

Cornerstones of Collaborative Governance for a Just & Equitable Future

Presented by the Just Futures project partners:

Front and Centered, People's Economy Lab, Statewide Poverty Action Network



August 2023

Key Takeaways

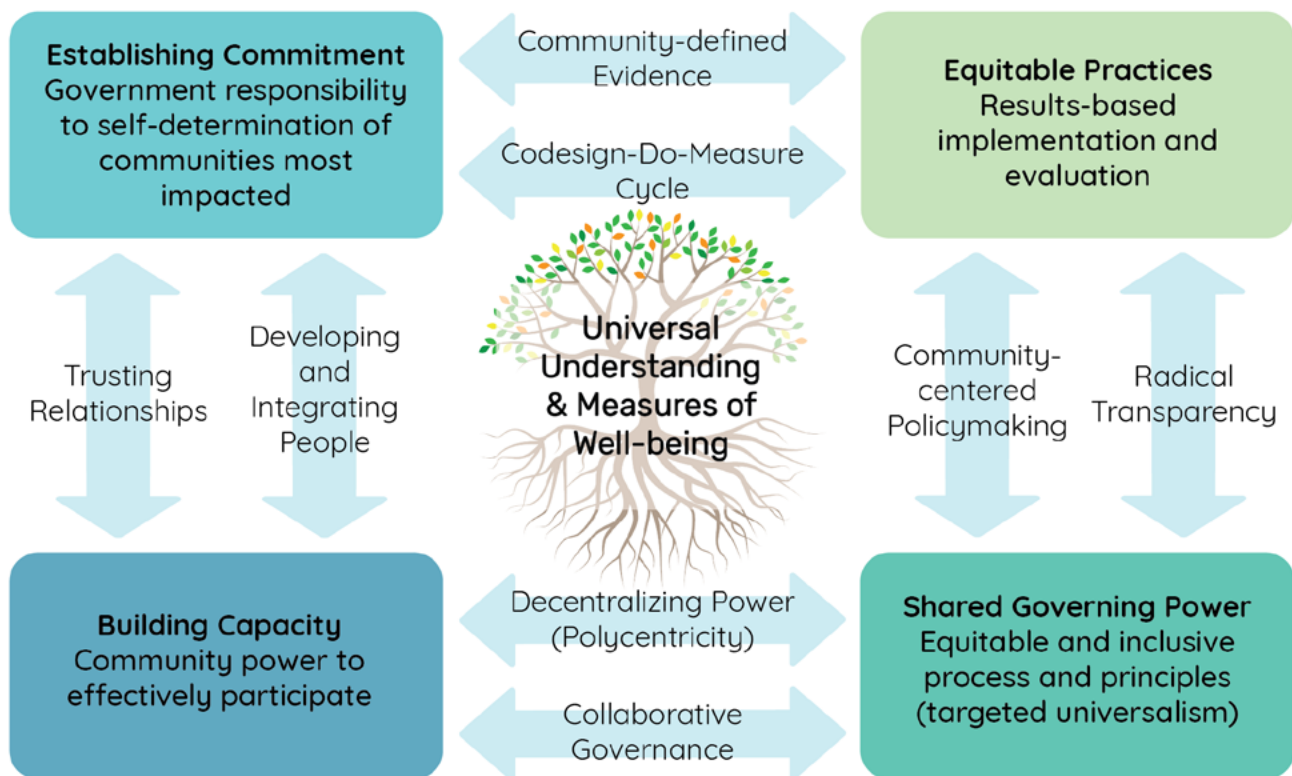
Advancing Equity Through the Economic Recovery from COVID-19

Long before COVID-19, frontline communities (BIPOC and low-income communities) lacked equitable access to basic needs, such as healthcare, housing, jobs, healthy food, safe environments, and education. The pandemic showed us how deep these inequities go.

In 2022 and 2023, the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services contracted Front and Centered, Statewide Poverty Action Network, and People's Economy Lab to lead a leadership committee made up of frontline community members in envisioning and recommending how the State could advance equity in the economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Collaborative Governance for a Just & Equitable Future




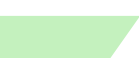



Together, after a series of community listening sessions and roundtables, the Just Futures project partners and Community Leadership Committee designed the Cornerstones of Collaborative Governance for a Just and Equitable Future—a framework rooted in democracy, self-determination, sustainability, and equity towards shared economic well-being for all Washingtonians.



Recommendations

The Just Futures project partners and Community Leadership Committee recommend Washington State formally adopt the Cornerstones, allocate a portion of each agency budget toward participatory budgeting with frontline communities, fund community-based organizations to implement community assemblies across the state, replicate the expanded HEAL Act for all state agencies with required Just Futures economic equity analysis, and adopt the Genuine Progress Indicator and mandate its use across agencies.

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Introduction

In alignment with the 10-Year Plan to Dismantle Poverty in Washington, the Just Futures project has created a community vision and process for advancing shared economic well-being in Washington State that is rooted in democracy, self-determination, sustainability, and equity. Front and Centered, People's Economy Lab, and Statewide Poverty Action Network, in collaboration with the Just Futures Community Leadership Committee, which included Indigenous, Black and brown Washingtonians, rural residents, 2SLGBTQIA+ people, farmworkers, small businesses, people with disabilities, and ministerial groups, came together to develop a model for meaningful community partnership for state decision-making. That model is the Cornerstones of Collaborative Governance (Co-Governance), which we describe in this document.



Front and Centered (F&C) is a diverse and powerful coalition of groups across Washington State composed of and serving communities of color whose missions and members come together to advance equity and environmental and climate justice. Our work includes community capacity building, research and development, coalition alignment and advocacy.



People's Economy Lab (PEL) convenes community leaders, workshops transformative ideas, and builds better economic models. We push the boundaries of what's possible for a Just Transition to local, community-centered economies that are equitable, democratic, and regenerative.



Statewide Poverty Action Network (SPAN) builds grass-roots power to end causes of poverty and create opportunities for everyone to prosper. We advocate for and organize anti-poverty strategies such as basic needs and cash assistance, removing barriers to reentry after incarceration, and providing consumer protections around fringe financial services, such as payday lending and debt collection.

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Definitions

Assembly Anchor: An existing community-based organization with pre-existing deep relationships and community buy-in that leads a community assembly effort. (Just Futures Community Leadership Committee)

Collaborative Governance (Co-Governance): A collection of participatory models and practices, formal and informal, through which government and communities work together to make collective policy decisions, co-create programs to meet community needs, and ensure those policies and programs are implemented effectively. (Partners for Dignity & Rights and Race Forward's *Co-Governing Toward Multiracial Democracy*)

Community Assembly: A participatory democratic process that brings people together to articulate community needs, assess solutions, and mobilize for action, with a focus on those furthest from economic well-being. (Just Futures Community Leadership Committee)

Frontline Communities: Communities most impacted by systemic injustice, who are also often on the frontlines of mobilizing for change. These include Black, Indigenous, and communities of color; low-income communities; immigrants and refugees; disability communities; LGBTQIA2S+ communities; marginalized faith communities.

Just Transition: A vision-led, unifying and place-based set of principles, processes, and practices that build economic and political power to shift from an extractive economy to a regenerative economy. (*Movement Generation*)

Extractive Economy: A capitalist system of exploitation and oppression that values consumerism, colonialism, and money over people and the planet. The extractive economy perpetuates the enclosure of wealth and power for a few through predatory financing, expropriation from land and commonly accessed goods/services, and the exploitation of human labor. An extractive economy views natural resources as commodities—expanding the free-market logic into all cycles and functions of the Earth with an oppressor mentality—which places a price on nature and creates new derivative markets that will only increase inequality and expedite the destruction of nature—to dig, burn, and dump with no regard for its impact on communities and utilizes oppressive force to undermine democracy, community, and workers. (*A People's Orientation to a Regenerative Economy*)

Regenerative Economy: An economy based on ecological restoration, community protection, equitable partnerships, justice, and full and fair participatory processes. Rather than extracting from the land and each other, a regenerative economy values the dignity of work and humanity and prioritizes community governance and ownership of work and resources. It requires a re-localization and democratization of how we produce and consume goods and ensures all have full access to healthy food, renewable energy, clean air and water, good jobs, and healthy living environments. A regenerative economy requires an explicit anti-racist, anti-poverty, feminist, and living approach that is intersectional and eschews top-down, patriarchal, classist, xenophobic, and racist ideology. (*A People's Orientation to a Regenerative Economy*)

Participatory Budgeting: A democratic process through which community members decide how to spend at least a part of a public budget. It gives people real power over real money. ([Participatory Budgeting Project](#))

Targeted Universalism: An equitable strategy that benefits all but is crafted to lift up communities facing the greatest barriers, and therefore provides community-specific results. Targeted universalism affirms a particular policy goal that everyone should be able to benefit from, such as climate protection, but recognizes the differential strategies and implementation mechanisms needed to account for structural marginalization. ([Accelerating a Just Transition in Washington State](#))

Towards a Just & Equitable Future: How We Got Here

In 2018, Governor Inslee convened agency leaders, advocacy groups, and community members with lived experience of poverty and tasked them with “developing a strategic plan to reduce poverty, improve communities and make needed progress related to housing, health integration, employment and education.” This group, known as the Poverty Reduction Work Group, discussed what it really means to build power and to think about the economy in a different way. They decided that Washington State needed to establish measurable and achievable goals for reducing poverty and worked to create eight poverty reduction strategies: (1) undo structural racism, (2) balance power, (3) increase economic opportunity, (4) ensure foundational well-being, (5) prioritize urgent needs, (6) build a holistic continuum of care, (7) decriminalize poverty, and (8) prepare for the future of work.

The Just Futures Cornerstones of Co-Governance (described below) are created in alignment with the 8 Strategies for Poverty Reduction, in particular strategy #2, balance power: “make equal space for the power and influence of people and communities disproportionately affected by poverty and inequality in decision-making.”



In 2019, unrelated to Governor Inslee’s Poverty Reduction Work Group, PEL, F&C, SPAN, and the Washington State Budget and Policy Center partnered to create the New Economy Washington (NEW) report, which articulated a vision of a sustainable, equitable economy rooted in deep democracy and self-determination with the goal of creating shared economic well-being. This

vision intentionally departs from our existing dominant economy, which is rooted in rampant growth, commodification, extraction of natural resources, and workforce exclusion and exploitation based on race and gender. The NEW report outlined principles and conditions for an equitable economy in Washington State, including a clear understanding of the history of how we got here as a society, a belief and willpower to create change, built consensus, and a willingness to organize across silos throughout the state to build trust, patience, and capacity to move towards long-term change.

The following year, in the wake of a global pandemic, the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) convened a Technical Advisory Group (TAG) to shift the State’s thinking about the economic recovery to using more comprehensive measures of progress, disaggregated by race and geography, which is also a goal of the State’s 10-Year Plan to Dismantle Poverty. At the same time, F&C led the effort to develop and pass the Healthy Environment for All Act, focused on environmental justice, which created a series of mandates for state agencies to be more accountable to communities on the frontlines of injustice.

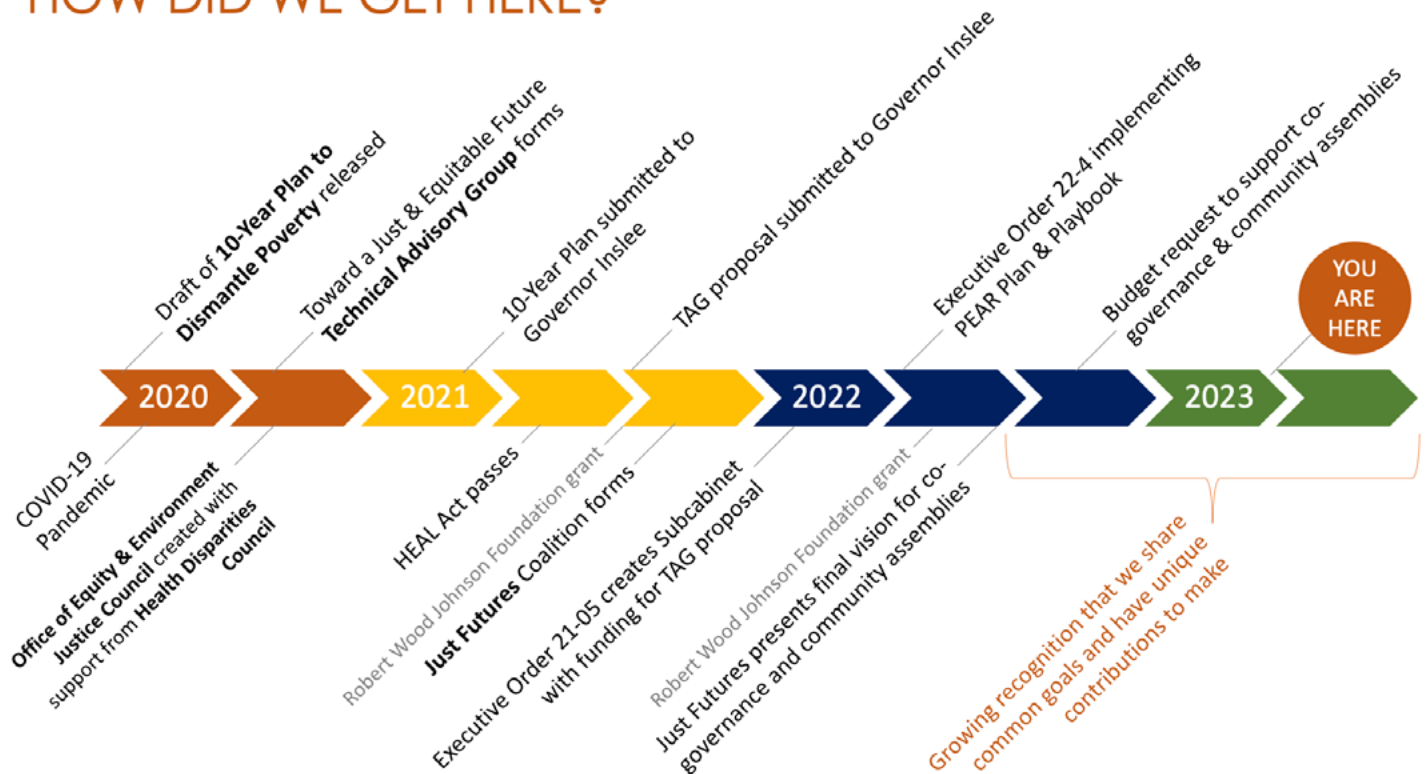
Finally, in spring of 2021, DSHS received a grant from Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to create the Just Futures project to establish a community process and new definitions and measures to hold the government accountable to frontline communities in the economic recovery from COVID-19. See the timeline below for an account of steps taken since 2020.

The Just Futures Project became a collaborative project of Front and Centered, Statewide Poverty Action Network, and People’s Economy Lab. Building upon previous years of work and commitment to a Just Transition, they convened a Community Leadership Committee comprised of community representatives and leaders from the following organizations:

Community Leadership Committee
Central Valley Early Learning Center
Choose 180
Disability Rights Washington
Familias Unidas por la Justicia
Skyway Coalition
Young Warriors
Asian Pacific Cultural Center
Tacoma Ministerial Alliance
Black Dot Underground
Utopia
Latino Community Fund
RISE Network

Over the course of two years, the Just Futures Community Leadership Committee offered crucial insight, expertise, and legitimacy, representing a variety of lived experiences and ensuring community-oriented policies and programs, designed and intended to seed economic resiliency, will meet communities' needs.

HOW DID WE GET HERE?



Just Futures: A Just Transition

The COVID-19 pandemic emphasized deep inequities within Washington State, particularly within our economy. Financial opportunities, such as relief funds, related to the pandemic and recovery have disproportionately benefited wealthy, white, and metropolitan communities at the expense of low-income, BIPOC, rural, and other frontline communities. The Just Futures project formed in response to this reality, in an effort to offer grassroots community guidance to the state government on advancing equity in the economic recovery from COVID-19. In partnership with BIPOC and low-income communities across the state, the Just Futures partners endeavored to create space for the leadership and participation of frontline communities in creating a vision, definition, and measures for an equitable economic recovery, assessing progress, and holding the state accountable to implementing their vision.

Project partners and the Community Leadership Committee sought:

- To educate and strengthen statewide community capacity in economic literacy and power building
- To define, measure, and build accountability toward a Just Transition through the economic recovery from COVID-19 in Washington state
- To establish community cornerstones of a just and equitable future

In the first year, we partnered with community leaders and organizations across the state to host listening sessions. We heard from community members about how they view Washington's economy, how they participate in it (or are excluded from it), and what they thought our government could and should do to improve our economy.

Input from Listening Sessions

Stunted Economic Mobility: The inability to save money or access loans limits economic mobility.

Participants explained how low credit scores resulting from school or medical debt, credit card fraud, or previously declaring bankruptcy limit their access to loans and therefore keeps them stuck in the cycle of poverty. Unexpected expenses, such as a tree falling in the yard, COVID medical bills, or expensive dental procedures, strip individuals of economic decision-making power and become a large barrier to climbing out of debt, affording everyday expenses, and feeling fulfilled in life.

Mental Health: The coronavirus pandemic and everyday challenges of living in poverty negatively affect mental health.

Participants expressed the anxiety and depression they experience when trying to make ends meet for themselves and their families. For many, the pandemic exacerbated these feelings by isolating individuals from their community and adding medical expenses to their list of worries.

Community Resilience: People often turn to their neighbors and family members for support, safety, and information.

Participants explained how they often help to educate their neighbors on social service programs and local government issues, provide technology support, and offer essential items like clothes or furniture to one another. Many people stated their wish to help the community more—that if they had access to affordable education or extra cash on hand, they'd dedicate themselves to supporting their neighbors. In terms of public safety, individuals recognized that a police presence made them feel safer, but they would also like to receive resources and training from police on how they can keep their community safe.

“[Additional financial support] would bring a sense of security to me and my kids. And it would bring some sort of like relief for my mental health because, yes, I’m working and I’m making a living, but I’m constantly in like duress and anxiety, and I would love to be able to sit back for just like one day and not have to worry about the next bill that’s coming in the mail. Or if I pop my tire, am I going to be able to afford food? Just to be able to relax. And like my kids just don’t ever see me in a relaxed, comfortable state. I’m always hustling.”

Eligibility Thresholds: Program eligibility limits for public services are too strict.

There is a lack of services available for people with incomes just above the eligibility threshold—leaving many to rely upon food banks, donating plasma, or similar resource methods. Eligibility thresholds are outdated and use gross income as a measurement, not accounting for different tax statuses.

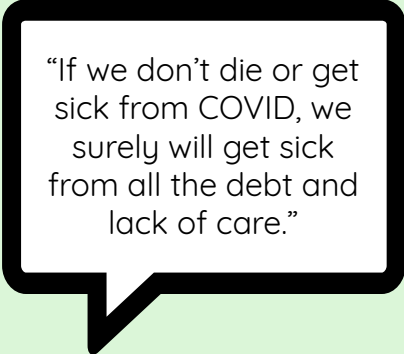
“Then the people who could use the program as well, who are just barely above that marker, we get stuck in that same boat of like, ‘Well, we could use that program, but we’re not poor enough.’”

Insufficient Benefits: People on low and fixed incomes experience resource scarcity due to harsh benefit cliffs and time-consuming processes.

While most participants stated they were employed, they discussed the challenging cycle where if they make slightly more money, they may lose their food or social security benefits and find themselves unable to afford basic needs again. In order to make ends meet, participants explained how they spend all of their time outside of work meeting basic needs by waiting in lines to receive clothing, food, rental assistance, or a bed to sleep in for the night.

Financial Mobility: Debt and limited resources stunt financial mobility.

There are limited options for individuals to build credit or maintain financial security after falling into debt from criminal justice involvement, child support expenses, or payday loans. Many participants explained creative ways they use their resources, including using the child tax credit to pay car insurance, yet they still struggle to pay off debt or make ends meet.



“If we don’t die or get sick from COVID, we surely will get sick from all the debt and lack of care.”

Impact of COVID: The Coronavirus pandemic has impacted employment and household finances.

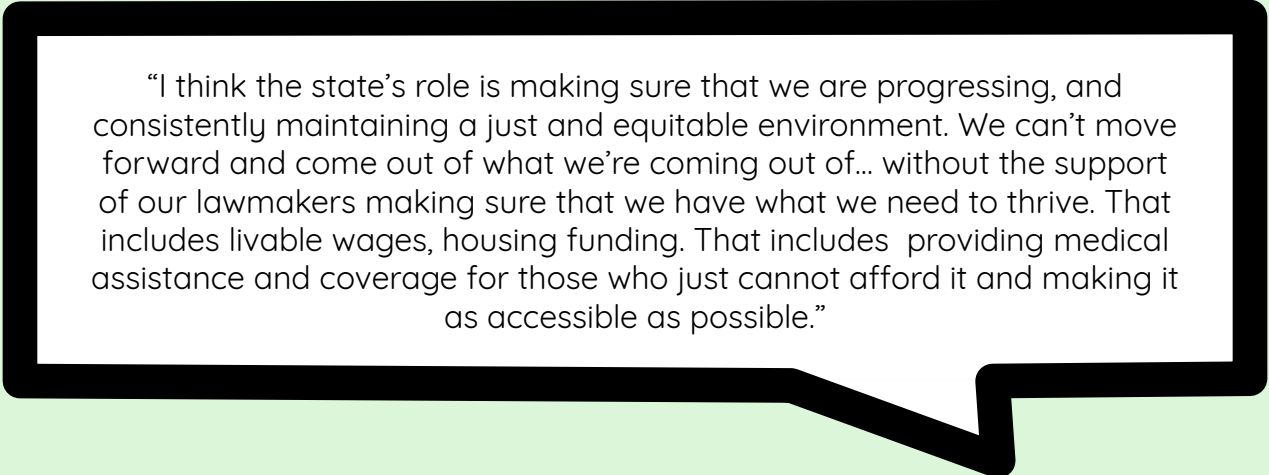
Participants explained how quarantining from a COVID exposure would require people to use up their sick days, take unpaid time off, or lose their job. In some cases, employers are requiring employees to work despite showing symptoms or testing positive for COVID. COVID has also put undue burden on caregivers, requiring some people to stay home and take care of family members instead of working outside the house for income.

Debt: Debt causes families to have to make difficult financial decisions and impacts well-being.

Medical expenses, student loans, and payday loans with high interest rates have caused some households to acquire large amounts of debt. In turn, many families must make tough decisions between healthcare, food, education, or paying off loans. When asked what they would do with \$300-\$400, the majority of participants said they would put it toward paying off their debt.

Dignity: People do not feel they are being treated with dignity or respect.

There is a lack of community resources for unhoused individuals and individuals facing housing insecurity. Many listening session participants reported feeling unsafe in their community, being treated unfairly by landlords, or worrying for their financial well-being in the face of unjust systems.



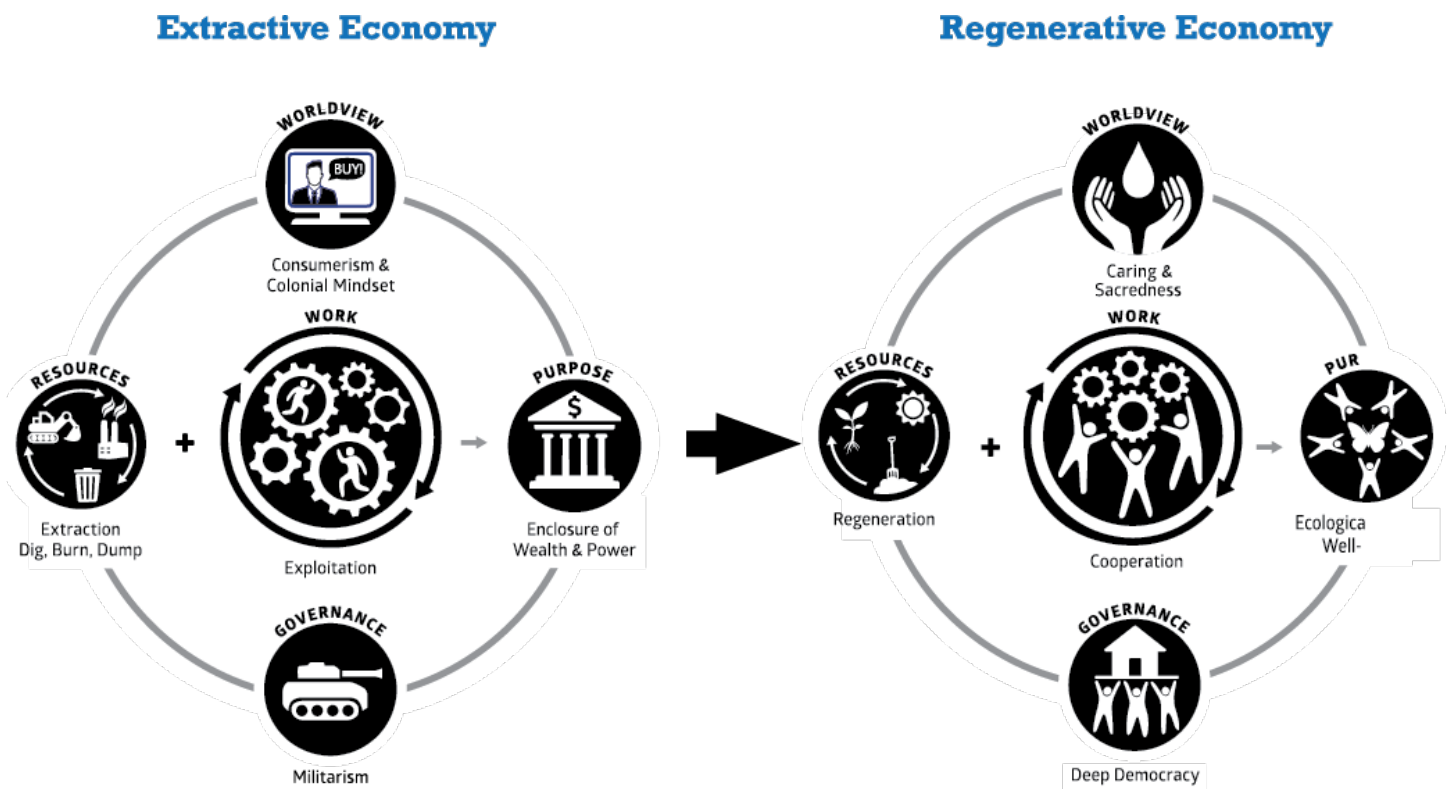
“I think the state’s role is making sure that we are progressing, and consistently maintaining a just and equitable environment. We can’t move forward and come out of what we’re coming out of... without the support of our lawmakers making sure that we have what we need to thrive. That includes livable wages, housing funding. That includes providing medical assistance and coverage for those who just cannot afford it and making it as accessible as possible.”

Based on feedback from listening sessions, discussions, and drawing from their own lived experience, the Just Futures Community Leadership Committee established a consensus that:

- Our current economy is built on exploitation of resources and human labor for the purpose of accumulating wealth and power for the few instead of the many.
- Systems built upon oppressive ideologies, such as white supremacy, patriarchy, consumerism, and militarism, are used to maintain governance of the current economy.

- Our collective community vision is to transition to an economy that is rooted in democracy, self-determination, sustainability, and equity towards shared economic well-being.
- A Just Transition won't happen on its own. First, we must center social and ecological well-being and make headway toward governance rooted in deep participatory democracy.

From the outset, the Just Futures project led with the Just Transition framework—a framework for shifting from an extractive to a living economy that prioritizes the leadership and well-being of communities who have been most harmed by the extractive economy. This framework was originally created based on strategies used by labor unions and environmental justice groups fighting for workers' rights and land protections. Just Transition describes the economy as having five pillars: worldview, resources, work, purpose, and governance. These pillars function as the economy's engine, and understanding them provides an opportunity to pursue a community vision of social and ecological well-being and better governance rooted in deep participatory democracy.



The graphic above illustrates a shift from an extractive economy to a living economy that prioritizes the well-being of people instead of exploiting their labor. A Just Transition is about giving power back to the people to create a sustainable future. A key element of the Just Transition framework is organizing “through democratic and voluntary cooperation, rather than coercion and exploitation.” This includes the management and facilitation of human labor and natural resources.

BIPOC and low-income communities experience the economy much differently than white and economically advantaged communities. This was particularly evident during the COVID-19 pan-

demic. When asked “how do you and/or your community experience the economy,” the Just Futures Community Leadership Committee shared that their communities:

- Experience the economy through circumstances tied to identity (race/ethnicity, income level, etc.).
- Acknowledge certain demographics in the community are not represented.
- Feel that government agencies assume that certain services are accessible by all, even when they are not.
- Had to create small business “pop-ups” to start and run their own micro-economy when they didn’t see the macro economy spending in their communities.
- Recognize that agricultural workers are not provided the opportunity to know or realize the real returns on their work.
- Understand that their decisions and politics are influenced by where they work and live.
- Recognize that when they don’t experience any value or dignity from their work, when they don’t have power in their work, they don’t have power in their communities.
- Feel that incarcerated communities are excluded more from the economy. For example, renting and getting a job are challenges when one has a criminal record.
- Believe that immigrant communities are treated as if they are disposable.

This input from committee members underlines the importance of prioritizing the lived experience of frontline communities in decision-making structures. Our extractive economy is built upon ideologies like white supremacy, patriarchy, and consumerism and does not serve our increasingly diverse communities. We need to transition to a regenerative economy—an economy that values care, uses resources conscientiously, prioritizes ecological and social well-being for people and the planet, and through which work is shared and benefits are equitably distributed.

The 10-Year Plan to Dismantle Poverty in Washington states that “people experiencing poverty are the foremost experts on their lives and possess considerable knowledge as users of the systems and programs intended to assist them. Incorporating the knowledge and expertise of those most affected by poverty, as well as sharing power and resources with them, is essential to the design of equitable policies, programs, and practices that build a just and equitable future.” We agree and are aligned in centering lived experience to understand and diagnose gaps in policy design and implementation.

The second strategy of the 10-Year Plan is to “make equal space for the power and influence of people and communities disproportionately affected by poverty and inequality in decision-making.” In the pursuit of “equal space,” we must answer these important questions:

- What does it mean for frontline communities to have “equal space?”
- What resources and infrastructure are available to prepare for and occupy that “equal space?”
- What mechanisms would these communities require to build power to influence policy and decision-making?
- Who controls and legitimizes the authority of the “equal space?”
- More importantly, how can these communities approach this opportunity in a strategic way? (i.e. How can they focus their work upstream and avoid getting pulled into every decision, so as to maximize their limited capacity?)

The Just Futures partners and Community Leadership Committee believe a Just Transition to a living economy requires understanding the history of our current economic system in order to redefine and reshape it, and that in order to promote equitable economic mobility and well-being for Washingtonians, Washington must invest in the conditions necessary to pursue them. These conditions include:

- Building trust between government and frontline communities
- Building consensus among frontline communities
- Harnessing power through sustained, state-wide, cross-silo efforts
- Prioritizing community-led research
- Establishing a joint commitment to long-term systemic change

The Community Leadership Committee concluded these conditions can only be created by addressing governance systems. They sought to further understand economic governance systems to determine strategies that would create space for community-led solutions. In particular, they recommended strategies that involve community voices at the front end of design processes.

In short, our key question was: How do we define, measure, and build accountability toward a Just Transition through the economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic in Washington?

The Community Leadership Committee's response: "We have to be willing to practice self governance in a different kind of way. It's not just about winning what you can win, but putting more power in the hands of the people so that people are in control of the decisions that affect their daily lives."

The Cornerstones of Collaborative Governance

The Cornerstones of Co-Governance for a Just & Equitable Future lay out an ecosystem of work, which requires community organizations and government agencies to partner with one another via strategic teams, special committees, advisory groups, etc. and pursue economic policies for the common good—for people and the planet.

To make equal space, the Cornerstones call for the adoption of a deeper form of democracy—shared decision-making power with frontline communities in Washington. By “co-governance” we mean the implementation of “formal and informal participatory models and practices through which government and communities work together to make collective policy decisions, co-create programs to meet community needs, and ensure those policies and programs are implemented effectively.” Co-governance rethinks what power looks like at all levels of government.

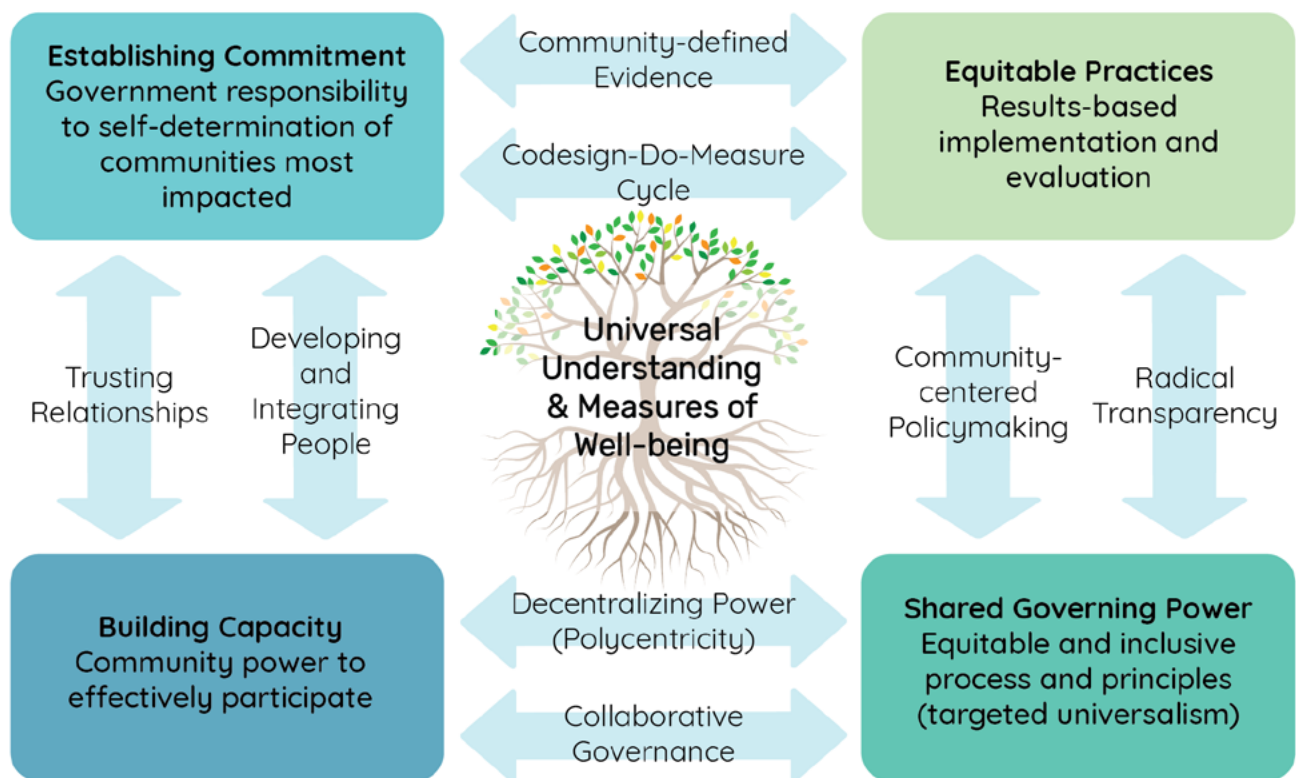
Current System of Government	Collaborative Governance
Government seeks input from community	Government seeks direction from community
Extractive and slow-moving	Regenerative and timely
Tends to be politically motivated in engagement/responses	Simplified/lower barriers to participate and engage
Resources community participation through stipends or gift cards. Isn't ongoing and can't be relied on.	Resources community capacity building through ongoing, consistent funding and support to community infrastructure and individuals.
Requires special knowledge to participate or engage	Transparent with information and provides data collection support
Strategizes internally, referencing community input in closed-door spaces	Strategizes directly with community in shared decision-making spaces

Co-governance requires the government not only to share decision-making authority, but also to invest in building community capacity and infrastructure to effectively participate in program and policy development. We believe this will lead to better:

- Opportunities to facilitate outreach to frontline communities
- Feedback loops to understand experiences of those accessing agency services
- Sharing of information and ability to cross-reference across agencies
- Trusting and robust connections amongst community and government
- Resourcing of communities to organize and engage community members on issues that affect them
- Leveraging established organizations with expertise in policy and legislative advocacy

The Just Futures project partners and Community Leadership Committee sought to create a framework rooted in Just Transition principles and the power of organizing and co-creating collaboratively. The four rectangles represent the cornerstones of co-governance. The arrows represent zones of engagement between the cornerstones, approaches that must continuously and consistently be reinforced to foster a culture of collaboration. The cornerstones all center around universal understanding and measures of well-being, established and agreed upon by frontline communities and government.

Cornerstones of Co-Governance for a Just and Equitable Future



Universal Understanding & Measures of Well-being

The Problem

State measures of progress and success focus on concentration and accumulation of money for those with power rather than core conditions and outcomes that signify universal well-being.

Frontline Community Solution

Shift focus to living qualitative and quantitative indicators of human and ecological well-being disaggregated by race and geography. While the 8 Strategies for Poverty Reduction is a good beginning, there's still more to do in this area.

Action Needed

1. Look to frontline communities to identify living measures of human and ecological well-being for state agencies.
 - Measures of well-being should include access to basic needs like healthcare, housing, jobs, income, food, education.
 - The long-term goal is to move past survival and into thriving communities with a high quality of life.
 - Communities should be able to self-define what well-being means to them.
 - Specific communities will need individual strategies to meet their needs. Employ targeted universalism.
2. Convene state agencies and community organizations committed to the Cornerstones of Co-Governance annually to advance a universal understanding of well-being.
 - Convenings should be co-created and co-led by community organizations and state agencies with space for storytelling, trust building, and connection.
 - Remove accessibility barriers and provide stipends to community members to maximize participation.
 - Set intentions and expectations for entering the space with an open, non-defensive mindset and centering frontline community voices, leadership, and power.
 - Use convenings to define long-term success, assess progress, agree on follow-up items, and hold each other accountable.

Establishing Government Commitment

The Problem

There is a gap between what the government does and what the community wants the government to do. Government actions do not result in most frontline communities realizing benefits. Government agencies seem more concerned with engaging frontline communities for the sake of checking the community engagement box rather than engaging communities to receive and act on their input.

Frontline Community Solution

Government action must be tied to accountability of frontline communities. Communities should be able to self-determine what they need and who is best positioned to facilitate their well-being. Impact rather than intent should be evaluated.

Action Needed

1. Dedicate a percentage of agency budgets to participatory budgeting processes and direct funding for community capacity.
 - Research participatory budgeting practices.
 - The Office of Financial Management and Office of Equity must advocate to the legislature for funding participatory budgeting.
2. Require agencies to incorporate a racial equity analysis and community input in policy, budget, and strategic plan decisions.
 - Host discussions between community organizations and agencies on shared values, goals, and accountability to commitments.
 - Track data on racial disparities (example: rates of COVID-19 infections).
3. Practice “double loop learning.”
 - Continue to listen to community members, use their input to change the plan, and check back in about what has been done with the input.
 - Continuing dialogue between agencies and community organizations (i.e. regular meetings and updates on both broader issues and specific questions to identify gaps and targeted needs).
 - Genuine listening to inform action.
 - Hear what community organizations are prioritizing for their community members to thrive.
 - Ensure that listening is more than checking a box, that it leads to action.

Building Capacity

The Problem

Due to power and funding dynamics, community-based organizations do not have the infrastructure, information, or resources to participate fully in co-creating solutions that result in true impact.

Frontline Community Solution

Community-based organizations already have access to and trust from frontline community members. The state government needs to resource community-based organizations, including funding, access to information, and technical assistance, to support frontline community members to participate in co-creation of solutions.

Action Needed

1. Fund and support a statewide network of “community assemblies,” led by community-based organizations, to provide leadership, direction, and oversight in the co-creation of solutions.
 - Engage in asset mapping.
 - Who is doing work and what kind of work are they doing?
 - Are there gaps or overlap among those doing the work?
 - Who is best positioned to anchor community assemblies?
 - How can agencies resource community-based organizations that need support to increase their capacity?
2. Build alliances among community-based organizations to create a coalition that coordinates shared funding and strategic planning across agencies and community assemblies.
 - Create an umbrella organization, coalition, or institute for community assemblies to maintain connections and track progress toward goals.
 - Build trust with communities through relationship building, resourcing, and following through on commitments. Only then will community members feel confident giving real, robust input and feedback.
 - Maintain emphasis on community priorities of equity and racial justice.
3. Government funding should be transparent.
 - Implementation funds should stay in state. Hire independent contractors from Washington (ideally BIPOC-led organizations).
 - Share outcomes openly.

Practicing Equity

The Problem

Government processes are designed to exclude those with the greatest need.

Frontline Community Solution

Dismantle rules of exclusion and establish mutual accountability. Share power with frontline communities, and create more opportunities for civic engagement.

Action Needed

1. Develop a process for frontline communities to engage and co-create within state agencies.
 - Regular meetings to gauge community pulse and prioritize transparency about agency actions.
 - Discuss who needs to be at the table and make sure they get there.
 - Measures of success:
 - How are recommendations from community members listened to and followed up on?
 - Is there documentation at every step?
 - What gets brought to a vote, and what actually happens?
2. Fund community member participation in state engagement processes via community-based organizations.
 - Compensation should demonstrate value for community members' expertise and lived experience, and it must be built into the budget at the outset.
 - Elevate frontline community voices.
3. Develop a "community equity and accountability" framework to apply to agency practices and activities (ex: rules, budgeting, contracting process).
 - Require a reasonable timeline for action. (What will this be used for, what steps will be taken, how will we be kept in the loop?)
 - Equity assessments should be tied to required actions.

Sharing Governing Power

The Problem

Frontline communities are NOT built into the design or eligibility requirements for programs and other government processes. As a result, government processes, services, and products are not reaching everyone, nor are they serving frontline communities the way they are intended to serve them.

Frontline Community Solution

Apply targeted universalism and community accountability. Provide everyone access to what they need to live and thrive. Target focus on those that face the greatest barriers. Use community-defined, rather than state-centric, screening.

Action Needed

1. Create a cross-agency governance body composed of community members and leaders (like Communities of Opportunity, Environmental Justice (EJ) Council, Poverty Reduction Work Group, etc.) to advance co-governance. A governance body that centers community expertise and voices will lead to:
 - Trust building.
 - Communities need to trust the agencies in order to participate. Trust needs to be rebuilt where it has ruptured.
 - Trust should be built among groups with lived experiences of significant barriers to economic well-being to build stronger coalitions (especially when interacting with agencies).
 - Funding based on collaboration instead of competition. Communities are often pitted against each other for resources, and this should not be the case.
 - Agency transparency where agencies should be clear about the resources that are and are not available.
 - This should apply to all levels of governance-state, local, agency.
2. Create agency guidelines and toolkits on how to decentralize power within leadership structures. Build in “circuit breakers” to:
 - Create decision points where frontline community members must be consulted in order to proceed.
 - Involve frontline communities at every part of the process, not just approval when it’s done.
 - Continuously improve the design of processes and programs.

Each of the Cornerstones of Co-Governance seeks to overcome barriers to co-creation between community organizations and government agencies, and to lay foundational steps towards the practice of co-governance, including recognition and understanding of the unique contributions each stakeholder can make towards a commonly desired outcome.

More importantly, the Cornerstones are designed to usher in a culture of leveraging one another's strengths, identifying each stakeholder's contribution, selecting leadership representatives, establishing internal guidelines and principles, working on policies and programs that facilitate investments towards shared goals, etc. As agencies work to build their internal capacity and competency to engage and serve communities more equitably, they must work to mitigate information-sharing and decision-making silos. Silos prevent resource sharing, ultimately shifting representation and visibility away from communities that are most in need. Silos can also lead to favoritism in funding distribution to community organizations. Information is access and access is prosperity. Countering this entails cross-referencing agency-specific work to prevent people from being bounced around between agency programs and/or missing out on valuable complementary opportunities.

Community Assembly Model

In Phase Two of the Just Futures project, we chose to focus on community assemblies as one possible tool for implementing the Cornerstones of Co-Governance.

The Just Futures Community Leadership Committee defined “community assembly” as a participatory democratic process that brings people together to articulate community needs, assess solutions, and mobilize for action, with a focus on those furthest from economic well-being. These assemblies are intentionally convened and inclusive of people and ideas.

Community assemblies bring together a group of people with a variety of life experiences that have been historically marginalized from decision-making. They may share a common identity, geography, and/or similar goals for their lives and the future of their communities. Community assemblies position communities as policy designers and decision makers. Primary functions of community assemblies include:

- Engaging frontline communities most affected by the issues, including community leaders who work on these issues
- Providing situational analysis and historical background of the issues being discussed
- Creating space where people most impacted can do the hard work of collaborative problem solving on the issues that affect them
- Engaging in human-centered, creative and design thinking to seek solutions, drawing from data and community experience
- Exercising shared decision-making through trust and commitment

Organized to structure participatory democracy at the community level, community assemblies are not to be confused with community listening sessions. Whereas listening sessions seek input and feedback loops, community assemblies propose solutions and include a formal expectation of joint action. Community assemblies are effectively designed to establish community-identified policy and programmatic solutions to address community-identified issue(s) and challenges, as well as assess progress on measures of well-being.

- **Short-term goal of each community assembly:** Resolve among community members to work toward specific goals, create proposals for action, commit to taking action steps as a community, and provide input or corrective feedback to work underway.
- **Outreach:** Engage frontline communities and overly burdened communities (as defined by the Healthy Environment for All Act).
- **Facilitation:** Well designed/structured, high-level discussion of community issue(s) and co-creation of action steps. Establish definitions and context at the outset.
- **Decision-making:** Create or adopt a consent-based consensus practice.

This framework positions communities to define their needs and articulate objectives, and positions government agencies to support and resource those objectives. In order for community assemblies to be an effective model for co-governance, government agencies must commit to listening and endeavor to enact the objectives articulated by communities through community assembly resolutions.

We will release a Community Assemblies Toolkit in November 2023.

Looking Ahead: Policy Recommendations

Frontline communities and individual community members possess invaluable perspectives, knowledge, skills, and ideas for improving Washingtonians' well-being. Community assemblies present an opportunity for communities to share those assets by identifying problems, developing suggestions and solutions, and guiding the State to better policy making. While the Cornerstones of Co-governance exist as a guide towards equitable, regenerative, and transformative change in Washington State, their success is contingent on community leaders and government agencies establishing shared commitment to create and resource operationalizing models like community assemblies.

Upon the creation of the Cornerstones, the Just Futures partners and Community Leadership Committee recommended the following to the State of Washington:

- Allocate a minimum of 20% of each agency budget toward participatory budgeting with frontline communities in 2023-2024, aiming for 50% by 2030.
- Create and sustain a \$10 million community assembly fund (over two years) to support community-based organizations to facilitate community assemblies in local neighborhoods statewide.
- Replicate the expanded HEAL Act for all state agencies with required Just Futures economic equity analysis of budgets, plans, policy proposals, grants, projects, etc., and an assembly that connects local organizations together and to state government.
- Adopt the Genuine Progress Indicator for Washington State and mandate its use across agencies in coordination with community assemblies.

We also asked the State and state agencies to formally adopt our Cornerstones of Co-Governance for a Just and Equitable Futures (described above).

Want to keep up to date on the progress of the Cornerstones of Co-Governance in Washington?

Sign up for People's Economy Lab's email newsletter at peopleseconomylab.org.