



Equity & Health Fellows Report

Class Two

2019

RMHF
RICHMOND MEMORIAL HEALTH FOUNDATION

As stewards of a community resource, we understand the critical importance of engaging with and listening to the people who work courageously and creatively to address the disparities and inequities that persist in our region.

+ WE SEEK TO

Advance Health Equity and Reduce Health Disparities

+ OUR MISSION

Fostering an Equitable and Healthy Richmond Region

+ OUR APPROACH

We Believe Meaningful Change Requires Active Engagement and Investment

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FROM THE DIRECTORS

RMHF's Fellowship Journey



The goals of the class included:

1. Model and support practices across sectors that explicitly promote racial equity and improve health outcomes.
2. Invest in the development and participation of traditionally underrepresented community members to be decision-makers and leaders in fostering equity.
3. Be a catalyst for greater racial equity and inclusion in nonprofit hiring and governance in the region.
4. Advocate for federal, state, regional, and local public policies that foster health and equity in the region.

As part of Richmond Memorial Health Foundation's (RMHF's) commitment to fostering an equitable and healthy Richmond region, we intentionally focus our work on addressing the social, economic, and structural conditions that contribute to poor health outcomes.

These efforts can be complex, interconnected, and influenced by our own experiences and biases. As stewards of a community resource, we understand the critical importance of engaging with and listening to the people who work courageously and creatively to address the disparities and inequities that persist in our region.

To that end, we kicked off our first class of Equity + Health Fellows in 2016. Eighteen individuals representing diverse, mission-aligned organizations in the Richmond region came together over a nine-month period to map out a bold and actionable equity agenda for RMHF. The 2017/18 Fellows recommended four goals and ten strategies to pursue for RMHF.

We have made significant progress against these goals, including the launch of a second class of Equity + Health Fellows in alignment with the suggested strategy (under goal number two) to "Develop and support a cohort of grassroots leaders to promote health equity."

The 2018/19 Equity + Health Fellows are a group of twelve grassroots and community leaders working individually and collaboratively within their communities to advance health and racial equity in the spaces and places where they live and work. What follows is a report, written by the Fellows, reflecting on the process and offering recommendations to RMHF about how our Board and team can address health equity in the built environment while applying a racial equity lens.

Not unlike our first class, these Fellows approached the Fellowship with passion, courage, and impatient optimism. We are grateful to have learned with and from them and look forward to integrating many of their recommendations as our Trustees embark on strategic planning for the organization's next three years.

Sincerely,

Mark D. Constantine, PhD
President & CEO

Deborah L. Ulmer, RN, PhD, PhD
Chair, Board of Trustees

Vanessa Walker Harris, MD
Equity Taskforce Chair, Board of Trustees



The city's built environment bears the scars of racial inequality inherent in slavery, Jim Crow discrimination and economic marginalization.

INEQUITIES IN OUR COMMUNITY

INTRODUCTION |

Our Collective Purpose



Class of 2018 Fellows:

Agustin Bravo
 Duron Chavis
 Lacette Cross
 Toria Edmonds-Howell
 Max Hepp-Buchanan
 Willie Hilliard
 Maritza Mercado Pechin
 Shekinah Mitchell
 Ryan Rinn
 Patrice Shelton
 Jay White
 Chelsea Higgs Wise

On May 22, 2018, twelve of us began our collective work as grassroots leaders selected as RMHF Equity + Health Fellows. We each brought our personalities into an open process for the benefit of RMHF, our organizations, our communities, and ourselves. We listened, challenged, sat in discomfort, learned, and found purpose toward the complicated and nuanced challenges of racial and health equity in the built environment. Through our individual projects and feedback from our peers, we found new solutions and further lines of inquiry into improving place in the Richmond region and beyond. Twelve evolving narratives of racial and health equity with hope of one just and transparent future.

As 2018 Equity + Health Fellows, we were brought together to achieve a healthier, more equitable region by changing conditions that adversely impact people in Richmond. Through our individual and collective activism, we work to make Richmond a community where people have a voice, a sense of belonging, good health, safe and affordable homes, and transportation options. We want people in the region to acknowledge historical racism and seek greater justice and equity between those who can afford to live here and those who can't. We want neighborhoods with safe and welcoming gathering spaces that put us all on equal footing and allow us to be who we are.

Each leader entered the fellowship ready to learn more about racial equity, the built environment and best practices to improve our communities. What we encountered were deep and engaging conversations with one another about the connective ways our work addressed systemic concerns of health, power and race. Over the course of each meeting we networked with one another allowing opportunity and space to dive deeper through dialogue — on matters of white wealth, racial justice, and political realities. We discovered the powerful ways our passions brought us to the work of being grassroots leaders in our communities.

In this report, we identify our priorities for achieving greater equity, highlight our efforts to address them, and make recommendations to RMHF on how the foundation can advance grassroots leaders in building a healthier, more equitable region. We also invite RMHF Trustees and staff to join in the ongoing work of community building through mutuality and respect.

Our hope is to continue the work of advancing racial equity and health in the built environment within the greater Richmond region through deepened working networks.

INEQUITIES

The Disparities We Seek To Change

We see inequities throughout the region. In a community at its best, residents feel at home, have resources to thrive, and sense connection with others. Our research and organizing shows this is not the case in Richmond. Racism has had a lasting and pervasive impact on the built environment—from persistent segregation to public policies and economic and real estate decisions that deprive residents of adequate housing, education, health, and gathering places.

We see conditions that are unacceptable across lifespans, neighborhoods, and social structures; we experience these in our own lives and those we work with.

The city’s “built environment bears the scars of racial inequality inherent in slavery, Jim Crow discrimination and economic marginalization.” Examples of this include the limited access to healthy food as seen in the food deserts of the east end and south side; the redistribution of public transportation due to the Pulse line down Broad street. Essentially, we are able to see the “ripple effects” of racial inequity throughout the built environment across the city.

E+H Fellows have uncovered the following realities as a part of their work within their communities and the projects advanced through the fellowship:

[Left] Hillside Court youth serving FeedMore meals to the community in December 2018. **[Middle]** Black Pride RVA team members show their spirit at the Virginia Pride Fest on Brown’s Island in September 2018. **[Bottom]** Jay White is interviewed by WRIR on the topic of LGBTQ and aging. He highlighted the challenges of LGBTQ elders and the need for wraparound services.



Residents' voices are underrepresented in public planning and decision making.

Only 20% of respondents to the latest City of Richmond Master Plan survey were African American, despite being a majority African American city.

As a result of the racial funding disparities in urban place-making, communities of color do not experience opportunities to realize solutions to their own problems on their terms.

Residents live in unstable, rapidly changing, and unsafe conditions.

In South Richmond, mobile home residents struggle to maintain safe conditions, while drainage leaks into the streets and houses, jeopardizing families' health.

Lower income Northside communities face a rapidly rising housing market where gentrification is changing the identity and culture of the neighborhood.

Youth entering the workforce after high school do not have access to quality affordable housing and support to facilitate their career growth and financial self-sufficiency.

Church Hill North has the highest density of public housing per square mile in the entire state, while Church Hill South has homes currently for sale at over \$600,000.

* <https://www.philanthropy.com/article/Opinion-Systemic-Bias-Behind/240171> "It's Bias That Hobbles People of Color, No Lack of a Leadership Pipeline", The Chronicle of Philanthropy, June 6, 2017

Our nonprofit organizations are neither diverse nor equitably resourced.

White-led organizations in the region have more resources, greater investment from local philanthropy, and limited African American presence among staff, leadership, and boards.

The Chronicle of Philanthropy reports, "Despite years of deliberating the question of diversity, little has changed. Blacks, Latinos, Asians, and other racial and ethnic minorities still fill fewer than 20 percent of nonprofit executive-director positions, a figure that hasn't budged for more than a decade."*

Road quality and unsafe driving conditions put our safety at risk.

Our safety is jeopardized by unsafe conditions in Richmond's built environment. Roads are particularly hazardous for low-income and minority communities that rely on walking and cycling for transportation yet lack safe infrastructure on which to travel.

The rate of pedestrian deaths per 100,000 people in Richmond is 4.93, as compared to Virginia's 1.38, New York City's 1.18, and Virginia Beach's 0.26.

[Right] One of many examples of "gentrification" in Richmond's Northside, this photo shows a revitalized home in Brookland Park right next to an older home in need of repair.

Richmond offers limited support for LGBTQ persons.

LGBTQ persons of color lack places to gather and feel welcome and connected.

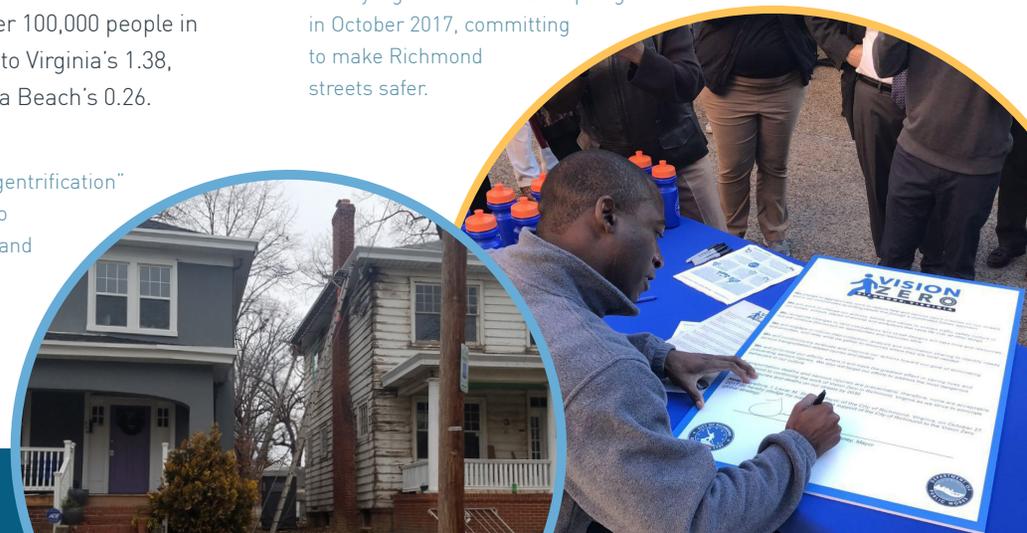
LGBTQ residents do not have adequate access to social and community support as they age.

Nationwide, 53% of elders experience social isolation. Studies show that older adults without social interaction are twice as likely to die prematurely.

The full history of racial segregation and violence is not told.

Richmond's racial history and strife is not fully acknowledged in monuments, education, or local narratives. While many states have memorialized lynchings within The National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Alabama, Richmond has not.

[Below] Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney signs the Vision Zero pledge in October 2017, committing to make Richmond streets safer.



HOUSING & TRANSPORTATION FELLOWS



Toria Edmonds-Howell is working with a youth advisory committee to design a prototype housing solution for young adults living at RRHA properties. She strives to create an “inclusive housing landscape that responds to needs of young adults looking to transition out of RRHA and move towards self-sufficiency and be thriving adults.”



Max Hepp-Buchanan works to eliminate traffic-related deaths and injuries for people who most rely on walking and biking for transportation to get to jobs, school, and basic services.



Willie Hilliard is preserving housing affordability, seeking to prevent displacement, and advocating for policy change that empowers the senior and lower income communities of Northside. Willie brings Northside communities together in a safe green space to advocate on behalf of the most vulnerable for a healthier community.

COMMUNITY VOICE FELLOWS



Agustin Bravo is forming a resident association in his mobile home park to address sub-par living situations, such as poor drainage systems and inadequate sidewalks connecting children to school.



Maritza Mercado Pechin helps give voice to people traditionally not included in land planning decisions. Through her work updating the City of Richmond’s master plan, Maritza seeks pragmatic, community-driven solutions to ensure Southside is represented in the master plan and to help make the whole City of Richmond a healthier, better place.



Ryan Rinn prepares community members and youth with toolkits to advocate to City Council for policies that ease the pressures of gentrification and protect against displacement.



Patrice Shelton mentors and trains future youth leaders from within her community who can advocate for the community’s needs to City officials.

LEADING CHANGE IN THE RICHMOND REGION

PLACE MAKING FELLOWS



Duron Chavis has identified four urban greening projects to be run by organizations of color that will be resourced to transform the built environment on their own terms, using a placemaking process that optimizes community assets and the long-term sustainability of the project.



Lacette Cross is committed to improving the health and wellness of Black LGBTQ persons in Greater Richmond. Through successfully launching the inaugural Black Pride RVA event this summer, she recognizes the lack of, and need for, a dedicated space for persons who are Black and LGBTQ in the Richmond area.



Chelsea Higgs reconnects people to the vibrant strengths of their ancestry and culture, helps them process the grief of past traumas, and create new historical narratives that can have healing effects, with particular attention to creating a memorial to a lynching in Richmond.



Shekinah Mitchell is mobilizing support to redevelop the southern end of the Martin Luther King Jr. Bridge into a 3.5-acre community park that is endorsed by local stakeholders and residents. Rooted in community engagement and economic inclusion, this project will support cultural place-making, place-holding, and place-keeping.



Jay White builds support and equity for elder LGBTQ persons in the Richmond region through increased access to culturally competent and sensitive resources, supported by a resource guide, storytelling, and inter-agency collaboration.

EXTERNAL REVIEWERS

Alfredo A. Cruz
VP of Programs & Special Initiatives, Foundation for Louisiana

Susie Lee
Executive Director, Potomac Health Foundation

Valerie L. Liggins
Program Director, Cameron Foundation

Courtney Rice
Director of Inclusion & Community Impact, Robins Foundation

Allen Smart
Project Director, Campbell University

Karl N. Stauber
Former President & CEO, DRF

Mary L. Thomas
Chief Operating Officer, The Spartanburg County Foundation

Albert Walker, Th.M, MDiv
Director of Healthy Communities, Bon Secours

RESOURCES & ADVISORS

Kevin Allison
Professor, Senior Executive for Special Projects in the Office of the President, VCU

William Buster
Executive VP of Community Investments, St. David's Foundation

Kelly Chopus
President & CEO, Robins Foundation

Susan Brown Davis
Philanthropy Consultant; Trustee, Jenkins Foundation

Damon Jiggetts
Executive Director, Peter Paul Development Center

Dominic Moulden
Resource Organizer, OneDC

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Gladys Washington
Deputy Director, Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation

PROGRAM FACILITATORS

Saphira Baker
Founder & Principle Consultant, Communitas Consulting

Ebony Walden
Founder & Principal, Ebony Walden Consulting



Each Fellow leads community efforts to increase health equity in the built environment. These efforts will be stronger as others join in to mobilize and invest in the work. The realization is that the lifespan of our work “was about equity, access and justice then. It is about equity, access, and justice now.”

Shekinah Mitchell, 2018 Equity + Health Fellow (on the history of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Bridge in Church Hill)

STRIVING FOR EQUITY THROUGH PHILANTHROPY

LOOKING AHEAD

Our Collective Recommendations

What would it look like for the funding community to use its power and influence more intentionally to advance grassroots leaders working toward these aims and others?

We believe RMHF has the resources and community influence to support community-based and grassroots leadership. Collectively, we challenge RMHF to address these six areas in the next two years to further its commitment to racial equity and health equity in the built environment. Individually, we anticipate participating in the work of RMHF and staying connected as area leaders advancing this work.

NONPROFITS

Support more representative and inclusive nonprofit leadership by:

- » Investing in the work diversifying nonprofits’ executive and board leadership
- » Addressing funding disparities in organizations run by people of color

Increase operational support for nonprofits by:

- » Creating a non-traditional, flexible, accessible funding mechanism for operational needs of grassroots organizations
- » Advocating for living wage pay of area nonprofits

FELLOWS

Advance the Fellows’ projects by:

- » Engaging Fellows as consultants to RMHF
- » Holding media events to showcase Fellows’ work

Connect Fellows to influential networks across sectors by:

- » Introducing Fellows to affluent and influential partners who can support and enhance their impact
- » Working with Fellows and partners to convene cross-sector events

Advocate for racial equity by:

- » Providing funding to nonprofits to support racial equity work and training
- » Investing in media strategies that highlight the links between race, health equity, and Richmond’s built environment
- » Hosting a “Racial Equity and the Built Environment” colloquium focused on Community Voice, Housing & Transportation, and Place-making that features RMHF Fellows and non-Richmond practitioners sharing their work and leading conversations about advancing racial equity through our built environment policies
- » Publishing a set of articles written by RMHF Fellows and others focusing on topics discussed at the “Racial Equity and the Built Environment” colloquium

Invest in an affordable built environment by:

- » Supporting the purchase of land that is affordable in perpetuity for low-wealth populations
- » Investing in training sessions to bring together Fellows and local leaders in improving the built environment

COMMUNITY



In a community at its best, residents feel at home, have resources to thrive, and sense connection with others.

MEASURABLE IMPACT

IMPACT

Collaboration And Network Expansion

Together we have expanded our own networks and those of RMHF to reach populations in the community who are often not heard from. We have demonstrated ways in which we can impact the social determinants of health through actions in the built environment. We have designed ways to strengthen grassroots organizations and support leaders. Individually, we have made progress on our respective projects and initiatives, built working relationships to further the work happening in the city, and dialogued about deeply pervasive issues of race, power, wealth and equity. To bring about the change we all seek requires a community of support and action, as well as additional resources. We will continue to advance our work that started during the fellowship.

As a collective network of grassroots leaders, we have already begun collaborating:

Ryan helped Chelsea connect with the University of Richmond related to the Equal Justice Initiative.

Jay and Chelsea worked together to support Black Pride events.

Maritza asked the Fellows to come to a meeting to completely redesign the community engagement approach on the City's master plan.

Shekinah convened a group of people to address gentrification, and included the Fellows.

Max, Chelsea and Ryan all provided connections to local stakeholders for Shekinah including existing projects near the Martin Luther King, Jr. bridge and Bridge Park RVA.

Agustin reached out to Maritza and Ryan to help him with his work in his mobile home community.

Duron reported a strong showing of Fellows at his Food for Thought event with National Food Justice leader Malik Yakini at Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, cohosted with Chelsea.

Max and Willie wrote and published an editorial related to transportation for the Richmond Times-Dispatch.

Toria worked with youth with Max around biking.

A photograph of a city skyline at dusk, featuring several tall skyscrapers with illuminated windows. The sky is a mix of orange and blue. In the foreground, there are green trees and a bridge structure. A semi-transparent blue overlay covers the bottom half of the image.

We encourage Richmond Memorial Health Foundation to listen to and value the communities and the members that experience inequity.

**FINAL
THOUGHTS**

IN CLOSING

Final thoughts for RMHF

Philanthropic organizations often have difficulty identifying and interpreting what “doing equity” means for their organizations. As a result, hierarchical relationships and challenging power dynamics that result from unaddressed issues of race, class, gender and ability are not evaluated. Subsequently this can inhibit foundation staff from engaging in reflective work to optimally cultivate equitable strategies that lead to justice in the communities in which they work.

We encourage Richmond Memorial Health Foundation to listen to and value the communities and the members that experience inequity, and to treat them with dignity and respect as they evolve into deeper relationships. We stress the necessity of RMHF to be adaptive and to internally evolve its policies and staff capacity so as to be welcoming and realize non-hierarchical, anti-racist, anti-classist, anti-sexist and anti-ableist power dynamics when engaging marginalized communities.

“We are grateful to the Fellows for their commitment to the program, for candidly sharing their perspectives, and for providing recommendations that will influence the direction of RMHF over the next three years and beyond.”

Mark D. Constantine, PhD
President & CEO



Health equity means that everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy and well as possible. This requires engaging communities and partners to reduce health disparities by removing obstacles to health such as poverty, discrimination, and their consequences.



RICHMOND MEMORIAL HEALTH FOUNDATION

Fostering an equitable and healthy Richmond region