Case Studies

Six projects. Six problem reframes.
Each case shows what co-design revealed that no conventional process could.

01 PUBLIC SPACE
Discovery Walk Design
A landmark park redesigned from the lived realities of communities' traditional outreach never reached.

02 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
Main Street Grant Application
A $3M COVID recovery grant redesigned so the communities it was meant to reach could access it.

03 WORKFORCE EQUITY
Rochester Built Environment
Industry and BIPOC women at the same table, revealing trust deficits no training program had addressed.

04 CIVIC INSTITUTION
Rochester Public Library
Surfacing why communities the library most wanted to serve had never walked through its doors.

05 HOUSING EQUITY
BIPOC Home Ownership
BIPOC communities leading the analysis of a homeownership gap that research alone had failed to close.

06 HEALTHCARE EQUITY
LGBTQIA+ Healthcare Access
Co-designers now compensated as the ongoing training facilitators they helped design.

CASE STUDY 01

Discovery Walk Design

DMC EDA & City of Rochester, MN • Public Space Design • 2020–2021

BY THE NUMBERS

7
co-designers recruited

4
design studios + 3 sprints

45+
Co-designer interviews

3
outcome domains: Spatial, Programmatic, Policy

The Challenge

Downtown Rochester was planning a landmark 4-block linear park, Discovery Walk, adjacent to Mayo Clinic. The DMC EDA and the city of Rochester had strong design intent, but the community engagement process revealed a critical gap: communities most likely to use and benefit from the space had not been consulted on the design principles.

Traditional outreach had reached those already connected to institutional channels. The result was a design process moving forward on assumptions rather than the lived realities of Rochester's diverse communities, including communities of color, elderly residents, immigrant populations, people with disabilities, and young people.

What was at stake was more than aesthetics. A public space designed without these communities risked becoming a space that didn't feel safe, welcoming, or accessible to those who could benefit from it.

WHAT TRADITIONAL ENGAGEMENT MISSED

Open houses and institutional outreach reliably surface those already connected to decision-making structures.

They do not reach:

- Immigrant communities unfamiliar with public process, cultural context, and/or language
- Residents who don't feel safe in current park spaces
- People whose cultural practices don't match park programming
- Those without transportation or fixed schedules

"A public space designed without these communities risked becoming a space that didn't work for them."

Who Was at the Table

Seven co-designers were recruited through a deliberate process by the DMC EDA, City of Rochester, Diversity Council, and Olmsted County Public Health. Rather than institutional outreach, the team identified trusted connectors already embedded in the communities most likely to be impacted by the park.

Co-designers were selected for two qualities: their own lived experience and the networks they could access.

Compensation: Each co-designer received $450 for 14-15 hours of work, a professional-rate recognition of their expertise. Co-designers that continued to work with the developer were paid additionally for their oversight work.
Structure: 4 design studios + 3 community exploration sprints within trusted networks.

PERSPECTIVES REPRESENTED

Communities of Color
East African, Latinx, Asian-American members with trusted networks in underrepresented communities

Elderly Residents
Older adults navigating mobility challenges, isolation, and year-round accessibility needs

Young People
Youth representing generational perspectives on safety, programming, and social connection

Disability Community
Individuals evaluating spaces for real-world mobility and cognitive accessibility

Healthcare Community
Clinic staff and patients navigating the intersection of healthcare and public space near Mayo Clinic

Faith Communities
Leaders with connections to communities whose cultural practices shape how public spaces feel

How It Worked

The Discovery Walk co-design ran from winter 2020 through the end of construction documentation, a year-long process integrated across the Schematic Design and Design Development phases. It followed four structured iterations, each pairing a design studio with a community exploration sprint.

ITERATION 1 • Broad Discovery Co-designers grounded in project context. Initial community conversations begin through trusted networks.

ITERATION 2 • Pattern Identification Co-designers share what they heard. Themes surface across communities. Design team identifies shared patterns.

ITERATION 3 • Priority Definition Themes tested against broader community. Tensions between priorities and institutional constraints made visible.

ITERATION 4 • Solution Testing Design principles finalized with co-designers. Design team tests against lived realities before adoption.

GOVERNANCE • Post-Project Co-designers continued as design team members to select local artists. Presented insights to City Council and boards.

Winter 2020 – End of Construction Documentation • Year-long process • Integrated into active design phases

What the Process Revealed

The most important outputs were not design features, they were problem reframes. Co-designers surfaced structural truths the design team could not have found through any conventional method.

WHAT WAS ASSUMED
The park needs standard amenities: seating, paths, greenery.

WHAT CO-DESIGN REVEALED
Immigrant communities needed spaces of warmth, especially in the winter. The long dark winter drives isolation.

WHAT WAS ASSUMED
Safety means lighting and physical sight lines.

WHAT CO-DESIGN REVEALED
Safety is cultural. For some communities, pet access and alcohol presence were primary deterrents, not the built environment.

WHAT WAS ASSUMED
Design for daytime medical visitors adjacent to Mayo Clinic.

WHAT CO-DESIGN REVEALED
East African and Asian families gather in the evening. A strategic lighting network and shelters for after-dark use became a design priority.

WHAT WAS ASSUMED
The park's role is public greenspace and recreation.

WHAT CO-DESIGN REVEALED
Clinician burnout and patient healing are both public health challenges. The park could bridge healthcare and community well-being in ways no clinic space can.

What Was Built & What Carried Forward

DESIGN OUTCOMES BY DOMAIN

SPATIAL

- Snow melt system for year-round accessible navigation
- Healing space designated near clinic entry points
- Raised plant beds creating immersive landscape without barriers for those in wheelchairs
- Strategic lighting network for evening gatherings

PROGRAMMATIC

- Cultural symbols and flags signaling belonging
- Multi-generational and interactive programming
- Clinician-community connection opportunities built in
- Custom benches and gathering shelters for after-dark use

POLICY

- Non-smoking/vaping policy adopted
- Affordable access for fixed-income residents
- Pet access limited to designated times/areas
- Strategic alcohol restrictions to ensure safety

WHAT CARRIED FORWARD

Governance: Co-designers continued as design team members after the formal process ended, interviewing and selecting local artists for the park.

Advocacy: Co-designers presented to City Council and relevant boards, translating community insight into decision-making spaces. Their collective voice helped decision-makers understand why design elements like snow melt and shelters mattered, even with an increased cost.

Sustained Relationships: The DMC EDA continued inviting co-designers to business and community networking events, treating the relationships as ongoing infrastructure rather than project artifacts.

> *"The co-design process allowed for in-depth conversations about how public spaces are perceived and used by different cultures, leading to discussions about sense of belonging that brought new thoughts for the design team."*
>
> **- Britton Jones, Senior Associate PLA, Coen + Partners**

CASE STUDY 02

Main Street Grant Application

DMC EDA • Economic Development • 2021

BY THE NUMBERS

6
co-designers recruited

4
design studios + 3 sprints

30+
Co-designer interviews

4
outcome themes: Access, Finance, Trust, Support

The Challenge

The DMC EDA was awarded $3 million from Minnesota DEED to disperse to Rochester businesses for downtown recovery from COVID-19. A primary goal was reaching targeted businesses and underrepresented populations; communities of color, entrepreneurs, and others typically excluded from institutional grant processes.

The challenge was structural: traditional grant application processes are designed by and for those already fluent in institutional language and systems. Complex requirements, reimbursement-based funding, and lack of translated materials meant the communities most intended to benefit were the least likely to apply.

Without co-design, the grant would have reproduced the same exclusion it was meant to address.

WHAT TRADITIONAL GRANT DESIGN MISSED

Institutional grant processes are designed for those already connected to formal business networks and comfortable with bureaucratic language.

They do not reach:

- Business owners who don’t know the opportunity exists
- Communities of color unfamiliar with grant reimbursement structures
- Entrepreneurs without relationships with institutional lenders
- Diverse business owners who distrust or have been excluded from city programs

“To reach these populations, you have to start by asking them what would make this process actually accessible.”

Who Was at the Table

Six co-designers were recruited through the Diversity Council and Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation (SMIF), representing the full range of perspectives needed to make the grant genuinely accessible.

Co-designers were selected for their own business experience and the networks they could access, especially those most likely to be left out of traditional channels.

Compensation: Each co-designer received $500 for 14 hours of work, reflecting professional-rate recognition of their expertise.

Structure: 4 design studios + 3 community exploration sprints across Rochester's business and cultural networks.

PERSPECTIVES REPRESENTED

Downtown Business Owner
Existing businesses in the downtown corridor with direct experience of the recovery challenges

Prospective Business Owner
Entrepreneurs considering opening downtown, facing barriers to entry and application complexity

Philanthropist
Individuals connected to funding networks and familiar with grant structures from a funder perspective

Commercial Bank Lender
Institutional knowledge about the lending process and the required 70% match requirement

Community Navigator
Trusted connectors with ties to diverse business owners, especially communities of color

Developer
Real estate and development perspective on how grant terms affect project feasibility

How It Worked

The Main Street Grant co-design ran across four design studios and three community exploration sprints. Co-designers worked within their own networks to test draft application requirements against the realities of diverse business owners, surfacing barriers invisible to institutional designers.

ITERATION 1 • Broad Discovery Co-designers grounded in grant context. Initial conversations explore what barriers exist to application and awareness.

ITERATION 2 • Pattern Identification Co-designers share what they heard in their networks. Themes around language, trust, and financial structure surface.

ITERATION 3 • Priority Definition Key barriers refined into actionable design criteria. Tensions between institutional requirements and community access made visible.

ITERATION 4 • Solution Testing Draft application changes and support structures tested with co-designers. DMC EDA adjusts based on feedback.

GOVERNANCE • Post-Project Co-designers invited to record the promotional video (filmed in four languages) and attend Rochester business networking events.

2021 • 2.5–3 months • Integrated into active grant design and application development

What the Process Revealed

The most important outputs were not application edits; they were problem reframes. Co-designers surfaced structural barriers the DMC EDA could not have identified through institutional analysis alone.

WHAT WAS ASSUMED
The application just needs to be simplified.

WHAT CO-DESIGN REVEALED
Trust, not complexity, was the real barrier. Communities of color had no relationship with the program and trust had to be built before access could be designed.

WHAT WAS ASSUMED
Reimbursement-based grants are standard practice.

WHAT CO-DESIGN REVEALED
For small businesses with limited cash, reimbursement is exclusionary by design. Co-designers named this the single largest barrier to participation.

WHAT WAS ASSUMED
Lenders will connect applicants to the required match.

WHAT CO-DESIGN REVEALED
Diverse business owners lacked relationships with lenders who knew the program. The grant needed to actively identify culturally competent lending partners.

WHAT WAS ASSUMED
A translated application is sufficient for language access.

WHAT CO-DESIGN REVEALED
Translation alone wasn't enough. Co-designers named the need for oral, human support from trusted navigators walking applicants through the process in their language.

What Was Built & What Carried Forward

DESIGN OUTCOMES BY THEME

ACCESS / KNOWLEDGE

- Application translated and summarized in multiple languages
- Oral support provided through community liaisons
- Rolling submission window replacing fixed deadlines
- Promotional video filmed in four languages with co-designers

FINANCES / TRUST

- Direct disbursement model replacing reimbursement structure
- Grant funds held as applicants identify lending match
- Metered release of funds aligned with project readiness
- Transparent communication about timeline and approvals

SUPPORT / CONNECTIONS

- Business support services identified and linked within application
- Culturally competent lenders identified and listed by name
- Navigation support for diverse business owners built into process
- Co-designers invited to Economic Development and Chamber events

WHAT CARRIED FORWARD

New Partnerships: The DMC EDA, after hearing from co-designers about the importance of lending partners, researched and built new relationships with new financial institutions (with diverse lending portfolios) that didn't exist before the process began.

Co-Designer Leadership: Co-designers were invited to participate in creating the grant's promotional video, filmed in four languages, translating their governance role into public communication and community representation.

Sustained Networks: Co-designers were invited to the Rochester Area Economic Development Annual Luncheon and Chamber events, extending their professional networks as part of the institution's ongoing commitment.

> *"This engagement approach provides for a deeper level of engagement with communities that can't be replicated through a government employee alone."*
>
> **- DMC EDA, Main Street Grant Reflection**

CASE STUDY 03

Equity in Built Environment

City of Rochester • Workforce & Industry • 2021

BY THE NUMBERS

6
co-designers recruited

5
design studios + 4 explorations

55+
Co-designer interviews

3
pilot phases: Adult, Post-Secondary, K–12

The Challenge

Less than 1% of construction industry positions in Rochester are held by women of color. Attempts to address this through isolated interventions, job fairs, training programs, and outreach campaigns, had not produced lasting change. The design and construction industry continued to reflect assumptions built without the women it was hoping to recruit.

The challenge was not a lack of talent or interest. It was a design failure: every solution had been built by industry without the people it aimed to include. Programs assumed culture, flexibility, and support structures that simply didn't exist for women of color navigating both structural inequity and a white male-dominated worksite culture. Any sustainable solution required the voices of both women of color and industry partners at the same table.

WHAT TRADITIONAL APPROACHES MISSED

Job fairs and training programs are designed by those already inside the industry. They reflect assumptions that don't match the realities of women of color entering it.

They do not address:

- The cultural gap between industry expectations and the lived experiences of women of color
- Early exclusion from STEM pathways; girls 'opted out' by age 11–12
- Lack of knowledge that so many careers exist in the built environment
- Absence of mentorship, flexibility, and psychologically safe worksites

"Attempting to create a solution in isolation without women of color and industry leaders at the table will be ineffective and has the potential to do more harm than good."

Who Was at the Table

Six co-designers were recruited representing both women of color navigating the industry and industry professionals with hiring and worksite authority. The combination was intentional: sustainable solutions required both communities in the room.

Co-designers were selected for their lived experience of the problem and their relational access to networks of women, employers, and educators across Rochester.

Compensation: Co-designers were professionally compensated, reflecting the expertise and time required for five workshops and four community exploration sprints.

Structure: 5 design workshops + 4 community exploration sprints with individual support between each session.

PERSPECTIVES REPRESENTED

BIPOC Women - Experienced
Women of color with direct experience navigating the built environment industry, including barriers to entry and retention

BIPOC Women - Seeking Entry
Women of color considering or actively pursuing a career in construction, architecture, or design

Industry Partner - Hiring
Employers and project managers with authority over hiring decisions and worksite culture

Industry Partner - Training
Professionals in training and apprenticeship programs, aware of pipeline gaps and education barriers

Community Navigator
Trusted connectors with networks among BIPOC women, youth, and workforce development organizations

Educator / Counselor
School counselors and educators who influence whether girls are introduced to STEM and construction pathways

How It Worked

The Built Environment co-design ran across five workshops and four community exploration sprints. Each iteration deepened the understanding of why previous solutions had failed, moving from surface-level knowledge gaps to the root challenge: revealing systems and structures that do not support (or recognize) success for women of color.

WORKSHOP 1 • Broad Discovery Co-designers develop relationships, gain project familiarity, and practice first-round interviews with BIPOC community members and industry contacts.

WORKSHOP 2 • Pattern Identification Co-designers share insights. Group develops themes expanding on the three original areas: Culture Clash, Education Gap, Knowledge Gap.

WORKSHOP 3 • Opportunity Mapping Co-designers identify promising spaces, partners, and industry sectors most ready to move toward inclusive work environments.

WORKSHOP 4 • Prototype Feedback Co-designers offer input on industry prototype storyboard, mentorship structure, and the overall co-design approach.

WORKSHOP 5 • Validation & Governance Co-designers validate the proposed pilot and phasing. All co-designers confirmed the process was beneficial and recommended citywide adoption.

2021 • Multi-month process • Integrated with ongoing workforce development planning

What the Process Revealed

The most important shift was not a new program; it was a reframe of the root problem. What initially appeared as a knowledge gap deepened into a system and trust deficit that no amount of outreach could fix without structural change.

WHAT WAS ASSUMED
Women of color just don't know about careers in construction.

WHAT CO-DESIGN REVEALED
They know. The industry hasn't created conditions for women to see it as safe or welcoming. Awareness campaigns miss the root problem entirely.

WHAT WAS ASSUMED
Training programs are the solution.

WHAT CO-DESIGN REVEALED
Training fails when worksites aren't ready. Industry DEI competency building must precede any cohort-based training intervention.

WHAT WAS ASSUMED
The same solution works across ages and contexts.

WHAT CO-DESIGN REVEALED
There is no single intervention. The pilot requires three phases: adult women, post-secondary, and K–12, each needing different partners and approaches.

WHAT WAS ASSUMED
The primary barrier is lack of awareness.

WHAT CO-DESIGN REVEALED
Psychologically unsafe worksites, not lack of awareness, are why women leave or never join. Trust and structural safety are the primary barriers.

What Was Built & What Carried Forward

DESIGN OUTCOMES BY THEME

CULTURE & INCLUSION

- Industry DEI assessment and competency building for worksite crews
- Worksite readiness modifications (facilities, uniforms, accommodations)
- Crew training completed before women begin collaborative work

MENTORSHIP & SUPPORT

- On-site mentors assigned to both women and worksite crews
- Daily check-ins and weekly group evaluations to address issues
- Wrap-around services and technical skills assessment for participants

EXPOSURE & ACCESS

- Early and consistent career exposure for girls starting before age 12
- Network access and opportunity sharing between industry and BIPOC women
- Phased pilot across adult women, post-secondary, and K–12 settings

WHAT CARRIED FORWARD

Bloomberg Mayors Challenge: The co-design process earned a $1 million Bloomberg Mayors Challenge award to build and develop the pilot's community-informed workforce model.

Scalable Model: The four-phase approach; assessment, worksite experience, group evaluation, and outcomes, was designed to scale across communities and industries beyond construction.

Generational Impact: Women participants are expected to become mentors for future cohorts and role models for younger girls, creating a self-sustaining pipeline into the built environment.

A Systems-Level Change Model: This project didn't address one barrier — it addressed the system that produces them. Industry culture, early exposure, mentorship infrastructure, and worksite readiness are four interdependent leverage points that reinforce each other. The pilot intervenes at all four simultaneously — which is why it scales as a model, not just a program.

> *"The most valuable part of this process has been to collaborate and listen to different perspectives of both employers and BIPOC women."*
>
> **- Co-Designer**

CASE STUDY 04

Rochester Public Library

Rochester Public Library • Strategic Planning • 2025

BY THE NUMBERS

7
Co-Designers recruited

30+
Co-designer interviews

5
community groups: young adults, elderly, Somali, Hispanic, LGBTQIA+

4
priority themes: Safety, Space, Programming, Access

The Challenge

Rochester Public Library recognized that the communities who could benefit most from its services were the ones least likely to use them. Despite offering extensive resources and programs, the library's traditional outreach had consistently reached the same connected residents, leaving young adults, elderly residents, Somali and Hispanic community members, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and people with disabilities largely outside its reach.

The challenge was not simply awareness. For many, the library felt unwelcoming, inaccessible, or simply unknown. Some community members didn't know it existed beyond schools. Others had experienced or anticipated feeling unsafe, unwelcome, or confused. A single negative experience was enough to ensure they wouldn't return.

The library needed to understand what would make it genuinely useful, not from assumptions, but from the people it was failing to reach.

WHAT TRADITIONAL OUTREACH MISSED

Surveys and listening sessions reliably surface those already connected to the library and comfortable navigating institutional spaces.

They do not reach:

- Somali residents who didn't know a public library existed outside schools
- Parents who assumed their children would be too loud or disruptive
- LGBTQIA+ individuals weighing whether the space signals their belonging
- Elderly and disabled residents uncertain of physical access

"I thought that only schools had libraries."
- Co-Designer

Who Was at the Table

Co-designers were recruited to represent communities structurally excluded from library participation. Partners including Pamoja Women, Cradle2Career, DMC EDA, and the City's DEI office supported outreach to trusted community networks.

Co-designers were selected for their lived experience of the library's gaps and their relational access to broader community networks across Rochester.

Compensation: Co-designers were professionally compensated, recognizing their expertise and the community engagement work conducted between sessions.

Structure: 3 design sessions with community explorations between each, engaging 20–30 additional community members.

PERSPECTIVES REPRESENTED

Young Adults
Community members in their 20s–30s seeking spaces for connection, career development, and peer community post-COVID

Elderly Residents
Older adults navigating isolation, mobility challenges, and limited awareness of available library services

Somali Community
Members of Rochester's Somali community, many of whom were entirely unaware of the public library or its services

Hispanic Community
Spanish-speaking residents navigating language barriers, limited cultural representation, and unfamiliar institutional spaces

LGBTQIA+ Individuals
Community members evaluating whether the library signals genuine belonging through its spaces, collections, and staff

People with Disabilities
Individuals navigating physical access, sensory needs, and whether the library's design goes beyond minimum ADA compliance

How It Worked

The RPL co-design ran across four design sessions, each followed by community explorations in which co-designers engaged friends, family, neighbors, and others in their personal networks. The process surfaced insights that no survey or public meeting had previously captured.

SESSION 1 • Broad Discovery Co-designers grounded in project context. Initial community conversations explore experiences with and barriers to library use.

EXPLORATION 1 • Network Outreach Co-designers interview trusted community members about library awareness, barriers, health resources, cultural values, and what makes spaces feel safe.

SESSION 2 • Pattern Identification Co-designers share insights. Four priority themes emerge: Safety, Physical Space, Programming & Offerings, Connection & Access.

EXPLORATION 2 • Deeper Inquiry Co-designers test emerging themes with broader networks. Questions probe Physical Space, Safety, Programming, and Connection & Access in depth.

SESSION 3 • Priority Definition & Solution Design Co-designers validate themes and generate 45+ specific program ideas across six priority categories.

EXPLORATION 3 • Solution Feedback Co-designers share proposed priorities with community members, gathering feedback on how solutions could be implemented.

SESSION 4 • Report-Out & Recommendations Co-designers present final priorities and recommendations to RPL leadership, grounded in three rounds of community input.

2024–2025 • 4 design sessions • 3 community explorations • 20–30 community members engaged across trusted networks

What the Process Revealed

The most important outputs were not program lists; they were structural reframes. Co-designers surfaced why the library had been failing to reach these communities, not just what it was missing.

WHAT WAS ASSUMED
The library just needs better marketing to underserved communities.

WHAT CO-DESIGN REVEALED
No marketing will convince people to show up. Trust must be built through relational outreach, community peers and liaisons, not institutional channels.

WHAT WAS ASSUMED
Safety means physical security and clean spaces.

WHAT CO-DESIGN REVEALED
Safety is cultural. For some communities, the idea of bringing their child with a disability to be loud at a place that is supposed to be quiet was unthinkable.

WHAT WAS ASSUMED
The library is accessible because it meets ADA requirements.

WHAT CO-DESIGN REVEALED
Minimum compliance is not accessibility. Wheelchair users couldn't see shelves, routes were indirect, parking was disconnected. Accessibility must be explicitly designed.

WHAT WAS ASSUMED
Programming for families means children's programming.

WHAT CO-DESIGN REVEALED
Families need simultaneous spaces: children safe, parents recharging, elders gathering, young adults with their own place. The whole family unit matters.

What Was Built & What Carried Forward

PRIORITY THEMES & KEY DIRECTIONS

SAFETY & BELONGING

- Proactive community outreach through trusted cultural liaisons
- Clear signals of welcome: flags, greetings, diverse collections
- Peer-based "what to expect" guidance before first visits
- Culturally specific wayfinding and navigation support

PHYSICAL SPACE

- Semi-private spaces for families, study, and cultural gathering
- Accessibility beyond ADA: tall tables, visible shelving, open aisles
- Third-place environments for young adults and elders
- Sensory-aware design: warm lighting, comfortable seating, nature

PROGRAMMING & ACCESS

- 45+ community-prioritized programs across six categories
- Educational support: resume help, FAFSA, health navigation
- Multicultural programming: story time with elders, cultural events
- Intergenerational connection as a strategic programming priority

WHAT CARRIED FORWARD

Sustained Relationships: The co-design team, including Pamoja Women, Cradle2Career, DMC EDA, and the City's DEI office, committed to continued connection with co-designers and willingness to connect future project leaders with participating community members.

Strategic Direction: The library was advised to prioritize depth over breadth; sustained, meaningful engagement with one or more underserved communities rather than attempting to meet all needs simultaneously.

Governance Commitment: RPL committed to co-designer involvement in the next phases of development and implementation, including prototyping, piloting, and ongoing program evaluation aligned with community-defined values.

> *"Spiritual spaces feel safe and welcoming because people have similar experiences and backgrounds and speak the same language I do."*
>
> **- Co-Designer, RPL Co-Design Process**

CASE STUDY 05

BIPOC Home Ownership

Coalition for Rochester Area Housing • Housing Equity • 2022

BY THE NUMBERS

10
co-designers predominantly from BIPOC communities

4
design sessions + community sprints

60+
Co-designer interviews

5
stakeholder groups targeted for change

The Challenge

Minnesota has one of the largest racial homeownership gaps in the country. In Olmsted County, 77% of White households own their homes compared to just 22% of Black/African American households, a disparity the Coalition for Rochester Area Housing identified as among the largest in the nation.

The Coalition recognized that this gap was not a failure of individual BIPOC community members. It was the predictable result of racist practices such as redlining, single-family zoning policies, and the intimidation and destruction of BIPOC neighborhoods, compounded by structural systems that continued to produce inequitable outcomes long after those practices were formally ended.

To address it meaningfully, the Coalition needed the BIPOC communities most directly impacted to lead the analysis. No institutional study could surface what lived experience already knew.

WHAT TRADITIONAL APPROACHES MISSED

Housing gap analyses and policy reports are written by researchers and institutions. They describe the problem but rarely ask those living it to define the solution.

They do not surface:

- The navigation barriers inside financial and lending institutions
- Cultural and religious factors shaping how BIPOC families approach homeownership
- The role of mentorship and trusted peer networks in the purchase process
- What structural changes lenders, realtors, and builders actually need to make

“The co-design process is one where the BIPOC communities lead.” - Coalition Report

Who Was at the Table

Ten co-designers, including those working in the trades, and those from local BIPOC communities with diverse racial, cultural, and religious backgrounds, participated. Personas covered the full spectrum of homebuying experience; from long-term renters to successful buyers, mortgage professionals to immigrant families.

Co-designers were selected for their lived experience of the housing system and relational access to broader BIPOC networks. The project team was led by the Coalition with support from the City of Rochester, DMC EDA, and Elocina, Inc.

Compensation: Co-designers were professionally compensated across four design sessions and multiple community sprint conversations.

Structure: 4 sessions: Introduction, Exploration (x2), and Themes & Recommendations, with community sprints between each.

PERSPECTIVES REPRESENTED

Experienced Realtor
Realtor with significant BIPOC community relationships and experience helping first-time buyers navigate the purchasing process

Mortgage Professional
Experienced banker familiar with the underwriting process and mortgage qualification for first-time BIPOC home purchasers

Successful Homeowner
BIPOC community member who purchased a first home through traditional avenues and could reflect on that experience

Long-Term Renter
BIPOC community member who had always rented and had not previously considered purchasing a home

Immigrant Family Buyer
Immigrant family with household income of $80,000 or less who faced barriers but successfully purchased a home

Single Parent / First-Time Buyer
Educated single parent with household income $80,000 or less navigating the purchase process for the first time

How It Worked

The co-design ran across four sessions with community sprints between each. Co-designers were trained to conduct their own interviews within their trusted networks, surfacing barriers and opportunities the project team could not have anticipated. Each session built on the prior, moving from relationship-building to exploration to co-developed stakeholder recommendations.

SESSION 1 • Introduction Co-designers build familiarity with the project, team, and timeline. Learn interview approaches and identify community members in their networks to engage.

SESSION 2 • Exploration Co-designers share insights from their community conversations. Seven themes surface: Education, Navigation, Belonging, Safety & Security, Structural Racial Barriers, Mentorship, Representation.

SESSION 3 • Exploration (Continued) Continued probing of identified themes with broader community networks. Cultural and institutional barriers deepen, especially around navigation and cultural competency.

SESSION 4 • Themes & Stakeholder Recommendations Co-designers synthesize findings and develop targeted recommendations for five stakeholder groups: Financial/Lending Institutions, Realtors, Community Housing Support, Developers/Builders, and the BIPOC Community.

ONGOING • Governance & Dissemination Project team recommends annual DEI-focused homeownership conference and sharing findings with Housing Alliance, Regional Realtor groups, and State Housing conferences.

2022 • 4 design sessions + community sprints • 10 co-designers across diverse BIPOC communities

What the Process Revealed

The most important outcomes were not a list of programs, but a set of structural reframes of why BIPOC homeownership had been failing to improve despite years of effort.

WHAT WAS ASSUMED
BIPOC homeownership gaps are primarily a financial literacy problem.

WHAT CO-DESIGN REVEALED
Navigation is the primary barrier. The mortgage process itself, complex and opaque, is what co-designers named as the single largest obstacle to BIPOC homeownership.

WHAT WAS ASSUMED
Cultural competency means diversity training for staff.

WHAT CO-DESIGN REVEALED
Cultural competency requires structural change: diversifying the workforce, exploring Islamic lending, accepting rental history as credit, and building ongoing community relationships.

WHAT WAS ASSUMED
The solution lies in making existing programs more accessible.

WHAT CO-DESIGN REVEALED
Mentorship is a distinct structural need, a separate entity guiding home seekers throughout the entire process, that no existing program was providing.

WHAT WAS ASSUMED
BIPOC community members need to be better informed about homeownership.

WHAT CO-DESIGN REVEALED
Communities already hold the knowledge. What's missing is a framework for sharing it: peer networks and culturally specific education from youth through adulthood.

What Was Built & What Carried Forward

RECOMMENDATIONS BY STAKEHOLDER

FINANCIAL / LENDING

- Complete DEI assessments and implement recommendations
- Diversify workforce and establish community relationships
- Explore Islamic lending and rental history as credit
- Translation and language services for entire mortgage process

REALTORS & BUILDERS

- DEI assessment and workforce diversification
- Cultural business competency training and community outreach
- Multi-generational and culturally aligned home designs
- Proximity to worship, welcoming schools, minimal maintenance

COMMUNITY & MENTORSHIP

- Develop BIPOC homeownership mentorship pipeline
- Framework for information sharing within BIPOC communities
- Annual DEI-focused homeownership conference across stakeholders
- Education from youth through post-purchase completion

WHAT CARRIED FORWARD

Multi-Stakeholder Accountability: Recommendations were deliberately separated by stakeholder; Financial/Lending, Realtors, Community Housing Support, Developers/Builders, and the BIPOC Community, so each could be held accountable for its own structural changes.

Coalition Investment Strategy: Co-designer insights directly informed the Coalition's funding priorities, translating community-led analysis into cross-sector financial commitments from Olmsted County, Mayo Clinic, the City of Rochester, Rochester Area Foundation, and DMC.

Sustained Dissemination: Findings introduced at the Housing Alliance, State Housing conferences, and Regional Realtor groups, extending co-designer impact into institutional spaces where structural change is decided.

> *"Their time and talents are invaluable to advancing change in our community."*
>
> **- Coalition for Rochester Area Housing, Project Report**

CASE STUDY 06

LGBTQIA+ Healthcare Access

Olmsted County Public Health Services • Healthcare Equity • UCare-funded

BY THE NUMBERS

4

co-design sessions + community interviews

30+

Co-designer interviews

3

community-designed initiatives co-developed

2

Co-designers now compensated as ongoing training facilitators of the training developed through the process

The Challenge

LGBTQ+ residents in Olmsted County Public Health Services (OCPHS) face significant health disparities in mental health, substance use, and access to care compared to heterosexual residents. Olmsted County Public Health Services identified these gaps and sought to understand what it would actually take to improve access, not from an institutional perspective, but from the perspective of those navigating care every day.

The challenge wasn't lack of programs. It was that the programs were built on assumptions. Clinics displayed rainbow flags but produced isolating experiences. DEI training existed but didn't address intersectional LGBTQ+ needs. Insurance was complex, coverage was inconsistent, and the only reliable navigation tool was a personal network most people didn't have.

OCPHS recognized that the people who had been forced to develop workarounds for a system that didn't serve them were the people who needed to design the solutions.

WHAT INSTITUTIONAL APPROACHES MISSED

Healthcare systems had been asking the wrong questions. Rainbow flags and DEI trainings are visibility signals, not safety signals.

What the system couldn't see:

- Finding "welcoming" care requires exhausting trial-and-error
- Personal networks are the only trusted navigation tool
- Young adults face acute insurance and privacy vulnerabilities
- Providers lack intersectional LGBTQ+ training, not just awareness

"While it is easy for a clinic to have a rainbow on their website, finding a welcoming environment can be a difficult and exhausting process of trial and error."
– Co-designer

Who Was at the Table

Co-designers were recruited through trusted community networks after significant challenges identifying willing participants through institutional channels, itself a signal of the distrust this project was designed to address.

More than 30 additional community members were engaged through co-designer networks. Co-designers were professionally compensated throughout and continue to receive compensation as ongoing training facilitators after the project concluded.

Compensation: Co-designers were professionally compensated across four design sessions and multiple community sprint conversations.

Structure: 4 design sessions + community interviews between each. Facilitated by Jess Roberts & Jes Springer, ByDesign.

PERSPECTIVES REPRESENTED

Young Adults
LGBTQ+ individuals navigating the insurance system without family support, often uninsured or on parents' plans without the privacy needed to access care

Queer People of Color
Community members whose distrust of the healthcare system intersected with both racial and LGBTQ+ identity, naming distinct barriers not captured by either lens alone

Trans & Nonbinary People
Individuals managing complex care needs, including hormone therapy and gender-affirming care, with providers unprepared for their bodies or identities

Rural & Geographically Isolated
LGBTQ+ residents in outlying areas where welcoming providers were severely lacking.

Healthcare System Insiders
LGBTQ+ people working within medical institutions who named the gaps in DEI training from the inside what staff were never taught

Community Network Navigators
People who are informal healthcare navigators within their own networks, helping friends and neighbors find and prepare for care.

How It Worked

The co-design ran across four sessions with community interviews between each. Co-designers engaged their own trusted networks, friends, family, and neighbors, to surface barriers, fears, and hopes the project team could not have accessed through institutional outreach. Each session deepened understanding from exploration to priorities to three co-designed community initiatives.

SESSION 1 • Introduction Co-designers grounded in the project, team, and process. Begin identifying interview approaches and community members in their networks to engage.

SESSION 2 • Exploration Co-designers share what they heard from their networks. Core themes emerge navigation barriers, insurance complexity, provider training gaps, safety vs. signaling, trust through personal networks.

SESSION 3 • Exploration (Continued) Continued probing of identified themes. The role of peer networks as the primary navigation infrastructure crystallizes. Providers who need training are not the ones who will seek it out.

SESSION 4 • Initiative Development Co-designers synthesize insights into three concrete, community-designed proposals: Community Care Navigator, Story-Based Provider Training, and Peer-Informed Resource Mapping.

ONGOING • Governance & Implementation Co-designers transition from design authority to implementation authority. They are currently compensated as facilitators of the story-based training they developed; the governance commitment that didn't end when the project did.

Olmsted County • UCare-funded • OCPHS + ByDesign

What the Process Revealed

The most consequential reframes were not about programs or services. They were about where the real navigation infrastructure already existed and what institutions had been misdiagnosing as individual failure.

WHAT WAS ASSUMED
A rainbow flag signals a safe space.

WHAT CO-DESIGN REVEALED
Flags without follow-through are more disorienting than no signal. Staff must use pronouns, honor privacy, and avoid irrelevant assumptions - a flag alone means nothing.

WHAT WAS ASSUMED
DEI training improves care for LGBTQ+ patients.

WHAT CO-DESIGN REVEALED
Most DEI training co-designers experienced was abstract and out of touch. Story-based training facilitated by LGBTQ+ community members is what produces genuine change.

WHAT WAS ASSUMED
The care access problem is primarily a resource gap.

WHAT CO-DESIGN REVEALED
Personal networks are the primary navigation infrastructure. The solution isn't more information; it's supporting the trusted people already doing this work.

WHAT WAS ASSUMED
Providers who need training will seek it out.

WHAT CO-DESIGN REVEALED
Clinics that opt into training aren't the problem. But a certification system lets patients identify genuinely welcoming providers before exhausting trial-and-error.

What Was Built & What Carried Forward

THREE COMMUNITY-DESIGNED INITIATIVES

COMMUNITY CARE NAVIGATOR

- A trusted community member with lived LGBTQ+ experience providing on-demand navigation support
- Helps individuals find, afford, and prepare for care, including in-clinic advocacy
- Specialized insurance knowledge and awareness of local welcoming providers
- Trust hierarchy: independent > nonprofit > healthcare > insurer

STORY-BASED PROVIDER TRAINING

- Training for entire care teams (receptionists through providers) grounded in real LGBTQ+ experiences
- Designed and facilitated by LGBTQ+ community members, not abstract DEI curriculum
- Certification/badging system to help patients identify genuinely welcoming clinics
- Co-designers now compensated as ongoing facilitators, governance that didn't end

PEER-INFORMED RESOURCE MAPPING

- Community-generated directory of LGBTQ+-welcoming providers, clinics, and resources
- Peer reviews and lived experience emphasized over institutional listings
- Inspired by platforms like 'Everywhere is Queer' and 'Queering the Map'
- Could be tied into the Care Navigator role for consolidated community feedback

WHAT CARRIED FORWARD

Governance That Didn't End: Co-designers are currently compensated as facilitators of the story-based training program they designed. This is the truest form of co-design governance: community members moved from design authority into sustained, paid implementation roles.

Lived Experience as Institutional Change: The training is delivered by the people who lived the experiences it's built on, not external DEI consultants. Their continued compensation maintains accountability between the institution and the community whose safety the training is meant to create.

A Model for the Field: This project demonstrates that the governance commitment described in the Playbook, co-designers remain compensated participants in implementation, is achievable. It requires institutional willingness to share authority beyond the project period. OCPHS did that.

> *"We cannot do our work without the voice of those most impacted by these challenges."*
>
> **- Olmsted County Public Health**

EQUITABLE COMMUNITY CO-DESIGN

Facilitator Resources

Worksheets + Reference Materials
In Process Order

How to Use These Resources

These worksheets are designed to be used alongside the Co-Design Guide. Each tool corresponds to a phase in the process and a chapter in the Guide, so you can move between the conceptual framing and the practical work at any point.

You do not need to use every worksheet. Instead, follow the lead of your community members to draw on the practices and approaches that are most supportive, when they are most supportive.

For practitioners running a project
Work through the worksheets in sequence, starting with WS 1A (Scoping) and moving through recruitment, session design, and governance.

For organizational leaders
Start with WS 1A and 1B to test whether a project is genuinely ready for co-design before committing resources.

For facilitators mid-process
Jump to the worksheet that matches your current phase. Each tool stands alone and can be pulled individually for any active project.

FACILITATOR RESOURCE GUIDE · PROCESS MAP + PLAYBOOK CHAPTER REFERENCE

PROCESS PHASES	**1 Project Identification & Scoping**		**2 Proactive Recruitment**	**THROUGHOUT ALL PHASES:**
PLAYBOOK CHAPTERS	**Ch. 4** · System & Org. Readiness **Ch. 5** · Project Scoping & Preparation		**Ch. 7** · Recruitment as Power-Building	Community Participant Agreement, one-on-one check-ins, & Co-Designer Tracking Sheet (compensation, check-ins, exit interview, final payment, etc.)
WORKSHEETS & TOOLS	**WS 1A** Framing Design Challenges	**WS 1B** Project Scoping Canvas	**WS 2** Persona Development **WS 3** Position Description **WS 4** Recruitment + Snowball **WS 5** Compensation Planning	

PROCESS PHASES	**3 Equitable Co-Design**		**4 Development, Implementation & Governance**	
PLAYBOOK CHAPTERS	**Ch. 6** · The Co-Design Process **Ch. 8** · Facilitation & Holding Space		**Ch. 9** · Insights to Implementation **Ch. 11** · Sustaining Co-Design	
WORKSHEETS & TOOLS	**WS 6** Session Sequencing + Facilitation Guide	**WS 7A & 7B** Co-Design Discussion Guide	**WS 8** Implementation + Continued Authority	

HOW TO READ THIS MAP:

- Worksheet cards are organized under their phase - find your phase, find your tools
- Chapter tags reference the Playbook section that goes deepest on that phase
- Use worksheets in sequence or pull individually for any active project

Source: **ByDesign LLC**

Framing Design Challenges

Use these questions as discussion starters before settling on your co-design project scope. Work through all four categories.

Appropriate Scale

- How might you scale your project to allow co-designers to offer meaningful input that is broad enough for exploration, but narrow enough for engagement?
- How does your project focus on a specific audience of co-designers? How did you identify this population?
- How do you know your project is at a stage where collaborator input can still influence its direction?

Iterative

- How might you frame your project for exploration rather than validation of an embedded solution?
- How might your project offer transparency about why you're seeking input and what will be done with it?
- How might co-designer involvement influence project development and implementation beyond the engagement phase (into implementation and evaluation for example)?

Asset-Focused

- How might your project benefit from including community lived experiences?
- How have you framed your project to focus on systems and structures, not training people to adapt to existing ones?
- How might you create structures to avoid assuming collaborator needs, values, or fears?

Enhance

- How has your project been informed through previous engagement efforts?
- How does your project seek to access and grow relational networks?
- How do you know your project is focused on challenges that can be practically addressed, or at least show real progress?

Project Scoping Canvas

Clarify your design challenge, build the project brief, and test readiness before moving to recruitment.

STEP 1 **Initial Design Challenge: Write the challenge you hope to explore. Frame as a question, not a solution.**

STEP 2 **Root causes: Describe at least 3 reasons this challenge persists. For whom is this a structural problem? How do you know?**

Root cause 1	Root cause 2	Root cause 3

STEP 3 **Refined Design Challenge**

Actionable · People-focused · Practical · Leadership investment confirmed

STEP 4 **Project Considerations: timeline, staffing, constraints, assets**

READINESS CHECK · All six criteria must be confirmed before moving to recruitment · Problem open for discovery · Co-designer authority is real · Compensation budgeted · Timeline allows longitudinal work · Lived experience is central

Persona Development

Prioritize the perspectives you need to recruit. Diversity is a design requirement; homogeneous groups limit insights, creativity, and action.

	Access to process & influence →	
Impacted by outcome →	**HIGHLY IMPACTED LOW ACCESS** *Priority recruitment targets*	**HIGHLY IMPACTED HIGH ACCESS** *Steering team candidates*
	LESS IMPACTED LOW ACCESS *Community partners*	**LESS IMPACTED HIGH ACCESS** *Institutional allies*

PERSONA PROFILES

#	Lived experience, culture, and assets	Age range	Race / culture	Networks this person can reach
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				

DIVERSITY LENS: Age · Race & ethnicity · Gender identity · Geography · Disability · Immigration status · Veteran status · Multiple personas may exist in one person

Co-Designer Position Description

A position description signals professional, compensated work, not volunteerism. The language you use signals whether co-designers are advisors or governance partners.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

What is this project, what will co-designers influence, and why does it matter?

ROLE & RESPONSIBILITIES

Frame contributions as active and expert, not passive participation.

SESSION TIMELINE

Session 1:	Introduction & broad discovery
Session 2:	Pattern identification
Session 3:	Priority definition
Session 4:	Solution testing & co-design thesis
Ongoing:	Governance & implementation authority

COMPENSATION

$/hr · max hrs · $ total

QUALIFICATIONS

Lived experience is the qualification

MUST INCLUDE · Clear title · Decision-making authority scope · Time commitment · Compensation rate · No formal education required

LANGUAGE GUIDANCE · Partner, not participant · Governance partner, not advisor · Lived experience IS the qualification · Commitment to follow through on decisions

Recruitment + Snowball Outreach

Recruitment begins with trusted connectors already embedded in the communities you seek to engage. The snowball model expands reach through relational channels, not open calls.

1	2	3	4
Collaborator Mapping	Prioritizing Collaborators	Outreach via Relational Networks	Expectation Setting

OUTREACH CONVERSATION GUIDE

OPENING

"I'm reaching out because [organization] is working on [challenge]. We're looking for people with real experience, not experts, not volunteers. This is paid work."

THE ASK

"We're looking for co-designers who'll help us understand what's broken and design what better looks like. You'd be paid $[rate]/hr for [X] hours across [Y] sessions."

WHAT IT'S NOT

"This isn't a focus group or survey. Co-designers shape the problem framing and solutions and stay involved through implementation."

IF YES

"Tell me about your experience with this. Who else in your network has a strong perspective we should hear from?"

COMMON BARRIERS + HOW TO ADDRESS

- Childcare / family obligations: provide stipend or schedule around care
- Transportation: cover costs or meet where people are
- Language & literacy: offer interpreters and translated materials
- Institutional distrust: build relationship before asking; trust is earned
- Documentation fears: ensure confidentiality; use trusted community orgs
- Schedule conflicts: flexible timing and multiple session options
- Safety: create a diversity of ways for co-designers to show up how and when it is most comfortable

TRACKING TOOL: For each co-designer, record: name · background · contact · connector · confirmed · W-9 submitted · check-in 1 · check-in 2 · check-in 3 · exit interview · final payment

Compensation Planning Guide

Compensation is a structural requirement, not optional recognition. Professional-rate pay demonstrates that lived experience is valued as expertise and ensures co-designers can fully participate.

SCOPE OF COMPENSATION - WHAT TO INCLUDE

Activity	Hours each	# sessions	Subtotal
Design sessions (prep + attendance)			
Community exploration work between sessions			
Governance + implementation sessions			
Travel time / incidental expenses	flat rate or mileage	—	
TOTAL			

Living wage reference: www.livingwage.mit.edu: $30–$60/hr is a reasonable starting point in most regions.

PARTICIPANT AGREEMENT - KEY TERMS

Scope:	Co-designer agrees to share lived experience related to the project
Rate + ceiling:	$[rate]/hr · max [X] hrs · $[total] maximum compensation
Contractor status:	Independent contractor, not an employee or partner of the compensating organization

Timeline:	State start/end dates. Extensions require amended contracts.
Invoice schedule:	Two invoices: project midpoint + project conclusion (can be adapted if pay affects ability to qualify for resources)
Tax paperwork:	W-9 may be required before payment and 1099 issued at tax season (see IRS requirements)

RECOGNITION BEYOND PAY

- Co-authorship on reports and publications
- Professional references naming governance contributions
- Certificates & credentials
- Employment pathways: first-line candidates for roles they helped create
- Network access: professional events, advisory boards, leadership
- Ongoing relationship: sustained partnership beyond the project
- Meals & gathering at every session

TAX + BENEFITS · Compensation may affect co-designers' state/federal benefits (housing, SNAP, Medicaid). Explore implications before finalizing rates. Consult legal counsel as needed.

Session Sequencing + Facilitation Guide

Co-design alternates between facilitated design sessions and community explorations. Co-designers are interpreters, not data collectors, they contextualize what they hear through lived experience.

1 Broad Discovery

- Ground co-designers in project context
- Establish relationships and psychological safety
- Begin community exploration through trusted networks
- Exploration: What frustrates you most? Tell me about a time when...

No solution yet. Design team listens only.

2 Pattern Identification

- Co-designers share what they heard from their networks
- Themes surface across communities
- Design team identifies shared structural patterns
- Exploration: What matters most? What does success look like?

From stories to structural patterns.

3 Priority Definition

- Themes tested against broader community networks
- Tensions between community priorities and institutional constraints made visible
- Exploration: If you could change one thing about this system, what would it be?

Productive tension is the mechanism.

4 Solution Testing

- Co-design thesis finalized
- Prototypes/training/measurement tested against lived reality
- Thesis is a structural commitment, not a recommendation
- Governance transition: from design to implementation authority

Nothing is final until tested alongside real lives.

FACILITATION PRIORITIES

1 Safety & Belonging

Emotional, cultural, relational. Critical when inviting people harmed or excluded by systems.

2 Power in the Room

Power dynamics don't disappear when community members and (and if) institutional staff share a room.

3 Inclusive Tools

Accommodate multiple ways of learning, sharing, and processing. Everyone participates fully.

4 Holding Tension

Conflict is information, not failure. Tension reveals depth and complexity of the issue.

5 Co-Facilitation & Resonance

Pair facilitators across lines of difference. Different strengths and community ties build trust.

Community Exploration Discussion Guide

Between design sessions, co-designers engage their trusted networks through open conversations where they are an interpreter, not a data collector.

SETTING UP CONVERSATIONS

Choose people you already know
Reach out to people in your networks affected by this issue.

Explain what you're doing
"I'm helping with a project about [issue]. I'd love to hear your experience."

Find a comfortable setting
Private, familiar, free from distractions. Meet them where they are.

Be clear about confidentiality
Responses stay anonymous. Their voice shapes the work; we do not collect identifiable information.

Schedule 3+ conversations
Each runs 30–45 min. Aim for three before the next group session.

EXAMPLE STARTER QUESTIONS (each phase)

1 Broad Discovery

- What do you value most when it comes to your health or your family's health? Why?
- What makes it hard to focus on your health or keep track of things? Why?
- Who do you trust when it comes to health decisions, and why?

2 Pattern Identification

- What or who have you relied on most to address/navigate this [issue]? Why?
- Describe how this [issue] gets in the way of doing the things that matter most to you.
- What do programs or institutions consistently get wrong about your community or your experience?

3 Priority Definition

- If you could change one thing about how this is handled, what would it be and why?
- What feels most urgent to the people you know? Why?
- How do you balance this [issue] with the other challenges facing you and/or your family?

4 Solution Testing

- We've been working on [approach], in what ways does this reflect (or not) what you have heard in previous interviews?
- What part of this [approach] do you feel would be most impactful? Why?
- If you were delivering this [approach] what would you need to be successful? Why?

Continued on next page →

Community Exploration Discussion Guide

Tips for conducting and documenting your community conversations

WHILE FACILITATING

1. **Connect first**
   Begin by connecting as people. Share a bit of your own story first
2. **Listen actively**
   Use gentle follow-up: “Tell me more” or “Why does that feel that way?”
3. **Allow silence**
   People need time to reflect. Don’t rush to fill the gap.
4. **Follow the ‘why’**
   That’s where the most important things live
5. **Handle emotion with care**
   If someone gets emotional, thank them and let them know they can stop
6. **Stay flexible**
   You don’t need to ask every question; follow the lead of the person you are interviewing - see where the conversation goes

CAPTURING WHAT YOU HEAR

- Jot down what stood out. What was powerful, unexpected, or common
- Record feelings, values, and themes, not just facts
- Note exact phrases when they capture something important
- What are the top 3 things you heard, and why do they matter?

SHARING BACK

You are lifting up what your community shared, not speaking for them, but with them in mind.

When you bring insights back to the group, focus on themes, feelings, and patterns, not individual identities. Your role is to be a bridge between the community and the design process.

Implementation + Continued Authority

Implementation is not a handoff. Without sustained authority, community-derived insight is diluted or abandoned. Without governance, co-design becomes insight without consequence.

1 Protect the thesis

Co-designers review every implementation decision against community-defined commitments. Identify and flag departure before it becomes institutionalized.

2 Trust before finalizing

Prototypes, training materials, and measurement frameworks are tested against co-designers' lived experience before scaling. This is design governance, not user feedback.

3 Sustain the relationship

Co-designers maintain the institutional relationship with the community on whose behalf they have governed. That bridge must remain open for the work to endure.

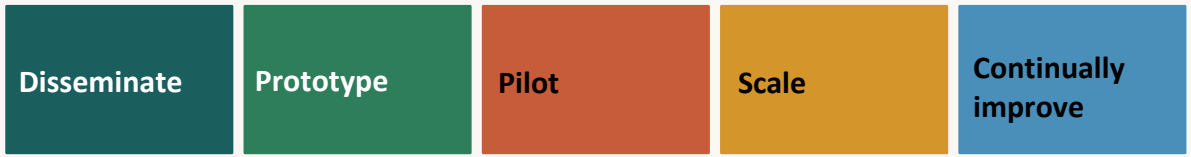
CO-DESIGN THESIS DOCUMENTATION

PROBLEM REFRAME: What the institution assumed vs. what co-design revealed:

IMPLEMENTATION PILLARS: The structural conditions any solution MUST address; community-defined, not negotiable:

ACCOUNTABILITY + GOVERNANCE: How will we honor these commitments? What roles do co-designers hold through implementation?

IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUUM



DRIFT WARNING SIGNS

- Decisions made without co-designer review
- Scope narrowing for operational convenience
- Language shifting to institutional metrics
- Co-designers being thanked but not consulted
- Timelines moved without co-designer input

POST-PROJECT ROLES

- Implementation advisor
- Evaluation partner
- Peer facilitator
- Community ambassador
- Frist-line candidates for the roles they helped to create

Source: **ByDesign LLC**

How Ongoing Governance Works

Authority only holds if it is structured. Define who decides what, how often the work is reviewed, and how governance survives turnover.

1 Decision rights

Name the decisions co-designers sign off on, not just advise on. Fidelity, scope, and measurement changes require their approval, not only notification.

2 Review cadence

Set a fixed rhythm for governance review. Implementation is checked against community commitments on a schedule, not only when problems surface.

3 Terms & succession

Define how long co-designers serve, how they rotate, and how new members join so governance outlives any one individual.

GOVERNANCE CHARTER - DRAFT HERE

DECISION RIGHTS: Which decisions require co-designer sign-off (or at least collaborative decision making), not just input?

REVIEW CADENCE: How often does the governance body meet, and what does it review each time?

SUCCESSION: How do co-designers rotate on and off, and who recruits replacements?

IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUUM

Disseminate	Prototype	Pilot	Scale	Continually improve

CO-DESIGNER SIGN-OFF GATES

- Implementation fidelity changes
- Scope or eligibility changes
- Measurement & evaluation design
- Budget shifts affecting the work
- Public communication & framing

REVIEW RHYTHM

- Standing governance meeting each cycle
- Decision log reviewed regularly
- Fidelity check against the thesis
- Open action items tracked to close
- Annual charter & terms review

Source: **ByDesign LLC**

Sustaining Governance: Compensation & Durability

Governance you do not resource is governance you will lose. Compensation, budget, and ownership turn continued authority into durable change.

1 Pay for the role

Co-designers in governance are compensated as designers and researchers, not thanked as volunteers. The rate reflects the authority they hold.

2 Budget the continuity

Ongoing governance is a line item, not a favor. Fund meeting time, facilitation, and co-designer roles across the full implementation horizon.

3 Ownership = durability

Systems designed with community embed the conditions for sustained engagement. Compliance cannot. Durability comes from who holds the work.

SUSTAINABILITY PLAN - DRAFT HERE

COMPENSATION: What will co-designers be paid, and against what role or rate benchmark?

BUDGET SOURCE: Which line funds governance beyond the project period, and who protects it?

THE CONVERSATION: What are the biggest institutional barriers to doing this work and how can you find work-arounds (or even better, solutions)?

IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUUM

Disseminate	Prototype	Pilot	Scale	Continually improve

WHAT GOVERNANCE COSTS

- Co-designer compensation (per role)
- Facilitation & meeting coordination
- Materials, travel & access needs
- Evaluation & reporting support
- Onboarding for new members

SIGNS GOVERNANCE WILL LAST

- Co-designers hold paid, named roles
- Funding secured beyond the pilot
- Decision rights written down
- The community relationship stays open
- Ownership sits closest to the issue
- Contributions are recognized and credited

Source: **ByDesign LLC**