Central Black Belt Phase 0
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Introduction

ioby’s MISSION AND THEORY OF CHANGE

ioby directly supports residents rebuilding and strengthening healthy and sustainable neighborhoods, towns, and cities. We blend resource organizing and crowdfunding to help leaders of local projects find the resources they need within their own communities. Our vision is to create a future in which our communities are shaped by the powerful good ideas of our own neighbors. Our mission is to mobilize neighbors who have good ideas to become powerful civic leaders who plan, fund, and make positive change in their own neighborhoods.

ioby removes friction from neighborhood action, helping people to make positive change. ioby supports resident leaders in every step, from idea through implementation. We focus on local residents because we know that they have great ideas to improve the neighborhoods where they live, work, and play. But there are many barriers to leading positive change, such as: lack of funding, lack of confidence, lack of knowledge about permitting processes, lack of 501(c)3 status, lack of teammates, and fear that no one will help.

ioby’s model—including a crowdfunding platform, coaching, fiscal sponsorship, resources, and project implementation support—removes these barriers, so that great ideas from residents can be implemented locally, quickly, and with neighbor support. Making it easier for residents to take neighborhood action is important because neighborhoods are the most tangible, relatable, accessible places for us to practice civic participation and flex the civic muscle we need for a healthy democracy.

While ioby is available to residents across the United States, we currently have Action Strategists—community organizers who work intentionally to support residents, increase civic engagement, and strengthen community power in neighborhoods with histories of disinvestment—working with residents in Memphis, Cincinnati, Detroit, Cleveland, and Pittsburgh to support them in making positive change happen where they live.

WHAT IS PHASE 0?

Before we begin a deliberate phase of work in a new place, ioby strives to learn as much as possible about the civic landscape from the very people who we will eventually be supporting. We do not make any assumptions at the outset about the skills, needs, and resources of the community leaders whom we hope will eventually be using our platform and services. We aim to support and contribute to, rather than supplant or duplicate, the services of existing local technical assistance providers. The Phase 0 research reveals residents’ goals for their communities and helps us develop a strategy to best position our services toward those goals.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

ioby aims to identify opportunities and craft a strategy for our team to increase civic engagement and enable residents to complete projects that improve public spaces and make their neighborhoods, towns, and cities stronger. To be successful in the Central Black Belt, ioby must first:

1. Improve ioby’s understanding of the region’s civic landscape.
2. Assess competition and new opportunities for ioby to add value to the region’s civic sector.
3. Measure the region against ioby’s predictors of success.
4. Evaluate potential demand for ioby’s services in the region.
5. Identify the trends that drive communities’ interest in taking on projects like those that ioby typically supports.
6. Characterize civic participation across the region.
7. Recommend strategies to source and serve ioby project leaders across the region.
Methodology & Limitations

LOCAL RESEARCH FELLOW

To conduct Phase 0 research in seven regions in the South, ioby felt that it was essential to engage with local research fellows who had deep roots and connections in their region. In the Central Black Belt, ioby hired Lauren Taylor for this role. Lauren Taylor received her Bachelor in Sociology and Masters in Public Administration from Clark Atlanta University, a historically Black university. In addition to her fellowship with ioby, Lauren is the secretary of the International City Managers Association, Partnerships Chair for her University's Student Government Association, as well as a member of multiple social justice and professional organizations such as the NAACP. Lauren is originally from Detroit, Michigan and has lived in Atlanta for seven years.

GIS FELLOW

ioby hired a GIS Fellow, Sarah Kontos, to help us understand and visually represent the diverse social, economic, and physical landscapes in each of the southern regions. Using data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the IRS, and other sources, Sarah Kontos created maps that informed many of the findings and strategies presented in this report. Sarah Kontos is a spatial analyst and urban designer based in Brooklyn, New York. She has worked for a wide and varied range of nonprofits and city-adjacent agencies to translate lived experiences into novel spatial and analytical frameworks. She also has previous experience as a GIS analyst-for-hire, a data visualization specialist, and a teacher, and has served on volunteer boards related to pedestrian and bicycle advocacy. She holds a B.A. in Urban Studies and History from the University of Pittsburgh and an M.S. in Design and Urban Ecologies from Parsons, The New School.

WORKSHOPS

ioby’s Local Research Fellow led two grassroots fundraising workshops, on December 6, 2019 in Birmingham, Alabama and on March 1, 2020 in Atlanta, Georgia. Attendees provided valuable feedback on ioby’s mission, training content, and approach to grassroots fundraising.

INTERVIEWS

From a total of 34 one-on-one conversations with civic leaders and 36 attendees of ioby’s grassroots fundraising workshops in the Central Black Belt, ioby began to identify the context, opportunities, and challenges involved in working in the region. While the Local Research Fellow was already connected to some of the interviewees, she also relied on existing contacts who introduced her to additional leaders in the region.

INTERVIEWEES AND WORKSHOP ATTENDEES

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name of Interviewee or Workshop Attendee</th>
<th>Title and Affiliation(s)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Karen Thompson</td>
<td>Temporary Emergency Services</td>
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<td>Ivette Bledsoe</td>
<td>Firefly Trails</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin Vest</td>
<td>Hometown Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathleen Kirkpatrick</td>
<td>Hometown Action</td>
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<tr>
<td>Max Rykov</td>
<td>Community Engagement Specialist &amp; Dean, Birmingham Chapter of the Awesome Foundation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stephen Litchfield</td>
<td>Munifaq</td>
</tr>
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<td>Name of Interviewee or Workshop Attendee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patrice Barlow</td>
<td>Saving our Sons and Sisters International (SOSSI)</td>
</tr>
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<td>Liza Nicholson</td>
<td>Younger Women's Task Force</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dana Larkin</td>
<td>Growing Up Knowing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stuart Rockoff</td>
<td>MS Humanities Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>Councilor John Hilliard</td>
<td>Birmingham City Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>Angelou Ezilou</td>
<td>Greening Youth Foundation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Todd Michney</td>
<td>Urban Historian, Georgia Tech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel Umana</td>
<td>Bike Walk Macon</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Royster</td>
<td>Georgia Tech &amp; Communities Who Know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demechia Luster</td>
<td>Urban Advocate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elijah Davis</td>
<td>Urban Impact</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cam Christian</td>
<td>Plantlanta</td>
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<td>Rey Holmes</td>
<td>Soul Spirit Farmers</td>
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<td>Mary Shell</td>
<td>Alabama Communities of Excellence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Danny Glover</td>
<td>AgriHood</td>
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<td>Lois Cortell</td>
<td>CloverdaleCommunity Garden</td>
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<td>Mr. King</td>
<td>King's Canvas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kalonji Gilchrist</td>
<td>21 Dreams MGM</td>
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<td>Binh Dam</td>
<td>MARTA Army</td>
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<td>Justin Overton</td>
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<td>Nicole Gelb Dugat</td>
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<td>Abiodun Henderson</td>
<td>Come up Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kynesha Brown</td>
<td>Rolling to the Polls</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jill Arrington</td>
<td>Groundwork Atlanta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonia Sequeiria</td>
<td>Atlanta City Studio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ernesta Ingram</td>
<td>Southwest Ecumenical Emergency Assistance Center (SWEEAC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley Edwards</td>
<td>Foreward South</td>
</tr>
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ioby designed a survey to uncover new perspectives on the civic landscape and asked community-based organizations to share it with constituents. The survey included questions about civic pride, attachment, trust in institutions, and the region’s existing culture of giving to grassroots projects. As an incentive for residents to complete the survey, respondents were entered to win one of thirty $200 gift cards.

We received 109 survey responses from the Central Black Belt:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity (Self-reported)</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Share of Total</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Black</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>44.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latinx</td>
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<td>1.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>37.61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Race</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native/Indigenous</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13.76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**LIMITATIONS**

Because the Central Black Belt region is large and varied, compared to the way ioby has typically focused Phase 0 research on a single city, the perspectives of interviewees and survey respondents are not representative of the entire region. Rather, perspectives are only representative of the town or city of the participant.

**The Central Black Belt’s Assets and Challenges**

Guided by the tenets of asset-based community development, ioby always aims to understand the existing conditions of a place before we make plans to grow our local presence. The Central Black Belt’s civic assets are numerous. They include:

- Robust community engagement, particularly in the region’s cities
- Nonprofit leaders who represent the demographics of the communities they serve
- Government transparency and accountability

These assets have aided the region as residents and community-based organizations have grappled with profound challenges in their towns, cities, and neighborhoods. These include:

- Inequitable access to computers and high-speed broadband
- Gentrification under the guise of revitalization in low-income communities of color
- Lack of access to funding opportunities for nonprofits and community-led projects
Objective #1: Improve ioby’s understanding of each sub-region’s civic landscape.

For ioby to be successful in a place, residents must step forward with ideas for creating positive change, and neighbors must feel comfortable turning to each other to fund their projects. To develop our strategy for growing our impact in the Central Black Belt, we must first understand where and how patterns of disinvestment and social, economic, and public health trends have impacted residents’ perceptions of their towns, neighborhoods, cities, and region.

PATTERNS OF DISINVESTMENT

In Atlanta, Montgomery, Birmingham, Jackson, and Tuscaloosa, Black residents account for either the majority of the population or are the largest minority population. According to the United States Census Bureau, each city is also characterized by a high poverty rate and a median household income that is lower than the national average. With the exception of Tuscaloosa, each city has also experienced a substantial population decline since its peak. These attributes are direct effects of systems of racism, classism, and disinvestment in the Central Black Belt region.

The map below reveals that the region remains heavily segregated by race, with the majority of people of color living in urban areas.

Map 1: The Central Black Belt region is heavily segregated by race.

Atlanta, Georgia

"Because of systemic disinvestment, communities have tried to take care of themselves and it's an expensive operation." - Dr. Jacqueline Royster

Like many other American cities in the mid-twentieth century, historically Black neighborhoods in Atlanta were bisected and destroyed for the construction of local roads and interstates as a form of urban renewal.
The forced displacement of Black families from their homes and neighborhoods amounted to what James Baldwin called "Negro removal," a process through which neighborhoods were uprooted and neighbors were forced to separate and relocate.

Between 1956 and 1974, seven urban renewal projects in Atlanta forced over 4,000 families from their homes and neighborhoods.\(^1\) 89% of these families were families of color.\(^2\) Affected neighborhoods included:

- West End
- University Center
- Mechanicsville
- Summerville
- Sweet Auburn
- Downtown
- Rockdale

Interviewees told ioby that disinvestment continues to affect residents in Atlanta's majority Black neighborhoods today. For instance, in the West End, Mrs. Ernesta Ingram of SWEEAC said that there are relatively few places where residents can buy groceries, the area is generally inaccessible by foot or transit, and there is a scarcity of healthcare providers. Dr. Jacqueline Royster of Communities Who Know, Inc. noted that disinvestment has forced a degree of self-reliance: "Because of systemic disinvestment, communities have tried to take care of themselves and it's an expensive operation."

In 2015, Atlanta voters approved the Renew Atlanta bond, which secured $250 million to address a backlog of critical facilities and infrastructure improvements. Projects funded through Renew Atlanta include complete streets renovations, sidewalk and mobility improvements, multi-use trails, amenities and improvements in parks, and public art. In 2016, voters approved a transportation special purpose local option sales tax (TSPLOST) that was slated to generate an additional $260 million in revenue to fund transportation projects and upgrades citywide.\(^3\) To date, the City of Atlanta has not explicitly prioritized Renew Atlanta or TSPLOST funding for projects in neighborhoods with histories of disinvestment, and projects have been approved or are underway in each of the city’s 12 City Council districts.

**Montgomery, Alabama**

"We hear a lot about the Montgomery Bus Boycott, a lot of how Dr. King and the rest of the organizers spent 383 days not riding the bus and how it impacted this city economically. But what you don't hear about is the planning commissioner at the time admitting that he ran an interstate through our neighborhood to break up the Black businesses and Black homes." - Kevin King

The same systems of racism and segregation continue to affect residents of color in Montgomery, Alabama. The I-85 interstate highway that cut through the Black neighborhoods of Atlanta also cut through Montgomery’s Black neighborhoods.

According to Kevin King of Kings Canvas on the Westside of Montgomery, the city’s stretch of I-85 deliberately cut through the city’s only middle-class Black neighborhood: "We hear a lot about the Montgomery Bus Boycott, a lot of how Dr. King and the rest of the organizers spent 383 days not riding the bus and how it impacted this city economically. But what you don’t hear about is the planning commissioner at the time admitting that he ran an interstate through our neighborhood to break up the Black businesses and Black homes. That’s literally the interstate that runs through the back of my building and our community hasn’t recovered since then because it bypasses through our community and no one has a reason to stop anymore. All of the Black businesses that used to thrive are no longer there because of eminent domain."

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\(^2\) Ibid.

\(^3\) "About Renew Atlanta-TSPLOST." Renew Atlanta-TSPLOST. https://www.renewatlantabond.com/about.
Interviewees also suggested that public officials used I-85 to intentionally stifle the Civil Rights movement. In a 2019 article in the Journal of Urban Affairs, Rebecca Retzlaff confirms that public officials in Montgomery “designed (Interstate 85) to displace and punish the organizers and leaders of the civil rights movement and to reduce the number of registered African American voters.” It was well-documented that the selected route for the highway project would be more expensive, take longer, and create displacement for 245 African-American families who had no other place to relocate. Retzlaff cites a complaint filed with the U.S. Civil Rights Commission that states that Sam Engelhardt, Alabama’s Highway Director and self-proclaimed white supremacist, stated that it was his intention to destroy Reverend Ralph Abernathy, as revenge for his work with Dr. King and the Freedom Riders.

Rev. Abernathy sent the following telegram to President Kennedy in 1961:

“Mr. President if this route is approved it will destroy one of the best negro neighborhoods in the south and make for a hazardous condition near the local negro college, a high school, and an elementary school [...] my home will almost be in the center of this route. [...] But my concern is mainly for the large number of negroes who have sacrificed across the years and from inferior wages built comfortable homes. These families will not have decent neighborhoods in which they can relocate their homes, businesses, churches, etc. You are familiar, I am sure, with the restrictions placed upon negroes in a southern city such as ours. The vast majority of the home owners in this area are professional and business people. They constitute to a great degree the few negro voters in this community. The destruction of this neighborhood will only aid the segregationist in their attempt to make the negro vote as ineffective as possible.”

Between 1950 and 1966, two urban renewal projects in Houston Hill and North Montgomery forced more than 600 families, including about 540 families of color, from their homes and neighborhoods.

Interviewees told ioby that private disinvestment in Alabama’s communities of color has substantial impacts on residents’ quality of life. Mary Shell of Alabama Communities of Excellence described the disinvestment: “No jobs, industries have moved out, the education systems are struggling.” Several interviewees said that West and North Montgomery have endured the greatest disinvestment: “They have seen significant disinvestment in properties, people have left, a really high absentee landlord, or ownership is outside of that area and there is significant blight.” Caylor Rolling of Eat South in Montgomery added that “West Montgomery is practically African American low-income, while North Montgomery is a Latino population. These two sides of the city have the least infrastructure, parks, [and] least access to community centers.”

Kynesha Brown, founder of Rollin' to the Polls in Montgomery, suggested that the city government has been complicit in this disinvestment: “I do believe there are neighborhoods that are kind of forgotten. There are a lot of vacant properties, people living next door to vermin infested properties, potholes, and in affluent neighborhoods you don’t see that.” Brown added that she believes that this is beginning to change: “I am confident with the new mayor that we will see progression going into those forgotten neighborhoods.”

Throughout 2018, the City of Montgomery solicited community input for the City’s comprehensive plan, called Envision Montgomery 2040. The most recent draft of the plan, revealed in September 2019, includes explicit mentions of the lasting effects of redlining and segregation on the city’s Black communities. The plan lays out goals, objectives, and projects aimed at revitalizing the city and improving the quality of life of residents in neighborhoods with histories of disinvestment.

Separately, Brown told ioby that discussion of new investment in these neighborhoods have largely been related to plans for new development: “There has been discussions of some development coming into the marginalized communities. That was started with the previous administration and we were trying to see where it will go with the new administration, though there has been discussion about investment into those areas.”

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5 Ibid.

6 Nelson.
Birmingham, Alabama

Redlining and urban renewal projects created a pattern of disinvestment in Birmingham that persists today.

Between 1951 and 1969, three urban renewal projects in the Ensley, Avondale, and Five Points South neighborhoods displaced about 1,963 families. 90% of these were families of color. Several interviewees told Ioby that Ensley, a historically Black neighborhood and one of the most densely populated areas of the city, was hit especially hard by urban renewal projects.

Birmingham City Councilmember John Hilliard said that the city's financial institutions often tell property owners in disinvested, historically Black neighborhoods that their properties are worthless: "Financial institutions are telling owners that the properties are worth $0 so it makes it hard the owners to invest in the community and help it grow to its full potential."

In March 2018, the City of Birmingham committed to spend $90 million for a new stadium in the city's downtown and reinvest projected tax revenues from adjacent new development in a neighborhood revitalization fund that would be available to all of the city's 99 neighborhoods. Max Rykov told Ioby, "This is super controversial and like everything in Birmingham this became a Black/white issue. Money from this new field is supposed to go towards a neighborhood revitalization fund which would go back in the community. We don't know if that's going to happen yet."

In October 2013, the City of Birmingham adopted its first Comprehensive Plan since 1961. At the same time, the City invited communities to produce "Community Framework Plans" that would guide new development in each of the city's neighborhoods. The City had pledged to "look to the Community Framework Plans for direction on land use, new development, transportation, housing, parks, trails and open space, utilities and economic development." 8

In fall 2019, Councilman Hilliard told Ioby that the City is in the final stages of developing a new vision for Birmingham's Northside and Southside neighborhoods, in partnership with members of the community: "There's a North Birmingham framework plan that's in the final stages of its planning now. There are regular community meetings discussing the vision of North Birmingham."

After convening over 150 community members across seven meetings in the Northside and Southside neighborhoods and collecting 400 survey responses from residents beginning in January 2019, the City of Birmingham released a first draft of the Northside Southside Framework Plan for public comment in September 2019 and an updated draft in July 2020. Recommendations in the plan are organized by theme, including Community Renewal, Green Systems, Economic Vitality, Transportation, and Future Land Use. 10 The plan includes strategies to "identify and reduce blight," "ensure the safety of communities," and "improve citizen involvement in their communities and establish new partnerships." 11

Planning for the Community Framework Plans in the Eastern and Southern areas of the city is still underway. 12

Macon, Georgia

"Affordable isn't always attainable. It has been a very protracted effort at displacing and gentrifying these areas. My neighborhood on the Southside is now being called College Hill, and it started ten years ago with different name changes." - Danny Glover

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10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
Between 1959 and 1973, three urban renewal projects displaced about 705 families. 73% of these were families of color.

Rachel Hollar, executive director of Bike Walk Macon, told ioby that mid-century urban renewal projects and interstate construction catalyzed disinvestment in historically Black neighborhoods that persists today: “So many houses, and now they’re empty. Also, Pleasant Hill used to be a thriving black community then an interstate came through the neighborhood and now it’s filled with blight.”

More recently, City-led revitalization efforts have introduced new development and higher-income residents in Macon’s neighborhoods with histories of disinvestment. Danny Glover, founder of the One South Community Development Corporation (One South CDC) and a one-time user of ioby’s crowdfunding platform, told ioby that Macon’s neighborhoods are now grappling with a lack of affordable housing, particularly on the city’s south side. Glover told ioby that “affordable isn’t always attainable. It has been a very protracted effort at displacing and gentrifying these areas. My neighborhood on the Southside is now being called College Hill, and it started ten years ago with different name changes.”

OPPORTUNITY ZONES
ioby anticipates that the introduction of new funding for real estate projects catalyzed by the federal Opportunity Zones program may deepen residents’ concerns about the threat of displacement, particularly in communities of color and low-income areas. Through this program, investors are offered a set of attractive tax benefits for their investments in real estate, housing, infrastructure, and existing or start-up businesses in designated Opportunity Zones. These Opportunity Zones, nominated by the governor of each state, are typically in low-income neighborhoods with histories of disinvestment.

OPPORTUNITY ZONES
As illustrated by the map below, new investment in urban areas is attracting people with higher incomes to the region’s cities, even as per capita income has fallen rapidly in rural and some suburban areas.

Residents in large portions of the region are already severely rent burdened, paying an average of more than 50% of their adjusted gross income on rent. These residents are most vulnerable to displacement when rents rise due to new investment.

Map 2. Cities and their suburbs are attracting higher-income residents, even as income falls in rural areas.

COMMUNITY leaders across the region are engaged in efforts to end mass incarceration and the opioid epidemic, two national crises that disproportionately affect communities of color and low-income communities.

Mass Incarceration
In 2018, the Alabama Baptist reported that Mississippi, Georgia, and Alabama incarcerate residents at a rate of 1,039, 970, and 946 per 100,000 citizens, respectively. These data indicate that about one of every 100 individuals in these states will be incarcerated within their lifetimes. The National Institute of Justice found that children of incarcerated parents are six times more likely to be incarcerated, indicating that these states perpetuate a vicious cycle of incarceration.  

The study by Alabama Baptist also found that these high rates of incarceration stem from policies such as mandatory minimum sentences, rather than an increase in instances of crime.

Opioid Epidemic
According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), health practitioners in Alabama write more opioid prescriptions than the number of combined residents in the state each year. In 2017, it was found that physicians wrote 107.2 opioid prescriptions for every 100 patients. In 2019, the National Institute of Drug Abuse found that the age-adjusted rate of drug overdoses has increased significantly in Alabama by 11.1%, and it was found that the majority of these deaths were related to opioid usage. The Alabama Department of Mental Health found that the annual number of overdose-related deaths in the state increased by 82% from 2006 to 2014.

According to the Georgia Department of Public Health, the number of overdose related deaths attributed to opioids increased 245% from 2010 to 2017, accounting for over two-thirds of drug related deaths.

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The Office of the Attorney General found that Georgia is among the “top 11 states with the most opioid overdose deaths, and 55 Georgia counties have an overdose rate higher than the national average.” Georgia physicians wrote 541 million opioid prescriptions from June 2016 to May 2017, or about 54 prescriptions per resident in the state of Georgia.

The National Institute of Drug Abuse found that, in 2018, 173 deaths in Mississippi were related to opioid overdoses. Although Mississippi ranks within the top five states with regard to the ratio of the number of prescriptions to the state’s population (in 2017, physicians wrote 92.9 opioid prescriptions for every 100 residents), this ratio is the lowest it has been since 2006.

**Objective #2: Assess competition and new opportunities for ioby to add value to the region’s civic sector.**

**CROWDFUNDING IN REGION**

None of the interviewees mentioned a crowdfunding platform with a strong presence in the region and only 32% of survey respondents indicated that they had ever led crowdfunding campaigns before. Interviewees raised no potential misgivings or concerns about funders or other organizations in the region perceiving ioby as duplicating, competing with, or undermining their work.

As we begin to raise ioby’s profile in new places, we find that our platform is often compared to other crowdfunding platforms with which residents are already familiar. We assessed data from a sample of cities in the Central Black Belt (Atlanta and Macon, Georgia; Birmingham, Montgomery, and Tuscaloosa, Alabama; and Jackson, Mississippi) and found that more than 29,000 residents have used crowdfunding platforms like GoFundMe (8,609 fundraisers currently listed) and Kickstarter (6,742 projects currently listed) to meet their personal and creative funding needs. 13,583 teachers in schools located in and near these cities have successfully fundraised with DonorsChoose for classroom supplies.

ioby’s intention is to supplement, rather than compete with; these crowdfunding platforms in the Central Black Belt. ioby differs from these platforms in key ways:

- We support projects from idea through implementation, and focus our support and evaluation of success on the development of the leader of the project, rather than on the project or on the financial transactions. Informed by organizing models such as asset-based community development (ABCD) and resource organizing, ioby’s training and coaching are designed to build the confidence and fundraising capacities of grassroots leaders.
- As a nonprofit, ioby is able to guarantee that all donations made on our platform are tax-deductible. For groups without 501(c)(3) status, we offer project-specific (Type C) fiscal sponsorship.
- ioby believes that residents know what is best for their neighborhoods. We only require that projects be based in the United States or its territory and have a public benefit.
- ioby is mission-driven to focus on communities with the most need, and so we deliberately build networks of leaders in areas with histories of disinvestment.
- ioby stewards a national network of civically engaged neighbors that project leaders join when they run a campaign with us. We encourage our nationwide network to learn from each other, and provide opportunities for them to do so.

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19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
23 “Mississippi: Opioid-Involved Deaths.”
EXISTING SOURCES OF FUNDING FOR NONPROFITS AND GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATIONS

Various entities have historically funded small to mid-sized projects led by residents and community-based organizations in the region. Interviewees said that residents and organizations with small and urgent funding needs have typically sought support from the Kellogg Foundation, the Black Belt Community Foundation, the Birmingham chapter of the Awesome Foundation, the Arthur Blank Foundation (primarily in Atlanta), local governments, and a variety of state and community foundations.

The Black Belt Community Foundation, a regional foundation based in Selma, currently operates a small Community Grants program through which they fund approximately 40 organizations between $500 and $3,000 each year. Eligible projects concern crucial civic institutions and services (e.g., fire departments’ and libraries’ funding needs), community and economic development, education, environment, health services, youth development, community organizing, and organizational development.27

The Birmingham chapter of the Awesome Foundation awards one $1,000 grant each month to a project related to science, the arts, education, civic engagement, media, and entertainment. Groups do not need to have 501(c)(3) status in order to receive an Awesome Foundation grant.28

Despite this modest support from the region’s institutions, community leaders generally expect to fundraise to meet their funding needs. Lois Cortell said that “most organizations expect to fundraise for new civic endeavors.”

Kevin King of Kings Canvas underscored this point and added that the race of the leader of an organization seems to determine the degree to which they expect to receive grants from foundations: “We definitely have to fundraise, especially if you’re Black, because you don’t get the same type of opportunities that the white nonprofits receive. There’s only three non-profits in the town that were started by African Americans and they’re able to draw a paycheck from it, which is myself and two other organizations. People don’t just give to us.”

Although interviewees told ioby that there are more private funders in Atlanta than in other cities and towns in the region, leaders of Atlanta-area nonprofits still expect to seek individual donations to close the gap between their funding needs and the amount of support they receive from foundations.

Objective #3: Measure the region against ioby’s predictors of success.

ioby measures success by the number of leaders trained in online grassroots fundraising and supported on our platform, as well as the amount of “citizen philanthropy” funneled to projects led by neighbors and community-based organizations. Based on our experience working in Pittsburgh, Detroit, Cleveland, Memphis, and New York, ioby has identified five predictors of success.

1. CULTURE OF GIVING

Background: A strong culture of giving is characterized by general participation in charitable giving across income brackets and a general comfort with grassroots fundraising among would-be users of ioby’s platform. This is measured using a combination of interviews, survey responses, and IRS charitable giving data.

Why this matters: In a place with a robust culture of giving, ioby leaders are more likely to succeed because they are more comfortable asking for donations and their neighbors are already accustomed to donating to charitable projects. For example, the average household in Memphis donates about 5.6% of adjusted gross income to charitable organizations, a figure considerably higher than the national average.

of about three percent. Coming from Memphis’ culture of giving, most ioby leaders in the city have felt comfortable making asks of donors and have had great successes in their grassroots fundraising campaigns.

**Finding in the Central Black Belt: STRONG**

There is a robust culture of giving in the Central Black Belt. A *Chronicle of Philanthropy* report ranked Birmingham and Atlanta as the 3rd and 4th most generous cities of the 50 largest metropolitan areas in the U.S., respectively. This is based on the average share of household income donated to charitable organizations. In their 2017 tax returns, Birmingham residents reported $1.1 billion in charitable contributions (5.4% of households’ adjusted gross income) and Atlanta residents reported $5.7 billion (4.6% of households’ adjusted gross income). Notably, these giving ratios are significantly higher than any other city where ioby currently has a presence, with the exception of Memphis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metro Area</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Average Giving per itemizer</th>
<th>Average % of income</th>
<th>Total in itemized contributions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Memphis</td>
<td>1.3 million</td>
<td>$9,329</td>
<td>5.60%</td>
<td>$1.0 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salt Lake City</td>
<td>1.1 million</td>
<td>$8,412</td>
<td>5.50%</td>
<td>$1.2 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birmingham, Ala.</td>
<td>1.1 million</td>
<td>$9,388</td>
<td>5.40%</td>
<td>$1.1 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Jose, Calif.</td>
<td>1.9 million</td>
<td>$14,046</td>
<td>4.60%</td>
<td>$5.1 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlanta</td>
<td>5.5 million</td>
<td>$8,044</td>
<td>4.60%</td>
<td>$5.7 billion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While 75% of survey respondents indicated that people in their community were likely to donate to projects that positively impact their community, there was less consensus about people’s comfort fundraising from their personal networks and donating to projects that have a risk of failing.

In response to the question, “Would people in your community feel comfortable donating to a project that has a risk of failing?” 28% of respondents indicated that people in their community would be afraid to take a risk, 38% indicated that their community is comfortable with some risk, and 35% indicated that they did not know their community’s level of comfort with risk.

Survey respondents indicated the following reasons for being unlikely to crowdfund:

- “limited knowledge of the process"
- “limited network reach"
- “people are poor and won’t give"
- “not commonly used here, might encounter resistance, it was proposed once for a small item and there were fears about fees”
- “crowdfunding seems to be pretty exhausting work without a decent ROI”
- “I would likely crowdfund but know I would have an education/learning curve in order for it to be successful”
- “not enough of a social media presence”
- “I don’t like fundraising. I’m obligated to do it for my daughters’ three schools.”
- “wouldn’t want to ask people for money”
- “I need to build the fundraising skill”
- “not sure if it would be too time consuming”
- “not sure if people will people trust this source”

One interviewee told ioby that a resident’s willingness to donate depends on that person’s discretionary

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income: “If you need food or are worried about self-sustenance, you’re not going to be too worried about recreation.” As a result, this interviewee suggested that giving to charitable projects and organizations tends to be lower in low-income communities, where families prioritize payment for food and housing over charitable donations.

This seems to be a widely held perception among residents in the region. When asked about barriers to civic engagement in the region, 33% of survey respondents responded that residents do not become civically engaged because they are simply unable to commit any of their income to causes and campaigns that are important to them.

Justin Vest of Hometown Action disagrees with this claim. He told ioby that there is “definitely a large subset of the population that is willing to donate money, but it’s not who you think it is. It’s not the rich people”. Vest believes that, although the culture of giving differs across cities, towns, and neighborhoods, histories of disinvestment have caused “lower income people to be more willing to donate their time and money to local grassroots organizations and to do it with more regularity.” Conversely, Vest notices that “wealthier folks are more willing to give to larger organizations that don’t have a local impact, if they give at all.”

Importantly, research indicates that there is no correlation between a community’s median household income and the success of a crowdfunding campaign in their neighborhood.30 Even so, the perception that neighbors are generally uncharitable–regardless of whether it is grounded in an accurate assessment of residents’ giving habits–may prevent civic leaders from attempting to lead grassroots fundraising campaigns.

Using the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*’s “giving ratio” (calculated as itemized charitable deductions as a percentage of gross income) as our metric, charitable giving appears most heavily concentrated in the region’s metropolitan areas.

Important, in areas where income is very low, it is unlikely worthwhile to itemize deductions. For this reason, the “giving ratio” is often criticized for being a great measure of who itemizes donations and little else. We do not find giving ratios to be a complete look at generosity, which would include giving to faith

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institutions, helping family members in need, and giving cash at local organizations’ fundraising events.

2. COOPERATIVE CIVIC SECTOR

Background: A cooperative civic sector is characterized by a culture of collaboration among organizations and government, where collaboration is born out of a mutually enforced creative or strategic ethos rather than from a funder.

Why this matters: ioby finds it easier to build meaningful connections to organizations and grassroots leaders in cities where nonprofit leaders are deeply committed to each other’s success. For example, Memphis nonprofits have deeply interwoven staff, board and members, that are reinforced by social connections. Because Memphis boasts this supremely collaborative environment for nonprofits, our local partners and champions have had great success encouraging other organizations in the city to work with ioby.

Finding in the Central Black Belt: STRONG

The region’s nonprofits, funders, and grassroots and community-based organizations are deeply connected to each other. There was clear consensus among interviewees in each of the region’s towns and cities that organizations would be far less effective without assistance from mission-aligned organizations. Interviewees said that, although civic leaders are aware that they are competing for the same limited pool of funding, this competition is generally friendly and does not affect their ability or willingness to partner with other organizations.

Most interviewees were eager to tell ioby about their organizations’ partnerships. Lois Cortell of the Cloverdale Community Garden in Montgomery told ioby that her organization partners with any mission-aligned group or leader who wishes to collaborate: “The garden itself partners extensively with school groups, like Alabama State University, Huntington College, businesses in the neighborhood and the military.”

Caylor Rolling of EAT South agreed that there is a culture of collaboration among nonprofits and named some of the organization’s most successful partnerships, including with local businesses: “We partner very closely with our City recreation center to offer after school programs and summer camps. We have close ties with the City of Montgomery, as well as the Director of Education who also has a nonprofit. We have a relationship with everyone from Whole Foods to the local BBQ place. We have partnerships with Tuskegee University and Alabama State University as well.”

Kevin King in Montgomery said that, although his group seeks partnerships with mission-aligned organizations, "There is a culture of competition because everyone is going after the same funding."

Jill Arrington with Groundwork Atlanta told ioby that, despite this competition, nonprofit leaders generally collaborate effectively: “It’s human nature. We get territorial but, when you realize that there’s more out there and more people who need it, and that it’s funding that comes with that, then it shouldn’t be a deterrent.” Cam Christian at Plantlanta agreed, “Organizations tend to collaborate effectively. Everyone we’ve partnered with has put their equal stake into whatever event we’re planning. This has helped us grow with those relationships. There is more collaboration over competition.”

The map below reveals large clusters of incorporated nonprofits in the region’s metropolitan areas, with the greatest concentration in and around Atlanta.
3. OPENNESS TO GRASSROOTS FUNDRAISING

**Background:** To successfully motivate and prepare residents to crowdfund for their ideas, ioby depends on a general openness to the tenets of grassroots fundraising and asset-based community development. This includes willingness on the part of residents and community-based organizations to ask neighbors, relatives, friends, colleagues, and strangers for donations to their projects.

**Why this matters:** ioby may predict the extent to which residents and leaders of community-based organizations will embrace ioby’s model of online grassroots fundraising by looking at local examples of successful fundraising campaigns and by surveying residents about their proclivities for fundraising. Example: When ioby first set down roots in Cleveland, leaders of some community development organizations were already looking at how they might use crowdfunding to extend their reach to grassroots donors. This openness to grassroots fundraising enabled ioby to quickly grow our presence in Cleveland.

**Finding in the Central Black Belt:** STRONG

Most interviewees told ioby that leaders of organizations and grassroots groups expect to seek individual donations to meet their funding needs, and not to depend exclusively on the support of foundations.

Justin Vest told ioby that organizations have no reason to believe that a large foundation would meet the majority of a given funding need because they have not seen enough “on-the-ground investment” from funders. Vest added that most funders who invest in the work of nonprofits in the region tend not to fund community-led projects. As a result, civic leaders largely expect to fundraise.

Ivette Bledsoe agreed, “People feel different about (who should fund projects) but we expect to fundraise.” In 2017, Bledsoe used ioby’s crowdfunding platform to raise over $60,000 for the Firefly Trail, a rails-to-trail project that will connect Athens to Union Point. Bledsoe told ioby that, when local officials saw the overwhelming demand for a trail demonstrated by the successful ioby campaign, the City added the trail to a special purpose local option sales tax (TSPLOST) ballot initiative. In 2019, Athens voters approved the referendum that enabled the City to prepare a special-purpose local-option sales tax (TSPLOST) to collect enough revenue over the next five years to fund 37 civic projects. Other projects funded by the TSPLOST included a library on the city’s East Side and an affordable housing project.31

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Bledsoe told ioby that she has encountered some people in her community who question whether civic projects should need to depend on citizen philanthropy, “Others do believe this shouldn’t be something that just a small amount of people pays for; the government should pay for it.” Bledsoe’s comment suggests that ioby may contend with at least a degree of uneasiness with the notion of grassroots fundraising in the region.

Even so, 65% of survey respondents said that people in their community are very likely or somewhat likely to fundraise from their networks. Only 9% survey respondents felt that people in their community would be very unlikely or somewhat unlikely to fundraise in their network. This suggests that people in the Central Black Belt are either accustomed to or comfortable with the notion of fundraising from neighbors.

Bledsoe’s experience with fundraising using ioby’s crowdfunding platform was transformative for members of her group who had been uneasy with the idea of grassroots fundraising for the Firefly Trail. Bledsoe told ioby that fundraising is no longer as difficult for her group, and that the experience of participating in or witnessing a successful campaign improved the confidence of people in her community to fundraise for their own projects. Bledsoe said that she hopes that her team’s success made grassroots fundraising less intimidating for nonprofit leaders in her area.

4. TRANSPARENT, ACCESSIBLE GOVERNMENT SERVICES

**Background:** ioby determines the transparency and accessibility of local government by examining the extent to which residents find it easy to obtain permission for projects in public spaces.

**Why this matters:** Because many ioby projects take place in public spaces, project leaders often seek permits for their work. In municipalities and counties where residents are easily able to obtain official permission to execute a project, ioby leaders are able to complete their projects more quickly and, often, with greater efficacy. Example: In Pittsburgh, the Office of Community Affairs and the Mayor’s Bureau of Neighborhood Empowerment proactively educate residents at public forums in neighborhoods across the city about the kinds of permits that are required for projects in public spaces and assist them in navigating bureaucratic processes. The City of Pittsburgh’s willingness to assist residents as they seek support for their projects has been an asset for ioby in the city.

**Finding in the Central Black Belt:** MIXED

Most interviewees in the Central Black Belt told ioby that it is difficult for civic leaders to access permits and approvals for projects in public spaces.

Justin Vest said that it can be “very difficult to navigate the bureaucracy in order to obtain permits, approval and endorsements” in Alabama’s municipalities. Mary Shell with Alabama Communities of Excellence disagreed, telling ioby that she believes that “it’s pretty easy” to access government services in towns and cities across the state.

In Montgomery, Brown with Rollin’ to the Polls stated that it is generally “difficult here” to receive a permit, endorsement or approval. Brown told ioby, “What I’ve noticed is simple information isn’t easily accessible to the government. Our online system in Montgomery is kind of archaic and we’re hoping this will also change with the new administration.” Other interviewees agreed that municipal governments’ websites are not easily navigable and that permits are difficult to obtain as a result.

In Birmingham, Councilor Hilliard told ioby that, although accessing government services is currently difficult for most residents, the current administration is making changes to that. He pointed to recent progress, “We’re one of the only city councils who have our meetings live streamed. The process is very clear.” With regard to accessing permits and approvals, Councilor Hilliard said, “I believe it could be streamlined more, I don’t think people should have to go to multiple departments. I think it should be a one-stop shop, but that’s something our administration is working on.”

In Atlanta, Cam Christian with Planlanta told ioby, public officials “are trying to be more transparent. I’ve seen it in the last two years.” In terms of gaining approvals for projects, Christian told ioby that civic leaders have had more success in securing permits when they win the support of public officials, “It’s easy if they believe in your mission.”

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Some municipal and county governments across the region are making strides in improving the quality and depth of their engagement with residents. Lois Cortell of the Cloverdale Community Garden in Montgomery told ioby that the newly elected Mayor Steven Reed has a plan to work with residents to create stronger and more sustainable communities. In fall 2019, she told ioby that Mayor Reed “talks a lot about engaging residents and he’s about to start a transition team and committees, and he’s trying to work on a new comprehensive plan to mobilize citizens.”

5. CIVIC PRIDE

**Background:** Civic pride refers to residents’ demonstrable sense of pride to be from their town, neighborhood, city, and region. ioby measures pride through interviews and survey.

**Why this matters:** When residents are proud to be from a neighborhood, town, city, and/or region, ioby is more likely to be able to motivate them to create and fund civic projects. Example: ioby has found that many New Yorkers have a strong pride in their city, and connect their personal identities to their borough. Project leaders in New York City are willing to spend time working with neighbors to fundraise for and implement an ioby project because they have personal and long-term interests in making their neighborhoods stronger and more sustainable.

**Finding in the Central Black Belt: STRONG**

Pride in the region is very strong but varies based on residents’ social, economic, and political backgrounds. 80% of survey respondents said that people are proud to be from their town or city, and 69% said that people are proud to be from the Central Black Belt region.

Vest of Hometown Action believes that pride in one's town is contingent upon the social class of the individuals. He stated that residents are more likely to be proud of their towns and cities “if you’re more privileged, so middle-class and upper-class and white, because there has been revitalization. But I don’t see the same level of pride from lower income communities or communities of color.” People who have benefited from new investment and development are especially proud of their towns and cities, and people who have suffered economically as affordable housing has evaporated and income and wealth inequality has worsened were less likely to say that they are proud.

Justin Vest shared that political affiliation also has some bearing on a person’s pride in their home towns or region, “There is a partisan divide. With people who are more progressive typically, [they] don't have a lot of pride in the state, though folks who are more conservative do.”

When measured only against other places where ioby has hired local staff, the Central Black Belt appears
to be a strong fit for ioby’s services. We expect that our efforts to source and cultivate local leaders with ideas for their communities will benefit from the Central Black Belt's strong culture of giving, cooperative civic sector, openness to grassroots fundraising, and civic pride.

Some scores from ioby's previous Phase 0 reports have been changed to more accurately reflect the nuance in our findings.

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**Objective #4: Evaluate potential demand for ioby’s services in the region.**

Before determining ioby’s approach to working in a place, we must predict the degree to which residents will be interested in using ioby’s crowdfunding platform, grassroots fundraising coaching, and fiscal sponsorship service. This prediction hinges on the extent to which residents and community-based organizations in the Central Black Belt have led and donated to the types of community-led, “DIY,” and tactical urbanism projects that ioby tends to support.

In most neighborhoods and cities within the Central Black belt region, there is a burgeoning culture of residents leading DIY and tactical urbanism projects in public spaces. Every interviewee said that organizations and leaders are weary of waiting for funders and government to fill a void in civic life, so they have decided to roll up their sleeves and fund and create projects themselves. Several interviewees told ioby that community-led projects related to agriculture, creative placemaking, and economic development are common. Many of these projects have an explicit focus on racial equity, food security, and stemming displacement:

- Rey Holmes of Soul Spirit Farmers in Atlanta creates community gardens in neighborhoods with histories of disinvestment, with the help of volunteers and neighbors who care about their community. These gardens are growing rapidly and helping to invigorate and educate communities in food deserts.
• Caylor Rolling of EAT South believes that there is a burgeoning culture of community gardening in Montgomery. Rolling told ioby, "There are teachers who have started their own gardens. Our arts magnet high school built a garden as well."

• Lois Cortell said that the Old Cloverdale Community Garden in Montgomery started "as a blight remediation project where there was a dilapidated home, and after a 501(c)(3) was formed, we were able to acquire the home and form a community garden."

• Main Streets programs across Alabama, including in Birmingham and Montevallo, utilize creative placemaking techniques to rehabilitate and activate commercial corridors and attract new investment to historic downtowns.32

• Through their Placemaking Program, the City of Atlanta and the Trust for Public Land (TPL) award small grants to creative placemaking projects led by residents. Each year, the City and TPL invite residents to submit applications to implement their placemaking ideas. Applicants must commit to leading the design process and gathering community support for the project. Selected groups receive an initial budget ranging from $5,000 - $50,000, depending on the funding need.

• With support from ArtPlace, King’s Canvas in Montgomery has worked to create an arts and culture district. The goal of the district is to use creative placemaking principles to attract new investment to the area while also combating "racial, economic and cultural displacement (or gentrification) as the area develops."33

• In 2015, Binh Dam, a newcomer to Atlanta, had an idea to add bus schedules to downtown bus stops. Encouraged by officials at MARTA, the transit agency, Binh worked with ioby and Transit Center as part of the “Trick Out My Trip” match campaign. He raised funds to install temporary schedules at several stops. Following on the tails of his innovative project’s success, Binh was asked to help MARTA develop new, participatory engagement strategies through a volunteer effort called MARTA Army.

In 2016, MARTA Army worked with the City of East Point to purchase and install trashcans at 80 bus stops in East Point, a suburb of Atlanta. Responding to this powerful display of residents’ interest in improving transit conditions, the State of Georgia awarded more than $30 million to MARTA to install new signage, shelters, and other amenities at bus stops and rail stations.34

**Objective #5: Identify the trends that drive communities’ interest in taking on projects like those that ioby typically supports.**

Learning from ioby’s work in New York, Memphis, Detroit, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and places around the country, we know that ioby’s services are most helpful to grassroots leaders working in areas with histories of disinvestment. To be most impactful, we aim to understand how conditions of institutional disinvestment and resource scarcity have shaped residents’ approaches to creating projects in their towns and neighborhoods. We also must understand how new investment, particularly in towns and neighborhoods with a history of disinvestment, has impacted residents and how community leaders are responding to these changes.

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THE REGIONAL ECONOMY

Although organizations and leaders disagree on the precise boundaries of the Black Belt, a study of trends related to race, public health, and poverty reveals the rough outline of the region. In 2017, a FiveThirtyEight study compared maps of rural hospital closings, medical provider shortages, poor education outcomes, poverty, and mortality in the Southern United States. The study found that the maps reveal the outlines of slavery: "Rural, Southern black Americans who live in communities founded on slavery routinely have some of the worst health outcomes in the country."35 The following public health outcomes are most prevalent in areas of the South that are majority Black:

- Deaths from diabetes, blood, and endocrine diseases
- Deaths from HIV and tuberculosis
- Deaths from cervical cancer
- Infant mortality

Poverty rates in Black Belt counties in Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi are typically higher than in neighboring metropolitan areas. For instance, in many of Alabama’s rural Black Belt counties, the poverty rate is greater than 25% (compared to 18.5% statewide, 11.8% nationally, and 14% in the Birmingham metropolitan area).36 37 Alabama was also recently named the sixth poorest state in the nation by the nonprofit Alabama Possible.38

NEW INVESTMENT

Justin Vest of Hometown Action believes that, in Alabama, cities such as Huntsville, Tuscaloosa, and Birmingham are seeing the greatest share of new investment. Vest told ioby that he believes that, in Birmingham, the City has outpaced the State of Alabama in its economic development efforts and is responsible for attracting most of this new investment. Mary Shell told ioby that most new investment

38 Ibid.
is taking place in Birmingham, Mobile, and Huntsville. She also said that long-time residents are being displaced because of this investment, and that "a lot of inner city people are having to move to the outskirts of town." Shell said that some cities are pursuing corrective measures to ensure that gentrification does not uproot communities, such as protecting and creating affordable housing. Shell warned that cities' definition of affordable housing may differ from residents. "It still may not be the price that the residents are used to," said Shell.

In Birmingham, Councilor Hilliard agreed that several neighborhoods are seeing new outside investment, including in Downtown, Crestwood, Woodlawn, Five Points West, and Avondale. Hilliard said that residents in these neighborhoods have come to working agreements with developers and investors that he believes will prevent displacement.

Dr. Royster of Communities Who Know, said, “There is huge investment now on the Westside of Atlanta, but is the money going towards organizations that are trying to do the work that communities need to do? Maybe, maybe not.”

Leading up to and following the 2017 opening of the Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta, the Westside neighborhood has experienced a tremendous uptick in new investment. Dr. Royster of Communities Who Know, said that although new development has expanded the local private sector, it is unclear whether affected communities have benefited: "There is huge investment now on the Westside of Atlanta, but is the money going towards organizations that are trying to do the work that communities need to do? Maybe, maybe not.”

A representative from MARTA Army told ioby that “the core areas like Downtown, Midtown, Buckhead, the Perimeter are where you’re seeing a lot of investment from the outside as well as within the region.” Many of the areas targeted for new development are neighborhoods with histories of disinvestment, and communities of color and low-income residents are particularly vulnerable to rising real estate prices.

**Objective #6: Characterize civic participation across the region.**

By most accounts, residents in the Central Black Belt do not suffer from widespread apathy or a lack of interest in civic activities such as volunteering, donating to a civic project, voting, and meeting with decision-makers. Instead, survey respondents reported that the chief barriers that prevent residents from becoming more civically engaged are:

- A lack of knowledge about where to begin (69%)
- Neighbors are disheartened because they do not believe that their participation will result in any important changes (39%)

About a third of respondents (33%) claimed that people don’t have enough spare cash to donate to causes or campaigns and 31% said that civic participation just takes too much time for some people. Only 28% of respondents said that their communities are apathetic or simply do not care enough, and only 14% said that people think that they wouldn’t enjoy being civically engaged.

Given that ioby's success depends in part on the robustness of a place's culture of giving, we are concerned by the 33% of survey respondents' belief that residents are simply unable to commit any of their income to causes and campaigns that are important to them. Earlier in this report, a study of household giving to charitable organizations revealed that the culture of giving in the Central Black Belt is not quite as weak as these survey responses might suggest.

The data suggest that, in order to broaden and deepen community engagement in the Central Black Belt, ioby should partner with leaders in government and nonprofits to:

- Use ioby's platform and services to increase the number and accessibility of entry points for residents who wish to become involved in public decision-making processes but who do not know where to begin.
- Offer opportunities for “quick wins,” or community-led projects that are funded and implemented quickly, that prove to neighbors that real and meaningful change is achievable in the short-term.
Which of the following barriers prevent people in your community from becoming civically engaged (i.e. volunteering, donating to a civic project, voting, meeting with a decision-maker)?
*Based on 109 survey responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People don't know where to start</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic participation just takes too much time for some people</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People feel that participating in civic life won't change anything, so it's not worth it</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People think that they wouldn't enjoy being civically engaged</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People don't have enough spare cash to donate to causes or campaigns</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In interviews, the barriers to engagement that came up most often included:

1. A lack of transportation options. Caylor Rolling with EAT South told ioby, “[…] the Council meetings are downtown and if you don’t have transportation you can’t get there.”

2. Inconvenient times of local meetings. Ashley with Foreward South told ioby, “I think there’s a deliberate effort to keep individuals from becoming civically engaged. In Birmingham the meetings are at 7pm but here [in Montgomery], they’re at 5pm.”

3. Poverty. Kynesha Brown from Rollin’ to the Polls told ioby, “If a person has to work harder to make sure their lights stay on, then they’re not going to be interested in what goes on in City Council meetings. Until those problems are fixed then I don’t think people are going to be as civically engaged as we’d like to.”

4. Distrust in government, based on generations of exploitation and abuse, particularly in communities of color. Justin Vest said that he believes that disengagement from civic life is primarily due to “people not believing that the government works for them.”

5. Lack of interest in topics on the agenda for discussion. Mary Shell of Alabama Communities of Excellence told ioby that the robustness of civic engagement depends upon the “community and the situation being discussed at the meeting. Hot buttons have a big crowd but typically there aren’t large turnouts.” Shell also told ioby that degrees of engagement differ between rural and urban areas: “Urban areas have more involvement and in rural areas, if there’s [an issue such as a] landfill, there will be people showing up, but otherwise there isn’t a lot of input.”

Our research suggests that there is considerable opportunity for ioby to positively impact the region’s civic landscape. When developing a strategy to grow ioby’s presence in a place, we ask the following questions:
Objective #7: Recommend strategies to source and serve ioby project leaders across the region.

How do we reach people who might be interested in leading fundraising campaigns with ioby?

We seek to hire City Action Strategists in the region’s largest cities, Atlanta and Birmingham (one in each city), with deep personal connections to their cities and region and who are well connected to their local civic sectors. Each new hire will need to be comfortable and experienced with working in neighborhoods with histories of disinvestment, including in low-income communities and communities of color.

How do we attach to and work with forms of civic participation that are already working? (e.g. Public meetings, charrettes, etc.)

ioby will form strategic partnerships with organizations and agencies led by people who have already earned the trust of civic leaders and potential users of ioby’s platform. By positioning crowdfunding as an effective supplement to organizations’ fundraising and community-building activities, ioby hopes that community leaders will perceive ioby to be an important addition to the local civic infrastructure.

How can we reach well-connected leaders in the region?

In places where it is especially difficult for outsiders to join social and professional networks, it will be important for ioby to earn the trust of residents and community leaders before we can expect many of them to use ioby’s platform and services. In places where residents have voiced skepticism toward outside organizations like ioby, our team:

- Spends time cultivating relationships with highly regarded leaders and communicating our strong mission alignment with their groups and organizations.
- Relies on referrals from highly regarded leaders and organizations in the region, including leaders whom we interviewed for this Phase 0 report.
- Amplifies stories of local leaders who have successfully funded projects on ioby’s platform.

As projects are successfully funded on our platform and more leaders become familiar with our staff and services, we expect that ioby will gradually become an essential part of the region’s civic landscape.

How do we circumvent barriers to civic participation in order to reach the deep roots?

Survey respondents told ioby that the following barriers commonly prevent people in their communities from becoming civically engaged:

1. People don’t know where to start.
   To address this barrier, ioby will create resources that help residents understand how to create and fund projects for their neighborhoods. We may position civic crowdfunding as a first step for residents hoping to become more civically engaged by: helping leaders create their campaign pages, sharpening leaders’ grassroots fundraising skills, and connecting them to technical experts in the city and across the region and country who can assist with implementation.

2. Civic participation just takes too much time for some people.
   From our work in neighborhoods with histories of disinvestment across the country, we have found that “quick wins” are the best way to counter deeply rooted perceptions that civic participation is time consuming, or that low-income people are unable to donate to campaigns. We should be able to dispel these notions, and trust should be easier to gain, when we are able to point to a series of strong examples of how ioby’s model works in Birmingham and Atlanta. When ioby has successfully supported grassroots campaigns across each city, including in neighborhoods with histories of disinvestment, we may begin to see momentum build as well-regarded community leaders and leaders of organizations refer people in their networks to ioby.

3. People don’t have enough spare cash to donate to causes or campaigns.
ioby's local staff would be trained to address this myth in trainings and conversations with residents who are considering running a campaign on ioby's platform. As stated previously, research indicates that there is no correlation between a community's median household income and the success of a crowdfunding campaign in their neighborhood. In fact, compared to people who live in high-income neighborhoods, people in low-income communities tend to give larger shares of their incomes to organizations and causes that are important to them.

4. People feel that participating in civic life won't change anything, so it's not worth doing.
By sharing stories of leaders who have successfully funded and built projects in their own neighborhoods, ioby can inspire residents to take action. At the same time, we would encourage leaders to fund and deliver projects quickly in Birmingham and Atlanta so that residents understand that they are able to make meaningful changes without much difficulty.

WORKING IN RURAL AREAS

In the Central Black Belt, interviewees raised three potential challenges regarding ioby's ability to work in rural areas:

- **Distrust**: Based on our conversations with leaders of organizations across the region, it is clear that residents and civic leaders in rural areas are generally distrustful of organizations led by people from outside of their areas. This distrust seems to stem from a common feeling that solutions are only reasonable or palatable when they come from people in the area. Philosophically, this aligns nicely with ioby's founding principle—that people closest to a problem are best suited to solve it—and signals a strong fit for our services. In practical terms, this distrust presents a significant barrier to our work. An organization like ioby, from outside of the region, may find it difficult to build trust with civic leaders.

- **Limited experience with engagement**: some interviewees in the Central Black Belt told ioby that residents of the region's rural areas only tend to become civically active and attend public meetings when they are looking to make a complaint to their elected officials or town planning boards.

- **Doubt that anything can be changed**: In addition, our research suggests that people in rural areas have been relegated to the position of "passive recipient of change" rather than change agent. Civic leaders who aim to bolster engagement in their communities contend with a sentiment that there is simply no point in trying to change anything because no one is listening anyway.

**Strategy #1: Hire a Birmingham Action Strategist and an Atlanta Action Strategist**
When funding is secured, ioby will hire a Birmingham Action Strategist and Atlanta Action Strategist to identify leaders from across each city, prepare them to crowdfund, and connect them to experts in their fields. Using the blended on-the-ground and digital model successfully implemented in New York, Memphis, Detroit, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and Cincinnati, the Birmingham and Atlanta Action Strategists will use the findings of this Phase 0 Report as a guide and begin to identify local leaders who have ideas and funding needs.

**Strategy #2: Train Partners**
To build ioby's presence in cities and towns across the Central Black Belt, ioby will train a cohort of civic leaders, including community-facing members of staff from highly-regarded community-based organizations from cities and rural areas across the region to:

- Learn about community development models and frameworks that can help them more creatively address challenges in their towns and cities, including:
  - Asset-based community development (ABCD)
  - Tactical urbanism
  - Creative placemaking
- Preparing to lead a grassroots fundraising campaigns by:
  - Deciding whether crowdfunding with ioby is right for them
  - Building a strong and diverse fundraising team
  - Crafting and telling a compelling story about their work and its significance
  - Assessing their team's fundraising capacity using a prospect chart
  - Creating an online communications strategy to support their fundraising campaign
The ideal participant in this cohort is a member of staff who spends at least 50% of their time working directly with community residents, and frequently organizes meetings, convenings, workshops, or trainings with residents who are focused on local project-based work. Each participating organization would be compensated for their staff time. Through this approach to building ioby’s presence across the Central Black Belt, we hope to:

- Equip residents and community-based organizations with the tools and skills that they need in order to access citizen philanthropy for projects that make their towns stronger, more connected, more vibrant, and more sustainable;
- Build strong and authentic relationships with leaders of nonprofit organizations that are highly regarded by leaders who might benefit from ioby’s services and platform;
- Cultivate a robust culture of leading and giving to grassroots projects in cities, towns, and neighborhoods with histories of disinvestment.

**Strategy #3: Pursue match fund partnerships in the Central Black Belt**

Ioby has found that an effective way to prove our worth to civic leaders in a place is by accruing several quick wins.

To accelerate grassroots fundraising efforts in the region, ioby will pursue match fund partnerships. A time-limited, match opportunity with broad eligibility criteria would serve as a strong incentive for organizations to begin connecting residents and community-based organizations in their networks to ioby’s crowdfunding platform and services.

Ioby expects that this strategy would be most impactful when paired with Strategies #1 and #2. Place-based matching funds are most successful when local staff are able to manage the program and when the local leaders and organizations who are promoting the opportunity are equipped to explain the advantages of crowdfunding and prepare people in their networks to run their fundraising campaigns.

**Outputs**

In the medium term, ioby expects that on-the-ground organizers in Birmingham and Atlanta and a training program for leaders in rural areas will have the following results:

1. More people in the Central Black Belt region will lead projects at the town and neighborhood scale that are concerned with making their communities stronger, safer, and more sustainable. These projects will be designed by residents, funded by neighbors, and implemented by the community. Public spaces will have more stewards invested in positive change.
2. Civic leaders across the region will become better equipped to fundraise, use digital communications, and organize their communities.
3. Leaders will have a network of like-minded people doing similar work around the region and country, to whom they can turn for peer support.
4. New, previously untapped sources of citizen philanthropy will become available to civic groups working to make their communities stronger.

**Outcomes**

In the long term, we expect that:

1. Previously disengaged residents will contribute to existing community development and city and regional planning initiatives. As a result, engagement with local community-based organizations will expand and diversify, and the regional civic sector will grow to be more connected.
2. Municipal and county agencies will be better positioned to make smart decisions and policies for residents based on authentic input from community leaders, the ingenuity of residents who live closest to the problems in the community, and small-scale demonstrations that build community buy-in.
3. Residents will feel more ownership over initiatives that affect their towns and blocks, and understand the larger scale impact of their own projects in their communities.
Appendix A – Survey Questions

1. In which of the following regions do you live?
2. Are people generally proud to be from your town or city?
3. Are people generally proud to be from your region?
4. Have you ever worked on (e.g. volunteered for, donated to, or led) a project to make your community better in some way?
5. Who initiated the project?
6. If you had an idea for a project that would improve your town (or neighborhood, if you live in a city) in some way, who do you think would be very likely to fund it? (Check all that apply)
7. If you had an idea for a project that would benefit your community in some way, do you know of anyone in local or county government who would be willing to help you get the necessary approvals, permits, or resources to make it happen?
8. If you had an idea for a project that would benefit your community in some way, how likely would you be to crowdfund for that project?
9. If you answered that you are unlikely to crowdfund for a project, what are some reasons that you might not pursue this option?
10. How comfortable are people in your community with fundraising from their neighbors, friends, family, and colleagues?
11. Are people in your community likely to donate to projects that they think are positively impacting the community?
12. Would people in your community feel comfortable donating to a project that has a risk of failing?
13. Have you ever crowdfunded for a project before?
14. Was your crowdfund campaign successful?
15. If you answered "no," what do you think could have made your campaign more successful?
16. Which of the following barriers prevent people in your community from becoming civically engaged (i.e. volunteering, donating to a civic project, voting, meeting with a decision-maker)?
17. Do people in your town (or neighborhood, if you live in a city) trust each other?
18. Do long-term residents in your town or neighborhood tend to trust new transplants to the community?
19. Do new transplants to your town or neighborhood tend to trust long-term residents?
20. To what extent do you know what nonprofit organizations are doing to support your community?
21. Do you trust government to keep its promises to your community?
22. Do you trust philanthropists to keep their promises to your community? Why or why not?
23. What is your full name?
24. Email address
25. Occupation (if applicable)
26. What is your zip code?
27. In what town or city do you live?
28. What is the name of the neighborhood where you live? (If applicable)
29. How would you describe your race and/or ethnicity?
30. For how long have you lived in your town or city?
31. Who sent you this survey, or how did you discover it?
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