



SUMMARY AND
OBSERVATIONS FROM
PROJECT PHOENIX

OBSERVATIONS
OF THE WORK
AT THE CLOSE
OF PHOENIX

While in philanthropy we support work to address systemic change in labor, environment, housing, land use, education, health, and democracy, it seems that we have a harder time thinking systemically about the economy — particularly finance and business.

OBSERVATIONS OF THE WORK AT THE CLOSE OF PHOENIX

1.

The better that we are able to understand the whole system, the better we can promote new economy and just transition interventions. The learning and rethinking we embarked on around finance and business only scratched the surface.

We began to explore political power by understanding who holds power in the places that we examined.

We believe there are other gaps in our learning, including an examination of the role of technology in particular to advance ownership, control, and organizing.

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We began to debunk what the “private” sector means beyond multinational corporations, by examining how strategies in business and finance should be included in social movements.

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3.

What are the right starting places for a just transition, and how can we experiment more courageously around scale?



We are more comfortable in tangible and small examples.



Local and smaller-scale projects are important in seeding new ideas and testing intentional practices. However, in a vacuum, they may not be the best examples or great investments.

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3.

What are the right starting places for a just transition and how can we experiment more courageously around scale?



What is needed to create city- or regional-level change? Our ability to feel comfortable with the contradictions of the system that controls finance, policy, and governing decisions can eventually help us create the necessary imagination to envision and fund alternatives at least at a city level.

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5.

In order to intentionally build toward a new economy, we must understand where power is held, who are the players that hold what types of power, and how power is wielded.

Place: We learned in many of the sites how movement organizations look at power and work to build power. Similarly, we learned how places are at different stages of having the infrastructure for patient and social justice-aligned capital and businesses.

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Ownership: We looked at various individual examples of business ownership (worker co-ops), land (Oakland and other land trusts), and housing co-ops. We also learned a bit about the role of the public sector in ownership (for example: the San Diego housing example that was publicly incentivized) and the role of art, music, and narrative to ground, shape, and move public conceptions of who owns what and why (for example, the Coronado bridge in San Diego and in Eastern Kentucky). Social justice organization should better align with ownership agendas to realize their goals.

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- Control: These and others examples also grow from a power analysis about where there are levers to influence how mainstream economic actors should work (policies as well as decisions in public and private spheres). The questions still stand. Are these market interventions effective or enough?

- Governance: We can explore governing power more closely to consider the role of government in creating the conditions that support the economy. We can take this further to examine philanthropy's ongoing role to support governing power and continuous contestation by social movements in partnership with businesses.