



IMPACT REPORT

& 2020 ASPEN INSTITUTE ANNUAL REPORT



The
Aspen
Institute





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LETTER FROM DAN PORTERFIELD



Dan Bayer

The Aspen Institute is an optimistic institution—and a resilient one—especially in difficult times. And 2020 was a year of profound hardship. We grappled with a global pandemic, structural racism, economic turmoil, public mistrust, growing polarization, and a worsening climate crisis. And then, one week into the new year, a large group of violent insurrectionists mounted a deadly attack on the US Capitol with the goal of invalidating the legitimate outcome of the US presidential election.

Now what? America's pluralism, political ideals, and economy should be sources of strength—but they don't seem to be today. What can be done to restore democratic fellow-feeling and a sense of national direction?

There is no one answer, but given our world, the Aspen Institute's mission is more important than ever.

Founded in 1950 with humanistic optimism and in the service of human dignity, we use many tools and methods to promote freedom, equity, and justice.

We support inclusive, open-minded dialogue among people with diverse views from varying walks of life. We convene leaders from all sectors to discern their core values and callings, and then recommit to public-spirited actions. And we bring people together to create practical progress on issues like education, economic inclusion, the environment, social trust, global security, and discrimination in its many forms.

Dan Bayer

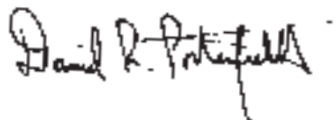
These approaches are necessary to drive productive change for the one and the many, in the short term and the long term—and they made a difference in 2020, even though we couldn’t gather or work in person.

We published research that prevented evictions, advocated for better-paying jobs for frontline workers, published Covid-19 safety guidelines for food-service workers, and promoted policies to protect small businesses. We hosted the Aspen Ideas Festival free and online for the first time, attracting more than 100,000 participants. We launched new work in key areas, ranging from criminal justice to interreligious dialogue, from public health to youth leadership. And more.

Internally, our community came together over the past year to deepen our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion—critical for our society and for our organization. We’re developing new processes for assessing our operations and policies, strengthening our culture, and centering equity in our work. We’re elevating issues of justice across our programs and platforms, engaging in peer learning and best-practice sharing, and, as colleagues, addressing how our beliefs or behaviors may need to transform to address systemic and implicit biases. To do this work well—and to pursue it as a living commitment of the Institute—we recruited our first Vice President for People and Culture and are developing our first Action Plan to establish goals and drive progress. This is work not for one time but for all time, and is central to our calling and our mission.

I’m proud that the Aspen Institute didn’t simply hold it together amid 2020’s many financial and operational shocks, but rather we continued to make real and lasting impacts. I thank our many funders and donors for supporting us when it really mattered and look forward to our continued work together.

Thank you for your partnership.



Dan Porterfield
President and CEO

SCALING PROMISE

The **Braddock Scholars Program** identifies, invests in, and supports the growth of established ventures led by Aspen Institute fellows—and Institute leadership has prioritized building out the program, starting with hiring an inaugural executive director, Kim Vender Moffat, in the Office of the President. BSP develops and empowers a new generation of business leaders to drive transformational impact by bringing their innovations to scale. The program matches scholars—high-potential entrepreneurs—with Institute trustees who serve as mentors to focus on the key scale challenges scholars face.

The best way to appreciate the significance of the program is to understand the journey of one recent scholar, Cody Friesen, who leads SOURCE Global to make drinking water an unlimited resource through the world’s first-ever infrastructure-free drinking water system. Leveraging the support of BSP, Friesen has addressed scaling opportunities, including business model optimization, manufacturing pricing, and partnership development. With the help of 20 trustee mentors, more than two-thirds of the 30 ventures involved to date have materially progressed along the journey to scale. New expansion plans will extend the time of engagement, building a stronger community among cohorts and across the Institute.





EQUITY & RACIAL JUSTICE

Around the world, people are finally starting to acknowledge historic injustices. Because recognizing them isn't enough, programs within the Aspen Institute are leading the charge to right wrongs, expand opportunity, and deliver a future that works for everyone.

MAKING JUSTICE LOCAL

The Criminal Justice Reform Initiative maps progressive policies block by block.

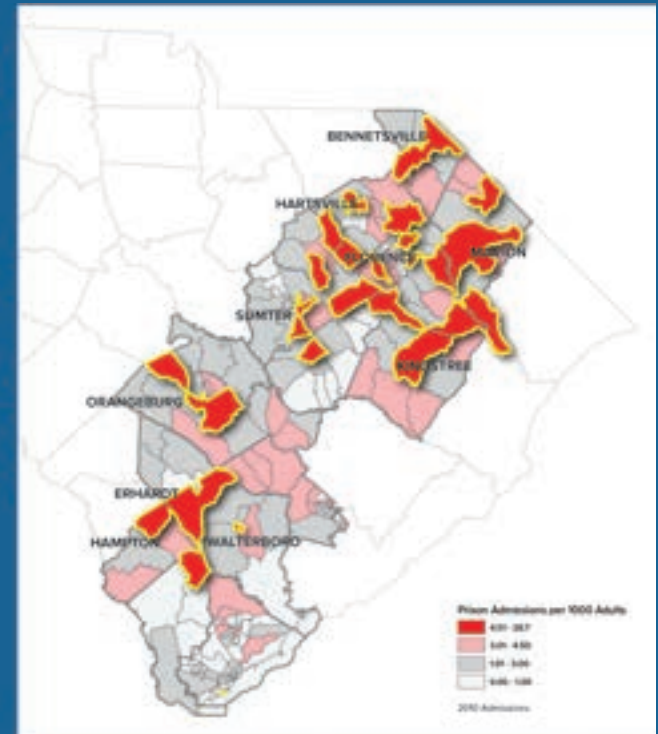
Arrests and incarceration are a blanket response to the challenges of racial segregation, social isolation, and economic divestment. Across every US jurisdiction, a minority of neighborhoods and communities disproportionately implement this response to criminal justice, and it is disproportionately concentrated in a minority of neighborhoods and communities in every jurisdiction in the country. Those neighborhoods are the same ones where there's high unemployment, frightening numbers of traumatized children, and emergency rooms that are overused for primary care. Without justice reform and targeted reinvestment, these neighborhoods are unlikely to extract themselves from the perpetual administration of costly, crippling government.

"CORRIDOR OF SHAME"
SOUTH CAROLINA
HIGH INCARCERATION COMMUNITIES
ORANGEBURG, SUMTER,
HARTSVILLE, FLORENCE +

SHARE OF CORRIDOR TOTAL
POPULATION: 19%
PRISON ADMISSIONS: 47%

SELECTED DEMOGRAPHICS
UNEMPLOYED: 11%
NO HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA: 21%
PEOPLE IN POVERTY: 29%
NON-WHITE OR HISPANIC: 66%

JUSTICE MAPPING



With only 5 percent of the world’s population, the United States holds over 20 percent of all the world’s prisoners: there is no doubt that the country has a justice problem. But many jurisdictions have substantially lowered their use of jail and prison—through intentional policies at the local level.

Unfortunately, such jurisdictions are the exception rather than the rule. Even the best data-driven criminal justice reform efforts often fail to incorporate empirical accounts of community experiences, interests, and priorities regarding safety and justice or the perspectives of justice system practitioners and those who have been involved in the justice system. The omission is especially problematic considering the well-documented concentrations of incarceration in low-income neighborhoods and

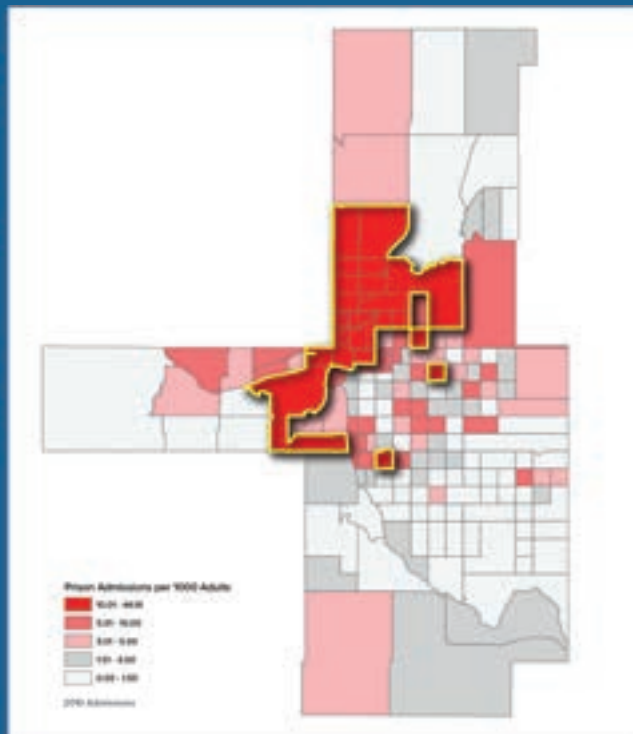
neighborhoods of color, which already suffer multiple layers of inequality.

To address this need, the **Criminal Justice Reform Initiative** is working with a cadre of national technical-assistance partners to launch a five-year national **Justice and Governance Partnership in mid-size cities and rural jurisdictions** across the country. Working with local justice intermediaries, the technical-assistance partners will develop and launch the Justice Mapping Center’s Justice Audit, which will produce maps—along with other data reflecting the justice ecosystem—that visually depict spatial concentrations of high rates of incarceration and overlapping inequities in CJRI partner communities. Ultimately, these visualizations and data will be a critical part of Justice Reinvestment Plans, which will inform criminal justice and governance reform policies in CJRI partner jurisdictions.

TULSA COUNTY | OKLAHOMA
HIGH INCARCERATION NEIGHBORHOODS
 NORTHWEST TULSA

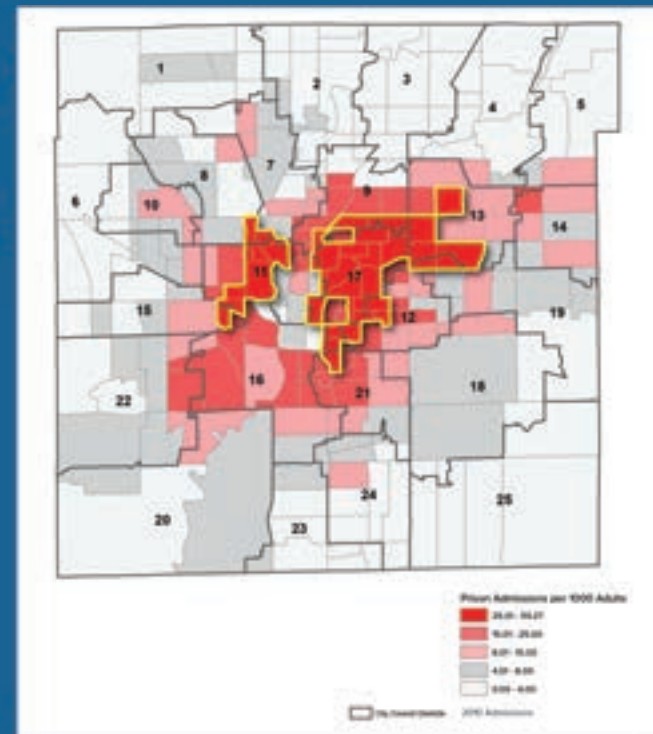
SHARE OF TULSA COUNTY TOTAL
 POPULATION: 10%
 PRISON ADMISSIONS: 45%

SELECTED DEMOGRAPHICS
 UNEMPLOYED: 11%
 NO HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA: 21%
 PEOPLE IN POVERTY: 33%
 NON-WHITE OR HISPANIC: 67%



INDIANAPOLIS | INDIANA
HIGH INCARCERATION NEIGHBORHOODS
 COUNCIL DISTRICTS 9, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17

SHARE OF INDIANAPOLIS TOTAL
 POPULATION: 23%
 PRISON ADMISSIONS: 51%



CAPITAL IDEA

The Economic Opportunities Program ramps up lending to entrepreneurs of color.

Businesses launched and owned by entrepreneurs of color tend to be smaller and in less profitable industries because of systemic inequality and racism. These entrepreneurs cannot rely on personal or familial wealth, nor can they get the external financing that is often secured by personal assets. They must start small and slowly work their way up. That means when they do apply for financing, they tend to be looking for smaller amounts of capital—the vast majority apply for less than \$100,000, and many seek less than \$25,000. Finding, underwriting, and supporting those businesses just costs too much compared with the interest earned: it is very difficult to make loans under \$100,000 at affordable rates and turn a meaningful profit. Bank lending to small businesses in amounts less than \$100,000 has been dropping for decades and is expected to decline more as a result of the pandemic.

Announced in December 2020, the Entrepreneur Backed Assets Fund will allow these lenders to extend more capital to hard-hit businesses and communities by buying existing loans from lenders. This new nonprofit, launched out of the work of the Business Ownership Initiative, part of the Institute's **Economic Opportunities Program**, will allow Community Development Financial Institutions that are already active lenders to entrepreneurs of color to provide more capital and support to those communities. The fund puts capital back into the hands of the lenders,



which they can turn around and give to other businesses instead of waiting for repayment on their existing loans. Positioning CDFIs to extend capital to small businesses will be critical to ensure an equitable recovery from the pandemic. Meanwhile, the fund will sell the loans it buys to commercial banks who are interested in the Community Reinvestment Act credits that lending to low-income communities can provide. The fund will continue to raise more capital—with a goal of \$50 million—to **buy more loans from more lenders, so that more money gets into the hands of entrepreneurs of color.** Everyone deserves to dream bigger.

Courtesy, LiftFund

The Energy and Environment Program goes to school to teach climate justice.



America's schools are an important center of climate action, and the nation will need a generation of climate-savvy STEM innovators and socially aware thinkers to lead the way. Last year, the **Energy and Environment Program** launched the K12 Climate Action initiative, with a mission to **unlock the power of the education sector as a force for climate action, solutions, and environmental justice.**

Public schools are among the largest consumers of energy in the public sector, and school buses make up the largest mass-transit fleet in the country. Switching to renewable energy and electric buses would reduce emissions and pollution. Additionally, public schools serve more than 7 billion meals each year, giving the sector immense power to reshape the way an entire generation eats. Advancing climate action in schools, in particular in communities with

high populations of low-income families, can also help advance environmental justice and ensure a just transition to a clean economy.

The initiative includes a commission of education, environment, and civil rights leaders co-chaired by former Secretary of Education John B. King Jr. and former Governor of New Jersey Christine Todd Whitman, as well as a coalition of more than 40 organizations. In 2020, K12 Climate Action released a state policy landscape report, hosted two public listening sessions, worked with the co-chairs to send a sign-on letter to the Biden-Harris transition team, and published opinion pieces elevating the role of schools in climate action.

Climate action has long been an exercise in educating the public. The Energy and Environment Program's new initiative will help harness the power of the educational sector itself.

THE GREEN ZONE

ECONOMY OF SCALE



The **Aspen Partnership for an Inclusive Economy** platform was created to provide centralized infrastructure and communications at the Institute to facilitate cross-enterprise coordination and collaboration on one of the most critical challenges facing society: economic inequality. The partnership was launched as the pandemic was exposing the broken systems APIE was designed to help fix. The Institute's programs mobilized quickly to equip leaders with **a range of new data insights and tools that enabled them to respond effectively to the unprecedented economic challenges families and small businesses were facing.**

The Financial Security Program, for example, produced a 10-part webinar series and research briefs during development of the CARES Act that helped shape federal, state, and local action on cash assistance programs, social safety net policy reforms, and moratoriums on evictions and student loan debt. Through the Institute's Business Ownership Initiative, Institute staff launched the Entrepreneur Backed Asset Fund (see page 8). The Aspen Global Leadership Network piloted a new way to incentivize and support fellows, including the new Black Bank Fund and National Black Bank Foundation, focused on educating the public on the anchoring role these institutions serve for underinvested communities. These are just some of the ways APIE is changing the way the Institute works. Together, these programs are helping rebuild the economy so it drives greater security, opportunity, and resilience for all.

The Aspen Partnership for an Inclusive Economy builds resilience and financial security for all.

Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs delivers \$1 million-plus for women-led businesses in Asia.



Courtesy Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs

Through its new Advancing Women’s Empowerment Fund, the **Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs** announced in 2020 that it offered grants to eight organizations with support from the US Agency for International Development and the Visa Foundation. The \$1.2 million fund **targets the finance gap for women-led small and growing businesses in South and Southeast Asia**. Each winner is receiving up to \$150,000 over one year. The projects span the region.

BoP Innovation Center and One to Watch are increasing investment-ready businesses in Myanmar; MIT’s D-Lab is tackling the investment gap in India; the Miller Center for Social Entrepreneurship and CaterpillHERS are building investment readiness for businesses in Pakistan; SHE Investments is creating a pipeline of investment-ready enterprises in Cambodia; Value for Women is strengthening access to finance and business-development services for enterprises in Myanmar, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Vietnam; Village Capital is testing approaches to mitigating bias in investment selection processes in India; Villgro Philippines is providing businesses with access to capital, capacity, mentorship, and investors; and the Women’s Initiative for Startups and Entrepreneurship is addressing the gap in seed funding for businesses in Vietnam. The fund is testing and learning how best to get investment capital into the hands of women entrepreneurs and comes at a critical time of need for these emerging markets.

A FUND FOR WOMEN



VALLEY, FORGED

The Hurst Community Initiative creates equitable leadership at home in Colorado.

L launched in 2020 thanks to the vision and generosity of Bob and Soledad Hurst, the **Hurst Community Initiative** has already established itself as the **go-to organization for coordinating and convening leaders** in the Roaring Fork and Colorado River Valleys. Dedicated to promoting dialogue and increasing understanding, the initiative collaborates with government officials, nonprofits, community organizers, the private sector, immigrants, and philanthropists. The work began at a moment of new need: hit hard by Covid-19, Aspen and Snowmass endured the highest unemployment rates in Colorado as well as an already high suicide rate, with the area's Latinx community bearing the heaviest burden.

Its flagship program, the Hurst Leadership Seminar, brings together regional elected officials and nonelected community leaders in an interactive, values-based leadership seminar. Its purpose is to strengthen interpersonal relationships among public officials and to encourage local leaders to reimagine the region as one collaborative community. Starting with 48 participants, the 2020–2021 cohort reported they would recommend the same program to friends and colleagues. Focused on recovery and resilience, the Hurst Community Initiative will continue to connect other community-focused Institute programs with those living in communities from Aspen to Parachute.

COUNTRY CODE



The Community Strategies Group spotlights the challenges minority-owned rural businesses face.

The Covid-19 pandemic hit rural places hard—and nowhere harder than in rural Native nations and Black, Latinx, and immigrant communities. As job losses threatened business and as health disparities began coming to light in 2020, a new collaboration anchored by the **Community Strategies Group** doubled down on CSG’s long commitment to highlighting the plight of diverse and economically challenged rural communities—and the creative work that intrepid innovators are doing to address it. Rural Opportunity and Development Sessions are an unprecedented collaboration of national organizations: a partnership of CSG with the Housing Assistance Council, Rural Community Assistance Partnership, Rural LISC, and the US Federal Reserve Board. The first two ROAD sessions were wholly focused on communities of color: one on **helping minority-owned rural small businesses during the pandemic**, the other focused on addressing Covid-related challenges facing immigrants in rural economies and regions. In 2020, ROADS hosted 22 speakers across four events, including 16 people of color, who shared stories and experiences from rural places across the nation. Nearly 1,000 policymakers, development practitioners, investors, and funders registered for each session.

Even for the speakers and moderators, these events were eye-opening and action-inducing. Dell Gines, the senior community development advisor for the Omaha Branch-Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, moderated a session on working with minority-owned firms during the pandemic. “Collaboration is necessary,” he said afterward. “So is empathy. It can’t be a top-down approach. You have to listen to the lived insights of the folks who are there and design solutions that really, truly impact them, instead of thinking you know best. My personal pledge is to deepen my consideration of Native, Latinx, and African American businesses in rural communities in my work at the Kansas City Federal Reserve. You can lean on me.”

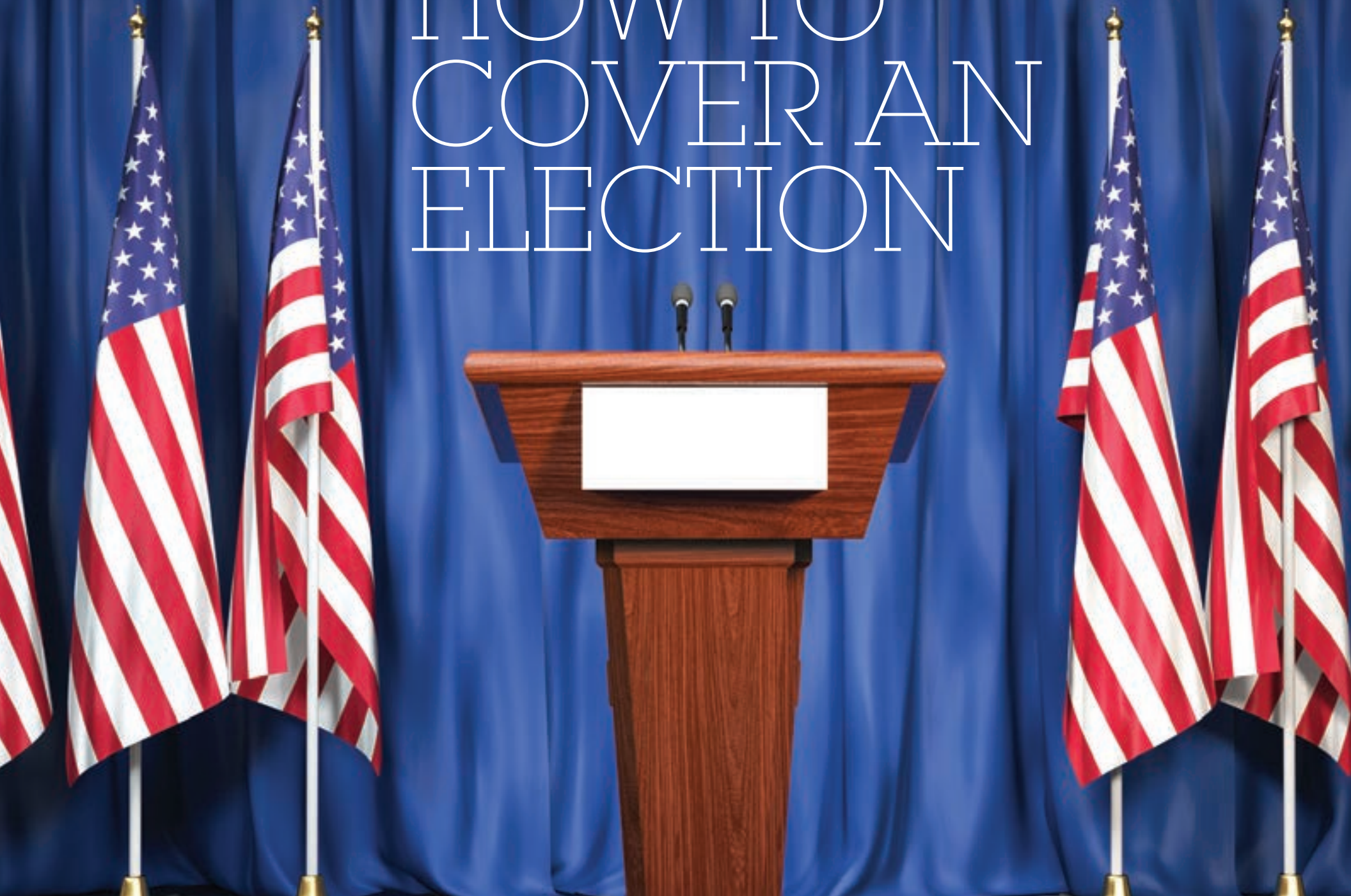
A photograph of several birch trees in a grassy field. The trees have characteristic white bark with dark, horizontal lenticels and vertical fissures. In the background, there is a large, white, abstract sculpture that resembles a stylized, open book or a series of overlapping, curved shapes. The scene is set in a lush, green environment with dense foliage in the distance.


CROSSING DIVIDES

In a world rife with economic, cultural, and political divides, the Aspen Institute is dedicated to giving organizations and individuals the tools they need to communicate effectively, reason intelligently, and find common humanity.



HOW TO COVER AN ELECTION





During incendiary times, Aspen Digital educated media companies and news consumers—and made a difference.

As 2020 shaped up to be an electoral campaign unlike any other, news outlets and social media platforms were still stuck in an outdated model: preparing for an election “night” that actually would last weeks; making generalized statements about voting laws and deadlines that varied widely by state; and even framing some normal procedures, like recounts, as potential problems. With national tensions boiling, these approaches threatened to further undermine public trust in the democratic process.

Aspen Digital, positioned at the intersection of media and technology, foresaw these looming issues and **hosted high-level educational briefings for media and tech executives**, attracting every major network, most national publications, and the primary online platforms. Scores of participants heard from experts on election and recount law, voter discrimination, political protest laws, polling and forecasting, and social media psychology. These private sessions were followed by a public briefing that explained the same concepts directly to voters.

The briefings had tremendous visibility, attracting coverage from *Politico*, CNN, and *Columbia Journalism Review*; widely read posts in Facebook’s Voter Information Center; and other successful social media platforms. One major news outlet said that Aspen Digital briefings formed the “backbone” of its coverage plan. This success led to new closed-door newsroom briefings where Aspen Digital helped frame issues of national importance, like the Covid vaccine rollout and the climate crisis, to encourage more informed and responsible reporting.

BY THE NUMBERS:

41
public, on-the-record
Aspen Digital programs

160
speakers

275+
media mentions

6,000+
live viewers

21,000+
post-event views

SONIC YOUTH



Aspen Ideas: Show Up amplifies young people's voices, so they can turn protest into policy.

Over two nights in October 2020, the Institute's Public Programs launched a first-of-its-kind digital event aimed at engaging people 18–34 years old. On the eve of the 2020 presidential election, **Aspen Ideas: Show Up** was meant to get people enthused about engaging in civic life.

Held in partnership with the Bezos Family Foundation and Now This, a social media–focused news organization, Aspen Ideas: Show Up featured athletes moving the bar on social justice, a tribal elder's fight for civil rights, a drag queen's efforts to inspire voter participation, and more. Programming was free and open to all and included an hour-long, pre-produced broadcast followed by an hour of interactive programming each night.

Conversations were built around how to have better arguments, how to productively move from protest to policy, and how to stay civically engaged for the long run. Performances included YelloPain, a young rapper and hip-hop artist, sharing his music video on the electoral process, and the sibling music collective Infinity Song, performing their song "Mad Love." The event included 4,200 unique registrants, 3,500 estimated live viewers across both nights, and more than 394,000 people from around the world who watched at least one piece of Show Up content across all platforms. In addition, the social media platforms involved in promoting the event received over 753,000 impressions.

One viewer on Twitter called Show Up a **nonpartisan forum for young leaders who represent the next generation of doers, experts, and thinkers**. Thanks to Jacklyn G. and Miguel A. Bezos, the Institute will keep those young leaders engaged for years—and elections—to come.



The Aspen Global Leadership Network promotes alliances among problem solvers.

In January 2020, fellows across the **Aspen Global Leadership Network** convened in Jordan for a seminar on leading in an era of globalization. Fellows from China, feeling the first waves of the pandemic, rang alarm bells around the seminar table that life was about to change. One person on the receiving end of that message was Henry Crown fellow Dayna Frank, the president and CEO of First Avenue Productions, Minnesota’s leading concert promoter and venue operator. She began to warn the live-music ecosystem of venue owners and artists about what was coming.

In April, Frank founded the National Independent Venue Alliance, a new organization that **brought the live entertainment industry’s leaders, artists, promoters, venue managers, and festival operators together** to address the dire impacts of the industry’s complete shutdown. The alliance became the driving force behind lobbying and grassroots efforts to pass the bipartisan Save Our Stages Act, which was signed into law on December 27, 2020. At the Jordan seminar, Frank met Finance Leaders fellow Clay Grubb, and they partnered to launch the Live Venue Recovery Fund to provide expertise and capital to keep independent venues independent.

The impact doesn’t stop there. The **Henry Crown Fellowship** accelerated alumni engagement efforts and launched initiatives centered on creating impact, inspiration, and interconnectivity. Between alumni programming and virtual class reunions, more than 90 percent of fellows engaged with the fellowship since March 2020. Zoom provided the confidential space to unpack important challenges as well as opportunities to lend advice and resources to those addressing needs in their communities. These are all powerful examples of why, in 2020, Renée and Lester Crown created the new Henry Crown Fellowship Alumni Engagement Endowment.

ALLIED FORCES



The Stevens Initiative creates global online exchanges and lasting impact.

After five years of conducting surveys that show participants build empathy, gain greater knowledge about other places and cultures, and increase cross-cultural collaboration and communication skills, the **Stevens Initiative**—which promotes virtual exchange to connect tens of thousands of young people from diverse places using everyday technology for collaborative learning and interaction—completed a study in 2020 showing that alumni frequently say their virtual exchange experience **continues to help them in their professional and personal lives long after the program ends**. Data about the long-term effects of virtual exchange are rare in this emerging field, so this study is a promising indication that these programs are effective.

Participants say that virtual exchange has even changed the way they think. “I became more aware of the things happening in the world,” says Aseel, an alumna of Global Nomads Group’s Student to World. “It has made me dream bigger.” Because of her experience, Aseel says she now hopes to one day study or work internationally.

Other participants in the Stevens Initiative, which is funded by the US State Department, have taken action. After identifying a gap in research funding in his community, Mohamed, an alumnus of World Learning’s The Experiment Digital, developed a tech platform that connects researchers with investors. Building the platform was possible, he says, in part thanks to the skills and confidence he gained during his virtual exchange. “If you want to build skills, networks, and gain opportunities, virtual exchange programs are the place for that,” he says. “They create opportunities to improve our communities.”

Courtesy Stevens Initiative

VIRTUAL & REALITY

FROM DISTANCED TO CONNECTED



As the pandemic forced individuals into isolation, Weave: The Social Fabric Project leaned into its work to create community.

Crisis are times of pain and possibility. When Covid hit, Aspen's **Weave: The Social Fabric Project** joined with the Listen First Project in April 2020 to launch a public engagement campaign to create deeper social trust and connection even as the world had to physically distance and as many retreated into isolation.

The #WeavingCommunity During Crisis campaign offered people ways to join virtual conversations with isolated neighbors and inspired small acts of bravery, kindness, and connection. The Weave Project fielded a social team to collect examples of connection from around the nation and to **share several posts a day across 120 partner organizations highlighting stories of everyday Americans**—from children and teachers to bankers and restaurant owners—finding ways to support their neighbors. One popular post showed neighbors turning their little front-yard libraries into small pantries for those who couldn't find the supplies they needed.

The campaign reached 21 million people in 2020 with its website and posts, and 461,000 people engaged with the stories and actions. Many continue to use the #WeavingCommunity tag to promote a way of living that is brimming with deep, healthy connections, where mutual trust and affection is the standard, equity is implicit, and all people find joy and meaning in daily life.

UNDIVIDED

The Aspen Strategy Group promotes national service and civic participation.

Anation as bitterly divided as the United States is today cannot aspire to be the global force it will need to be for the next decades. In the summer of 2020, as the country faced an unprecedented set of crises, the **Aspen Strategy Group**—a resolutely nonpartisan group of Republican and Democratic foreign policy professionals—met virtually to seek solutions to help the country unite and recover. After two days of discussions, one of the group’s central conclusions was that expanded access to national service would offer life-shaping shared experiences to help young Americans of all party affiliations and all economic, ethnic, racial, and religious backgrounds better understand and respect each other.

Group members and participants called on Congress and the White House to support a major national service initiative **to build the next generation’s commitment to a robust American future**, reinvigorate democracy, and heal political and racial divides. The statement, signed by over 40 experts, garnered public interest and was highlighted in several news outlets, such as *Bloomberg* and *Politico*. And since the statement’s release, the American Rescue Plan was passed—including \$1 billion in additional funding for AmeriCorps, which provides public service opportunities for adults across the United States in line with those advocated for in ASG’s call to action.



AN ARGUMENT FOR DEMOCRACY

The Citizenship and American Identity Program tackles tough conversations.

Since October 2020, the Better Arguments Project—a partnership of the **Citizenship and American Identity Program**, Facing History and Ourselves, and Allstate—has hosted monthly one-hour “101” trainings, with nearly 3,000 participants answering RSVPs. In these sessions, the team leads reflection on the role of arguments in a healthy democracy and introduces participants to the “Three Dimensions and Five Principles of a Better Argument”—the project’s framework for constructive disagreement. The project also regularly offers “Principles to Practice,” a two-hour, more-immersive version of the training.

In collaboration with the Aspen Institute Planning and Evaluation Program, the project has created post-training surveys to gauge impact on participants. The vast majority of attendees stated that as a result of the training, they are more likely to seek viewpoints that extend or challenge their own perspective, are better equipped to productively engage with people who have different opinions, and are **more confident that civic conversations can help bring people together, not drive them apart.**

One woman told the project team that she is trying to maintain a relationship with her childhood best friend, who has become a strident QAnon follower. A liberal man running for city council in a conservative, rural district uses the training as a framework to engage with citizens. A high school debate coach teaches this approach to young people. And the head of a nonprofit

in California provides educational resources and trainings statewide to public officials across the political aisle. These are just a few examples of participants who have told the Better Arguments team how they are applying the framework to engage constructively across divides.





A large, moss-covered boulder sits in a lush green landscape. The boulder is covered in vibrant green moss and is the central focus of the image. It is surrounded by a dense forest of tall, green trees. In the foreground, a calm pond reflects the surrounding greenery and the boulder. The sky is a soft, overcast blue. The overall scene is peaceful and natural.

PANDEMIC RESPONSE

The betterment of society usually progresses through an endless campaign of small victories, but when faced with a fearsome challenge, big thinkers spring into action. As the pandemic raged, Aspen Institute programs assembled experts in science, technology, and education to mitigate the worst—and to lay a path toward a promising tomorrow.

INTERNAL MEDICINE



Aspen Ideas: Health takes stock of the pandemic.

Unsurprisingly, the **Aspen Ideas: Health** team had a busy 2020. When its annual summer event was put on hold, the team launched a digital series **to connect the public with health experts and leaders.**

In August, just as Covid-19 cases in the United States climbed toward 5 million, AIH hosted Amna Nawaz, of *PBS NewsHour*, in conversation with Rajiv Shah, the president of the Rockefeller Foundation, to talk about the foundation’s national testing and tracing action plan. The plan argued that 30 million tests a week would be necessary to reopen communities and economies—far more than was then the norm—and offered critical action steps to put a coordinated strategy in place to take control of the pandemic.

In October, AIH welcomed Clifton Leaf, the editor-in-chief of *Fortune*, to

interview Obama administration FDA Commissioner Margaret Hamburg and Trump administration FDA Commissioner Stephen Hahn about the process of vaccine development, authorization or approval, and deployment. The speakers were optimistic about the ongoing research but concerned about the prospect of vaccine hesitancy—predictions that came true as safe and effective vaccines became widely available. “The trust and confidence in the process and the public health agency responsible for the regulatory oversight,” Hamburg said, “is being questioned because of the intrusion of politics.”

“Do we stand behind science?” Hahn asked. “Do we stand behind the performance of clinical trials? Do we stand behind one of the most important public health measures we have: vaccination?” The recommendations were clear—and they point the way toward a safe future for the country.

Aspen Tech Policy Hub fellows create US Digital Response to tackle the pandemic.

Courtesy Aspen Tech Policy Hub



In March 2020, just as they were wrapping up their **Aspen Tech Policy Hub** fellowship, Raylene Yung and Jessica Cole co-founded U.S. Digital Response—an organization that connects pro-bono technologists with government agencies, small businesses, and nonprofits to assist their Covid-19 responses. *The New York Times* gave U.S. Digital Response its “Good Tech” honor, and *Financial Times* named Yung one of its six digital changemakers.

U.S. Digital Response now works with government partners in 36 states and territories—partnerships, Yung says, that before the fellowship would have been “unthinkable.” During the fellowship, Yung says she learned how technology policy “plays a role in everything from how quickly people receive benefits to how well voting systems function.”

That insight—what Yung describes as a deep respect for the power of working across disciplines—led her and Cole to co-found U.S. Digital Response as the pandemic hit in full force, which coincided with the fellowship’s end. What started as a pop-up volunteer organization has since turned into a **full-scale, rapid-response network with thousands of technologists standing by to help** and with over 100 projects completed.

So far, teams for U.S. Digital Response, which is funded by philanthropy, have developed a template for an election-information website now in use across a dozen counties, have helped the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania track and model hospital capacity, and have created a system to let small businesses in California find out if they’re eligible for stimulus funds. “And,” Yung says, “we’re just getting started.”

THE ONLINE FRONTLINE

A TEST FOR AMERICA'S SCHOOLS

The Education & Society Program is creating new ways to understand student performance and eliminate obstacles to equity and learning.

What is the true extent of the educational crisis in the United States? How deeply is it affecting children's lives? These are just two of the many challenges that states and school districts face. In normal years, state assessments in core subjects like math and reading shine a light on whether students are learning as expected. But the last year was not normal. Far too many American students experience extreme hunger, lack the technology and internet access they need, and during the pandemic had fewer beneficial interactions with teachers and peers.

But researchers don't have this information, sometimes referred to as Opportunity to Learn data, in enough detail or on an individual student level. So the **Education & Society Program** partnered with the National Center for Improvement in Assessment to write recommendations, published in October 2020, that call for more OTL data and guidance on measurement and academic assessment.

In response, several states added OTL to statewide data-collection efforts and cited the Education & Society Program's recommendations as the



key driver in supporting state action. As one example, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania used the guidance to collect additional student-level data on whether education was delivered remotely, in person, or in a hybrid model; if families had access to technology, hardware, and reliable internet service; what educator experiences and observations were like; and what challenges students and families encountered from food insecurity and housing.

By collecting this information, states like Pennsylvania will be better equipped to understand student experience; interpret standardized assessment data; serve students, families, and staff—and ultimately make students' lives better.



The Science & Society Program says science will be the hero of the pandemic—and the hope for the future.

In June 2020, the Institute’s **Science & Society Program** collaborated with the science outlet *leapsmag* (now called *leaps.org*) and the impact and engagement company GOOD/Upworthy to publish *The Pandemic Issue*, a magazine that **investigated big-picture ways that science, innovation, and communication can usher in a safer and more equitable world.** The magazine explored different challenges facing humanity in search of unexpected and encouraging stories emerging from the Covid-19 crisis. Content ranged from an article on how the pandemic could propel STEM experts into political power to an interview with astrophysicist Neil DeGrasse Tyson, who discussed why celebrities should spend more time promoting science.

Publication of the magazine coincided with a public virtual event called the Pandemic Science Summit. Experts like Peggy Oti-Boateng, the director of UNESCO’s division of science policy and capacity building, and Christopher Bailey, arts and health lead for the World Health Organization, discussed how the global community could end the pandemic. “Covid has reinforced the need for international collaboration, particularly within the sciences,” Oti-Boateng said. “There are no political boundaries. We need to work together.”

NEW HORIZONS IN SCIENCE





YOUTH & EDUCATION

All our work—as an organization, as a society—will be for naught if there isn't a generation of leaders and thinkers to carry it forward. Aspen Institute programs offer young people, particularly those from historically disadvantaged communities, economic and educational opportunities to help them reach their full potential.



NATION OF GENERATIONS

Ascend helps children and parents by taking a whole-family approach.

The **Ascend** Fellowship invests in diverse leaders with the courage and big ideas to bridge divides, build relationships, and accelerate innovation. This includes leaders like Aisha Nyandoro, the CEO of Springboard to Opportunities, who in March 2020 expanded a much-watched pilot on unconditional cash transfers for Black mothers in Mississippi. Her co-fellow Melvin Carter, the mayor of St. Paul, Minnesota, is now piloting a cash-transfer program for families there. In the 2020 national elections, Ascend fellow Reverend Raphael Warnock became the first Black US senator from Georgia. In New York, fellow Felix Matos Rodriguez, CUNY's first Latino chancellor, raised awareness to drive support for student parents.

Ascend's Fatherhood Learning and Action Community, with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, **leverages the power of leadership to shift thinking and influence policies** to support the important role of fatherhood and families. The evidence is clear: fathers play a critical role in children's health and influence mothers' well-being. Yet many policies do not recognize fathers along with mothers as an important family and community asset. Working with the Kresge Foundation, fathers, and other leaders, the Action Community examined the barriers facing families and recommended changes that enable fathers to be part of their children's lives. Its recommendations range from adding language about fathers to parenting programs and public health policies, to changing the stories we tell about fathers, to including fathers in federal research on what families need. As father and Action Community member Allan Wachendorfer says, "The most important role I will ever play is being a father."



CAMPUS CONNECTION



The College Excellence Program opens doors to higher ed.

Most students who start community college want a bachelor's degree, but few get one—and during the pandemic the number of transfer students declined as community college students struggled to pay bills, stay safe, and care for family.

Before the pandemic, students of color and students from low-income backgrounds already lagged in attainment of bachelor's degrees, which open the door to higher-paying, more-secure jobs. The **College Excellence Program** has been responding to this challenge by strengthening college transfer systems through initiatives like Tackling Transfer, a three-year collaboration with Sova Solutions and HCM Strategists that engages education leaders in Virginia, Texas, and Minnesota. In Virginia, CEP has been working with leaders to bring together two- and four-year colleges to ensure that community college students have equitable opportunities to transfer to, and succeed at, four-year colleges. With CEP's help, **38 campuses joined to shape legislation and campus policies to improve transfer pathways and student advising**. Transfer Virginia has engaged more than 1,500 faculty members, administrators, and policymakers from Virginia colleges and universities, the K–12 sphere, and college leadership associations to improve many aspects of the transfer experience for students.

Even while moving classes and services online because of Covid-19, schools worked together to provide clear, consistent information as students navigated transfer during the upheaval. Other states are learning from progress in these three states. As college transfer becomes more logical, America can make higher education more accessible.

The Center for Native American Youth tackles Indigenous topics and civic engagement.

The **Center for Native American Youth**, IllumiNative, the Native Organizers Alliance, and Indigenous researchers from the University of Michigan and University of California, Berkeley, created the Indigenous Futures Survey—the largest research project ever conducted in Indian Country thanks to support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Over 6,400 Native peoples across the country participated in the survey, representing 401 tribes from all 50 states. The survey is the first step in **understanding motivations, priorities, and involvement in civic engagement for Native and Indigenous peoples**—as well as understanding their hopes for the future.

Launched amid racial unrest, a global pandemic that disproportionately affected Indigenous people, and a historic election year, the data showed that Indigenous youth report lower rates of voting than any age group. One reason for the finding is that youth experience more barriers to voting than other age groups, particularly around access to transportation and polling places. One practical step is to increase accessibility. More troubling, however, is that one in five youth who did not vote report thinking that voting doesn't matter. When it comes to inspiring the youth vote, it is imperative that politicians not only listen to the priorities of Indigenous youth but work to address these priorities and affirm the importance of voting.

Despite the lower rates of voting, Indigenous youth do engage in the political system. Indigenous youth are signing petitions, sharing political content, getting involved in grassroots organizing, and protesting to ensure their voices are heard and that they contribute to positive futures. America must continue to empower them to use their collective voices for the betterment of their families, communities, and society.



Courtesy Center for Native American Youth

NATIVE VOICES

GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY

The Forum for Community Solutions helps young people make their next moves.

Oppportunity Youth—young people ages 15 to 29 who are out of school, unemployed, or working in informal jobs—were among the vulnerable populations most affected by the pandemic. But some youth leaders have transformed these challenges into opportunities. They composed Covid-19 volunteer surveys and responses to assess the needs of opportunity youth in the wake of the pandemic. The model designed by the Global Opportunity Youth Network, which is housed at the **Forum for Community Solutions**, provided the infrastructure **to understand the impacts of the pandemic on opportunity youth and their communities**. And it goes further: based on rapid assessment of community needs, the model provides tools to improve access to critical services.

The network is indeed global. In India, GOYN Pune partnered with Pune Municipal Corporation and 70 corporate and citizen volunteers to establish a Covid Helpline manned by 50 volunteers, which fielded 6,923 calls by opportunity youth and community members. The helpline coordinated with NGOs to support the distribution of food benefiting 7,000 families, and it became a source of information and emotional support for families in impoverished urban areas experiencing growing food shortages in lockdown.

In Colombia, GOYN Bogota produced a first-of-its-kind survey of 1,489 opportunity youth to understand the impacts of Covid on mental health, education, and employment. The study informed city-wide decision making



regarding the impacts of Covid and needed supports to strengthen mental health and socio-emotional skills.

“I’m a big believer in young people being co-creators of solutions that work for them,” says Alfred Sigo, the CEO of the Pwani Youth Network, a network that brings together youth-led community-based organizations in Mombasa, Kenya. In March 2020, Sigo spearheaded a Covid awareness campaign targeting highly marginalized populations with education about how best to protect themselves from the pandemic. “The Global Opportunity Youth Network enables youth to push for changes they deem necessary—and not just here but nationwide and worldwide.”

The Institute's International Partners host Europe's future leaders.

In June 2020, **Aspen Institute Romania** launched the Aspen Teen Online Seminar, a new leadership program dedicated to high school students ages 15 to 19, engaging 40 participants from 17 towns and cities from across Romania. The seminar offered students the space to explore complex questions at a decisive stage in their personal and professional development.

Students came away with **new views not only of themselves as thinkers but also as leaders**. “I loved talking about my personal view of a text and finding out that some of my colleagues were simply seeing a different picture,” said Anna Gheorghe, a high school student in Bucharest. Matei Pleșcan, a high school student in Iași, said, “Learning what a leader is and what their responsibilities are, I found myself wanting not only to be a leader but to be an amazing one—a leader who does everything in the interest of the team.”

In recent years, **Aspen Institute España** has seen increasing interest from ever-younger audience, and in 2017 decided to invite candidates ages 18 to 30 to participate in a youth leadership and values program. In 2020, Aspen España decided to tackle one of the greatest divides in the Spanish society: the generation gap, a clear divide revealed in voting and consumption trends, political and social values, and priorities for public spending and political action.

The Intergenerational Justice Program gathers participants across different generations to debate three key elements: the sustainability of the welfare state, climate crisis, and institutional creativity for civil participation. Already the program is creating a diverse network of current and future leaders willing to turn their ideas into action.



EUROPEAN TOUR



The Institute’s Arts Program screens the award-winning *Boys State*.

How healthy is democracy today? *Boys State*, the winner of the 2020 Sundance Grand Jury Prize Documentary, asks that question. The film follows high school students at Texas American Legion Boys State, a highly selective weeklong program where teens build a representative government from the ground up. Alumni of the Legion’s Boys State and Girls State programs include Justice Samuel Alito, Texas Governor Ann Richards, Senator Cory Booker, Vice President Dick Cheney, and President Bill Clinton. In July 2020 the **Arts Program** co-presented a pre-release screening and discussion of *Boys State* during the Eisner/Lauder New Views Documentaries and Dialogue series, featuring filmmakers Amanda McBaine and Jesse Moss and three of the film’s stars, Ben Feinstein, Steven Garza, and René Otero.

These teenagers, with diverse backgrounds and views, revealed humbling and insightful reflections on the state of politics. Feinstein acknowledged that he mirrored the smear campaigns too often seen in politics today. “We’ve denigrated our politics in a lot of ways, and I embodied that,” he said. “We have a wider democracy to defend that these values are not compatible with.” Asked whether their generation can change the current political dysfunction, Otero said he trusts in Generation Z’s strength but cautions that the effort can’t be theirs alone: “It’s the responsibility of older generations to give resources to younger folks—to give us these platforms—if you also want to see America change.” Garza agreed: “Young people have an interest in politics and getting involved. For the long-term health of our nation, that’s a good thing.”

DOCU-DEMOCRACY

PLAYING OFFENSE ON YOUTH SPORTS

After months of isolation kept teams off the field, Sports & Society is getting kids to come out and play.

The youth sports program in Montgomery County, Maryland, has a problem. Participation is down, costs are up, and there are significant disparities in race, ethnicity, gender, and family income. According to studies by the **Sports & Society Program**, this is the reality for youth sports across the country. What makes Montgomery County unique is that the community decided to do something about it, using the suggestions of Sports & Society’s Project Play initiative.

In early March 2020, the county released a report that cited national trends from the Institute’s 2018 and 2019 *State of Play: Trends and Developments in Youth Sports*. The county noted the benefits of youth sports and analyzed the structure and participant cost of local programs. They found that sports activities do not take place near families’ schools or homes, that available sports activities are too competitive even at very young ages, and that cost is a significant barrier: more than a third of respondents reported paying over \$2,000 annually for one child to play sports.

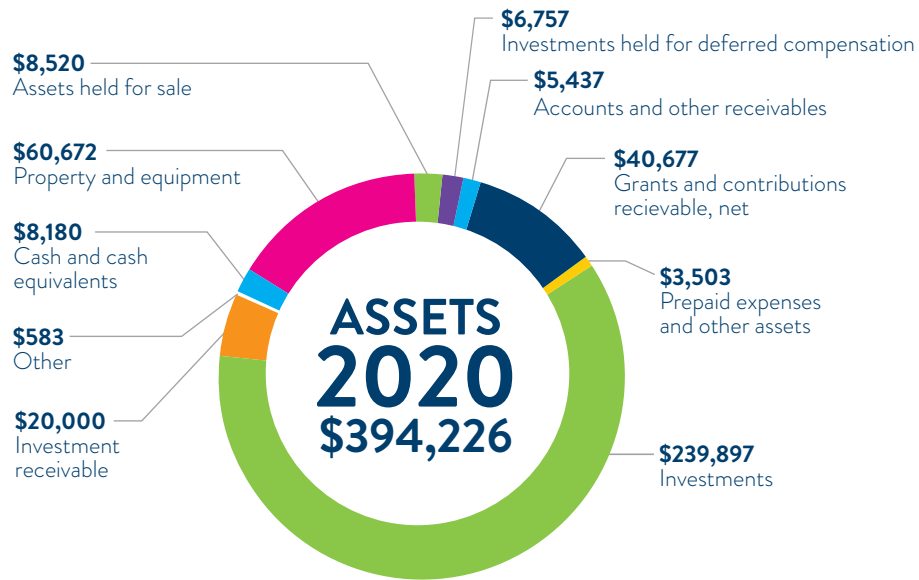
One of the county report’s findings noted, “The Aspen Institute’s Project Play **offers a framework for increasing youth sports participation** that focuses on children under age 12.” The report built on those recommendations to create an improvement plan.

A plan is a wonderful thing, but in the depths of the pandemic—when participation was drastically curtailed—finding funding might have been a problem. Bolstered with Montgomery County’s own research and insight from Sports & Society, the proposal went before the county council and came away with \$1.5 million to bring sports to underserved youth throughout the county.



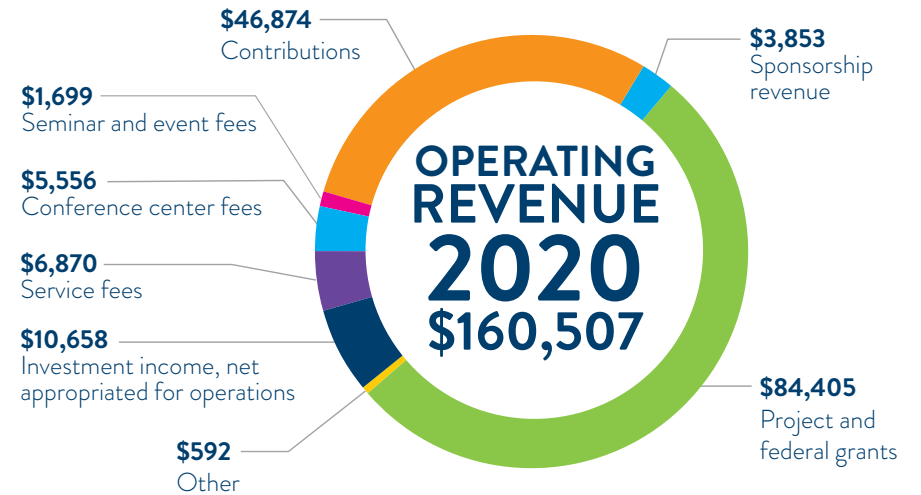
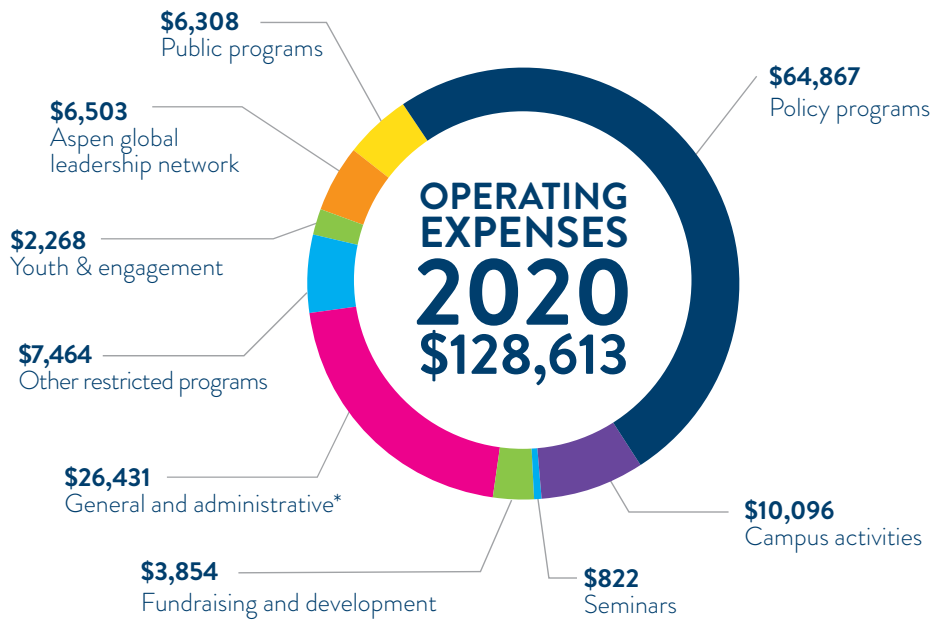
STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

(Dollars in Thousands)



STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES

(Dollars in Thousands)



*Includes Plant fund & Endowment fund expenses of \$3,300,405 and \$416,794 respectively

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION December 31, 2020

With Summarized Financial Information as of December 31, 2019 (Dollars in Thousands)

ASSETS	2020	2019	LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS	2020	2019
Cash and cash equivalents	\$8,180	\$14,263	Liabilities		
Investments	\$239,897	\$222,592	Accounts payable and accrued expenses	\$11,902	\$14,781
Investments held for deferred compensation	\$6,757	\$5,795	Grants payable	\$2,359	\$4,267
Accounts receivable, net	\$5,437	\$7,239	Customer deposits and deferred fees	\$2,737	\$2,134
Grants and contributions receivable, net	\$40,677	\$31,343	Refundable Advance	\$4,000	-
Prepaid expenses	\$3,503	\$3,550	Capital lease obligations	\$97	\$144
Inventory	\$139	\$146	Deferred rent and lease incentives	\$14,143	\$14,186
Property and equipment, net	\$60,672	\$55,653	Deferred compensation	\$6,757	\$5,795
Assets held for sale	\$8,520	\$8,595			
Security deposits	\$444	\$444	Total Liabilities	\$41,995	\$41,307
Investment related receivables	\$20,000	-			
Total Assets	\$394,226	\$349,620	Total Net Assets	\$352,231	\$308,313
			Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$394,226	\$349,620

NET ASSETS BY RESTRICTION

(Dollars in Thousands)



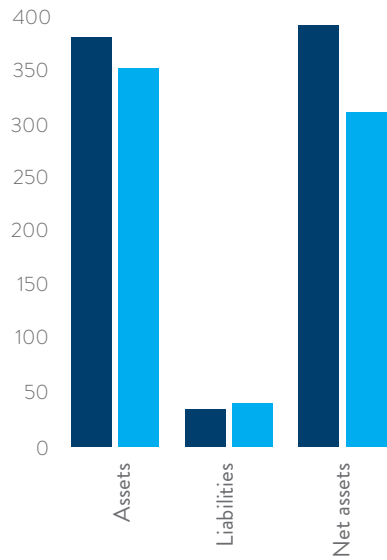
STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES December 31, 2020

With Summarized Financial Information as of December 31, 2019 (Dollars in Thousands)

OPERATING REVENUE & SUPPORT	2020	2019	EXPENSES	2020	2019
Project and federal grants	\$84,405	\$77,181	Program Services		
Contributions	\$46,874	\$31,928	Policy programs	\$64,867	\$67,588
Investment income appropriated for operations	\$10,658	\$5,524	Campus activities	\$10,096	\$18,067
Conference center fees	\$5,556	\$10,941	Public programs	\$6,308	\$13,296
Service Fees	\$6,870	\$11,462	Global Leadership network	\$6,503	\$8,483
Sponsorship revenue	\$3,853	\$8,504	Youth & engagement	\$2,268	\$2,717
Contract revenue	\$11,461	\$11,461	Seminars	\$822	\$995
Seminar and event fees	\$1,699	\$11,429	Other Restricted Programs	\$7,464	\$4,778
Other	\$168	\$805	Total Program Services	\$98,328	\$115,924
Rental income	\$424	\$390	Supporting Services		
Total Operating Revenue and Support	\$160,507	\$158,164	General and administrative	\$26,431	\$25,913
NON-OPERATING ACTIVITIES			Fundraising and development	\$3,854	\$4,510
Investment income in excess of earnings	\$14,024	\$20,191	Total Supporting Services	\$30,285	\$30,423
Provision for deferred taxes	\$0	(\$1,743)	TOTAL EXPENSES	\$128,613	\$146,347
Loss on uncollectible pledge	(\$2,000)	(\$790)	Change in net assets from operations	31,894	11,817
Change in Assets	\$43,918	\$29,475			
Net Assets, Beginning of Year	\$308,313	\$278,838			
NET ASSETS, END OF YEAR	\$352,231	\$308,313			

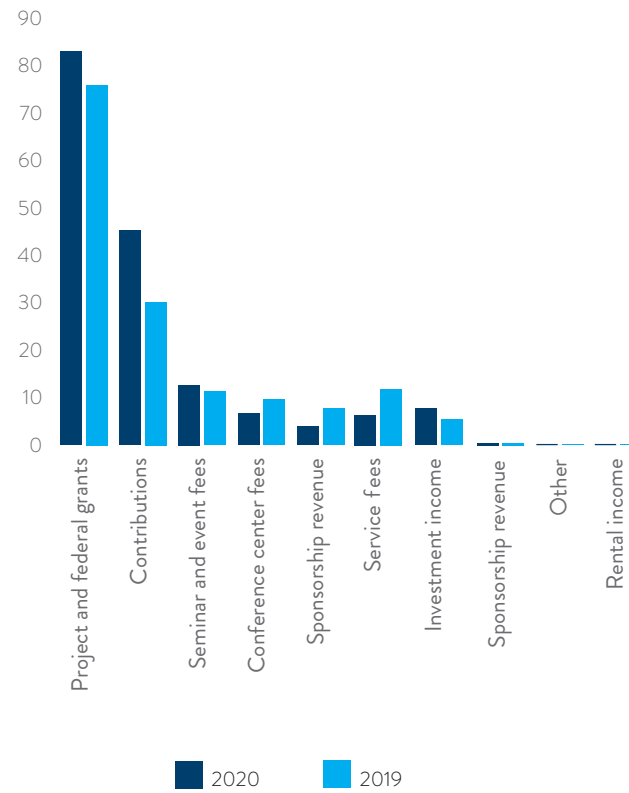
2020 V. 2019 ASSET, LIABILITY AND NET ASSET IN TOTALITY

(Dollars in Thousands)



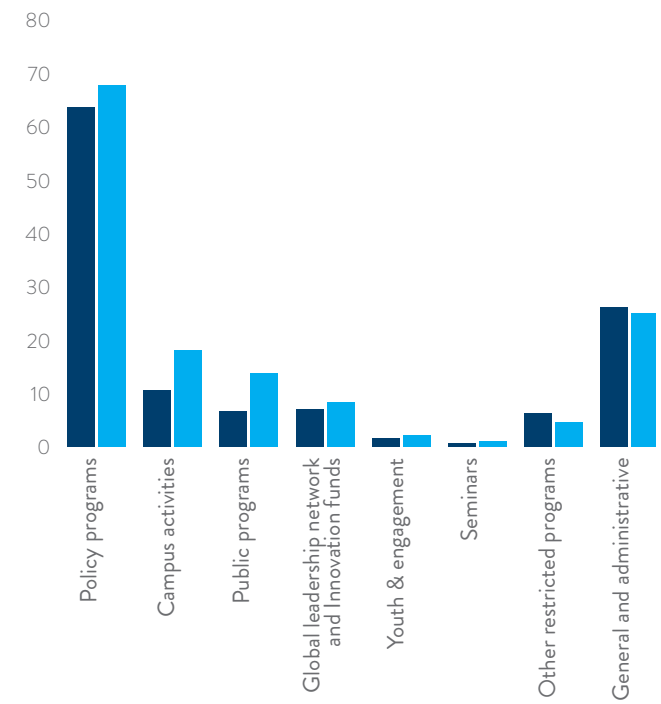
2020 V. 2019 REVENUE BY CATEGORY

(Dollars in Thousands)



2020 V. 2019 EXPENSES BY CATEGORY

(Dollars in Thousands)





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At the Aspen Institute, our values, our ideas, our theory of leadership, and our commitment to equity remain as timely – and as timeless – as ever. None of us could have predicted the challenges of this past year but your generous support and commitment to our work allowed us to meet this crisis with what we do best: building spaces for dialogue, inspiring the next generation of values-based, purpose-driven leaders, and amplifying stories and ideas that will change the world.

Philanthropy enables the Institute to invest in transformational ideas to meet the urgent challenges of the future. Trustees, Society of Fellows members, Paepcke and Heritage Society members, corporate and foundation partners, and other close friends of the Aspen Institute believe and stand behind our mission. The global impact of the Aspen Institute would not be possible without your support, and for this we are so grateful.

Thank for your tremendous support and commitment to our work as we strive to meet the societal needs of today and build a stronger future together.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Eric L. Motley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a horizontal line underlining the first name.

Eric L. Motley, PhD
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