

FUND FOR  
GUARANTEED  
INCOME

2022 REPORT

# VOICES OF THE COMPTON PLEDGE



# LETTER FROM AJA BROWN

The Compton Pledge was envisioned during one of the most difficult periods for Compton and the world. The pandemic and ensuing recession left our families facing sudden unemployment, impending evictions, and uncertainty around meeting basic needs. Policymakers were unsure when – or if – federal aid would be deployed.

As a historically Black and brown urban community, Compton is especially hard hit as a result of generational poverty, structural racism, and the trauma of police brutality. The transformation of Compton from a majority-Black to a majority-Latino city introduced further challenges as the growing population of undocumented residents remains excluded from many safety net programs.

From my own lived and learned experiences, I know first hand that providing people with economic support offers essential breathing room to transcend from survival mode. During my eight years serving as Mayor, I created an economic development strategy designed to strengthen Compton from the bottom up by investing in the well-being of community members directly.

And, in the midst of the pandemic, new policies and ways of meeting the demands for economic security were essential. The strategy accelerated. We created the Compton Community Development Corporation and the Fund for Guaranteed Income for residents to breathe and to build. I believe now more than ever that the well-being of individuals and the communities they live in are inseparable.

Our guaranteed income program provides an opportunity to invest directly in individuals and families, ameliorating the constant stress of financial security by affording families much needed breathing room. It captures a community's vision for dignity, resilience, and freedom. We named our pilot in honor of a grassroots movement started over a decade ago by community leader Eugene Durrah. It captured the heart of our city and our hopes for future generations, encapsulated in the rallying call - "We Pledge Compton." The mantra lives on.

New and bold initiatives have changed trajectories, but will not undo decades of injustice. This report provides an overview of what it looks like when we forge a path forward to rebuild our community – in our own terms. This is the path we were charged with. We Pledge Compton.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Aja L. Brown". The signature is fluid and cursive.

**AJA BROWN**  
**FORMER MAYOR OF COMPTON**

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# INTRODUCTION

**Guaranteed income is a simple but powerful idea:  
invest directly in people.**

Guaranteed income (GI) is a policy that provides direct, unconditional cash transfers to individuals or households over a sustained period of time. With no constraints on how the money is spent and fewer restrictions than other forms of welfare, it empowers people to build assets over a long time horizon. It should be provided as a supplement – not a replacement – to existing programs.

Because discriminatory social service and tax laws consistently provide fewer resources to neighborhoods of color, only a system built for recurring economic support can disrupt the racial wealth gap. The solution to poverty is, as Martin Luther King Jr. said, “to abolish it directly by now a widely discussed measure: the guaranteed income.”

The Fund for Guaranteed Income (F4GI) is a nonprofit launched in 2020 to disrupt the cycle of poverty and incarceration. Our approach aims to build a viable path to more inclusive social policies at the national level, starting with the Compton Pledge.



## WE DECODE COMPLEX BUREAUCRACY...

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The US government spends \$361 billion on bloated, dysfunctional welfare systems that many people can't use or don't trust. F4GI researches existing service delivery systems to identify and solve the obstacles that they pose. Understanding what doesn't work about today's government systems is essential to move innovative programs from pilot to policy.

## TO BUILD COMMUNITY- DESIGNED TECHNOLOGY

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F4GI's human-centered tools are built with over ten years of research, and in partnership with 20+ community organizations. Our payments platform removes barriers to access for hard-to-reach, excluded populations and connects ~2000 low-income residents to cash, case management, and community resources.

# THE COMPTON PLEDGE

The Compton Pledge is a two year GI pilot delivering between \$300-\$600 a month to 800 families. Compton is home to 100,000 residents, 30% of whom are Black and 68% of whom are Latinx. At the onset of COVID, poverty rates tripled in the city, with a growing number of residents relying on food pantries daily.

Mayor Aja Brown linked the public health crisis of the pandemic to pervasive PTSD in the community following decades of police brutality and underinvestment. Designed in collaboration with Mayor Brown's Office and the Jain Family Institute, the Compton Pledge is an investment in long-lasting economic self-determination. The pilot is intentionally inclusive and representative of the city's demographics to demonstrate the path to a true income floor.

The Compton Pledge Community Advisory Council consists of over 20 residents, religious leaders, educators, and heads of local nonprofits who guided the program's implementation. Over 15 national organizations in the movement for racial and economic justice have committed the program's collective vision.

Through a longitudinal, randomized control trial study, the Pledge is providing empirical evidence to bolster the case for GI. With a F4GI payments platform built specifically for cash transfers, the Pledge is also developing the infrastructure needed to build a safety net that protects those who are excluded from existing welfare programs and economic systems.

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## THE PEOPLE'S PLEDGE

### FAMILY SIZE

**800 participants, over 1,780 beneficiaries:** 86% of Compton Pledge recipients have children, adding up to more than 1,780 program beneficiaries total. The average household size in the program is four people.

### RACE

**Representative:** 61% of participants Hispanic or Latinx, 35% Black or African American, 3% other, 1% white. For participants in the Pledge, it will reduce 70% of the racial wealth gap.

### LEGAL STATUS

**Inclusive:** The pilot serves the one in four who are unbanked, and the formerly incarcerated and undocumented who are denied welfare benefits. 9.5% of participants are undocumented, and 3% are formerly incarcerated.

# IMPACT SO FAR

The Pledge is showing how an income floor can help someone keep their home if they lose their job or continue to put food on the table if they have a health emergency. For participants who serve three roles as part-time service workers, mothers, and teachers to their kids, it can compensate for *unpaid work* in the care economy. It is a critical step to ensure residents fully participate in building a flourishing family and strong, resilient community.

Compton is building a groundswell of support for a federally legislated income floor. Among the pillars of the BREATHE Act, named the modern day Civil Rights Act, is a call for the government to “pilot programs for universal basic income” (Section 3). The Compton Pledge is the first attempt to do so at scale in a major city, with important implications for how policymakers structure and execute future initiatives.

# BY THE NUMBERS

800

HOUSEHOLDS  
RECEIVING  
INVESTMENT

+20

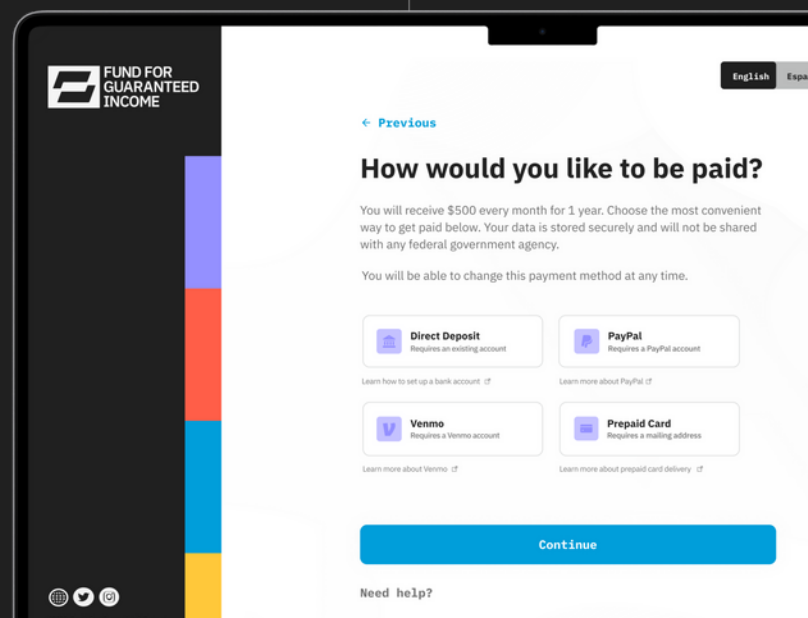
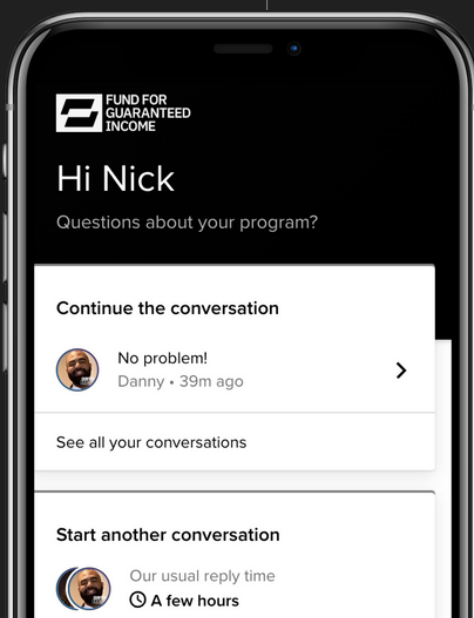
COMMUNITY  
ORGANIZATIONS  
CO-DESIGNED PILOT

\$8.2

MILLION DOLLARS  
DISBURSED  
SO FAR

+13

VOICES OF  
COMPTON PLEDGE  
MEMBERS



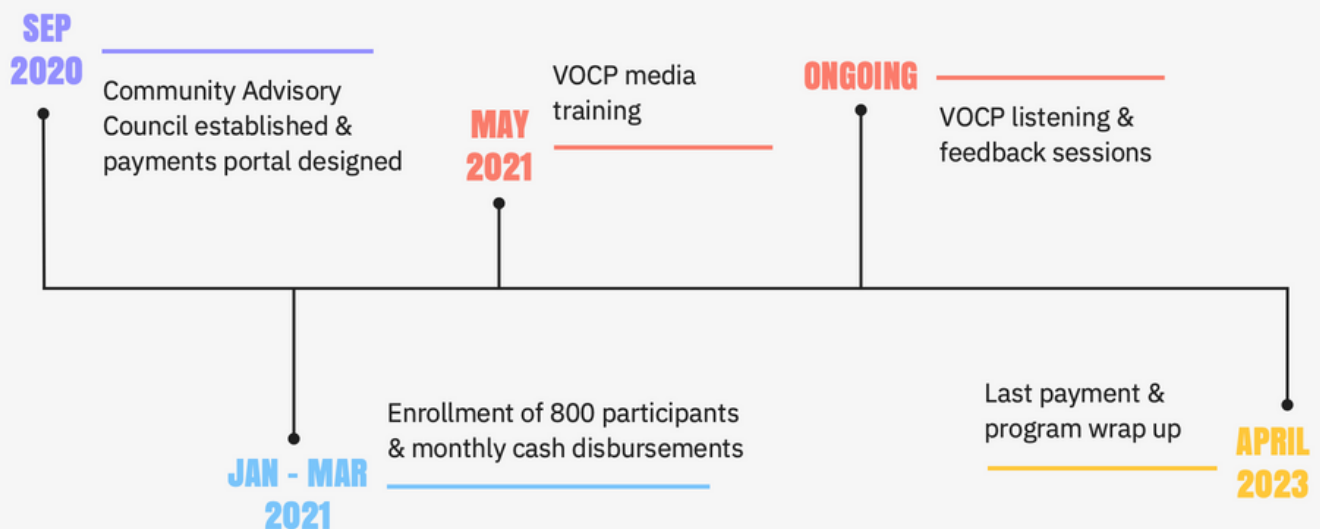
# VOICES OF COMPTON PLEDGE

**A storytelling cohort shaping the narrative of guaranteed income – on their own terms.**

Recipients of charitable or governmental support are too often reduced to data points. As news broke about the successful launch of the Compton Pledge, the F4GI team established a safe place for participants to choose when and who told their stories. The Voices of Compton Pledge (VOCP) storytelling cohort was a 100% volunteer opportunity for residents to share lived experiences. The VOCP members helped organize local community resource fairs and became a connected community outside of the program.

This report highlights their voices and provides insight into one of California's leading guaranteed income pilots. It aims to elevate experiences often ignored in traditional media soundbites. We co-developed the following goals to understand and improve the direct impacts of one of the largest pilots at the time. Together, we're charting the future of GI implementation.

## PROGRAM TIMELINE





# VOCP GOALS

## 1 TRAIN MEDIA EXPERTS

We discussed strategies for setting boundaries to ensure VACP members only shared as much as they wanted during media encounters. At all times, participants were supported to turn down media opportunities and questions for any reason, including busy schedules or personal preferences.

## 2 ENCOURAGE AUTHENTICITY

Pilot programs can responsibly share stories from the most vulnerable moments of people's lives if they are written on their own terms. VACP members were never treated as pull quotes, data points, or click-bait, but as people whose experiences and life stories are inherently important.

## 3 LISTEN TO LEARN

VACP members shared insight into the impact this investment had on their daily lives. During recurring meetings, members had space to reflect and discuss critical personal and social realities both individually as and as a group. In the process, F4GI learned how to improve the delivery of resources and cash to future program participants.

## 4 BUILD COMMUNITY

Through message groups and virtual meetings, the VACP fostered a community within the Compton Pledge program. Participants shared upcoming entertainment events, community service opportunities, and life updates with one another. The VACP family grew organically as participants uplifted and supported each other.



# TIFFANY RESILIENT BELIEVER

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## ABOUT TIFFANY

Tiffany has been a resident of Compton for over 30 years. When she first saw the offer to receive guaranteed income, she thought it was a scam. Through word of mouth in the community, she soon discovered the program was real.

When Tiffany first enrolled she had been struggling to pay bills for expensive, life saving medication that insurance did not cover. After a heart surgery kept her in the hospital for 46 days, her medical expenses amounted to thousands each month.

Today, Tiffany is back in full health. During the first year of the pilot she was unable to save funds from the program because of her medical expenses. In year two, she has been able to save towards her children. She recently adopted a baby boy making her a mother of three. Tiffany is proud of her city and optimistic about the future of her family.



**F4GI RESPONDS IN  
MINUTES AND  
TREATS ME WITH  
THE DIGNITY AND  
RESPECT OF A  
HUMAN BEING**

### **What's the biggest change in your life since being enrolled in the Compton Pledge?**

Guaranteed income provides me with the comfort of knowing I am able to pay a bill, or put food on the table during these trying times. The Compton Pledge instilled some faith that I had once lost in the city. At a certain point, it seemed like there was something negative in every direction. The Pledge helped members of this community – who had reached their breaking point – find some positivity. Many of us thought things were never going to change.

The program brought a positive light and really showed us how something small can create such a big change. It showed me that if I put your mind to it, I can do anything.

### **What concerns or hopes do you have as the Compton Pledge program comes to an end?**

I hope that this program continues with more participants that will come after the inaugural group. I want the program to impact someone else's life like it has impacted mine.

We never know what people are going through. From the outside looking in, everything may look like peaches and cream. But you never know what skeletons are in people's closets. You don't know if people can't afford to put food on their tables.

### **What do you wish people knew about you, your family, or your city?**

COVID-19 was stressful, but I am blessed. No matter where I go, I will always be a Compton Girl. Compton's determination inspires me. Everyone should know that Compton is not what it is depicted as. They put us out there as this high-poverty area filled with negative things.

The city is so much more than that. We are a bunch of like-minded individuals that promote change. A lot of people are big on God and Unity. Where we come from doesn't make us. We make where we come from.

As long as we continue to stay together and let our roots make us better for our children to follow, everything will improve.

# CHRISTINE COMMUNITY LEADER

## ABOUT CHRISTINE

Christine is a hardworking mother who struggled for custody of her four-year-old daughter and eighteen-year-old son, both of whom she loves dearly. A couple of years ago, Christine was experiencing homelessness and had been living in a shelter for multiple years.

She credits her new life trajectory to her faith in God. When she moved to Compton, she re-discovered her faith. She is very active in church and ministers to the community members experiencing homelessness, bringing mobile showers and supplying care packages.

Today, Christine is leading a service-first life for her community, her family, and, most importantly, herself. She has been reunited with her daughter. Funds from the Compton Pledge enabled her to secure better housing and a car.



**I HAVEN'T MET  
PEOPLE WHO ARE  
THIS HELPFUL  
AND JOYFUL**

## What's the biggest change in your life since being enrolled in the Compton Pledge?

The biggest change is having financial stability—especially right now with all the inflation. There are so many issues with people not having enough money and not being able to keep up with the changes in our economy.

## What concerns or hopes do you have as the Compton Pledge program comes to an end?

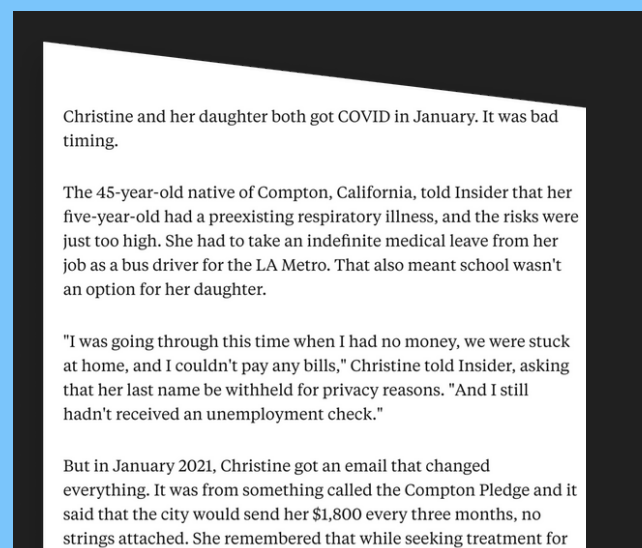
I would usually panic about it coming to an end. What will I do? I won't have that stability. But... I know that all great things have to come to an end. I rarely use the money to pay for bills. I see it as a luxury and save it (for the most part). I made it my goal to become as educated as possible when it comes to making the money last.

I was able to go to my dad's funeral and stay at a hotel with my daughter, which isn't something I would have been able to do. I was also able to go visit a cousin in Missouri, which my daughter really appreciated and was grateful for.

## What do you wish people knew about you, your family, or your city?

I want people to know that the Compton Pledge shows how the oldest city in the world that is known for gang violence and shootings is actually the most heart warming, loving place on the planet.

Through VOCP, I made true connections with neighbors and keep in touch with De'shawn about how we're both returning love to the community as participants to Compton Pledge. I created a community-based organization with my church to support Compton's unhoused population. *(Featured in Business Insider below).*



# DE'SHAWN ENTREPRENEUR

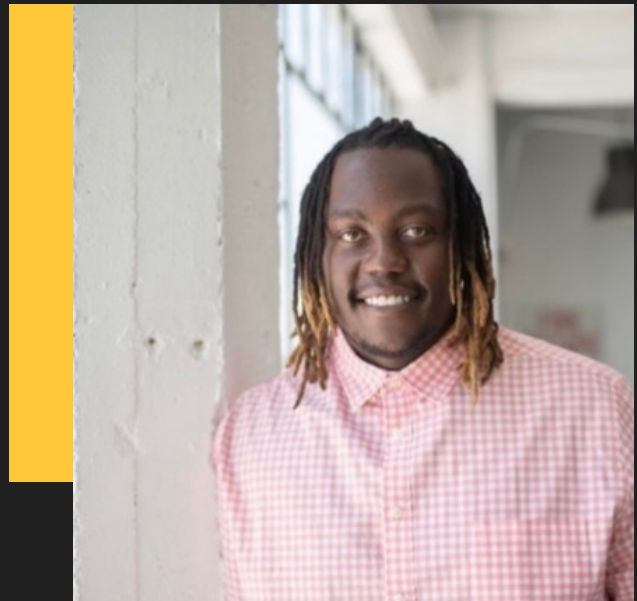
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## ABOUT DE'SHAWN

De'shawn is a longtime resident of Compton, with deep love for the city that raised him. He is a man of many talents – a comedian, musical artist, actor, and producer. De'shawn's real passion is his business: a wrestling promotion company by the name of Comptonmania.

He currently works 15-20 hours a week for the Parks and Recreation Department and reinvests his salary in Comptonmania. COVID-19 put a stress on the momentum he built, given the inability to host live crowds at wrestling events or promote shows. The Compton Pledge ensured that his business would survive.

De'shawn says that it has also given him the flexibility to be more aggressive in his business strategies. Now, Comptonmania is hosting live events. Moving forward, he strives to inspire his community and the youth he meets through entertainment and his personal success.



**THE COMPTON  
PLEDGE HELPS ME  
INVEST IN MY  
BUSINESS AND  
KEEPS ME AFLOAT**

## What's the biggest change in your life since being enrolled in the Compton Pledge?

The Compton Pledge has gone a long way for Comptonmania. We were waiting for a grant situation that had been delayed and the lack of funding put an extra stress on our business. The Compton Pledge has given me flexibility to put money in different places. Flexibility allows me to take chances and risks.

I want to bring Compton events that offer kids an outlet and expose them to different things that keep them out of trouble. I want to become the answer to what people need.

## What concerns or hopes do you have as the Compton Pledge program comes to an end?

The program coming to an end is definitely something fearful. It helps so much. On the same token, you don't want to get dependent on the guaranteed income. It will be a different situation depending on the participant.

I will always take the optimistic road, regardless of the situation. You have to keep the faith! We have to keep the Compton Pledge going!

## What do you wish people knew about you, your family, or your city?

Be proud of where you come from. Don't ever be ashamed of what you went through to get here. Use that to empower your community. Whatever family you have, protect it and hold it near. As humans, we need families and communities to survive. Put your best foot forward, and if you mess up, be accountable. Put one foot in front of the other and you'll be amazed on how brave, powerful, and strong you really are.

Dealing with the Compton Pledge team is like dealing with a family. I have been able to meet people in my community that I would have never met without this program. I've never had a single argument, and never had to reach out due to a major problem. One time, payments did not come on the pay day—but it was only for a day and the team was extremely transparent. You guys are gracious enough to support my business on your social media pages and I'm excited to see where it goes.





# A COMMUNITY'S VISION FOR FREEDOM

Tiffany, Christine, and De'Shawn are three out of over a dozen members of the VOCP storytelling cohort. Their testimonies of resilience speak to the impact of guaranteed income in the city, building our collective demands for investment straight into Compton.



The Compton Pledge is a powerful, simple act of love and caring. The program creates an endless ripple effect.

**NARA**



The Pledge came when I was struggling to make ends meet. It allowed me to keep a roof over my children's head as a struggling, single mom.

**KEVILYN**



The grant made a difference with me having to pay my daughters' rent while attending nursing school.

**SHIVEL**



I'm a mother of three, and have done side jobs driving, cleaning, and recycling. Now I'm able to catch up on bills.

**ROSALYN**



These funds came at a time where I was trying to start a family with my new baby girl and working to become a homeowner.

**KEISHA**



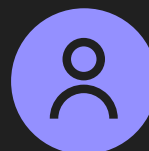
The Compton Pledge came at a time when I lost my job due to the pandemic and was sick at the hospital. It was my only source of income.

**ATISHA**



I feel grateful knowing my city created a program to support the community. And I feel grateful to be one of those members.

**MIGUEL**



I created a savings account and never use the funds. I'm committed to saving for a home and being a first generation propertyowner.

**MARIE**




# CONCLUSION

Residents used the additional funds to cover costs in times of sickness, start business ventures, and provide stable conditions for their families and communities. Some like Christine were able to start non-profit organizations, demonstrating the ripple effects of guaranteed income. Many like Tiffany went in with the goal of saving their payments. Others like De'shawn were able to advance their entrepreneurship, invest in staff, host live events, and grow their own brands. While participants hailed from different walks of life, guaranteed income ensured the flexibility to afford basic necessities and pursue their hopes for the future.

The Voices of Compton Pledge storytelling cohort gave our team at the Fund for Guaranteed Income deeper insights into the impacts of direct cash programs. All of the VOCP members noted how having just a little more economic freedom gave them breathing room and a source of hope in their everyday lives. The pledge to people's power demonstrates what is possible – and what is next – across the nation. Because now is a critical time to re-imagine the social safety net. In the words of Mayor Aja Brown:

"This is the path we were charged with. We Pledge Compton."



**NEW**  
**NON-PROFITS**

**3**

STARTED WITH FUNDS FROM THE COMPTON PLEDGE

**COMMUNITY**  
**PARTNERS**

**35**

NATIONAL AND LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS COMMITTED TO OUR PLEDGE

**FUNDS**  
**DISBURSED**

**\$8.2M**

OUT OF A TOTAL \$10.2 MILLION DOLLARS STRAIGHT INTO COMPTON

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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**Dr. Sharoni Denise Little** | CEO, The Strategist Company  
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**Sara Bomani** | Co-Founder, Unearth and Empower Communities  
**Sara Silva** | Co-Founder & Co-Exec Director, EntreNous Youth Empowerment Services  
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