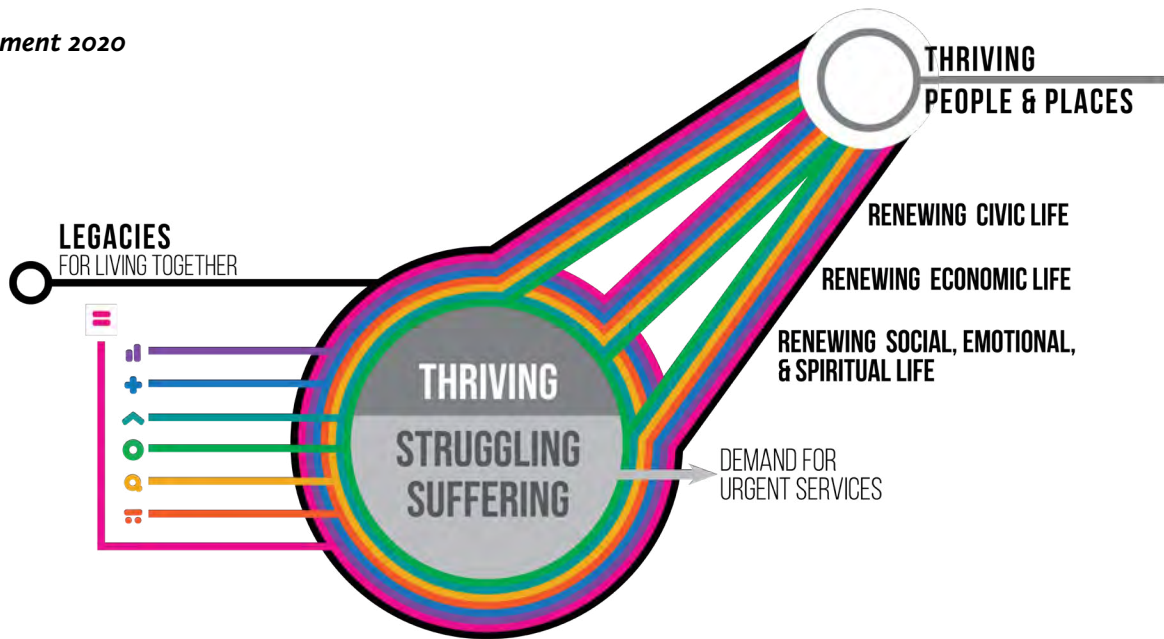
BELONGING & CIVIC MUSCLE

Sense of belonging and power to shape a common world

Social support; civic associations; freedom from stigma, discrimination, oppression; support for civil rights, human rights; civic agency; collective efficacy; vibrant arts, culture, and spiritual life; equitable access to information; many opportunities for civic engagement (voting, volunteer, public work)

LEGACY MOMENT 2020

Legacy Moment 2020



RENEWING LEGACIES FOR LIVING TOGETHER

We inherit vital conditions from our predecessors—their legacies are the starting points for our lives. However, we possess enormous capacities to transform current and future conditions, for better or for worse. When deciding which policies, practices, services, and investments to continue and which to leave in the past, a basic question for every person and organization is whether our own legacies will affirm dignity and inclusion for all people or inflict trauma and exclusion.

Legacies that honor everyone’s human dignity strengthen a mutual sense of belonging and civic muscle. In the accompanying image, *Belonging and Civic Muscle* (≡) wraps around the other vital conditions because it is both a vital condition unto itself and a pragmatic necessity for success in almost any endeavor to expand well-being.

Each step toward full and fair inclusion expands the circle of those who feel that they belong and can contribute to shape our common world. Legacies that favor some while inflicting trauma and exclusion on others do the opposite. They increase the number of people and places that are struggling and suffering, and intensify the adversity spiral that harms us all.

The good news is that even in the midst of a crisis, every person and organization can help to make a difference. Together, we have the power to counter this corrosive dynamic. It begins by joining to embrace new priorities for equitable recovery and resilience. Consider zoning policies that stand in the way of affordable housing. Or

the way we finance public schools—privileging families in higher-income neighborhoods while increasing obstacles for others. In almost every sector of our society, we can identify policies, programs, services, or investments that advantage some at the expense of others. These policies are not forces of nature: They were created by Americans and can be changed by Americans who combine their ideas and energy.

In general, four strategic imperatives, in this order, offer the highest leverage:

Strategic Imperatives

1. **Affirm human dignity by establishing racial justice and full inclusion for all people** as a daily, living reality
2. **Strengthen Belonging and Civic Muscle** by working across differences for the well-being of people and places, which in turn, unlocks abundant assets of those same people and places
3. **Expand the other vital conditions** with local stewards in the lead, beginning with people and places that are struggling and suffering
4. **Solidify new legacies for living together** by renewing civic life; economic life; as well as social, emotional, and spiritual life.

THE ART & SCIENCE OF THRIVING

Over the past several decades, the art and science of designing systems for thriving has matured into a vibrant frontier of knowledge, policy, and practice. Other countries, as well as a growing group of cities and major institutions, have embraced equitable well-being as their chief concern, backed by budget authority and transparent living standards. More remains to be discovered, but the work of advancing well-being for people and places is becoming increasingly practical.

Nevertheless, some will surely dismiss this course of action as overly ambitious under current circumstances. To them, we say: Look around. Things that were widely dismissed as impossible in February became worldwide realities two months later. Given the scale and cost of other systemwide changes that have already been implemented, is it really so unlikely that we might also be poised to convert our immense loss into long-overdue renewal?

We hold this contradiction with confidence and clarity. Especially now, as we pull together by staying apart.

SPRINGBOARD FOR A THRIVING MOVEMENT

This Springboard is designed to help us open a new chapter in America's quest for well-being and justice—to propel a movement that will match the high stakes of this legacy moment.

The guiding framework used in this Springboard does not tell us what to do or how to act. It simply organizes the things that all people and places need in order to thrive. This same framework has been incorporated into the Healthy People 2030 Objectives for the nation, as well as the forthcoming Surgeon General's Report on Community Health and Economic Prosperity. And it fits seamlessly with a uniform set of Well-Being in the Nation (WIN) Measures that are freely available to communities across the country. Most importantly, it is being embraced by a growing network of fellow system stewards.

In less than eight weeks, amidst intense competing priorities, nearly 100 people and organizations made substantive contributions to this Springboard. That fact alone suggests that the movement for well-being may already be more expansive than any of us know. There are, of course, countless other movements gaining strength in 2020 to advance human dignity and justice, such as Black Lives Matter, the Poor People's Campaign, the National Domestic Workers Alliance, and too many others to list here. We did not try to enumerate or examine their intersecting agendas. This document is a quick synthesis of our perspectives, infused with guiding wisdom and stories throughout. It is divided into the following sections:

CHANGING COURSE SUMMARIES are brief chapters focused on a particular vital condition or selected topic. There are 15 here, and each links to a longer *Deep Dive* document that was contributed by one or more well-established organizations. Each adapted summary features working definitions, recent facts, key issues, and a short list of pivotal moves that stand out as high priorities for quick action.

PATHS TO RENEWAL point to larger and longer-term ways of renewing Civic Life, Economic Life, and Social, Economic, and Spiritual Life. Each brief profile centers on a few crux legacy questions, framed by a quick sketch of current conditions, troubling trends, signs of momentum, and then leading to a short list of trend benders that could play out over a decade. Each section ends with a curated list of the measures that matter for learning together. These three renewals are distinct but synergistically connected. No single renewal could fully succeed alone, but together they could be truly transformational.

DEEP DIVES are the full source documents contributed by colleagues on the various topics selected in the *Changing Course* section. Other than having been formatted for consistency, these papers reflect the original work of each author group.

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RELATED EFFORTS

A growing catalogue of related plans and blueprints is beginning to emerge, including:

E PLURIBUS UNUM INSTITUTE

[Roadmap to an Equitable Response, Recovery & Resilience](#)

FULL FRAME INITIATIVE

[Wellbeing Blueprint](#)

HARVARD

[Roadmap to Pandemic Resilience](#)

HEALTH IMPACT PARTNERS

[Health Equity Policy Platform for COVID-19 Response and Recovery](#)

JUST CAPITAL

[Just Principles to Help Guide Corporate America During the Coronavirus Crisis](#)

NEW YORK TIMES

[The America We Need](#)

POLICYLINK

[Federal Policy Priorities for an Equitable COVID-19 Relief and Recovery](#)

[Principles for a Common-Sense, Street-Smart Recovery](#)

WELLBEING ECONOMY ALLIANCE

[Wellbeing Economics for the COVID-19 Recovery](#)

All parts of this Springboard remain open to evolve through ongoing discussion and debate. No one person or organization is likely to endorse every idea in this document. That is as it should be. At this stage, we are surfacing a diverse range of ideas and proposals designed to prompt creative thinking and swift action. In the work ahead, coalitions will form and new ideas will emerge.

This is a messy, far-reaching, rapidly changing movement, as all serious system change endeavors must be. Over time, new pivotal moves may arise. New measures may be devised. Stronger civic muscle might be necessary to bring trend benders to life. Along the way, this Springboard can evolve to help system stewards stay on course to thrive together.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

When making choices or weighing trade-offs, let these be our guiding principles:

LONG, THRIVING LIVES

Fully value long thriving lives, in aspiration and in calculations. Balance attention to physical health and wealth with equal concern for other states of being (mental, emotional, social, spiritual). Always begin with those who are struggling and suffering.

DIGNITY & JUSTICE

Fulfill America's overdue promise of justice for People of Color, Tribal Nations, people who experience gender inequality, and all others who endure unjust adversity; reject hierarchies of human value and tell a new story in which human differences are a strength, not a reason to destroy each other.

PEOPLE & PLACE

Let local wisdom shape solutions that are fit for each place and its people; look for existing assets and enrich them; remove constraints that impose segregation; pay attention to the interdependence of all things within whole living systems.

SHARED STEWARDSHIP

See ourselves—and one another—as interdependent stewards of well-being for people and places; negotiate vested interests, but do not lead only on behalf of your own issue or organization; work across differences with curiosity, grace, and humility.

PAST & FUTURE LEGACIES

Look back and reckon with legacies that inflict harm; look ahead to sustain past achievements while solidifying new legacies that expand opportunities for well-being and justice.