

# Explorations Into Relational Repair

Reflections, Intentions, and Experiences of  
Practitioners Engaged in Relational Repair

a report by Compton Foundation  
& Informing Change

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[relationalrepair.org/report](https://relationalrepair.org/report)

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# Introduction

This report is a partnership between the 79-year-old Compton Foundation, headquartered in San Francisco, California, and Informing Change, a diverse strategic learning firm based in Oakland. The individuals and organizations who participated in the interview and data collection process conducted by Informing Change (see page 58) were vital to the substance and originality of the research, as were Compton Foundation Fellows C’Ardiss “CC” Gardner Gleser, Audrey Jacobs, and Caitlin Brune, who contributed their thought leadership to the shaping and editing of the report.

Compton Foundation commissioned this research to make visible the nascent and novel approaches being tested in cross-racial and cross-class relational repair; to share the ideas and limitations across personal, interpersonal, and organizational exchanges; and to ignite more prototyping of relational repair efforts. Informing Change brought to this effort a depth of experience in strategic learning, research, and evaluation in the social and philanthropic sectors, drawing on work since 1998 to shape the design and analysis of the project.

## Why Relational Repair?

The term “relationship repair” is most commonly recognized in the field of psychology as a way to address ruptures in intimate and familial relationships. In this report, “relational repair” refers to an interpersonal and human-centered

practice that contributes to the broader movement for reparations. Relational repair is an effort to explore, navigate, and respond to the unexamined ways chattel slavery and settler colonialism harm us all. It aims to counteract and counterbalance Western modernity's dominant ontology: individualism and separation, hierarchy and segregation. It examines and explores anti-racist practice, decolonial frameworks, and non-Western and Indigenous ways of being, along with relational and nonbinary ways of knowing. It examines the role of money and our personal and interpersonal attachments, associations, and ideas about capital, wealth, class, and ownership.

The practitioners who participated in this research are actively and boldly engaging across class and race, uprooting deeply embedded narratives of separation, and transforming ideologies of individualism into reclamations of belonging. It is a journey of patience, bravery, and faithful commitment over time.

The overall purpose of this report was to gather insights with an eye toward building a shared resource among practitioners for ongoing learning, reflection, and practice. We invite the readers of this report to imagine what can emerge when people commit to repairing relationships across inherited, assigned, or accepted race and class identities. We encourage reflection and seek your contributions to the evolution of relational repair as both a practice and a movement.

## The Process

In the summer of 2023, Informing Change began documenting the processes involved in relational repair, speaking with Compton-funded partners and other individuals and organizations doing reparative work. Over the course of the following year, Informing Change examined the dynamics, frameworks, and practices that shape relational repair, reviewing documents, conducting interviews and focus groups, and synthesizing emerging themes and patterns through an iterative analysis process. The descriptions below detail each component of the research process.

- **Document Review:** Over **75 relevant documents and resources were reviewed** to capture the activities, motivations, and strategic directions underpinning various models and frameworks of reparative action. These

resources were sourced through literature reviews and contributions from evaluation participants<sup>1</sup> and Compton Foundation.

- **Data Collection:** A total of **54 participants were engaged through interviews and focus groups**. This included individuals participating in relational repair cohorts, Compton’s reparative action grantees, Compton staff, Compton fellows, and funders and field contributors identified by Compton. The process involved **31 qualitative, semi-structured interviews and 7 facilitated focus groups** designed to gather the direct experiences and perspectives of those engaged in cohort work.

These interviewees mostly consisted of practitioners and organizations engaged in reparations for Black people. However, relational repair that addressed land back, land repatriation, and the returning of cultural assets to Native Americans was also examined, both through the document review process and via several organizational interviews.

- **Qualitative Data Analysis:** Informing Change interviews and focus groups were recorded, transcribed, and coded using Dedoose, a qualitative analysis software that supports the review of large volumes of data. The analysis process was **iterative** and included frequent calls and thought partnership with Compton staff and fellows. These collaborative exchanges helped refine insights and assumptions over time and supported deeper connections between emergent patterns and thematic findings.

## This Report

Rather than attempting to confine or categorize the nascent work of relational repair, this report reflects on the shared questions, practices, and possibilities emerging across different efforts. The research revealed there is no single framework in relational repair; rather, there is an embodied practice that unfolds, through a process of inquiry, into what it means to mend harm historically woven into systems and relationships. Instead of offering definitive answers, this report probes big questions: If reparations for slavery were enacted at the federal level, what more would be needed to achieve true healing? What does repair look and feel

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<sup>1</sup> **Participant** is defined as any of the 54 individuals who took part in the interviews and focus groups conducted for this research. The term **practitioner** is used interchangeably with “participant” throughout this report.

like, personally, communally, and institutionally? What new ways of being might be necessary to make repair possible?

Overall, this report:

- Documents, shares, and synthesizes perspectives from the practitioners engaging in relational repair in service of reparations.
- Explores the questions, practices, and possibilities of relational repair.
- Shares insights from various models of, and approaches to, relational repair.

The subsequent chapters examine foundational aspects of the work, divided into three parts: **The Practitioners**, the people engaging in relational repair (from intimate cohorts to large institutions); **The Elements**, components that support the successful engagement of relational repair at the personal and interpersonal level; and **The Practices**, experiential categories through which relational repair is explored, advanced, and reproduced.

Also included is a chapter on **Philanthropy & Resourcing** that examines the role of philanthropy within relational repair. It makes suggestions for how funders might approach engaging in relational repair and catalyze reparative efforts. The **Conclusion** of the report shares possibilities for future research and insights into the limitations of the data.

## A Note on Language

Throughout this report, intentional linguistic choices guide the language used. Language is powerful as a socially constructed communication tool that often conveys its user's underlying beliefs, assumptions, or biases. Accordingly, terminology can uphold racist structures or radically challenge and dismantle them. To the best of our ability, terms are in alignment with those used by practitioners working in the "relational repair ecosystem," a phrase used here to describe the network of individuals, organizations, and communities engaged in this work. We acknowledge that those actively doing this work may have good reasons to make different diction choices. With that in mind, the list that follows makes visible the terminology in this report:

- **Reparations** is used primarily to describe government-driven policies or programs that seek to compensate for the harms, theft, and exploitation sanctioned by a state or state actors.

- **Relational repair** is used to describe the reparative process that seeks to address healing in relationships between individuals and groups. Relationships may be intimate (between family members and loved ones), social (within or between social groups), or status-based (between clients and staff within an organization).
- We capitalize **Black** to acknowledge that, in the United States, Blackness is an identity label and a rich and generative culture that carries inclusivity and solidarity within the variety of identities and cultures contained in it. For similar reasons, we capitalize **Indigenous** in reference to the collective cultures and histories of this land's original stewards.
- We capitalize **White** to acknowledge the way that Whiteness shows up and functions to perpetuate racism within institutions and communities. We understand that there is debate around this decision, and we respect those who decide to keep it lowercase because it describes a skin color rather than a specific shared culture or history. However, we want to acknowledge that to keep it lowercase would be to help maintain its position as a neutral default category for race. As Eve Ewing notes, "When we ignore the specificity and significance of Whiteness ... we contribute to its seeming neutrality and thereby grant it the power to maintain its invisibility."<sup>2</sup>
- We use **black-bodied** and **white-bodied** (lowercase) to highlight the historical and physical violence of racism and colonialism on bodies. Borrowing from Resmaa Menakem's work, racism is not just a social or mental construct but something experienced and felt within the body. These terms center the body in conversations and engagements about race.<sup>3</sup>
- We use **White supremacy** and **white body supremacy** interchangeably. We use the former in alignment with Menakem's work to highlight the somatic, lived experience of race and racism. We use the latter to refer to the enforcement of White ideals and standards onto bodies not racialized as White. This enforcement expresses itself not only through systems or ideologies but by becoming embedded in the physical bodies and nervous

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<sup>2</sup> Ewing, E. (2018). *Ghosts in the Schoolyard: Racism and School Closings on Chicago's South Side*. University of Chicago Press.

<sup>3</sup> Menakem, R. (2017). *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies*. Central Recovery Press.

systems of individuals, shaping how people of different races experience and enact safety, power, and belonging.<sup>4</sup>

- Given the U.S. context of this report, we use the acronym **BIPOC** when referring broadly to individuals who identify as **Black, Indigenous, or People of Color**. While we do not use the term **People of the Global Majority** within this report, we recognize it as a valuable alternative, offering a broader perspective that connects the legacies of harm, both past and present, across global contexts. We also use the words **Indigenous** and **Native American** interchangeably.

“When we reveal the truth about history, then we’ll have an opportunity to be in conversation ... figuring out ways to be honest and bring that conversation that leads to healing.”

— Participant <sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Throughout this document, we use both standalone quotes and quotes integrated into the text. These stylistic choices do not indicate any difference in significance or meaning; they are simply variations in presentation. Anonymous quotes are attributed to **Participant**, defined as any of the 54 individuals who took part in our interviews and focus groups. We also use the term **practitioner** interchangeably with participant in the text.

## The Practitioners

For this report, we interviewed individuals practicing reparations through small, informal cohorts as well as organizational leaders engaging in reparations across a wide range of institutional activities and industries.<sup>6</sup> These practitioners address the harms of chattel slavery and settler colonialism. For chattel slavery, reparations center on wealth return and redistribution, confronting white body supremacy, class dynamics, and deeply embedded assumptions rooted in power and privilege. For settler colonialism, reparations efforts focus on land return, land repatriation (i.e., restoring ecological, cultural, and spiritual practices of relating with the land), Indigenous language revitalization, and the repatriation of culturally significant items as described under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA).<sup>7</sup> All interviewees shared the understanding that facilitating financial restitution and resource redistribution is a central component of the repair process.

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<sup>6</sup> For the full scope of the reparations ecosystem, see [Liberation Ventures](#) and their Reparations Grantmaking Blueprint.

<sup>7</sup> [Official National Park Service/NAGPRA site](#). Updates to this law can be found at Center for Art Law. (2025, January 21) "[A Revised NAGPRA: Evaluating Progress Towards Repatriating Native American Ancestral Remains and Belongings in the Wake of Revised Federal Regulations.](#)"

## Cohort-Based Work

The relational repair cohorts, the initial focus and primary driver of this report, center on groups where primarily black-bodied women and white-bodied women with wealth come together to build relationships across race and class. White-bodied participants agree to provide financial and/or other types of resources to support the building of economic power and the leadership efforts of black-bodied participants, who are individuals from diverse fields and backgrounds. There is no application or proposal process; most are invited to participate through word of mouth and relationships. Not all invited Black women say yes or find the invitation compelling, given ancestral and personal experiences of anti-black racism that can become magnified in relationships with white women and across class divides, further amplifying harm. Nevertheless, all cohort members who agree to come to the table do so because they are willing to grapple with race and class dynamics, disappointments, and expectations, all rooted in the promise of relational repair and its evolution over time.

Facilitators play a key role in supporting the relational repair cohorts. They guide the engagement process and are instrumental in building trust and encouraging openness among participants. Facilitators aid accountability efforts and help navigate complex dynamics, supporting members' efforts to withstand and use discomfort for growth and to lean into grace, connection, and repair when harm occurs. Some cohorts use internal facilitators (i.e., members of the cohort), while others engage an outside facilitator either on a regular basis or when needed. As relationships deepen within cohorts and relational culture is built, the facilitator's role may shift, enabling shared facilitation among peers. A facilitator's identity inevitably impacts how they enter or frame conversations, just as much as participants' identities influence their participation.

The cohorts introduced below represent ever-evolving ways in which practitioners are moving into paradigms of relationality.

Three Seattle-based cohorts were initiated by LeAnne Moss, co-founder of **Leading from the Heart**, a social change project in Western Washington. In 2017, Moss began facilitating cohorts for White women to explore both their White privilege and their wealth privilege. After nearly 18 months of learning and deepening together, six women from the first cohort were ready to move into real-world action and build relationships with Black women. Over a six-year period, three different cohorts

emerged: the **Seattle Sisterhood**, the **Reparative Action Experiment with Entrepreneurs** (RAE), and the **Ripples**. Each group's process and development uniquely drew on the strengths, interests, and makeup of cohort members and facilitators.

The **Seattle Sisterhood**, twelve members strong, has evolved and deepened together over the past seven years. They coined the phrase "the return," meaning that the financial commitment transferred from the white-bodied to the black-bodied participants was not a gift but a return of the wealth that otherwise belonged to them. This group began with monthly meals and facilitated discussions, later forming councils and pods that further solidified relationships. Today, dynamic conversations flow, and a commitment to lifelong friendship has been widely affirmed.

The **Ripples**, the youngest and smallest of the Seattle relational repair cohorts, consists of four black-bodied women accompanied by two white-bodied women. Having made a three-year commitment at the outset and now in their third year, they anticipate continuing as a cohort with financial return. From the first time the women met, a caring bond was formed. A report produced by Headwater Peoples and Black Ivy Collective, "[Growing Repair: Planting Seeds of Love,](#)" shares more details about both the Ripples and the Seattle Sisterhood.

Meanwhile, in 2021, the **Reparative Action Experiment with Entrepreneurs** (RAE) was formed as a prototype to test whether the maximum gift tax exemption<sup>8</sup> could serve as an effective model for wealth return. A black-bodied woman from the Seattle Sisterhood architected this approach to support the independence and autonomy of three Black women solopreneurs. Five white-bodied women joined her in this endeavor, each committing to annual returns to the solopreneurs. In March 2026, the RAE will complete its fifth and final year, celebrating and documenting the relational and economic progress and successes of the experiment.

**Seeing Whiteness for Anti-Racist Action**, an Atlanta-based group, is a skill-building series consisting of practice and learning circles for white-bodied individuals to help them "notice and challenge the ways white people are socialized to protect whiteness and hold racism in place."<sup>9</sup> Discomfort is welcomed, as

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<sup>8</sup> If monetary gifts per person remain under a certain amount per giver per year (\$19,000 in 2025 & 2026), neither giver nor receiver has tax liability.

<sup>9</sup> Seeing Whiteness for Anti-Racist Action (updated 2022). Retrieved from Radical Optimist Collective. <https://theradicaloptimist.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Seeing-Whiteness-for-Anti-Racist-Action-Overview.Updated2022-2.pdf>

participants are asked to bring their full and honest experiences to conversations in order to move with fresh hope and commitment toward racial healing, racial justice, and the dismantling of racism in their communities. Notably, the facilitators of the circles communicate with BIPOC partners throughout the series, sharing discoveries and asking questions that will help them guide, focus, and deepen the explorations.

Another group, an outgrowth of the work of Seeing Whiteness, is the **Atlanta Circle of Relational Repair**. This emergent cohort is exploring opportunities where white-bodied women move into action for repair and wealth return with black-bodied women.

[Jubilee Justice Journey](#) (Alexandria, Louisiana) is a two-year cohort of 40 black-bodied and white-bodied individuals engaged in personal and [ancestral explorations](#) that address reparative justice's spiritual and communal dimensions. This group explores the intersections of land, spirit, money, and race rooted in collective healing. Members acknowledge the historical harms caused by racialized economic systems and practice long-term commitments to learning, healing, and engaging in reparative work. They focus on spiritual reflection, belonging, and personal healing, contributing to the broader racial and cross-racial liberation vision.

Artists actively reclaim historical roots through filmmaking and storytelling, producing enduring cultural works. [Acts of Reparation](#) is a collective that leans into narrative strategies by supporting people in retelling their stories of living as racialized people and bodies. Their documentary film "Acts of Reparation" delves into the meaning of reparations within this context of harmed communities. Through its impact campaign, Acts of Reparation facilitates "Circles of Practice," which provide white-bodied individuals with a space to reflect on and engage with the concept of reparations on a personal and familial level. This may involve exploring legacies of harm within family systems and addressing intergenerational trauma.<sup>10</sup> "Pink House Pop-Ups," a facet of the impact campaign focused on black-bodied people, offers ancestral healing opportunities by supporting Black people in tracing their genealogy. Through the reparative act of genealogy, Black people reveal and reclaim ties to places of origin and repopulate familial histories systematically erased or marginalized.

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<sup>10</sup> Acts of Reparation (Home). Acts of Reparation. Retrieved October 5, 2024, from <https://www.actsofreparation.com/>

For others, like the creators of [Re-Cede](#) and the [Rest Love & Justice Podcast](#), the practice of rest is the center of their work, a sacred act of resistance and healing. The co-founders of these initiatives—one Black, one White—share belief in rest as a revolutionary act, a pausing that invites deepening into seeing, feeling, and relating with more sensitivity. Through these projects, the women are refining what it can look and feel like to renew and resource Black women creatives and entrepreneurs to do the work they're called to do.

“Repair for me has been thinking about money as medicine—being able to seed opportunities, support visions, and build out the future we want for ourselves and our communities.”

— Participant

## Organization-Based Work

Organizations interviewed for this report include museums, collectives, intermediaries, field catalyts,<sup>11</sup> and philanthropic organizations. These groups bridge the gaps between grassroots leaders, networks, and larger power systems, including institutions across the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors. The organizations introduced below exemplify how institutions working to redress the

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<sup>11</sup> Hussein, T., Plummer, M., & Breen, B. (2018). “How Field Catalyts Galvanize Social Change.” *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. [https://ssir.org/articles/entry/field\\_catalyts](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/field_catalyts)

harms of chattel slavery and settler colonialism can, like individuals, engage in ways that shift paradigms of practice from hierarchical to relational.

Large cultural institutions like the [Museum of Us](#) (formerly the San Diego Museum of Man) represent how established organizations can look inward to create repair by actively confronting their historical role in supporting colonialism and systemic oppression of BIPOC communities. The Museum of Us has a Decolonial Pathways initiative that prioritizes and funds the return of cultural belongings and ancestral remains to their rightful communities using highly relational Indigenous-led repatriation efforts. The Museum highlights Indigenous knowledge by bringing to light histories, truths, and ways of being and knowing that have long been marginalized or hidden.

[Land Justice Futures](#) (formerly the Nuns & Nones Land Justice Project) partners with Catholic religious communities to create new land legacies rooted in racial and ecological healing by facilitating land transitions that address historical injustices. In this way, they work to heal the generations of harm the Catholic Church has done to Indigenous communities by supporting Indigenous land stewardship, regenerative farming cooperatives, habitat restoration, and ethical land transition. To shift narratives, mindsets, laws, and behaviors intergenerationally, Land Justice Futures leads campaigns to advance Indigenous leaders' call to revoke and redress the Doctrine of Discovery, a series of papal proclamations dating from the mid-1500s that still serve as the foundation of U.S. private property law and the commodification of nature more generally.

Some initiatives focus on addressing sectoral injustices. In Detroit, Michigan, the [Dignity Restoration Project](#) seeks to repair harm caused by unlawful property tax assessments by the city that disproportionately impacted Black homeowners.<sup>12</sup> This project offers economic compensation and focuses on restoring dignity through comprehensive, dignity-affirming interventions intended to repair practices that dehumanize and infantilize Black residents. DRP is a pilot program that serves as a model for hundreds of similar initiatives in cities across the country.

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<sup>12</sup> Stein, E. (2022, January 22) "Detroit overtaxed homeowners \$600 million. Years later, advocates still seeking reparations." *Detroit Free Press*.  
<https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/detroit/2022/01/22/detroit-overtaxed-homeowners-600-million/6620156001/>

Reparations field builders such as [The Embodiment Institute](#) (TEI) remap relationships by reconfiguring how connections are built across differences.<sup>13</sup> TEI is a training institute, research entity, and culture change engine that strategically develops people and organizations to be agents of transformation in families, social movements, and the environment. TEI uses body-based approaches to provide personal and interpersonal healing of racial trauma. As a field builder, TEI also engages a multiracial cross-class community as “Transformational Characters,” people committed to interrupting and healing the intergenerational violence of systemic oppression based on race, class, gender, and/or sexual orientation.

[The Decolonizing Wealth Project](#) explores truth, reconciliation, and healing from the harms of colonization by “disrupting the existing systems of moving and controlling capital.” It shifts the responsibility for reparative actions from those historically marginalized to those who hold the bulk of ill-gotten wealth and influence, particularly within philanthropy. The project documents and shares the growing reparations movement with philanthropic institutions and donors. It facilitates the flow of untethered resources—often referred to as liberated capital—directly to community-driven initiatives.<sup>14</sup>

[Liberation Ventures](#) (LV) provides grant funding, strategic guidance, and movement-building resources. It responds to past racial harms from enslavement and invests in a future rooted in a culture of repair, with justice and equity. It uses financial and nonfinancial strategies to build public support for reparations. LV’s reparative strategy focuses on investments in the future in the context of past wrongs.<sup>15</sup> Efforts include integrating reparations into a systemic framework, conducting narrative research, creating narrative frames, defining the agenda, and supporting emerging campaigns to reshape the narrative into one in which reparations are a “common sense and commonplace” policy solution.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The Embodiment Institute (About). The Embodiment Institute. Retrieved October 5, 2024, from <https://www.theembodimentinstitute.org/about>

<sup>14</sup> Decolonizing Wealth Project. (2023) Case for Reparations fund. <https://decolonizingwealth.com/liberated-capital/case4reparations/>

<sup>15</sup> Reparations Narrative Lab. Narrative House. Retrieved October 5, 2024, from <https://www.reparationsnarrativelab.org/narrativehouse>

<sup>16</sup> Liberation Ventures. (2023) Long-term Strategy: Building the Reparations Movement. [https://www.liberationventures.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Liberation-Ventures\\_Long-term-strategy.pdf](https://www.liberationventures.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Liberation-Ventures_Long-term-strategy.pdf)

**Cultivating Repair: Catalyst Initiative** embraces a participatory approach to philanthropy that centers the communities and practitioners who are catalyzing change. This initiative “combines a participatory learning cohort with unrestricted grant support for courageous efforts to heal America’s deepest wounds as part of a growing ecosystem for repair and healing.” The cohort chosen for this year-long effort gathers organizations and projects reflecting diverse approaches to repair and healing, representing a mix of perspectives, practices, sectors, audiences, and geographies. Cultivating Repair was launched in part to explore and share key insights and learnings with those in the broader reparations and relational repair fields, including other funders.

**iF, A Foundation for Radical Possibilities**, a grantmaking organization based in and focused on Washington, D.C., is advancing reparations through narrative change efforts and grantmaking to organizations “constructing a new status quo based on novel and reclaimed memories, traditions, and wisdom of Black people and people of the global majority that center community well-being, cooperation, collectivity, and love.” In 2023 iF co-produced, with the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP), [\*Cracks in the Foundation: Philanthropy’s Role in Reparations for Black People in the DMV\*](#).<sup>17</sup> The report establishes a Reporative Framework for Philanthropy, focusing on four specific sectors that have caused past harm to local Black people and their communities. With this initiative, iF seeks to spur collaborations, and to influence and motivate foundations and institutions in other sectors to engage in redress and repair.

**Fund for NonViolence**, a private foundation that will spend all its assets by 2027, uses its Reparations, Accountability, and Healing Program to provide stable, unfettered financial resources to support work that broadens public understanding and increases accountability for historical and ongoing structural racism and state violence experienced by Black and Indigenous communities in the United States. Its approach has involved resourcing a handful of “anchor organizations” that catalyze progress toward reparations and relational healing that specifically benefits Black and Indigenous people. Fund for NonViolence is also resourcing Indigenous Fellows to experiment with ways of flowing resources that dramatically shift decision-making power from the Fund’s staff and board to Indigenous residents in

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<sup>17</sup> Ponce, K., Garcia, E., Gerson, T., & Schlege, R. (2024, January) *CRACKS IN THE FOUNDATION: Philanthropy’s Role in Reparations for Black People in the DMV*. National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy. <https://ncrp.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/NCRP-reckoning-launch.pdf>

communities harmed by exploitation and extraction linked to the Fund's assets, which largely derive from timber and forest products.

[Kataly Foundation](#), a limited life foundation intentionally established to redistribute and redefine wealth, aims to contribute to financial systems transformation by strategically reinvesting resources in community-owned and led projects. The foundation provides significant funding and non-extractive loans to Black and Indigenous people and people of color for self-determined projects—initiatives based in collective stewardship, governance, and regeneration benefiting communities and the planet. Kataly directs its assets into three primary areas: the Mindfulness and Healing Justice program, the Environmental Justice Resourcing Collective, and the Restorative Economies Fund.

**Threshold Philanthropy**, an LLC that dissolved in June of 2023, first emerged from the alchemy of curiosity and willingness to experiment with new models of philanthropy intended to foster liberation among black-bodied and Indigenous women by giving directly to both individuals and organizations. From the outset, Threshold Philanthropy's creators identified care and rest as central to Threshold's approach and began weaving rest into their resourcing and structures. This included "no strings attached" funding for individual womxn of color leaders; funding for sabbaticals; facilitating a cohort circle for healing and learning; advocating for similar investments among peer philanthropic entities; and building rest into their own organizational processes. For a deeper exploration of cohort-based relational repair possibilities in philanthropy, see [Weaving Reparative Futures](#), a case study sharing Threshold's approach.

[Compton Foundation](#), after exploring its own wealth story and the power dynamics inherent in family philanthropy, began in 2022 to fund relational repair projects aimed at redressing the harms of chattel slavery and settler colonialism. Funding was disbursed in four key areas: land and cultural asset return; infrastructure and policy; narrative strategy; and field/individual organizing. These grants and fellowships supported institutions working for reparations and individuals engaging in practices around personal and interpersonal healing. Compton's theory of repair embraces a relationship-based approach, recognizing the potential for holistic and transformative pathways to reparations.

Among the many visionary leaders and organizations described above, each is contributing to a paradigm shift in how we understand and practice reparations,

exploring and experimenting with approaches and exchanges that prioritize relationality and mutuality. These initiatives in relational repair at the interpersonal level represent a small but growing part of the larger ecosystem. The seeds being planted through these efforts are gradually taking root. As they do, this innovative approach can help us reimagine reparations not merely as a moral obligation but as a call to recognize our fundamental interconnectedness and shared humanity.

“It’s messy, complex, and perfectly imperfect, but when it moves beyond transaction to true relationship, that’s when we know repair is happening.”

— Participant

# The Elements

Across conversations with practitioners, Informing Change identified four key elements of relational repair. These elements are present regardless of the scope or complexity of the repair environment, in both cohorts and organizations, and can be reliably returned to at any point as anchors of practice. Rooted in the fundamental and developmental dynamics of being in relationship(s), they offer a way to understand and articulate the essential yet challenging work of shifting from a mindset of individualism (me, mine, yours) to a mindset of relationality (we, ours) in the practice of repair. This shift corresponds with an evolution in worldview, from one characterized primarily by hierarchies of power and value to one characterized by mutual care and interdependent relationality that prioritizes collective safety, wellbeing, and belonging.

## The Invitation

For many of the practitioners we spoke with, the call to engage in relational repair often began with a personal invitation from a trusted individual. These invitations played a significant role in setting the stage for reparative work and highlighted the power of connection and relationship-building. One white-bodied participant captured this moment's emotional resonance: "I was absolutely moved, thrilled, to get an invitation to be in a study group with her. We embarked on 18 months of learning about the history of oppression and systematic cruelty, particularly focused on black-bodied people."

Invitations often come from friends or facilitators, signaling the central role of trust in the process. Another practitioner noted, “The first thing that comes to me about why I joined is that I was invited, and I take invitations very seriously,” highlighting how genuinely valued these calls to action were. Trust and personal connections set the foundation for many to step into relational repair work.

Entering into relational repair requires a thoughtful awareness and continuous probing of historical and ongoing systemic harms. It moves beyond words or actions to recognize the energies people carry in their bodies; their inherited traumas and resiliency; and how these elements live and converge across differences in race, history, and experience. Practitioners understand that healing must center those who have borne the heaviest burdens of systemic oppression. In repair cohorts involving black-bodied individuals, this reality was described accordingly: “Black women’s lives and experiences need to be centered because I don’t think that White women fully understand. At the same time, I think it’s important for the relationality for White women to share their stories so they can hear and understand and see the differences in the ways in which we have lived our lives so far.” This wasn’t just a call for acknowledgment but for a resonance—a bodily knowing of what it means to live in a world that often fails to see you, hear you, or honor your humanity.

Relational repair happens in organic, co-created, and often emergent spaces; i.e., spaces that are unscripted and dynamic, inviting authenticity and shared vulnerability/courage. These spaces are not designed to fix people or situations but to hold the complexity of the moment and allow healing to emerge naturally: “There’s this ‘youthness’ feeling that I think is part of the relationship, to be able to laugh, giggle, and make fun of ourselves when we do weird things.” This kind of co-created space, sharing light moments and acknowledging imperfections, allows for deeper connections rooted in trust.

At the core of relational repair is a more embodied form of giving and generosity that listens, follows the lead of those most impacted by harm, and honors the wisdom and insight of those with lived experience. Relational repair encourages focusing on small yet meaningful actions, such as leveraging personal connections to facilitate access to resources or opportunities. Such actions can be taken to support others and thus create significant impacts. Participants reflected on the importance of being available and responsive in relationships—creating a space where individuals feel valued and acknowledged. This attentiveness mirrors how one would prioritize close friendships, reinforcing the idea that relational repair includes committing to being present and engaged.

The process of relational repair is not easy. Individuals must confront uncomfortable truths, sit with pain and discomfort, and acknowledge complicity with, and the depth of suffering within, systems of harm. But relational repair also offers the possibility of a renewal that comes from connection, belonging, personal transformation, and healed relationships. *“There’s healing that needs to happen in black bodies ... and there’s healing that has to happen in white bodies,”* one participant said. This healing is not separate from the work of repair—it *is* the work.

“When considering what needs repair in one’s own life, the next question should be, ‘How can I heal? What do I truly desire?’ Then reflect on those who are never asked this question or whose desires are never considered important.”

— Participant

## Reflection and Motivations

In almost every conversation, practitioners noted the importance of engaging in **deep inner work**, as it is vital to the success and impact of the repair process. They must understand, commit, and recommit to the necessity of working through their unhealed personal and generational trauma. This iterative process includes building a vocabulary to discuss topics around social identity (race, gender, and class featured prominently in the conversations) and learning to sit through emotional discomfort without quitting or projecting/externalizing discomfort (acknowledging discomfort as a fertile part of the process). While much of this work is a prerequisite for engaging in repair groups or activities, many participants noted that personal work happens throughout the collective repair processes. Conversations and actions may bring up new tensions and emotions. Participants know that in order to move forward into repair that is relational, they must process and move through this discomfort. Cohorts have used various modalities to help members with this inner work, including reflection questions, journaling, using time in the group to process, getting outside help, and engaging in various somatic and embodiment practices.

As practitioners engaged in reparative action, **motivations** took on different meanings based on racial identity and personal history. For many white-bodied individuals, a growing awareness of systemic inequities—often sparked by the political climate of 2016 or the murder of George Floyd in 2020—catalyzed their involvement. This awareness was described by one participant as a “clear call or hook into anti-racism,” where the recognition of one’s participation in, or benefit from, systems of oppression spurred a desire to act toward justice. One white-bodied participant reflected that they had “never had to think about race before,” capturing the moment of realization that often leads to an understanding of how racialized harm is enacted and experienced, further prompting a commitment to relational repair.

On the other hand, black-bodied participants framed their motivations for relational repair as personal and intergenerational; one stated their reason as “Claiming [and] fostering relationships with my family but also with my ancestral community ... It’s so healing.” This sentiment reflects the responsibility many black-bodied individuals feel to engage in reparative work, not just for their own healing but for their communities, ancestors, and future generations. For them, relational repair was a way to reclaim spaces of healing that have been long denied to their communities. This sense of duty toward healing ancestral wounds was a recurring theme. In particular, many black-bodied women saw their involvement in relational repair as an act of resistance, a powerful tool to push back against systems of oppression that have fractured their communities. They were motivated by the hope that this work could rebuild trust and begin the process of communal healing.

“White people have to be willing to not just touch it with a finger and step away, and Black people need to be willing to receive and be open to the process of healing things that they don’t even know they’re holding in their bodies.”

— Participant

## Being in Relationship

True repair cannot be transactional. This was a recurring theme woven through the reflections of the practitioners interviewed. Some participants described the danger of approaching relational repair as something where money or superficial gestures serve as fixes. The practice of restoring right relationships was an important motivating force for many participants, linked to their spiritual commitments and aspirations for communal healing. For these participants, relational repair requires unlearning patterns shaped by white body supremacy and moving toward a way of being that transcends individualism to center mutual and collective well-being, a process described by one practitioner as *“un-selfing ... to practice times when I feel like I’m not separated from the tree I’m looking at right now.”*

For many, relational repair emerged as a transformative practice, reshaping their understanding of relating to others. Participants believed relationships function as a currency that rises above traditional monetary value. One participant reflected, *“The currency, then the wealth, is the relational networks ... I feel like I’m building wealth through relationships now.”*

Engaging in relational repair practice calls for a commitment to challenge the individualized connections prevalent in Western society. Relational repair moves away from the transactional lenses through which many view their interactions and gives way to integrating one another’s lives and cultivating an authentic, beloved community. One practitioner said, *“People will bring a meal but drop it off at the door and not even see you. You have to allow yourself to cross into people’s lives, and it can’t just be business only.”*

One of the tools that supports transformative relational practice is the formation of single-race caucuses. [Racial Equity Tools](#)<sup>18</sup> outlines how this approach can be helpful in laying the groundwork for authentic relationships. Such affinity spaces allow groups to address distinct needs and challenges: white-bodied participants can unpack whiteness and systemic racism without placing the burden of education on groups racialized as non-White, and BIPOC participants can engage in healing environments without the scrutiny inherent in white-dominated spaces. Within groups with shared identities, individuals can grow toward an understanding of the dynamics of power and privilege, how and why it exists, and the ways in which harm

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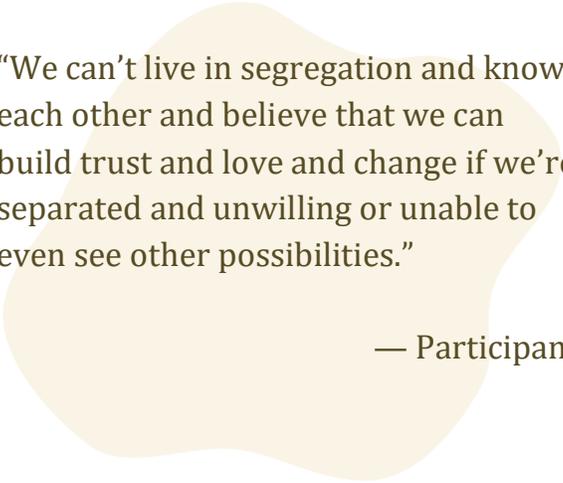
<sup>18</sup> Racial Equity Tools. Caucus and affinity groups. Retrieved from <https://www.raciaequitytools.org/resources/act/strategies/caucus-and-affinity-groups>

is unconscious and trauma is internalized. Many of the relational repair cohorts we spoke with benefitted from this method.

Participants emphasized the need to look forward, pointing to the urgency of practicing repair in the present instead of waiting for institutions or systems to lead the way: *“It’s a collective desire of how do we practice this now, not just in the future, but what does it look like in real time?”* This often took the form of dreaming together—creating spaces where people could share their visions for the future and build toward them collectively. As participants engaged more thoughtfully, they spent time understanding one another’s stories and dreams, weaving their lives together in a vision of connection and hope. In one cohort, individuals shared their dreams through presentations, opening doors to authentic conversation and connection. Many expressed a shared desire to deepen relationships and cultivate spaces for dreaming collectively—a powerful act of relational repair.

Some white-bodied women shared experiences of witnessing black-bodied women take sabbaticals, moments carved out to step back from life’s demands and focus on their basic needs and aspirations. This encapsulates one of relational repair’s principles—that witnessing the healing of others reverberates and, by extension, is a form of repair and healing for everyone in a relationship.

For many practitioners, being in relationship was also about building something new together. As participants explored ways to prepare for challenges like climate collapse or systemic failures, they dreamed of living in physical proximity to one another, creating communities rooted in care and mutual support: *“What actions can we take now together to move into that world? ... With these relationships, how can we work together and ... what can we make together with that? One ... is the dream of living physically close to each other.”*



“We can’t live in segregation and know each other and believe that we can build trust and love and change if we’re separated and unwilling or unable to even see other possibilities.”

— Participant

## Addressing<sup>19</sup> Power & Identity

Those who engage in the relational repair process carry their own burdens of harm and possibility. This work raises a conundrum: how to center and uplift Black and Indigenous voices while decentering Whiteness, all while reestablishing mutuality and kinship. This tension is complex: "It's important for both parties to enter into this relationship recognizing that there has to be community shifting, which requires relationship, and relationship is going to be messy."

Repair means confronting the power dynamics that shape relationships, and rebalancing power in tangible and authentic ways. Nevertheless, being in intentional relation with each other can replicate systems of oppression. While centering black-bodied individuals and their comfort in the work was mentioned, practitioners agreed that what it looked like daily within the cohorts and everyone's actions was constantly in flux. One participant reflected, "Power dynamics are like ... making assumptions about who would pay for dinner, why they would pay for dinner, and when they would pay for dinner." These kinds of conversations highlighted the discomfort and complexity of addressing money, a topic steeped in structural inequities. As they worked through these dynamics, one participant recognized the importance of being unambiguous: "We better be explicit about those money conversations next time we are together because everybody was hurt in some way or another."

This emotional labor comes at significant personal cost, requiring deep reserves of grace and an unyielding commitment to a vision of collective liberation. White-bodied individuals are invited to imagine a shared future in which they are also healed and included while not centered. Perhaps not surprisingly, when white-bodied women were engaged repeatedly and often on the topic of wealth return, these women inevitably became centered, exposing the inextricable connections among race, power, and capital. Many practitioners see the process of decentering White voices as an ongoing tension within the cohorts: "One thing we noticed was how so many of those conversations [between black-bodied and white-bodied women] still centered the White experience, and their primary purpose is to convince White people to give resources back to the community versus actually

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<sup>19</sup> While this report primarily focuses on race, there are many levels of social identity that are important to engaging relationally. For an in-depth look at identity, see Hays, P. (1996, 2008) The ADDRESSING Model. Ohio University. <https://www.ohio.edu/cas/psychology/diversity/addressing-model>

thinking about what it is [like] from the perspective of the recipients of resources when they've lived with scarcity for so long."

Participants also shared a concern about the narrative itself of centering/decentering. While this language is intended to illuminate power dynamics, it inherently reinforces hierarchies by implying that white-bodied women shouldn't share their voice or express their emotions in the relationship. The use of centering/decentering can, therefore, feel unwelcoming, which was not the intention. At times, this language also kept the white-bodied women from seeing themselves in a shared future: "In—rightfully and strategically—not wanting to center White comfort, we have created a narrative where White people who hold the power and money can't understand where they are in the future. There's a difference between decentering your future and still understanding that you're in one, that the people you love are in one, that your legacy can be a part of that, even if it's not centered."

Alternatively, black-bodied practitioners offered white-bodied practitioners the concept of **wholeness** to bring to their relationships, synonymous with total honesty to self and others. Coming into the reparative space, one black-bodied participant asked white-bodied participants to reflect, "What does wholeness call you into? Part of it is what's your responsibility, and the other is what do you dream of, and how can you support that; and can we trust that underneath, and with support and lots of accountability, underneath all the layers of all the bullshit we've learned, underneath Whiteness, we can trust on White people to spark their own stepping into that." This inquiry echoes the vision of collective liberation that animates many practitioners, where all bodies are treated as dignified, whole, and free from oppression.

In groups that can successfully deepen relationship and move beyond the centering of money, participants are able to summon and bear witness to extraordinary generosity of spirit. BIPOC individuals, despite being the ones to carry the weight of centuries of hurt and trauma, must consciously *choose* to engage in the relational components of repair. This process requires their willingness to extend trust, vulnerability, and grace. They not only carry their healing but often bear the additional labor of educating and emotionally supporting white-bodied individuals on the journey of relational repair. Additionally, they must navigate and negotiate the fractures that occur between and within racialized and traumatized bodies,

which can devolve into “oppression Olympics.”<sup>20</sup> Simultaneously, for white-bodied wealth holders, committing to feel and move through the shame and guilt that arises from associations with White supremacy and wealth accumulation requires ongoing efforts to move toward forgiveness and grace, of themselves and others. This generosity on all sides must be extended repeatedly and frequently as the group moves from individualism into a relational collective. One participant described this commitment as a refusal to let the violence of history prevent us from imagining a different future.

For many black-bodied people interviewed, relational repair was not merely about reconciliation but an act of reclamation—of space, dignity, truer narratives, and a future. This work resists the historical denial of healing spaces and reclaims them as essential to survival, solidarity, and a radically different future. Through their stories, practitioners illuminated a path forward marked by hope, collective dreaming, and the courage to embrace the sacredness of relationship. This is the work of repair: weaving lives together to honor the past, heal the present, and imagine and practice a future rooted in connection and care.



“What I get from this group is repair, is the hope of being in this community where I feel, most of the time, that the world is good, and this is possible.”

— Participant

In conclusion, practitioners of all types described repair as a highly relational and layered process steeped in accountability, trust, collective care, and a willingness to stay the course. Relational repair was described as an ongoing personal and shared commitment and a living practice that nurtures mutual healing and moves toward restored wholeness. It expands freedom by recognizing interdependence and affirming one’s authenticity and agency: “The more rooted and the more connected we are to each other, the more choices we have, the more free we can feel.”

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<sup>20</sup> For a definition, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oppression\\_Olympics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oppression_Olympics)

For many, relational repair is realized through collective imagination and the courage to rebuild relationships, as epitomized by this reflection: “What would it mean for people who have been advantaged not just to say, ‘Okay, I’m out,’ but rather to really invest in the flourishing of BIPOC? ... There’s work for everybody— people who are learning together, healing together, and receiving support. It’s about building out those individual, interpersonal relationships. I think those are the indicators that something transformative has happened.” Hope arises in the shift from extraction to reciprocity.



“We center repair where the most harm has been done.”

— Participant

## The Practices

The cohorts and organizations introduced earlier engage in diverse practices that support and build relational repair. The six practices described here represent evolving forms that relational repair can take, shaped by and responsive to those involved. A practice is not a one-size-fits-all process; activities may overlap and/or be intentionally combined. The dynamism of context, participants, and activities yields a **“no wrong way in”** ethos that honors the multiplicity of motivations and manifestations of relational repair. It also acknowledges repair as a multifaceted journey experienced differently across people, with adaptable and inclusive approaches that best meet the needs and intentions of those involved.

“The healing benefits of being in this group are so great ... What I get from this group is repair. The hope of being in this community where I feel, most of the time, that the world is good, and this is possible.”

— Participant

## \* Material Wealth Return Practices

Material wealth return (also called direct wealth return) involves the transfer of financial resources and/or material assets (land, culturally significant objects, buildings, inheritances) with the understanding that this activity is a **returning of resources**, not a redistribution. We acknowledge that redistribution alone comes up short in that it does not fully recognize the historical, intergenerational, structural, and personal harms caused by colonialism.<sup>21</sup> The cohorts interviewed for this study demonstrate how white-bodied and black-bodied individuals explored the flow of these resources, and the organizations interviewed exemplify the many ways in which land and assets can be returned to Black and Indigenous communities.

The practice of material wealth return is a foundational aspect of relational repair; it acknowledges and recognizes how the history of free labor and commodified land benefitted and reinforced social, political, and economic power and supremacy. In a universe where financial power is rebalanced, no one is restricted; **"The point of having wealth is having choice ... being able to feel free to make the choices you do have."** Material exchange also energizes the exploration of personal and interpersonal dynamics around stories about and attachments to wealth.

Relational repair, including wealth return, exists only within the context of relationships. This differentiates it from reparations originating in policy decisions. In relational repair, any financial exchange is infused with trust and inseparable from community. It is a belief in and shared gesture toward wholeness and connection. In this way, material wealth return is neither a transactional reparation nor a charitable donation, as valuable as those acts are in their own contexts. Direct wealth return is a two-sided practice in which both the receiver and the giver choose and experience repair.

Especially within the intimacy of a cohort, the real-life experience of direct wealth return can be uncomfortable. This discomfort is a powerfully honest part of the process. It supports participants as they move toward shedding the conditioned belief that money only arises from merit and hard work, a byproduct of the false narrative of bootstrapping. Those receiving wealth

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<sup>21</sup> Therapist/trauma specialist and author Dr. Resmaa Menakem speaks on this subject in [Racialized Trauma Isn't Just Personal \(Plus: the Definition of H.I.P.P.\)](#) in an interview with Ritu Bhasin about his [books](#) *My Grandmother's Hands* and *The Quaking of America*.

return often feel the need to justify why they deserve it. This report's research revealed how the dynamics of the exchange can leave black-bodied women wrestling with emotions around receiving. As one participant reflected, "Why me? Why not someone else? What did I do to deserve? I just got kind of randomly picked to participate, and here I'm getting money and I don't know what to do with it. Should I keep it for myself? Should I share it with my family?" At the same time, black-bodied participants also hold space for white wealth holders to grapple with their internalized class identity, notions of security, and societally-crafted tenets of "responsible giving" and accountability. Within the context of relationality, those who benefit from systems of power and privilege can recognize how these systems also tether them in ways that can limit their humanity and interdependence, numb empathy, erode authentic connections, and perpetuate cycles of guilt, shame, and fear.<sup>22</sup>

Breaking through embedded assumptions and embracing relationships rooted in care, truth, and interdependence is the work of relational repair. This vulnerability and introspection is a result of moving beyond traditional strictures and norms associated with the flow of money. It asks participants to be open and vulnerable/brave, and step into new ways of being.

When the practice of direct wealth return is successful, the transformation is well worth the journey. Upon receiving direct wealth return, the receiver continues a process of healing that enables them to sincerely receive the return. Meanwhile, the returner experiences healing through discovering and acknowledging what is possible when blinders and binders inherent in racialized capitalism are removed—not loss, but gain; not reduction, but expansion; not fragmentation, but wholeness. The wealth returner, as an individual, chooses to embody the system (governmental, legal, financial, linguistic, etc.) doing the harm, accepting that they and their family accrued its advantages. Both those returning and those receiving wealth now participate in the co-creation of a new system based in relationality, care, and interdependence—a kinship community in which wealth and power are redefined in practice.

One participant observed that financial return restores community; another highlighted the ripple effects of material repair generationally: "You would

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<sup>22</sup> Hübl, T. (Host) Point of Relation Podcast. Moral Injury and the Complex Legacy of Disney. Interview with Abigail Disney. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=Xe-7nFC3ujY>

see black-bodied women who launched organizations or businesses ... [or] bought homes that now serve as sanctuary spaces for people to come together to rest, heal, plan, and organize. They've cleared debt, which enables them to leave their children without encumbrance. They've looked after the needs of their elders. They've rested ... after 40-60 years of relentless labor done out of concern for their own security and the security of their family."

Of course, transferring material assets goes far beyond cash exchange. Some of the organizations interviewed prioritize Indigenous repair efforts, focusing on the repatriation of land and repatriation of culturally significant objects (specific to the Native community or tribal nation harmed). These interviewees expounded on this concept: "Land justice is about removing barriers to loving the land and expanding who gets to love the land. This work is ultimately about removing the barriers that obstruct or diminish love, and we do this work because we love the world." For those seeking to engage in repair with Indigenous communities, the return of land and cultural assets is essential in acknowledging and redressing the attempted erasure of Indigenous worldviews, spiritual beliefs and practices, languages, and lifeways. As one participant said, "The critical importance of returning belongings for an Indigenous community [is that] their belongings are not things; they are animate, breathing, living beings, and they are intimately tied to knowledge systems, worldview, kinship, and the way of the world."

Material wealth return seeks to reconfigure power and systems of wealth in the present and for the future. The focus is on understanding and attending to the extraction and harm imprinted on our country's historical fabric. This kind of return is highly personal and intimate; it involves mending wounds carried within and among bodies. The scars of slavery and colonialism extend beyond land and wealth to the severed relationships that disconnect people from the earth and living nature, as well as their roots, dignity, and felt sense of shared humanity. Relational repair challenges colonial structures by centering mutuality and care.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Garza, L. (2022, November 18) My Life Is Better With You In It [Audio podcast episode] Radical Resonance with Leah Garza. Apple Podcasts. <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/my-life-is-better-with-you-in-it/id1651101721?i=1000586698733>

“We had to be really vulnerable with each other to express what was coming up, to make sure it wasn’t just purely transactional ... If the goal is to heal, then you have to be in a relationship.”

— Participant

## \* **Personal History, Ancestry, & Genealogy Practices**

Relational repair includes reclaiming untold or falsified histories, personal and collective, in a **re-storying** of oneself and one’s people. The intention: to give voice and visibility to peoples and histories silenced across time. Historical and genealogical work helps honor context, surface truths, and redress extraction. The practices are myriad, and could involve diving deeply into ancestry, participating in group reckoning with how ancestors were harmed or committed harm, and re-storying lineage beyond the U.S. through genealogical research. For some groups, uncovering history is their purpose and primary vehicle for repair. For others, especially those controlling the flow of financial resources, understanding and acknowledging their own wealth histories and racial/social positionality are the first steps to redressing the harm done.

One practitioner interviewed helps people research their roots, which shines a light on the African diasporic lineages that have been erased or impacted by U.S. slavery. Their research goes beyond identifying an individual’s nationality to understand their specific ethnic group, kingdom, or tribal affiliation, helping black-bodied individuals connect to their ancestral roots in ways untethered from the terms and boundaries of Western colonization and enslavement. Other participants intentionally connected with relatives to listen to and understand their stories and experiences of racialization and discrimination. Family history is inescapable and illustrative of how people are relational beings rather than purely individual actors. Whether traumatic or transformational, experiences that influenced an ancestor’s life echo down

the generations, informing where and how repair can happen in the current generation.

Ancestry practices also include looking at immediate family history. One practitioner shared: "It dawned on me in the aftermath of my parents' death that I could not be satisfied with a lack of resolution for them and me. So that then led me to think about the wounds of their experience. I really think that my dad went to his grave without finding the healing that he needed and should have had. He was a World War II vet and just couldn't figure out how he felt like an outsider in the land of his birth."

Reflecting on ancestors' lives is a powerful tool of memetics, and memorials and monuments connect us to those who came before. The practice of exploring history through communal ancestry is exemplified by Jubilee Justice's visit to a plantation outside of Atlanta. Participants found the cemetery especially powerful in eliciting the painful history of the slaves and plantation owners who lived and died on that land: "Visiting a gravesite at a church across from a creek with alligators was very deep. I spent time with a tombstone and felt a connection with ancestors I didn't know but deeply felt."

In attempting to heal and repair, honoring and tending to historical and collective pain is key: "The White people in this group are standing in for the White people who enslaved my people, and we're standing in for the descendants [ancestors] who they [we] can't find." Exploring ancestry acknowledges timeless and deep scars while working in the present toward healing, rehabilitation, and restoration of severed connections. Yet beyond bearing witness to past harms, this practice also reclaims richness and resilience linked to identity and lived experience buried within history. In one participant's words, there is "that generation that's both uncovering the past and sharing it ... reclaiming our history, the history of Black people beyond slavery or prior to slavery" which "had a very rich culture and history before [slavery]." Making the decision to embark on a historical journey can be hard, but turning away from pain prevents movement into wholeness and joy.

“The stories of [all] our ancestors in this group are centered. ... We worked really hard through spirit and ritual to really be true to them and embody them as best we could.”

— Participant

## \* Cultural & Spiritual Practices

**Cultural dimensions** of relational repair focus on reclaiming rituals and ceremonial practices, traditions, languages, stories, relationships to land and living creatures, and histories that colonial systems sought to suppress or erase. This work recenters these elements, viewing reclamation not merely as a recovery process but as active resistance. For hundreds of years, assimilation pressures and persistent devaluation and exclusion of Indigenous cultural knowledge systems have sought to make invisible the richness and variety of the cultures and people in the U.S.

Cultural practices play an especially critical role when processing both historical and current-day racial trauma and injuries. For example, one practitioner spoke about the transformative power of ceremonies that focus on healing relationships involving money and land. Such practices can create profound shifts in perspective and experience. Pilgrimage to the lands of one’s ancestors can be an act of reclaiming rootedness, regaining a deep sense of one’s indigeneity, and building belonging among people and place. This work can heal the wound of un-belonging by reinscribing membership in a people, a lineage, and the practices that preceded coloniality/supremacy.

Overall, cultural practices work to reshape understanding of concepts such as abundance or scarcity, stewardship and ownership, and family/kin. One participant shared, “It was the ability to be in deep community with spirit and ancestors alongside race, money, and land. All of that together for me felt very compelling.”

**Spiritual dimensions** of practice anchor practitioners in broader systems of meaning. These dimensions often manifest through rituals, traditions linked to specific faiths in a communal or institutional setting, and contemplative

practices such as daily prayer and meditation. Participants spoke of drawing on spiritual resources to deepen connections to the self (personal values and identity), soul, community, and the sacred more generally. One participant described spiritual repair as having a *“call you to your highest self’ component.”*

Religious groups or congregations attempting racial repair use collective commitments to align their faith-driven values with collective action aimed at spiritual restoration and wholeness. Prayer and similar invocations help groups find or create alignment. As a participant observed, *“The movement for reparations is strengthened by a growing base of White Christians who commit to repairing past harms as a necessary powerful bid for their own wholeness. They’re able to see clearly how the empire has corrupted their faith, and rather than cower in guilt, they step powerfully into the call to material and spiritual repair, [and] that modalities like ritual and repair have found their way into the heart of this movement, the movement for reparations.”*

Spiritual practices alchemize and heal shame by reestablishing and strengthening an inherent sense of worthiness and belonging, supporting the release of a society that normalizes habits and practices of supremacy. If we imagine reparations as an **active spiritual commitment** requiring generosity, courage, and trust, it becomes relational. One participant shared that *“Reparation is understood as part of a joyful embodied spiritual commitment lived out by and requiring the participation of everyone. This movement has built momentum fueled by trust, including trust across racial groups organizing for reparations.”*

Having reliable access to spiritual resources can be a significant way to bring resilience and inspiration into the shared relational field. It can contextualize the real human limitations that are part of relational work, such as interpersonal tension and the truth that relational repair does not erase historical trauma but has the ability to transform how it is experienced in the present day. Spiritual rituals help to acknowledge the profundity of our shared wound and humbly invite in a new future. Additionally, spiritual practices that draw upon mystery and vastness can greatly assist participants in navigating the inherently ambiguous and unknown places that are part of walking a new path.

“Reparations as material and spiritual are necessarily intertwined; doing one without the other falls short.”

— Participant

## \* Narrative Practices

**Narrative change practitioners** focus on language and stories that enliven ways of being and acting and that lead to hopeful and liberatory futures inclusive of repair. These stories are constructed with intention, designed with an awareness of the counterproductive rhetoric that exists around reparations. Practitioners focus on people’s preconceptions about what reparations mean, who they’re for, and what they entail.

Generally, the often-unnamed notion of “deservingness” forms the base of someone’s opinion. The notion of “free money” is laden with stereotypes around charity and expectations associated with returns on grants and investments. However, when “deservingness” is recast as recompense, the meaning shifts. This is especially the case in relational repair work due to the personal nature of the exchange. Even within the intimate container of relationship, notions of “deservingness” arise, but in time, with careful tending, relationality does its work to heal and repair. *“If I’m sharing my story, you’re going to share a piece of yours, too. It’s freeing—for both of us.”*

Participants noted that repair involves confronting and addressing fundamental sources of harm, such as white body supremacy, wealth disparity, and anti-Black narratives. They acknowledged the need to treat the root causes of harm, not just the symptoms. One participant observed, *“There’s so much good work out there that’s treating symptoms, but how are we actually changing ... treating the poison and treating the groundwater that infects all of our systems?”* Interviewees emphasized that repair is not only about addressing past harms but also transforming present systems in pursuit of healing and a reimagined future as a tangible destination.

Narrative change efforts aim to modify both internal narratives and external conversations. Strategists are launching media-constructed campaigns to change hearts and minds through documentary films, advocacy, and social media campaigns. The projects reviewed for this report were [Acts of Reparation](#), [Dark and Tender](#), [Three Black Men](#), [Beloved Economies](#), and [Decolonizing Wealth Project](#). Others engaged in this work include [BLIS Collective](#) and [Visionary Justice Storylab](#).

“I think the crisis of unprecedented racial inequality stems back to a breach in relationship when a certain worldview of humanity placed human, then White human, and then White Christian human, above the rest of creation and created this hierarchy of life. Relationship isn’t possible inside of that worldview.”

— Participant

## ✳ **Body-Based Practices**

Many reparative action practitioners, both in structured settings and personally, use embodiment activities or somatic practices to move through a complex conversation topic or after receiving difficult-to-hear feedback. Common somatic activities include stretching, breathwork, grounding, dance, meditation, vocalization (humming, singing, chanting, etc.), and yoga. Often, these are taught or used in group settings to build up individuals’ skill sets for managing discomfort and moving through moments of challenge.

In this way, somatic work grounds repair in the physical experience of healing the body and attending to the impact of persistent intergenerational trauma. Grief and shame often come up when discussing race, legacies of racism, and associated harm. While these emotions manifest and express themselves differently depending on the person, they live in and move through the body and must be attended to. Embodied practices are used in meetings, focus

groups, interviews, and interpersonal encounters to help participants navigate conflict and address unintended ruptures. Having the capacity to sit with and move through unfamiliar and/or uncomfortable feelings was noted as a necessary foundation for repair. As one practitioner shared, "Communities that aren't able to process their grief aren't able to move in a generative way ... We have to help communities metabolize that. Otherwise, they just avoid the actual hard conversations. They spin, right?"

Another participant spoke to the shift toward embodied justice, where accountability and repair are not only conceptual but a physically lived experience. They described justice as something carried in the body rather than administered through systems. Reflecting on this change in social justice work, they shared: "The fact that people are looking at justice not being embodied in the court but embodied in people ... and that many people are doing the inner work to be able to integrate the emotional, spiritual action. Committing, even at great harm to themselves or their family." This sentiment was reflected in another discussion about the shift "from knowing intellectually that racism exists to knowing in my heart and my whole body the impact of that racism on me and on others and having tools to move forward." Repair starts personally, with the self, through intentional and honest internal work toward healing. It begins with confronting the internalized oppression that lives in bodies that are socially targeted,<sup>24</sup> and the way in which White supremacy shapes perceptions and actions. White-bodied practitioners pointed to the feeling of shame—a visceral emotion—as a critical sign of the work that needs to be done: "I can tell we're making progress when people are able to speak to their shame; shame is an indicator that there's probably something more."

For many, the relational repair process often leads to a reexamination of how a person perceives themselves in relation to others: "As a White person, what I have come to understand is that a huge part of anti-Blackness has to do with the fact that we numb ourselves to the pain of dehumanizing other people and that we are complicit in policies that allow and sustain that. In order to transform that, we have to feel that this is not right ... [and] know that it's sustained because we remain unfeeling and thus remain complicit. We have

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<sup>24</sup> Nieto, L., and M. Boyer, et al. (2010). *Beyond Inclusion, Beyond Empowerment: A Developmental Strategy to Liberate Everyone*. Cuetzpalin Publishing.

to understand what it is to reorganize our bodies so that they can be in active commitment to what they really stand for.”

Drawing on this embodied understanding, practitioners emphasized that repair begins when defenses soften, guilt dissipates, and fear gives way to the capacity for vulnerability and accountability. This creates space for authenticity and challenges those with wealth and privilege to show up differently: “There is you, as a real human person, having to engage in a much more grounded and messy way ... It forces a different dynamic. For people accustomed to being catered to and having their money open doors, it just forces you to show up as a human person.”

The need for proper **rest** was another theme that emerged among black-bodied participants in relational repair work, underscoring the idea that rest is not merely a break from work but a revolutionary act.<sup>25</sup> In mixed spaces, in which racialized bodies tend to bear most of the emotional labor, this exertion takes a toll. Considering that the historical burdens borne by Black and Indigenous bodies, families, and communities have delayed their ability to rest and heal fully, structured rest and intentional pathways for self-care were described as essential for repair.

Even entertaining the concept of rest can be a powerful, radical act for black-bodied women who have carried generations of weight: “A number of the black-bodied women I’ve been in relationship with around repair have taken sabbaticals. That is repair. What they’ve talked about is the healing that comes with being able to step back, have their basic needs covered, dream into their future, [and have] time to relax.”

Ultimately, rest is about more than literal rest; it is about what you are able to do with material resources and time. When you receive (without having to labor), you have breathing room, the ability to dream, the ability to be more relational, more interconnected instead of just striving to make ends meet and survive day to day.

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<sup>25</sup> Lorde, A. (1988). *A Burst of Light: Essays*. Firebrand Books.

“I have given myself permission, and then I have also, in so doing, tried to give others permission to take care of themselves.”

— Participant

## \* Visioning Practices

Practitioners also highlighted the **future orientation** of repair, describing repair as transformation in individuals, communities, and generations who orient toward a vision of collective liberation. One participant reflected, “Truly free Black people look different. They’re softer, freer, joyful. And free White people are also softer, more present, able to see the complexity in our differences but, in the end, just see humanity.” For another participant, repair shapes the future: “What gives me hope is young people reclaiming history, integrating emotional and spiritual work, and understanding that being ‘innocent’ and not knowing is no longer an excuse.” Collective agreements centered on future action were common; in some groups, the commitment might be as simple as setting an amount of money for white-bodied members to return to black-bodied members. Other commitments shared by participants include development of long-term action plans, repairing past harms inflicted by a group or institution, and transforming the idea of race or Whiteness.

In this way, visioning practice is focused on reimagining and working toward a more just society, one built on liberation and love. It is a creative and love-filled endeavor. Many conversations about reparations and racial repair tend to focus on the past, naming past harms and doing case-making for why repair needs to happen; while this is important for establishing a shared understanding of the harm and the motivation to repair it, the repair community refocuses the conversation on what is yet to come. What would our communities be like if repair is successful? How can we build a society that cares for and loves all its people?

**Collective spaces** bring people together to share healing practices and envision, together, the desired future. Conferences, convenings, retreats,

and gatherings of various sorts provide a pathway into the new ecosystem of repair. These gatherings enable participants to consciously experience relationality through opportunities to address harm, build trust, and reimagine connections; they constitute an environment where individuals and groups can find healing while exploring collective approaches to dismantling systems of harm. The Compton Foundation's 2024 Gathering by the River: A Relational Repair Convening<sup>26</sup> exemplified this. Hosted in New Orleans, its location near the Mississippi River symbolized historical flows of extraction and the potential for transformation. The Gathering embodied the essence of relational repair, bringing together practitioners of reparations and healing to engage in personal, interpersonal, and systemic reflections.

Participants described the Gathering as a transformative act of "convening the system ... to transform it." Through shared activities including storytelling and intentional dialogue, attendees worked to expand their understanding of relational repair beyond financial reparations, emphasizing the role of interpersonal healing. The Gathering encouraged collective organizing modeled on fluid leadership; think of a flock of geese flying south in V formation, in which members alternate leading roles. This approach disrupts traditional hierarchies, advancing collaboration and mutual accountability.

These gatherings illustrate the importance of community, collaboration, and sustained effort in addressing the legacies of harm while building pathways to healing. The relational repair journey is ongoing, iterative, and highly intimate. It is a long-term process not confined to short-term efforts or quick fixes: "If you want to see real change, it's five years at a minimum [or] ten years—then you'll see communities look different. Their kids will look different because the parents have different nervous systems."

The theme of leaning into the process emerged as a critical aspect in many conversations. For relational repair to be significant, long-term and systemic change is required: the recognition of the interdependence of all people, and honoring the experiences and collective wisdom of Black and Indigenous communities. This perspective cannot be passive; it requires an active, intentional decision to show up when the moments are difficult, the complexities overwhelming, and the future is still emerging. As one participant poignantly shared, this relational work was not just about

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<sup>26</sup> Compton Foundation. (2024) *Gathering by the River: Know Before You Go*. <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1MIInyRAzbpwH3xh4WNRiK0cL75iGtdnqgx5o3jISMGpU/>

enduring but about “choosing each other” in moments of pain, mess, and vulnerability. This is where relational repair is found, rooted in the transformative power of acknowledging our shared interdependence and the collective commitment to true healing and restoring right relationships.

“I think it is incredibly important in this work to actively protect and hold those visionary future forward spaces. People need space for dreaming. They need space for imagination. They need space for hope, and they also need space for practice.”

— Participant

# Philanthropy & Resourcing

Over the past decade, as evidenced by a growing number of funding initiatives and thought leadership articles, philanthropy has begun addressing and supporting the movement for reparations and engaging in relational repair. Throughout the research and interview process for this report, practitioners expressed their desire for relational, perceptive, and committed philanthropic partners. Additionally, funders already participating in this work showed they understand what it means to engage relationally with their grantees.

We would like to recognize Liberation Venture's groundbreaking research in the reparations field as a field catalyst. The "Reparations Grantmaking Blueprint" they created provides a framework for the role philanthropy can play in reparations and in building a culture of repair.<sup>27 28 29</sup> Their research outlined nine key areas ("pillars") of work necessary to bring about comprehensive reparations. Relational repair

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27 Liberation Ventures. (2025, February 3) "Building the Democracy We Need: Introducing the Reparations Grantmaking Blueprint." Medium.com.

<https://medium.com/@liberationventures/building-the-democracy-we-need-introducing-the-reparations-grantmaking-blueprint-581d76cb846a>

28 Florant, A., Edwards, T., Daniels, C., Williams, A., Asare, M., and Maturi, V. (2023, September 27) "Philanthropy's Role in Reparations and Building a Culture of Racial Repair."

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29 Florant, A., Edwards, T., Daniels, C., Williams, A., and Asare, M. (2023, September 27). "A Reparations Roadmap for Philanthropy." Stanford Social Innovation Review.

[https://ssir.org/articles/entry/a\\_reparations\\_roadmap\\_for\\_philanthropy](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/a_reparations_roadmap_for_philanthropy)

addresses two of the pillars: “Repair in Institutions” and “Individual Repair Practice.” This kind of personal and interpersonal work reflects the slow spread of ideas that scale over time and reside at the heart of lasting change. Acknowledging and honoring the work of all players in the ecosystem is fundamental to manifesting a future in which the practice of reparations is a reality, not merely an idea. To that goal we also recognize Decolonizing Wealth for their leadership in bringing wealth holders—individuals and institutions—to a sober, honest understanding of the exploitative and extractive origins of wealth; supporting philanthropic organizations to address the attendant harms; and redefining money as medicine.

This report posits that there are two stages to enacting relational philanthropy. One is **internal**, in which the funding organization revisits and reworks its understanding of its origin story, looking at where, how, when, and from whom its wealth was amassed and with what specific repercussions on particular places and peoples. This internal work often involves closely examining history, including and especially the often-untold stories linked to colonialism and enslavement. It involves confronting old assumptions and reckoning with old expectations about what can or should be done, reevaluating them in the light of relationality and repair. The **external** part of transformation involves shifting funding practices in the direction of authentic relationality inclusive of reparation. The second cannot come before the first.

Funder practitioners suggest the following internally-oriented and externally-focused practices of engagement:

## Internal Practices & Orientation

- **Embody a relational approach:** A relational way of thinking and being can transform top-down structures and methods that perpetuate inequitable power dynamics associated with givers and receivers (as in the charity paradigm), replacing them with relationships based in humility, mutual respect and care, and solidarity, where reciprocal cycles of feedback between partners catalyze new possibilities for impact. This shift in dynamics creates change at a deep level within individuals, organizations, and larger ecosystems.

The commitment of funders to doing their own internal work around Whiteness/White supremacy, and all that comes with it, is fundamental to engaging in this kind of work. A relational approach involves more than a

mindset—despite best intentions, an intellectual commitment alone can result in performative rather than authentic connections and processes. Taking the time to do the personal exploration, and reaching out to people and sources that guide and support this kind of internal work, is a crucial element in cultivating a genuine relationship with practitioners.

- **Acknowledge philanthropy’s roots in extractive racial capitalism:** Profit is typically generated through oppressive practices that disproportionately harm BIPOC people by creating a racial wealth gap. This disparity is the result of centuries of racialized commodification of land and labor, including the systemic influences of redlining, the prison industrial practice, etc. When funders openly acknowledge these truths, nonprofit partners no longer need to make the case for why repair is important and who should benefit.

However, for philanthropic organizations new to reparative processes, perfect alignment in these ground truth assumptions need not be an obstacle to right relationship between the funder and its nonprofit partners. All movement in the direction of rebalancing power imbalances, sincerely welcoming and responding to bidirectional feedback, and offering support “beyond the check” accrues toward repair and furthers solidarity.

- **Seek to understand the origins of foundation wealth:** Research into breaches of treaties with Native American peoples, and into ownership of slaves and other dynamics around labor and the use of land, water, air, and people, paints a clearer picture of specific harms calling for repair. Specialists like Jessica Intermill<sup>30</sup> have supported institutions willing to follow these inquiries and deepen into discussion about what form repair may take. Some foundations have scrutinized endowment investment practices and taken steps to realign capital uses with the foundation’s stated values and emergent understanding of reparative practices that return wealth to Indigenous and Black communities.
- **Explore limited life rather than assuming perpetuity:** A growing number of funders interviewed have either formed limited life philanthropic entities or chosen to pursue this path, recognizing the immense opportunities today to contribute to generational healing and repair that reshapes the present and future. This decision to move resources—from enclosure in highly racialized

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<sup>30</sup> Intermill Land History Consulting. What is your land story? <https://www.intermillconsulting.com/>

and extractive financial systems into communities enlivening alternative futures rooted in mutual care, regeneration, and wholeness—enacts a reparative legacy.

- **Situate understanding in the wider context:** Many funders interviewed respectfully acknowledged work that has been happening within BIPOC communities for generations, and described their efforts as contributing to existing movements rather than emerging from their own unique strategy or goals.

Internal organizational transformation plays a key role in building institutional leadership and developing new approaches grounded in relational strategies for the distribution of resources.

## External Practices

- **Find an entry point for repair:** A complete strategic shift is unnecessary for those new to funding repair. Look within existing areas of commitment to identify repair work already happening and/or follow guidance from nonprofit partners and peer foundations already engaged in reparative approaches. Specific reparative efforts can be tied to current philanthropic mission and priorities, yet reimaged and reworked to express a commitment to a relational ethos grounded in repair.
- **Provide flexible long-term funding:** Nonprofit partners deserve and benefit from autonomy and self-determination regarding strategy and use of funds. Transfer funds with little to no restrictions about how best to utilize resources, as well as provide multi-year investments that allow grantees to plan long-term and make decisions based on what the contextual conditions require, rather than labor to secure financial support year after year.
- **Resist the urge to “scale” or focus on traditional success metrics:** Relational repair emphasizes the who and the how (the process) more than pre-determined outcomes, while also acknowledging that reparation will unfold over generations. The contributions of any single organization, funder, or program may not be tangible or identifiable. Funding that is made contingent on realization of certain progress metrics or confined by fear of “failing” to reach a defined goal or metric can block pursuit of bold ideas or limit investment in important yet often invisible relational and administrative

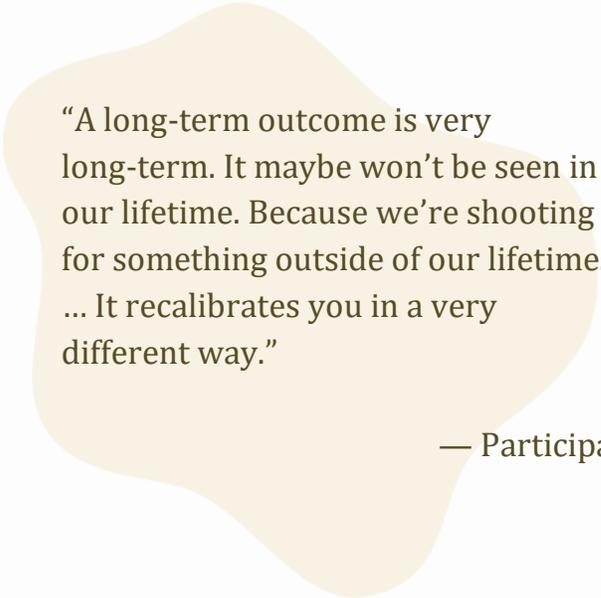
infrastructure in the repair ecosystem. Foundations may need to accept they will be unable to quantify the direct impact of their dollars or resources. Along these lines, the outcomes of relational repair efforts are not likely to be fully realized—or easily measured—within typical grantmaking timeframes or through using typical assessment processes.

- **Sit with discomfort:** Relational repair work is unpredictable, nonlinear, messy, and often uncomfortable. Conflict and tension will arise, alongside paradox and contradictions. Sitting within messiness is a core competency. This might manifest as navigating pushback or smear campaigns from board members or the media (social or traditional), or more gritty and authentic conversations with nonprofit partners. Recognize discomfort as fertile ground for transformation.
- **Demonstrate care and prioritize well-being for everyone involved in the work:** Many foundation staff we spoke with mentioned the importance of institutional practices that support the self-care of grantees and the internal team, in acknowledgment of the emotional toll this work has on practitioners.
- **Collaborate:** Scarcity mindset breeds competition and prevents cooperation and learning. Funding collaboratives (such as Liberation Ventures, which is dedicated to fostering the Black-led reparations ecosystem) can streamline resources while mitigating competition or redundancy. Often the work that requires the most support is already underway. Seeking collaborative and efficient ways to contribute to it by cultivating community with those similarly inclined and engaged can foster efficacy and the sustained vitality of entities across the reparations ecosystem.
- **Cultivate connections in the ecosystem:** Funding the work itself is only one way to support the repair ecosystem. Fostering connections is another. Organize convenings, introduce nonprofit partners to each other and to other funders, contribute to new collaborations and cross-organizational learning to reduce redundancy and siloization, and use your organization's platforms to showcase work and lessons learned.
- **Commit to wealth transfer:** Explore mechanisms that not only redistribute wealth but involve narratives that deepen the public's understanding that wealth is being returned to people and communities from whom the land or labor was originally extracted. A relational way of operating demonstrates how money can behave differently—moving away from being a static,

extractive tool of coloniality and profit toward a fluid, experimental force for collective liberation and healing.

- **Offer support that seeks to restore relationships** based on mutual dignity, safety, and belonging.

By disbursing capital free of restrictions, making non-extractive investments, and providing direct support in both financial and other-than-financial ways, reparative approaches move economic power to Black and Indigenous families and communities. Focusing on relational repair opens space for racial and cross-racial connections rooted in historical truth-telling and the intentional weaving of practices that foster personal, interpersonal, and communal healing.



“A long-term outcome is very long-term. It maybe won’t be seen in our lifetime. Because we’re shooting for something outside of our lifetimes ... It recalibrates you in a very different way.”

— Participant

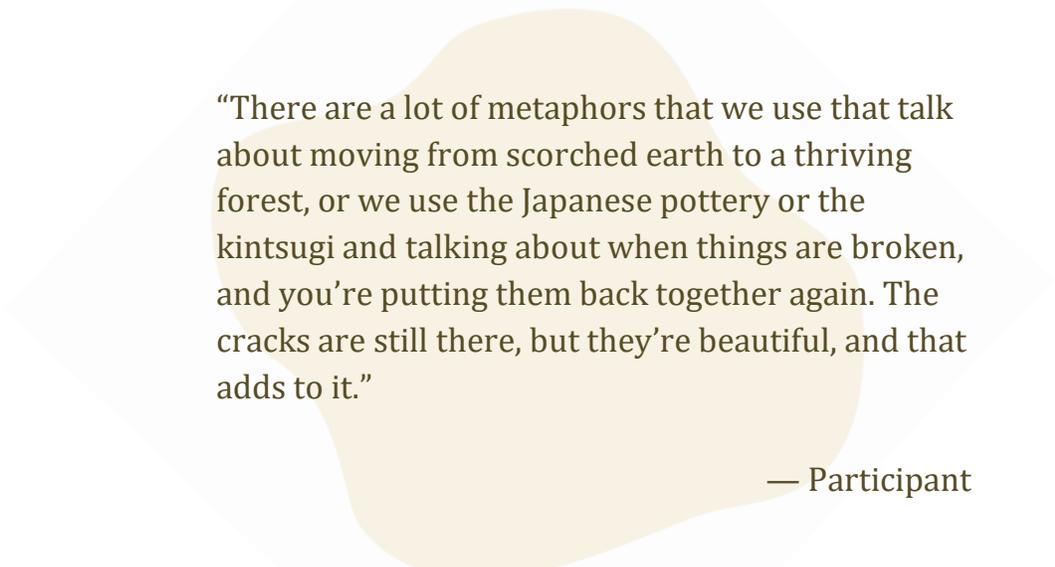
## Conclusion

Some of the most difficult work in the movement and call for reparations lies not just in the return of land, redistribution of wealth, or enactment of policy shifts but also in the intricate, layered, and often deeply personal process of relational repair and the fixing of broken connections. The trauma of enslavement and colonialism is not only economic but relational, severing ties to culture, community, and belonging. Relational repair unfolds as a long-term process in spaces where people sit with the complexity of history, personal loss, and generational harm and choose to heal—individually and together. The stories we heard in our conversations with practitioners were not only about financial reparations but also about families grappling with legacies of exclusion and the exhaustion of constantly laboring to be recognized for denied contributions and humanity. The wounds of generational harm and trauma linger and run deep, passed down like a family heirloom, unresolved and unhealed from one generation to the next.

At its core, relational repair asks us to confront these personal and collective wounds. It also asks us to imagine and inhabit a future where these wounds are actively healing, relationships with each other and the earth are held sacred, and an ethic of mutual care prevails. Relational repair invites an unlocking of imagination and embodied practices that support us to be more caring, connected, creative, and invested in each other's shared, prosperous future. Relational repair asks us to hold space for grief, shame, and anger and translate them into something that can heal. Whether through faith traditions, healing rituals, somatic work, or shifts in policy and narratives, these practices allow individuals and communities to process

pain and reconnect with themselves and each other, weaving together what was once broken.

This work is complex but necessary. It demands resources and changes in the habits and practices of supremacy that fracture relationships. It requires us to see reparations not as a transaction but as an act of repair—of relationships, histories, and humanity. And perhaps that is where the true power of reparations lies: not simply in what is returned but in how right relationships are restored.



“There are a lot of metaphors that we use that talk about moving from scorched earth to a thriving forest, or we use the Japanese pottery or the kintsugi and talking about when things are broken, and you’re putting them back together again. The cracks are still there, but they’re beautiful, and that adds to it.”

— Participant

## Limitations

The themes in this report emerged from select individuals and organizational representatives identified by the Compton Foundation. Though voiced by multiple contributors, the ideas and patterns identified do not offer a complete understanding of the relational repair ecosystem and may not represent every perspective.

We acknowledge the challenge of remaining impartial listeners as we bring our biases and perspectives to this work. We were not detached observers, as is often expected in research and evaluation, recognizing that our personal stories, experiences, and perspectives as evaluators intertwine with those we connected with. Accordingly, our process embraced a relational approach; interviews were opportunities to build meaningful relationships, and we engaged as co-learners with those we interviewed.

We also want to acknowledge that while the individuals we interviewed shared their unique insights, what they offered may not fully encapsulate their multidimensional views. The constraints of the virtual Zoom interview format and varying comfort levels in discussing deeply personal topics—particularly those tied to identity, relationships, wealth, race, and gender—significantly shaped what was expressed. We have done our best to recognize and honor the complexity and nuance of our conversations.

## Implications for Evaluation & Learning

While this research addressed certain elements of relational repair, it did not capture its full complexity. We highlight four priority questions for continued exploration:

### **1. How do various relational repair models and approaches address and balance the emotional labor involved in this work?**

Relational repair often calls Black- and racialized-bodied individuals into the work of healing systems they did not break. Their resilience, generosity, and trust, extended repeatedly despite centuries of disproportionate harm, make spaces of repair possible. This emotional labor can take a significant toll on physical and mental well-being. The process of revisiting and sharing past and present harms can compound trauma or disrupt the very relationships being mended. An important area for exploration is how different models, whether explicitly or implicitly, address these challenges in ways that create reparative approaches without reproducing or adding to the existing burden on racialized bodies. Attention is needed to how these approaches can, as one respondent shared, reinforce *"the healing that comes with being able to step back"* while maintaining focus and staying in relationship. These lessons will be important to new and emerging relational repair models.

### **2. How does relational repair shift or remake the ideas of Whiteness and White Supremacy?**

As practitioners shared, relational healing must extend inward (personal) before extending outward (interpersonal) while honoring our entanglements (intra-actions). Internalized supremacy and oppression live in bodies, mindsets, and behaviors, shaping how people move through the world, relate

to one another, and see themselves. One of the greatest challenges lies in navigating the narratives and manifestations of Whiteness. As white-bodied individuals engage in a shared future that seeks to radically reconceive or eliminate dominant narratives of Whiteness, this work can influence perspectives, biases, and emotional responses. This question explores not only how these processes shift understandings of identity but also how they affect somatic and emotional experiences. As one white-bodied practitioner shared in discussing anti-Blackness, this shift can be felt in how **“we numb ourselves to the pain of dehumanizing other people.”** Changes in these embodied and emotional experiences can shape how white-bodied individuals interact with and influence the narratives, norms, and perceptions of other white-bodied persons within their intimate, social, and professional networks beyond these engagements.

### **3. What are the collective or “aggregate” impacts and influences of existing and interrelated relational repair models?**

Although relational repair tends to happen through distinct interpersonal and institutional engagements, convenings such as Compton Foundation’s **Gathering by the River** provide glimmers of an emerging movement for relational repair. We spoke to many designers of relational repair experiments about how their activities could be seeds for more systemic and institutional change. We hope to explore how these distinct demonstrations of relational repair “add up” to a larger movement and impact communities and systems. The following three key areas should be considered in exploring this collective impact:

- **Time:** The goals and impacts of relational repair will take time. Evaluating and understanding the movement and systemic impacts of the bundle of relational repair experiments will require a long-range view and considerable time horizon to track.
- **Scale:** For relational repair to exert influence at the societal level, it must reach beyond those immediately engaged in a select experiment or model and persist after these experiments and initiatives conclude. Understanding the broader social shifts and implications of relational repair efforts may require new or novel evidence-gathering, analytic, and sensemaking techniques.

- **Interdependence:** Different approaches to relational repair may reinforce and strengthen each other. A community with three relational repair experiments operating simultaneously and adapted to different groups may realize the goals of relational repair in ways that differ from similar communities with only one model at play. Future work can explore the beauty of this diversity and how it affects shared goals and strengthen each other.

#### **4. How do material return expectations and approaches affect other dimensions of relational repair?**

Many relational repair models we explored were in the early stages of material return processes or focused on relational aspects as a precursor to material return. In future work, we want to deepen our exploration of the material aspects of relational repair. This includes expanding understanding of how relational repair contributes to changes at the institutional level and government and institutional responses to material return. It will be essential to explore how models and approaches may differ by personal and contextual backgrounds (e.g., race, gender, motivations, wealth, and age) to inform ongoing efforts to adapt and accelerate relational repair models that include explicit goals of material return and institutional change.

## **Concluding Thoughts from Informing Change**

These evaluative directions are ambitious, complex, and challenging, but we see these as important steps in embedding relational repair into everyday practice and systemic change. As we learned in the present work, documenting, understanding, and evaluating relational repair approaches requires nimbleness, openness, adaptability, centering the wisdom and stories of those engaged in the work, and multidimensional and qualitative approaches in evaluative designs, data collection, and analyses. Traditional “objective” evaluative approaches cannot fully capture the depth and wealth of insights and impacts over time and across communities. Adhering to principles and practices aligned with culturally responsive and equity-focused evaluation<sup>31</sup> provides a starting point for evaluations. We invite other

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<sup>31</sup> Expanding the Bench® Team and Advisory Team. (2019) *History and Definition of Culturally Responsive and Equitable Evaluation*. Change Matrix. Retrieved from <https://expandingthebench.org/cree-definition>

evaluators to enter this space and join us in exploring new and innovative approaches to understanding the rich and complex dimensions of relational repair.

Overall, this report aims to uplift the voices of those already engaged in relational repair and recognize their commitment to transforming the inherited legacy of chattel slavery and settler colonialism.

# Acknowledgments

We want to acknowledge the collective wisdom that shaped this report. The insights gathered through interviews, focus groups, and thought partnerships included members of the Compton Foundation, such as staff, fellows, reparative grantees, and partners. We spoke separately with black- and white-bodied participants involved in reparative efforts, capturing their unique perspectives and experiences.

We also connected with a diverse group of people committed to relational repair, including contributors from organizations focused on reparative efforts. In addition to Compton, these organizations and efforts include but are not limited to: Acts of Reparation, Beloved Economies, Be Still Tea, Black Ivy Collective, BLIS Collective, Decolonizing Wealth Project, Dignity Restoration Project, The Embodiment Institute, Fund for Nonviolence, HalfMyDAF, Healing Capital, Holistic Resistance/The CUT Project, Johnson C. Smith Theological Seminary, Jubilee Justice Journey, Kataly Foundation, Land Justice Futures, Leading from the Heart, Liberation Ventures, Museum of Us, Omidyar Network, The Opportunity Fund, Rooted Global Village, Satterberg Foundation, Studio Pathways, Threshold Philanthropy, and Trust-Based Philanthropy Project.

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- Big Tada: Design

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