



TRUTH RACIAL HEALING AND TRANSFORMATION (TRHT)

**2023-2024
EVALUATION REPORT**



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The **Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation (TRHT)** initiative in Mississippi, supported by the Foundation for the Mid-South (FMS), has reached a pivotal phase in its mission to dismantle systemic racism and promote economic equity through a focus on narrative change, racial healing, and economic transformation. Over the past year, the initiative has transitioned from a planning and community visioning stage into a more action-oriented implementation phase. The TRHT partners have used the framework to mobilize their communities, facilitating critical conversations, and launching initiatives that address deeply rooted racial and economic disparities.

During this period, the TRHT initiative's impact has been substantial, with various partners leading efforts that have directly engaged over **800 residents** statewide, including community members, students, leaders, and activists. The collective work of partners such as **Millsaps College, Mission Mississippi, Jackson State University (JSU), Tougaloo College, Neshoba Youth Coalition, and The Alluvial Collective** has provided platforms for dialogue, healing, and actionable change.

Each partner leveraged the TRHT framework to engage their local communities and foster racial healing through multiple events, such as storytelling circles, panel discussions, commemorative events, symposia, and listening sessions. These activities have focused on addressing key systemic challenges, including structural inequalities, economic disparities, and historical narratives that have perpetuated racial hierarchies in Mississippi. Collectively, the initiative has broadened its reach and impact by involving a wide range of stakeholders across various sectors, including educational institutions, faith-based organizations, local governments, and civic leaders.

IMPACT AND REACH OF PARTNER ACTIVITIES

- **Millsaps College:**
Focused on narrative change through racial healing storytelling events and art-based discussions, reaching over 100 participants. Their events created spaces for deep conversations about privilege, race, and social justice, fostering understanding and healing within the Midtown community of Jackson.
- **Mission Mississippi:**
Conducted “One Community” conversations in Biloxi, Hattiesburg, and Picayune, engaging 51 participants in dialogues centered on faith and racial unity. Their work created cross-racial, interfaith platforms that brought together diverse groups, helping foster a deeper understanding of shared challenges and opportunities for healing across racial lines.
- **Jackson State University (JSU):**
Led impactful listening sessions on community violence, structural inequality, and mental health disparities, with over 22 participants attending the event. The sessions highlighted the critical connections between policy, enforcement, and racial justice, providing an important platform for marginalized voices in the West Jackson area.
- **Tougaloo College:**
Emphasized economic empowerment in the agricultural sector by hosting panel discussions and fireside chats involving over 50 participants. These events aimed to address the historical and systemic barriers faced by Black farmers and agricultural stakeholders, reframing agriculture as a pathway to economic equity for BIPOC communities.
- **Neshoba Youth Coalition:**
Played a critical role in organizing the **60th Anniversary Freedom Summer** events, drawing in 564 participants from across the state. The events commemorated the civil rights movement while engaging youth and adults in conversations about racial healing, community building, and the ongoing fight for racial justice. The broad reach of these events demonstrated the power of history in mobilizing new generations to continue the work of social justice advocacy.
- **The Alluvial Collective:**
Focused on **Jackson’s water crisis**, facilitating symposia and webinars attended by over 100 individuals. These efforts highlighted the intersection of environmental racism and systemic neglect in Mississippi’s capital city. By addressing the water infrastructure crisis through a racial equity lens, the Alluvial Collective brought together key stakeholders to develop long-term solutions that prioritize racial justice and resilience.



MOVING FORWARD

As the TRHT initiative moves into the next phase, the focus will be on deepening the impact of these efforts through more targeted community interventions, strategic planning, and collaborative action. The success of this year's work lays the groundwork for expanded racial healing activities, deeper engagement with local communities, and a stronger emphasis on addressing systemic economic disparities. By continuing to build on the strengths of each partner and addressing the challenges encountered, the TRHT initiative is poised to further its goal of creating a more just, equitable, and inclusive Mississippi.

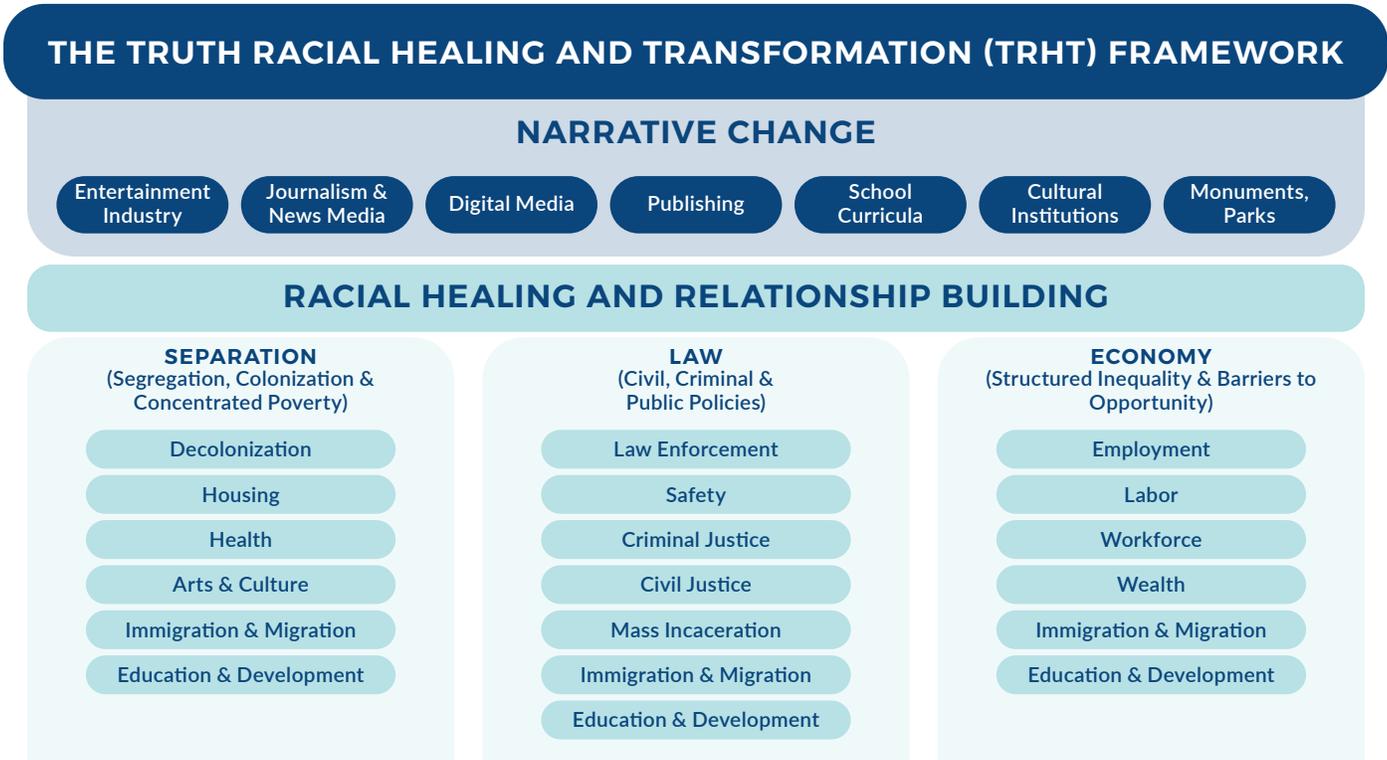
In this implementation year, TRHT partners will work collectively to chart a strategic path forward, leveraging the lessons learned from their work to date. This next phase will focus on capacity building for partners, more focused event planning, and a concerted effort to track progress through enhanced monitoring and evaluation systems. By continuing to engage stakeholders at every level and centering the work on the communities most affected by systemic racism, the TRHT initiative will advance its vision of racial healing, narrative change, and equitable economic opportunities across Mississippi.

THE MISSISSIPPI TRHT ALLIANCE: HOW WE GOT HERE

The Foundation for the Mid South (FMS) placed a great deal of focus on the TRHT framework providing a comprehensive strategy for unpacking root causes of inequality. By focusing on both narrative change and economic transformation, the Mississippi TRHT initiative fosters a holistic approach to racial healing. The community partner approach underscores the importance of collaboration among stakeholders—community organizations, local governments, educational institutions, and businesses—to achieve long-term, sustainable change.

COMMITMENT TO CHANGE

At its core, the Mississippi TRHT is committed to fostering an equitable and inclusive state where all individuals, regardless of race or ethnicity, have access to opportunities and are treated with dignity and respect. The narrative change and economy components of the TRHT framework are essential in addressing both the systemic barriers and the cultural perceptions that have perpetuated racial disparities in the state.



TRHT’S FOUNDATION: 2021-2022 FINDINGS

During the 2021-2022 implementation year, the TRHT initiative led by the Foundation for the Mid-South (FMS) set the foundation for transformative change through statewide engagement, data collection, and strategic planning. A mixed-method approach was utilized to ensure that a diverse array of voices was heard, with 240 surveys and 12 key informant interviews forming the basis of preliminary findings. In addition, a second survey of nearly 967 participants further expanded the insights gained, particularly in terms of understanding how Mississippians perceived racial inequality.

The evaluation report revealed that racial injustice remained a pressing issue for many residents. Approximately 47% of participants acknowledged the persistence of racial injustices, while others remained either unaware or unconvinced of its magnitude. Furthermore, a significant percentage of participants expressed a willingness to identify actions they could take to address racial injustices, highlighting the importance of collective responsibility in dismantling systemic racism. From these data points, FMS began to think about how best to expand on this work for further analysis using key partners to support reach and impact.

TRHT'S APPROACH: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND DATA-DRIVEN HEALING

The TRHT framework in Mississippi relied heavily on community engagement as a core component of its approach. Creating safe spaces for conversations about race was critical, and partners like Mission Mississippi, Millsaps College, Neshoba Youth Coalition and Jackson State University were instrumental in fostering these spaces. This evaluation methodology centers on building trust within communities and creating environments where difficult conversations could happen without fear of judgment. This inclusive approach was key to the success of the initiative.

One of the main challenges highlighted in the 2021-2022 evaluation report was the difficulty of recruiting participants for discussions about race in an online format due to the sensitivity of the topic. To address this, the TRHT initiative utilized a series of mini-grants to support community-based organizations, including churches, nonprofits, and Greek-letter organizations, to host localized discussions and events that encouraged deeper engagement. These mini-grants allowed for more intimate, in-person settings where participants could discuss the systemic and structural racism affecting their communities and the economy.

The **data collection process** from both surveys and interviews helped to map out the perceptions and experiences of Mississippi residents regarding race relations. More importantly, it highlighted the existing racial disparities in access to services such as housing, education, and employment, which were consistently flagged as barriers to racial equity. The findings underscored that while there was growing awareness of the need for change, many communities still felt disconnected from decision-makers and lacked the resources to advocate for themselves effectively. In the current year, the Mississippi TRHT sought to direct more intentional conversations and uncomfortable dialogues across the state using our partners as local facilitators. In the following sections, each of the participating partners are listed with their reported activities and impact.

MILLSAPS COLLEGE: ACTIVITIES AND IMPACT

INTRODUCTION

Millsaps College, located in Jackson, Mississippi, is a private liberal arts institution known for its commitment to academic excellence, community engagement, and the fostering of social justice and equity. Established in 1890, Millsaps has a long history of leadership in higher education within the state and region, offering a wide range of undergraduate and graduate programs aimed at cultivating critical thinking, creativity, and ethical leadership. The college's emphasis on developing well-rounded citizens who are prepared to engage in complex societal issues makes it an ideal partner in the Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation (TRHT) initiative.

The Millsaps Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation (TRHT) Alliance plays a critical role in the college's ongoing efforts to promote racial equity, healing, and narrative change. With the support funding awarded by the Foundation for the Mid-South (FMS) in September 2023-2024, the Mississippi TRHT Alliance has engaged the Millsaps campus and surrounding communities in a year of impactful programming, events, and initiatives. These activities have focused on dismantling structural racism, creating spaces for healing, and advancing conversations around economic equity.

The following provides a comprehensive summary of the work conducted by the Millsaps TRHT Alliance for the current funding year. It documents key activities and outcomes across three focus areas: Narrative Change, Racial Healing, and Promoting Equity (all under the tent of Economy: TRHT Framework). Through collaborations with faculty, students, community partners, and renowned authors, the Millsaps Alliance has been able to foster meaningful dialogue and contribute to the ongoing movement for racial healing and transformation.

KEY FOCUS AREAS

The following sections provide a detailed overview of the activities undertaken within each of these areas, alongside the outcomes and impacts observed over the course of the year.

1. Narrative Change: Shaping New Stories and Perspectives

The narrative change work focused on shifting dominant narratives that perpetuate racial inequities. Through strategic partnerships with artists, authors, and local institutions, the Millsaps Alliance created spaces for new stories to be told and for old ones to be reexamined

Changing the World with Stories: October 26, 2023

On October 26, 2023, in collaboration with Narrative 4 (N4), organized a day long event entitled **Changing the World with Stories**. This event brought together students, faculty, and community members to engage in a series of storytelling exercises and discussions centered on the power of narrative/storytelling.

N4 co-founders Colum McCann and Ishmael Beah led the event, guiding participants through various storytelling activities designed to broaden perspectives and foster empathy. Students from Millsaps College and Jackson State University (JSU) visited significant cultural landmarks, including the Eudora Welty House and the Medgar Evers Home, to reflect on the lives and legacies of these two iconic Mississippi figures.

Using Eudora Welty's short story *Where is the Voice Coming From?* Written on the night of Medgar Evers' assassination, as a starting point, participants explored the ways in which narratives shape social realities. The tours and subsequent discussions emphasized the contrasts and commonalities in the lives of Welty and Evers, challenging participants to consider the untold or overlooked stories that exist in the narratives of history.

Following the tours, students and faculty gathered at the Mississippi Museum of Art for a discussion led by McCann and Beah, where they reflected on their experiences and the role of storytelling in fostering racial healing. The day concluded with a story exchange at the COFO Education Center on JSU's campus. This exchange, similar in context to a racial healing circle, allowed participants to share personal stories, facilitating deeper understanding and connection across lines of difference. **Approximately 40 faculty, staff, and students participated, and feedback indicated that the experience was both emotionally impactful and intellectually stimulating.**

Storytelling and Panel Discussion

That evening, a panel discussion was held at Millsaps College featuring McCann, Beah, and local storytellers Talameika McBride and Ellen Ann Fentress. The discussion focused on how narrative change can be used as a tool for social transformation, with each panelist sharing personal stories and reflections on how their work contributes to shifting cultural narratives. **The panel was attended by over 50 guests from the Millsaps and JSU communities, marking a successful conclusion to the day's activities.**

Participants highlighted the importance of storytelling in fostering empathy and understanding, noting that the experience had encouraged them to think critically about their own narratives and the ways in which stories can be used to challenge structural inequities. This event, which was the product of collaboration between numerous partners, exemplified the power of narrative change to promote racial healing and social transformation.

2. Racial Healing: Fostering Dialogue and Connection

The funding also helped to support creating spaces for racial healing. Through a variety of events, workshops, and initiatives, the Alliance has provided opportunities for the Millsaps community to engage in conversations about race, identity, and healing.

Circles and Squares: Art Exhibition and Dialogue

In November 2023, the Millsaps Art Department, in collaboration with the TRHT Alliance, hosted an exhibition titled *In a World of Circles and Squares*. The exhibition, created by artist Michael Brohman, explored the ways in which white people have historically constructed and maintained systems of racial hierarchy. Using found objects, heat-branded cowhides, and other mediums, **Brohman's work confronted viewers with difficult questions about their own relationship to race and privilege.**

The TRHT Alliance provided reflection questions and prompts to guide viewers as they explored the exhibition. The questions encouraged participants to consider their personal biases and how they might contribute to systems of "inclusiveness" or "otherness." On November 30, 2023, the TRHT Alliance hosted an artist talk and racial healing circle dialogue, using the exhibition as a springboard for discussion. Approximately 30 participants attended, engaging in honest and, at times, uncomfortable conversations about race and privilege. The feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive, with many expressing gratitude for the opportunity to engage in such deep and meaningful dialogue.

The success of this event has led to plans for a similar exhibition in November 2024, featuring the work of Kurdish artist Huner Emim. The upcoming exhibition, titled *Manufactured Democracy and Testimonies from Mount Sinjar*, will continue the TRHT Alliance's commitment to using art as a medium for fostering dialogue and promoting racial healing.

National Day of Racial Healing: January 16, 2024

On January 16, 2024, the TRHT Alliance participated in the National Day of Racial Healing, an annual event held nationwide to encourage dialogue around racial healing. Due to weather and logistical challenges, the original campus-wide event was scaled down. However, Millsaps still held a successful event in the Student Center and Dining Hall, where students were asked to complete the sentence: "My hope for Millsaps is..." on table tents set up throughout the building.

Students were encouraged to engage in conversations with their peers about their hopes for racial healing and to discuss the prompts provided. These prompts sparked dialogue about the ways in which students experience race and identity on campus. While the event was smaller than planned, the TRHT Alliance noted that it successfully fostered meaningful conversations and allowed students to reflect on their personal roles in advancing racial healing at Millsaps.

In addition to the on-campus event, TRHT leaders Susan Womack and others participated in a virtual talk hosted by the **Foundation for the Mid-South** titled **From Listening to Power – A Virtual Talk on Mississippi's Elevation Through Racial Healing**. This event brought together leaders from across the state to discuss the importance of racial healing and strategies for advancing equity and inclusion in Mississippi.

3. Promoting Equity: Addressing Economic Disparities

As part of the statewide TRHT initiative, the Millsaps TRHT team collected data to understand and address the barriers to economic opportunity faced by majority and marginalized communities in Mississippi.

Economic Focus Groups and Surveys

In collaboration with Midtown Partners, a series of economic focus groups and surveys aimed at identifying the structural barriers that prevent African American residents of Jackson from achieving economic security. **These focus groups, held in the Midtown neighborhood, engaged 16 participants ranging in age from 30 to 65.** Participants were asked to reflect on their experiences with employment, housing, education, and financial services, providing valuable insights into the systemic challenges they face.

Based on the Midtown Focus Group held on August 7, 2024, several recurring themes emerged from participant discussions about economic opportunities, barriers, and their lived experiences. The following cites themes derived from the data recorded, highlighting key insights from the participants:

1. Generational Economic Challenges

Participants shared stories of economic struggles passed down from previous generations, highlighting how these challenges influenced their current financial stability. Note the following:

- **Poverty Mindset:** One participant reflected on how their mother's limited education shaped their own life: "My mom had a poverty mindset...We had to fight our way through school. I dropped out of school my senior year because of a poverty mindset I had."

- **Financial Literacy:** Another participant compared their upbringing and their knowledge of credit:

“My mom didn’t talk to me about credit and savings. The cycle continued into my adulthood when I began to learn about that..”

2. Economic Decision-Making and Limited Resources

The impact of limited financial resources on daily decision-making was a major theme. Participants expressed the difficult trade-offs they had to make due to their economic conditions.

- **Health vs. Financial Obligations:** A participant described the painful decision between healthcare and paying bills: “She gave me a medication prescription, and I was thinking, how am I going to pay for this? I was thinking medicine or utility bill.”
- **Family Size and Financial Freedom:** One participant discussed the conscious choice to limit family size due to financial constraints:

“I chose to have only one child because I didn’t want them to grow up like my upbringing.”

3. Access to Public Services and Systems

Participants shared frustrations with the difficulty of accessing public services, often due to systemic barriers that seemed designed to exclude those in need.

- **Childcare Access:** One participant shared a story of being denied childcare assistance because of their employment:

“It was almost like I was being punished for working a job, and my child was being punished.”

4. Community and Infrastructure Inequities

Several participants discussed the unequal distribution of resources and services between predominantly Black and white neighborhoods.

- **Infrastructure Neglect:** A participant spoke about the disparities between neighborhoods:

“Big disparity in support from council person for white neighborhood and Black neighborhood. We don’t get the same improvements. Water has come up to my third step and sewage from surrounding houses end up in my yard.”

- **Neglect in Public Services:** Another highlighted the lack of pharmacy access in their community: “With the closing of CVS and Walgreens, there is no place to get prescriptions filled. We need a pharmacy.”

5. Calls for Systemic Change and Equity

Finally, many participants expressed a desire for systemic changes that would address long-standing economic disparities, particularly racial inequities.

- **Historical Racism:** One participant emphasized the need for equity, not just equality:

“Black people are the only population that never got any kind of reparations. We don’t want equality. We want equity.”

- **Medicaid Expansion:** Another participant connected healthcare to economic security: “Not expanding Medicaid is a way to keep Black people down.”

The TRHT Alliance also administered an economic survey to members of the Millsaps community during the Juneteenth celebration. The survey asked participants to reflect on their personal experiences with economic mobility and access to resources, providing additional data that will be used to shape future efforts to address economic inequities on campus and in the broader community.



NEXT STEPS: ENGAGING WITH THE COMMUNITY AND EXPANDING THE MOVEMENT

Throughout the year, the TRHT Alliance has made significant progress in embedding the TRHT framework into the ethos and culture of Millsaps College and its surrounding community. The Alliance's work has been instrumental in fostering partnerships with local organizations, including Jackson State University, Tougaloo College, the Mississippi Museum of Art, and Midtown Partners. These partnerships have not only expanded the reach of the TRHT initiative but have also contributed to the broader movement for racial healing and equity in Mississippi.

One of the most notable developments has been the increased interest from campus departments and student organizations in collaborating with the TRHT Alliance. In particular, the Millsaps President's Task Force on Equity, Belonging, and Inclusion has begun integrating the TRHT framework into its strategic planning processes. This marks a significant shift in the campus culture as the TRHT Alliance moves from being a "sidebar" to becoming a central component of the college's equity and inclusion efforts.

The TRHT Alliance is also actively involved in statewide efforts to advance racial healing, serving as a member of the American Association of Colleges and Universities TRHT Campus Center network. Through this network, Millsaps has had the opportunity to learn from other institutions engaged in similar work, sharing successes and challenges as they work toward the common goal of dismantling structural racism and promoting healing.

MISSION MISSISSIPPI: ACTIVITIES AND IMPACT

INTRODUCTION

Mission Mississippi is a faith-based organization that has been at the forefront of fostering racial reconciliation and healing across Mississippi for over 31 years. Rooted in the Gospel message, their mission is to encourage grace and unity across racial lines by promoting honest dialogue, building relationships, and addressing systemic racial and economic disparities. By convening diverse groups, including churches, community organizations, and business leaders, Mission Mississippi creates safe spaces for meaningful conversations on race, truth, and reconciliation. In partnership with the Foundation for the Mid South (FMS), Mission Mississippi organized a series of “One Community” conversations aimed at addressing racial disparities and economic challenges in Mississippi through the framework of the Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation (TRHT) initiative. The following outlines key activities, outcomes, and impact of Mission Mississippi’s TRHT-related efforts from September 2023 to August 2024, focusing on three communities: Biloxi, Picayune, and Hattiesburg.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1. Engagement with Key Stakeholders

Starting in September 2023, Mission Mississippi began its engagement with FMS and other TRHT grantees to implement Mississippi TRHT grant activities. Key accomplishments in this phase included:

Advisory Committee Meetings: Mission Mississippi’s team participated in several advisory committee meetings with the FMS to plan and execute the TRHT grant activities.

Development of Data Collection Instruments: To ensure a structured and effective approach to the community dialogues, the team developed data collection instruments and created a protocol to guide the “One Community” conversations. These tools were essential for capturing both qualitative and quantitative data from participants.

One-on-One Meetings with TRHT Evaluators: The team engaged with TRHT evaluators to review their plans and discuss survey designs, ensuring the integrity of data collection and the robustness of their approach.

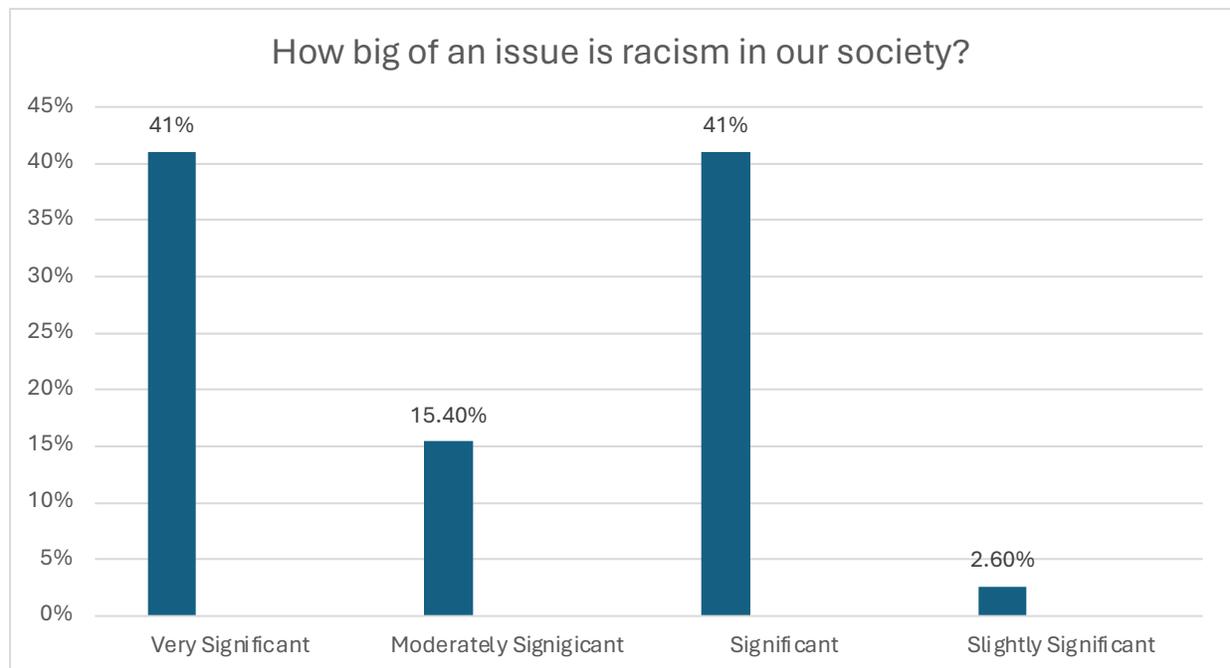
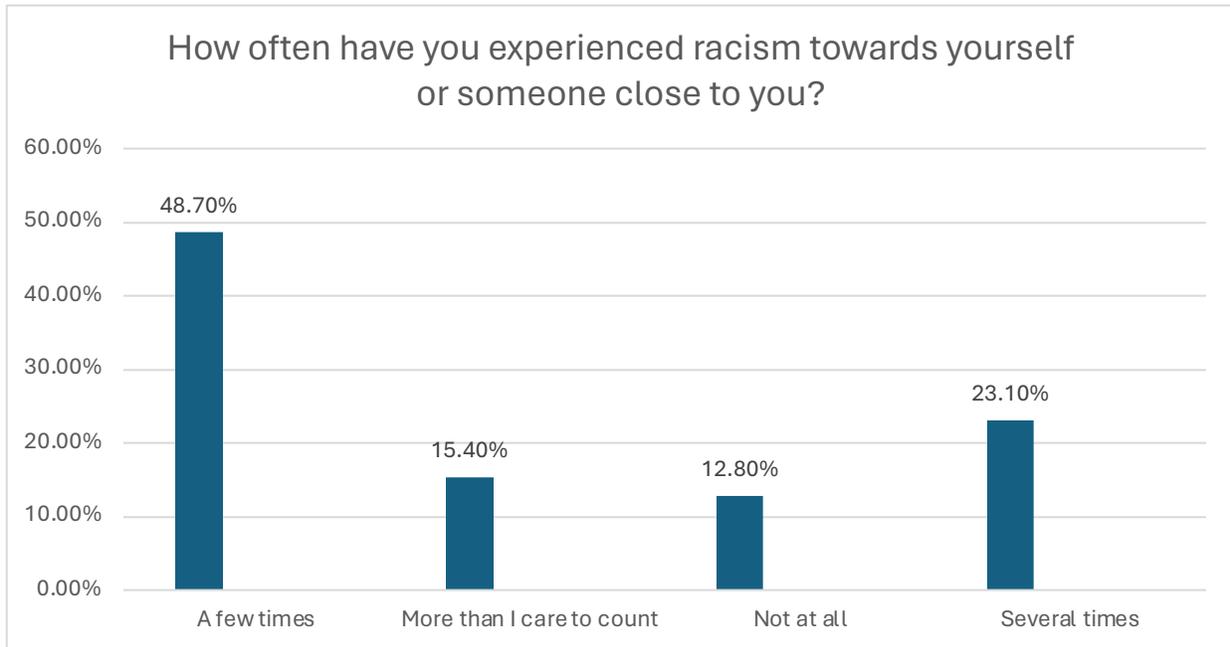
2. Prominent Leadership Participation

On January 16, 2024, President Brian Crawford represented Mission Mississippi during the “National Day of Racial Healing” in a virtual panel titled From Listening to Power: A Virtual Talk on Mississippi’s Elevation Through Racial Healing. As a key panelist, Crawford addressed Mississippi’s racial wounds and the need for healing to foster equal economic opportunities for all.

3. One Community Conversations: Community Engagement

In preparation for the “One Community” conversations, Mission Mississippi organized multiple meetings with regional leaders to ensure diverse representation and engagement from local communities. Between April and May 2024, Mission Mississippi held meetings with key stakeholders such as the MS Gulf Coast Chamber of Commerce, United Way of Southeast MS, Hattiesburg Area Development Partnership, and Hattiesburg High School. These engagements helped lay the groundwork for the community conversations by rallying local support and involvement.

To increase engagement, the Mission Mississippi team scheduled virtual planning meetings and outreach sessions for local officials and churches, encouraging their participation in the upcoming dialogues.



EXECUTION OF “ONE COMMUNITY” CONVERSATIONS

The core accomplishment of this initiative was the successful execution of three “One Community” listening sessions held on July 16, 18, and 20, 2024, in Picayune, Hattiesburg, and Biloxi, respectively. These conversations brought together community members, local leaders, and faith organizations to engage in meaningful dialogue about race, economic inequity, and solutions to systemic issues.

Date	Location	Total # of participants
7/16/2024	Picayune (Pearl River)	14
7/18/2024	Hattiesburg	20
7/20/2024	Biloxi	17
		51 Total

These conversations were particularly important as the Mississippi TRHT sought a statewide reach with the coastal area included as one of its regions. In terms of racial demographics, Coastal Mississippi has a predominantly White population, comprising about 70% of residents, while African Americans account for approximately 22%. Other racial groups, including Hispanic or Latino, Asian, and Native American populations, are also represented but in smaller numbers.

Participant Composition:

- **Racial Breakdown:** 71.8% Caucasian/White and 28.2% African American/Black.
- **Gender:** 59% male, 41% female.
- **Age Distribution:** Most participants (56.4%) were aged 55 and older, with representation from younger age groups as well.
- **Household Income:** 31.4% of participants had household incomes over \$100,000, and 20% reported incomes between \$50,000-\$74,999.
- **Educational Attainment:** Over 53.8% of participants held graduate degrees, highlighting the educated nature of the group.

During the community dialogues, guiding questions were used to prompt deeper discussions on race, reconciliation, and economic disparities. Participants were encouraged to explore what surprised or concerned them about the results and what gave them hope. These probing questions helped frame the conversations around the lived experiences of participants and the barriers they face in achieving racial healing.

Many participants expressed surprise at the extent of division within the church and the economic inequities tied to race. Concerns were raised about the persistence of systemic racism in institutions, while others were encouraged by the growing awareness of these issues and the willingness of community members to engage in honest dialogue.

Key outcomes from these conversations are detailed in the following sections:

KEY THEMES FROM THE “ONE COMMUNITY” DIALOGUES

Several recurring themes emerged from the community conversations, which highlighted the structural barriers that perpetuate racial and economic disparities:

- **Systemic Inequities and Leadership Deficits**

Participants consistently pointed out the lack of leadership in addressing community needs. They highlighted the disconnect between elected officials and the people they serve, leading to distrust and ineffective governance. These leadership deficits were seen as central barriers to progress in areas such as education, housing, and employment.

- **Social and Economic Disconnection**

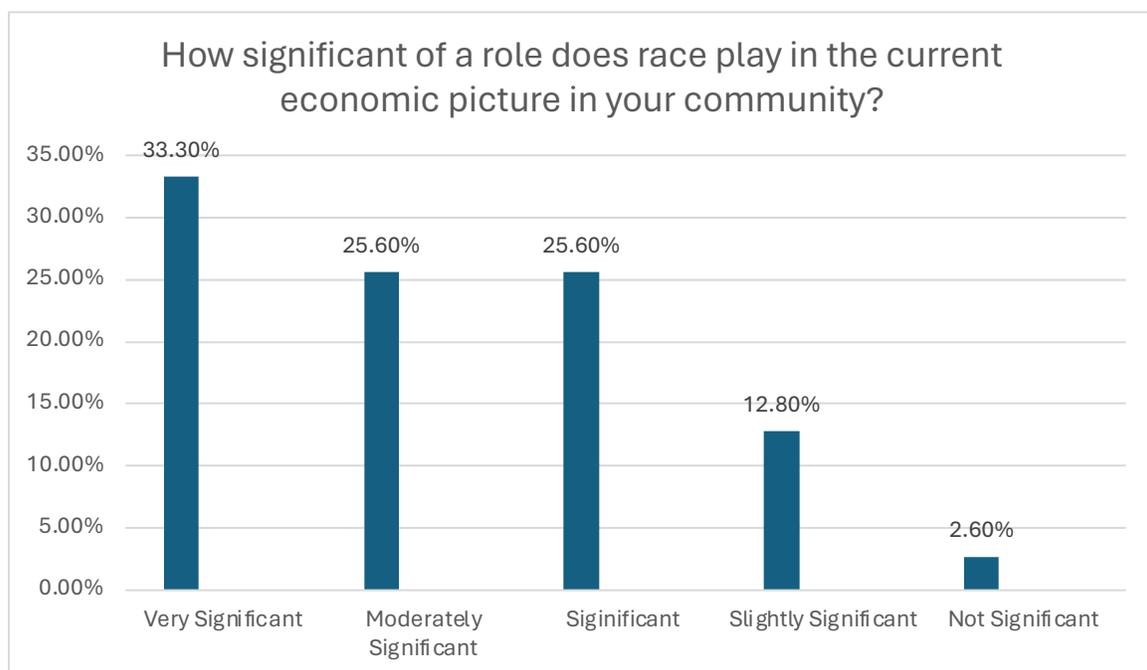
Participants described social fragmentation and apathy within their communities. For example, **one participant emphasized that people were focused on day-to-day survival, which impeded their ability to engage in long-term planning and collective problem-solving.** This disconnection, particularly along racial lines, was seen as a significant barrier to racial healing.

- **Historical and Cultural Challenges**

Participants also recognized the role of historical racism and cultural oppression in shaping present-day challenges. **One participant mentioned how religious oppression and generational disparities in educational opportunities continue to create systemic disadvantages for African American communities.**

- **Information and Accessibility Gaps**

A recurring theme in the dialogues was the lack of access to critical information and services. **Participants expressed frustration with navigating complex systems like public healthcare and housing assistance and emphasized the need for better communication and support to help them overcome these barriers.**



PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON ETHNICITY AND EXPERIENCES WITH RACISM

Another important survey question explored how often participants think about their own ethnicity and how it shapes the way they are perceived by others. **The responses varied, with many African American participants noting that they frequently reflect on their racial identity due to their lived experiences of discrimination and marginalization. White participants, on the other hand, were less likely to think about their race regularly, which highlights the different ways in which racial identity impacts individuals depending on their societal position.** Additionally, when asked how often they had experienced explicit racism toward themselves or those close to them, a significant number of African American participants reported frequent occurrences of racism. These findings brought to light the different realities experienced by various racial groups and underscored the need for open discussions on race.

DIVISION WITHIN THE AMERICAN CHURCH

Participants were asked to reflect on the state of racial division within the American church. **Many respondents agreed that the church remains racially divided in both practice and participation. Several participants expressed concern about the church's historical role in perpetuating racial divides, while others noted that churches often fail to adequately address racial issues within their congregations.** This theme became a focal point in the discussions, as participants sought to explore the church's potential role in healing these divisions and leading racial reconciliation efforts.

THE ROLE OF RACE IN ECONOMIC INEQUALITY

The final survey question focused on the significance of race in the current economic picture of their communities. **Participants overwhelmingly acknowledged that race plays a substantial role in determining economic outcomes, particularly in terms of access to job opportunities, housing, and financial services.** This response highlighted the economic dimension of racial disparities and reinforced the need for solutions that address both racial and economic equity.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS AND VISION FOR THE FUTURE

After identifying the key barriers, participants were asked to envision a community where these challenges had been addressed. Participants noted the following:

Educational Empowerment

One of the most prominent themes to emerge from the discussions was the need for increased access to education, particularly within marginalized communities that have historically been underserved. Participants underscored the transformative power of education in fostering both individual growth and broader community development. They recognized that providing young people with guidance and support is critical in ensuring they achieve their educational and career goals. As a result, **mentorship programs were proposed as an essential strategy to help students navigate educational pathways and make informed decisions about their future.** Mentorship would not only provide students with role models but also help them cultivate skills and confidence, ensuring that they are well-prepared for both academic success and career advancement.

Also, participants emphasized the need for enhanced teacher compensation and support. Many argued that improving the quality of education starts with investing in educators who play a pivotal role in shaping young minds. **Offering teachers competitive salaries, professional development opportunities, and access to resources would enable them to deliver higher-quality instruction and, in turn, positively influence student outcomes.** To complement this, participants also discussed the importance of improving access to technology and educational resources. In today's increasingly digital world, having access to the internet, learning tools, and tutoring services is essential for student success.

Many participants noted that, despite living in increasingly diverse societies, many communities remain deeply divided along racial lines. To break down these divisions, participants advocated for local initiatives designed to celebrate diversity and encourage collaboration across racial boundaries.

They envisioned initiatives that could include community events, cultural festivals, and forums where people from various racial and ethnic backgrounds come together to share their experiences and learn from one another. These gatherings would create opportunities for dialogue and understanding, while also highlighting the value that diversity brings to a community. Furthermore, participants stressed the importance of leaders prioritizing an inclusive decision-making processes. In their vision, community leaders would actively engage all segments of the population, ensuring that the voices of historically marginalized groups are heard and considered in policy and decision-making processes. By involving a broad spectrum of people in local governance and community planning, participants believed that leaders could promote unity and create a more inclusive and equitable society.

Economic Opportunity and Community Wealth

Economic empowerment was identified as central to any effort aimed at transforming communities. **Participants cited that creating pathways for individuals and families to build wealth was essential for overcoming systemic inequities.** Expanding access to well-paying jobs and opportunities for career advancement was seen as a critical component of this transformation. **Participants highlighted the need for targeted initiatives that would provide training and resources to help people develop the skills necessary to secure higher-paying jobs, particularly in industries that offer long-term stability and growth.** Furthermore, they called for efforts to address systemic disinvestment in under-resourced communities. They believe that many communities have suffered from a lack of investment in infrastructure, transportation, and local businesses, which has contributed to persistent economic disparities.

Leadership and Civic Engagement

Participants also highlighted the **importance of voter education and civic engagement** as essential tools for holding leaders accountable. They called for programs that educate citizens about their voting rights, encourage political participation, and increase awareness of how local and national policies impact their communities. Through active civic engagement, participants believed that communities could foster more accountable leadership and drive meaningful change. Empowering individuals to engage in the political process would ensure that their voices are heard and that leaders are responsive to the needs of all citizens, especially those who have historically been excluded from decision-making processes.

JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY: INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE AND RACE RELATIONS

The Institute for Social Justice and Race Relations (ISJRR) at Jackson State University (JSU) is dedicated to addressing issues of social justice, racial equity, and community engagement. Through research, public forums, and educational initiatives, the ISJRR works to foster dialogue about race and promote understanding across diverse communities. Its focus is on examining the systemic roots of racial inequality and developing strategies for racial healing, particularly within Mississippi. By linking academic research with real-world applications, the institute plays a pivotal role in shaping policy discussions and promoting social change. The ISJRR also engages students, faculty, and community members in efforts to dismantle racism and advance equity through truth-telling, education, and community collaboration.

The following points outline their reach, activities, and impact as a partner in the Mississippi TRHT work.

LISTENING SESSION WITH COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS ON “UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMMUNITY VIOLENCE AND STRUCTURAL INEQUALITY” DECEMBER 15, 2023.

The listening session, held on December 15, 2023, at the COFO Building in Jackson, Mississippi, brought together 22 participants, including residents of West Jackson, representatives from various community organizations, and Jackson State University faculty, staff, and students. The event aimed to explore the relationships between community violence and structural inequality. Dr. ConSandra McNeil welcomed the attendees, and Professor Joshua Cotton moderated the session. The discussions revolved around critical themes such as inequitable law enforcement, disempowerment, media narratives, access to mental health care, and the role of racism in structural inequality.

INEQUITABLE LAW ENFORCEMENT AND STRUCTURAL BARRIERS

Participants voiced concerns over the inequitable design, interpretation, and enforcement of laws, particularly those that disproportionately affect African American communities. A long-time resident of West Jackson shared an example of how parking regulations criminalize residents, as many homes in the area were built before garages became common. The prohibition of on-street parking and fines for parking in yards make it difficult for residents to comply, perpetuating resentment and distrust toward local authorities. Additionally, participants discussed how the criminalization of behavior linked to untreated mental illness disproportionately impacts African Americans, particularly in terms of inequitable charging practices and sentencing, which limit future employment opportunities.



DISEMPOWERMENT AND ALIENATION FROM POLICYMAKERS

Another key theme was the pervasive sense of disempowerment stemming from alienation from policymakers and decision-makers. **Participants expressed frustration with the lack of attention to their communities' needs, indicating that policies are often made without consulting or considering those most affected.** Examples included the perceived concentration of pawnshops in African American neighborhoods and the refusal to expand Medicaid. Additionally, community members highlighted how decisions made in routine settings, such as school board meetings, have significant consequences for communities of color, but those affected often lack the opportunity or knowledge to engage in these spaces.

MEDIA NARRATIVES AND THE PORTRAYAL OF AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITIES

Participants expressed deep frustration with the media's portrayal of Jackson, a predominantly African American city, as crime-ridden. Many argued that crime exists in neighboring municipalities, but the media disproportionately highlights crimes in Jackson. Moreover, some participants noted that crimes committed by individuals from outside Jackson are often attributed to the city. **Participants felt that these media narratives perpetuate harmful stereotypes of black criminality, which in turn reinforce racism.** Some suggested using data to counter these narratives, while others emphasized the importance of African Americans focusing on positive community portrayals. Additionally, there was recognition that younger people engage less with traditional media, and that efforts to address these issues must extend into social media platforms.

ACCESS TO CULTURALLY SENSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH CARE

Access to culturally sensitive mental health care was a recurring concern. Several participants noted that African American who experience trauma and racism are often minimized by non-African American mental health professionals, leading to a lack of trust in these services. The state's refusal to expand Medicaid further exacerbates access issues. **A nurse practitioner provided a powerful example of how African American patients are disproportionately diagnosed with conditions like schizophrenia, which carry lifelong stigmas and require heavy medication, compared to similar white patients who may be diagnosed with treatable conditions like drug-induced psychosis.**

STRUCTURAL RACISM AS A ROOT CAUSE OF INEQUALITY

The overarching theme of the session was that structural inequality stems from systemic racism. **Participants strongly believed that policies perpetuating inequality are often motivated by the desire to uphold white supremacy or racial animus against African Americans.** They argued that tackling structural inequality requires addressing racism directly, as many inequitable practices are deeply rooted in racist ideologies. Without confronting and disrupting racism, structural inequality will continue to thrive in various forms.



"RACIAL HEALING VIA THE DECOLONIZATION OF THE EXPRESSIVE ARTS" EVENT REPORT

The event titled "Racial Healing Via the Decolonization of the Expressive Arts", held on November 28, 2023, at Jackson State University, was an important discussion aimed at exploring how decolonization within the arts can contribute to racial healing. **With approximately 60 in-person attendees and 24 online participants,** the event featured prominent speakers from academia and the arts: Dr. Kelly Norman-Ellis (Associate Professor of English, Chicago State University), Dr. Joyce McCall (Assistant Professor of Music Education, Arizona State University), and Mr. Harold Hart (Owner of Elim's Art Concepts and Decorative Designs). The session was co-moderated by Dr. Lisa Beckley-Roberts and Dr. Ebony Lumumba from Jackson State University.



PANEL DISCUSSION AND THEMES

1. Personal Motivation and Experiences

The panelists emphasized their personal experiences as both students and professionals in the arts as motivations for joining the discussion. They underscored how systemic racial biases, and the colonial history of arts education and professional fields impacted their artistic development and professional trajectories. This intersection of racial identity and artistic expression was highlighted as a powerful mechanism for healing and addressing systemic racism.

2. Decolonization of Expressive Arts

Decolonizing the expressive arts emerged as a central theme, where panelists discussed the need to rethink traditional Eurocentric approaches to artistic education, representation, and critique. **They identified decolonization as a method to create “brave spaces” for more inclusive discussions on race, artistic expression, and cultural narratives.** The goal was to shift from spaces where dominant narratives continue to suppress underrepresented voices toward an inclusive reimagining of the arts, which embraces diversity in its many forms.

3. Impact on Education and Careers

Students and professionals alike reported learning about methods for discussing decolonization with friends, family, and colleagues. There was a focus on ensuring that culturally responsive creations and performances are accessible and appreciated by diverse audiences. **Attendees were also introduced to strategies for addressing these issues in academic and professional settings, including how to manage unconscious bias, stereotype threat, and covert discrimination in arts spaces.**

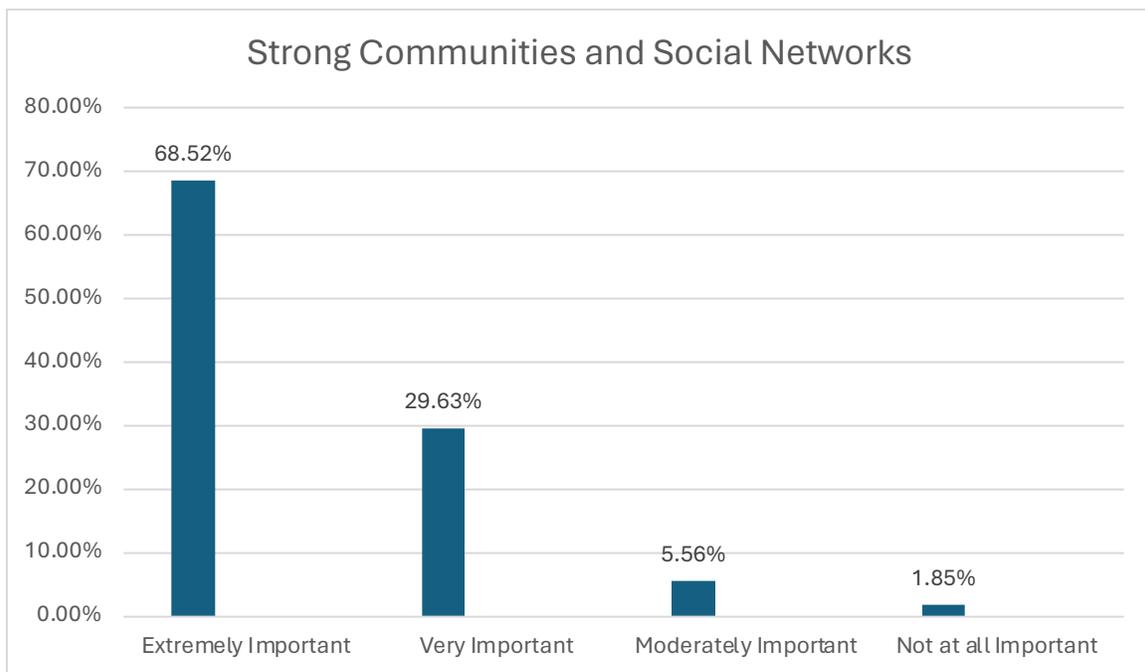
Panelists and participants acknowledged that the decolonization of the expressive arts could lead to positive changes in arts education and career opportunities for communities of color. They noted that openness to decolonization promotes the inclusion of varying viewpoints with respect to race, gender, disability, and other forms of identity, contributing to more effective problem-solving and more inclusive artistic representation.

DATA POINTS ECONOMIC BARRIERS SURVEY

A Likert scale survey was used to assess selected indicators and its impact on economic opportunities. The following data points will display descriptive data responses from selected survey questions:

“Strong Communities and Social Networks” as a factor in removing barriers to economic opportunity, **68.52% of respondents rated it as “Extremely Important,”** while 29.63% rated it as “Very Important.” This overwhelming majority (almost 98%) indicates a broad consensus on the critical role social networks play in economic advancement. Strong communities provide essential support systems, helping individuals access job opportunities, resources, and information, particularly in underserved or marginalized populations. These networks often function as informal safety nets, offering mentorship, job leads, and emotional support, which collectively enhance economic resilience.

Only 5.56% of respondents rated this factor as “Moderately Important,” suggesting that while they see value in community bonds, they may prioritize other structural factors, such as policy reform or education, in overcoming economic challenges. Interestingly, 1.85% of respondents rated it as “Not at All Important,” an outlier perspective that might reflect a belief in more individual-driven solutions or the importance of broader systemic change.



“Affordable and Quality Housing” in removing barriers to economic opportunity, **61.82% of respondents rated this factor as “Extremely Important.”** Access to affordable and quality housing is foundational for individuals and families to establish a stable economic footing. When housing is unaffordable or of poor quality, it creates financial stress and limits other opportunities, such as education, job growth, and healthcare.

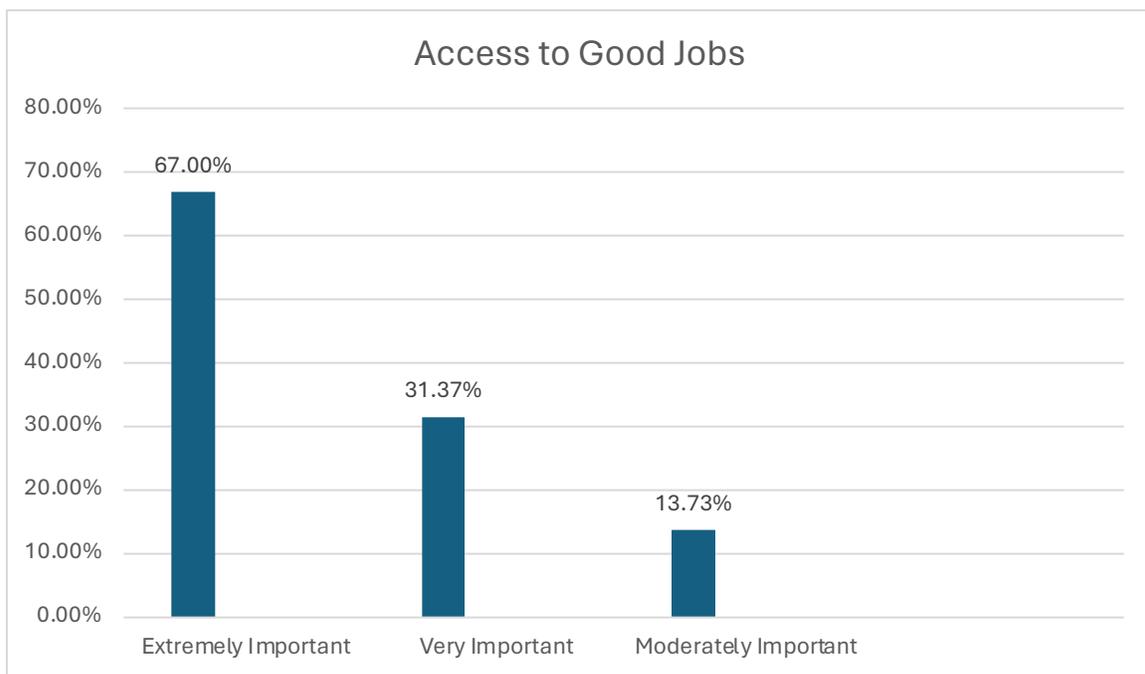
An additional 34.55% of respondents rated housing as “Very Important,” further emphasizing that nearly all respondents view it as a key component in economic advancement. The combination of these two categories (96.37%) illustrates that there is strong recognition of housing as a crucial element in overcoming economic barriers.

A smaller group, 5.45%, rated this factor as “Moderately Important,” possibly indicating that while they value housing, they might consider other factors like employment or education to be more pressing. Lastly, 3.64% of respondents rated it as “Slightly Important,” representing a minority view that may reflect either confidence in their housing situation or the belief that other systemic changes are more critical.

“Access to Good Jobs” in removing barriers to economic opportunity, **67% of respondents rated it as “Extremely Important.”** This strong majority indicates that there is a sense that employment plays in economic stability and upward mobility. Access to stable, well-paying jobs is widely viewed as a foundational element for financial security, as it directly affects income, benefits, and long-term career growth opportunities.

Another 31.37% of respondents rated this factor as “Very Important,” indicating that nearly all participants (over 98%) recognize the significance of employment in addressing economic disparities. These combined responses reflect a broad consensus that securing good jobs is essential for individuals to break out of cycles of poverty and build sustainable economic futures.

A smaller portion, 13.73%, rated job access as “Moderately Important,” suggesting that while they see employment as valuable, they may prioritize other factors such as housing, education, or policy reform in overcoming economic challenges.



NESHOBA YOUTH COALITION: ACTIVITIES AND IMPACT

The Neshoba Youth Coalition is a youth-led organization based in Philadelphia, Mississippi, dedicated to promoting social justice, racial healing, and community engagement. The coalition plays a critical role in empowering young people to take leadership in addressing issues of racial inequality and fostering unity in their communities. Through educational programs, workshops, and community events, the Neshoba Youth Coalition engages youth in conversations about civil rights, racial equity, and leadership development, ensuring that the next generation is prepared to continue the work of social justice advocacy.

The coalition's importance to the TRHT (Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation) alliance lies in its commitment to fostering narrative change, promoting racial healing, and building stronger, more inclusive communities. **By engaging youth in leadership roles and promoting intergenerational dialogue, the Neshoba Youth Coalition helps to advance the TRHT framework's goals of transforming communities and addressing structural racism.** Their work ensures that future leaders are equipped with the knowledge, tools, and commitment to create lasting change in the pursuit of racial equity.

REPORTED ACTIVITIES

The 60th Anniversary Freedom Summer Events in Philadelphia, Mississippi, were monumental in commemorating two significant milestones in the civil rights movement: the 60th anniversary of Freedom Summer and the 20th anniversary of the Philadelphia Coalition. Hosted by the Neshoba Youth Coalition, in collaboration with Mississippi Humanities Council, Visit Mississippi, and Mississippi TRHT, the events were held to honor past civil rights heroes, celebrate the progress made in racial equity, and promote ongoing narrative change in Philadelphia and Neshoba County.

These events highlighted the pivotal role that Freedom Summer played in the civil rights movement, bringing national attention to the fight for racial equality, particularly in Mississippi. They also celebrated the achievements of the Philadelphia Coalition, which has worked over two decades to foster racial healing and social justice in the local community. **The celebration's main focus was on engaging multiple generations, particularly the youth—in understanding the history of racial inequality and civil rights while working towards a more inclusive future.**

The two-day event featured key activities such as the Freedom Summer Marker Placement and the Freedom Summer Program at the Historic Ellis Theatre. **The events drew approximately 564 people, with diverse racial and age representation.** The crowd included local and national civil rights leaders, politicians, community members, and youth from across the state. The significance of these events was reflected in the powerful speeches, musical performances, and the emotional connection participants expressed to the history and future of racial healing in the region.

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

Day 1: Freedom Summer Marker Placement

The first day of the 60th Anniversary Freedom Summer Events featured the **Freedom Summer Marker Placement, which drew a diverse crowd of around 138 participants**. The placement of the marker was a symbolic act aimed at remembering the sacrifices of those who fought for racial equality during the Freedom Summer of 1964. It also served as a permanent tribute to the courage and resilience of civil rights activists in Philadelphia, Mississippi, while reaffirming the community's commitment to promoting racial equity.

Civil rights icons David Dennis and Hezekiah Watkins, who were key figures during the Freedom Summer movement, attended the marker placement. Their presence, along with that of local city officials, including the mayor, underscored the event's historical significance. The speeches delivered by these leaders evoked powerful memories of the civil rights struggle and reflected on how far the community has come in terms of racial reconciliation. Their reflections also emphasized the continued relevance of racial equity today, inspiring the audience to carry on the fight for justice.

The marker placement represented more than just a memorial to the past—it symbolized hope for future generations. By creating a permanent reminder of the civil rights movement in the heart of Philadelphia, the community reaffirmed its commitment to racial healing and social justice.

Day 2: Freedom Summer Program at the Historic Ellis Theatre

The second day of the celebration culminated in the Freedom Summer Program held at the Historic Ellis Theatre. **This event was attended by approximately 426 people**, including local leaders such as the mayor and former Secretary of State Dick Molpus, alongside youth from across the state. The program featured a stirring performance by a 45-voice multi-racial community choir, showing the event's spirit of unity and collaboration. The choir's performance was a powerful representation of the progress made in bridging racial divides and bringing the community together.

The keynote speakers for the program were retired U.S. Assistant Attorney Ronald Silver and U.S. Congressman Bennie Thompson. Both delivered inspirational speeches that reflected on the past achievements of the civil rights movement while urging continued advocacy for racial equity. Congressman Thompson's address was particularly moving, as he spoke about the importance of community building and civil rights activism in the fight for justice. His speech resonated deeply with the audience, many of whom expressed renewed commitment to working for change in their communities.

The program's mix of musical performances and speeches reinforced the importance of both reflecting on history and looking towards the future. The event emphasized the need to engage younger generations in civil rights advocacy, ensuring that the legacy of Freedom Summer continues to inspire new leaders in the fight for equality.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS DURING THE REPORTING PERIOD

In addition to the 60th Anniversary Freedom Summer Events, the Neshoba Youth Coalition made several significant accomplishments during the reporting period, contributing to their ongoing mission of promoting youth leadership, civil rights education, and community engagement. These activities were aligned with the TRHT (Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation) framework and aimed at fostering long-term social justice initiatives.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT WORKSHOPS

Over the reporting period, the Neshoba Youth Coalition conducted 15 youth engagement workshops across three cities: Philadelphia, Cleveland, and Jackson, Mississippi. These workshops, which drew a total of 430 youth participants, were focused on leadership development, civil rights history, community engagement, and the TRHT framework. By targeting young people, the workshops sought to educate and empower the next generation of leaders in the ongoing fight for racial equity and community building.

KEY TOPICS COVERED:

- **Educational Equity:**
Discussing the importance of equal access to quality education and the role of education in promoting economic and social mobility.
- **Voting Rights:**
Emphasizing the significance of civic engagement and the fight for voting rights as a cornerstone of the civil rights movement.
- **Leadership Development:**
Providing tools and strategies to help young people become effective leaders in their communities.
- **Community Building with a TRHT Framework:**
Teaching participants how to foster healing and unity within their communities using the TRHT framework.
- **Legacy of Local Civil Rights Leaders and History:**
Ensuring that young people are aware of the historical context of civil rights struggles in Mississippi and the contributions of local leaders.

These workshops were vital in engaging youth in conversations about racial justice, leadership, and civic responsibility. **The participation of 430 young people highlights the success of these initiatives in reaching the next generation and equipping them with the knowledge and tools to lead their communities toward positive change.**

COMMUNITY OUTREACH INITIATIVES

In addition to youth workshops, **the Neshoba Youth Coalition organized two community racial healing circles, one in Philadelphia and one in Cleveland, Mississippi.** These events drew 58 participants and were designed to create a safe space for open discussions about race, structural inequality, and community healing.

The healing circles aimed to bridge divides within the community by encouraging honest dialogue about difficult issues. Participants were encouraged to share their personal experiences with racial injustice and explore ways to foster unity and healing. These circles were not only therapeutic but also educational, as they allowed participants to reflect on the historical context of racial inequality while identifying pathways toward reconciliation and progress.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

The Neshoba Youth Coalition also partnered with the Mississippi Community of Practice to host a youth educational equity conference. This conference, which included guest speakers from the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) and state legislators, was attended by 10 youth participants.

Participants learned about the importance of advocating for educational reform, particularly in communities of color where disparities in funding and resources have long been a barrier to academic success. The presence of state legislators provided an opportunity for direct engagement with policymakers, enabling youth to better understand how government decisions impact educational opportunities in their communities.

ADULT ATTENDEES' COMMENTS

“The events were a powerful reminder of our history and the progress we’ve made.” – Darryl Young

“These events have renewed my commitment to promoting racial equity.” – Brian Jones

“The multi-racial choir was a beautiful representation of unity.” – Michelle Richardson

“These events brought our community together in a meaningful way.” – Princess Dawkins

“Seeing so many young people engaged was inspiring.” – Marilyn Burns

TOUGALOO COLLEGE: ACTIVITIES AND IMPACT

Tougaloo College, founded in 1869, is one of Mississippi's most historic institutions of higher learning, known for its deep ties to the civil rights movement and its enduring commitment to social justice and racial equality. As an HBCU (Historically Black College or University), Tougaloo has long been a leader in educating African American students and fostering leadership in the fight for racial and economic equity. The college's legacy includes being a safe haven for civil rights activists during the 1960s, hosting pivotal meetings, and nurturing leaders who played critical roles in the struggle for racial justice in Mississippi and beyond.

Tougaloo's unique history and dedication to racial justice make it a vital partner in the Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation (TRHT) initiative. The TRHT framework is centered on confronting and dismantling the belief in racial hierarchies while addressing the systemic inequities that have shaped communities of color. Tougaloo College's long-standing commitment to these principles aligns perfectly with the goals of the TRHT initiative. The college's rich legacy in civil rights advocacy, positions it as powerful force in advancing the TRHT's goals of narrative change, racial healing, and economic transformation.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Tougaloo College has been deeply involved in TRHT initiative, with a particular focus on the agricultural sector. **The work done through the Tougaloo Agri-Growth Initiative (TAGI) under the TRHT framework emphasized the intersection of racial healing, economic empowerment, and narrative change.** The following section offers a comprehensive summary of their efforts and key accomplishments as outlined in reports provided and participant statements.

TRHT Framework and Agricultural Focus

Tougaloo College's work under the TRHT initiative centers on addressing racial inequities within the agricultural sector, a space historically marked by systemic barriers for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities. As a TRHT partner, data points included hosting several significant events aimed at engaging BIPOC stakeholders in discussions on systemic barriers, workforce inequities, and strategies for sustainable development.

Key Events:

- **Rooted in Resilience: Blacks in Agriculture Fireside Chat:** This event was designed to collect valuable insights from BIPOC farmers and students on the challenges they face, as well as possible solutions to promote inclusivity and resilience in the agricultural sector. The event, held on June 27, 2024, was marked by strong student leadership and engagement, with student moderators playing a central role in facilitating discussions.
- **Panel Discussion on TRHT and Agriculture:** Following the fireside chat, the TRHT panel discussion focused on historical and contemporary barriers faced by BIPOC stakeholders in agriculture. The panel featured five key speakers, including student leaders, who shared experiences and deliberated on strategies for collective decision-making and economic sustainability within the agricultural sector.

Narrative Change: Shifting Perceptions in Agriculture

A key component of the TRHT framework is narrative change, which Tougaloo College has successfully incorporated into its work. The participant statements from various events emphasize how storytelling and the reframing of agriculture's history for BIPOC communities can contribute to healing and empowerment. Reports provided the following examples:

- **Challenging Historical Narratives:** Participants highlighted the outdated and negative image of agriculture for many in BIPOC communities, shaped by the historical exploitation of Black labor in farming. Efforts to reframe agriculture as a space for empowerment and ownership were seen as a key strategy for boosting Black communities.
- **Empowering Future Generations:** Involving students in agriculture has been pivotal in promoting diversity within the sector. As highlighted by panelists and participants, students bring fresh energy, new ideas, and innovative solutions that are essential to making agriculture more inclusive and sustainable.

KEY TAKEAWAY: THESE NARRATIVES AIM TO TRANSFORM HOW BIPOC COMMUNITIES PERCEIVE AGRICULTURE, FROM ONE THAT IS OFTEN ASSOCIATED WITH HISTORICAL TRAUMA TO ONE THAT REPRESENTS POTENTIAL ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE.

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT THROUGH AGRICULTURE

Tougaloo College's TRHT initiative places a strong emphasis on the economic transformation aspect of the framework, particularly through its work in agriculture. The focus on creating economic opportunities for BIPOC farmers and communities is a direct response to the systemic barriers that have historically excluded them from wealth-building opportunities in this sector.

KEY POINTS ON ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT:

- **Local Food Economies:** Several participants in the TRHT events emphasized the importance of local food economies for Black communities, noting that growing local food keeps money within the community, creates jobs, and improves access to healthier food options. This focus aligns with the TRHT framework's goal of fostering economic resilience by promoting locally owned, BIPOC-led businesses and cooperatives.
- **Mentorship and Workforce Development:** Mentorship was highlighted as a critical component of economic empowerment. The presence of mentors who understand the unique challenges faced by BIPOC farmers helps guide younger generations into leadership roles and prepares them for long-term success in the agricultural industry.

STUDENT LEADERSHIP AND CAPACITY BUILDING

A distinctive feature of the work is its emphasis on student leadership and capacity building. Both the fireside chat and panel discussion were student-led, with students taking on key roles as moderators, facilitators, and data collectors. This approach not only empowers students to lead important conversations around racial healing and agricultural equity but also prepares them for future advocacy work.

Key Accomplishments:

- **Student Moderation:** During the June 27, 2024, events, students such as Kiarri Bradley-Wilson and Kelsi Williams took on leadership roles, moderating discussions and ensuring that the events ran smoothly. Their involvement demonstrated the TRHT initiative's commitment to fostering leadership skills and giving students the tools they need to continue this work in the future.
- **Capacity Building:** By giving students responsibility for facilitating discussions, analyzing feedback, and developing advocacy strategies, the initiative strengthens their capacity to engage in racial healing work beyond the immediate context of the TRHT events. This investment in student leadership is critical for ensuring the long-term sustainability of the TRHT framework at Tougaloo.

ADDRESSING SYSTEMIC BARRIERS IN AGRICULTURE

A recurring theme in the TRHT events at Tougaloo College was the systemic barriers that continue to limit the participation of BIPOC communities in agriculture. These barriers include lack of access to land, resources, and workforce protections, as well as racial inequities that have built up over time.

Key Discussions:

- **Workforce Protections and Resilience:** Panelists at the fireside chat and panel discussion delved into the historical and ongoing barriers that BIPOC farmers face in the workforce. Issues such as land loss, lack of access to capital, and exclusion from decision-making processes were key points of discussion.
- **Sustainability as a Cultural Value:** BIPOC farmers have historically developed strategies for surviving tough economic conditions, which panelists described as a form of cultural resilience. Participants underscored the importance of building on these strategies to create sustainable and inclusive agricultural systems for the future.

FEEDBACK AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The feedback gathered during these events will be useful in shaping future directions for the initiative. Participants provided thoughtful insights into the importance of collaboration, partnership-building, and inclusive decision-making in BIPOC-led agricultural initiatives. This feedback will inform the development of future TRHT storytelling efforts, advocacy programs, and community engagement activities.

Key Feedback Points:

- **Collaboration and Inclusivity:** Participants emphasized the need for more interdisciplinary collaboration and for ensuring that voices from BIPOC communities are heard in decision-making processes related to agriculture. This feedback underscores the importance of continued efforts to promote inclusivity and equity in the agricultural sector.
- **Optimism for the Future:** Despite the challenges discussed, students and participants expressed optimism about the future of BIPOC-led cooperatives and agricultural initiatives. Many students felt inspired to get involved in agricultural projects and cooperatives, signaling a growing commitment to this work.

THE ALLUVIAL COLLECTIVE: ACTIVITIES AND IMPACT

The Alluvial Collective was enlisted as a partner in advancing the **Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation (TRHT)** initiative in Mississippi. This report provides a summary analysis of the organization's efforts to foster racial healing, promote narrative change, and equitable economic outcomes in Mississippi, particularly within Central Mississippi. The Alluvial Collective's work is grounded in the belief that Mississippi's journey toward racial equity is a multi-generational commitment, rooted in the state's policies and historical practices.

PROJECT OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES

The Alluvial Collective's core focus during the grant period, which began in September 2023, centered around organizing, facilitating, and conducting symposia events aimed at fostering narrative change and addressing systemic issues such as Jackson's water infrastructure crisis. In addition to **narrative change** and economic opportunities, the organization also aimed to build capacity among local organizations, fostering community-level resilience and equipping stakeholders with the tools needed to navigate crises, both present and future. This work, which aligns with the TRHT framework's goal of dismantling racial hierarchies, involves critical community conversations and collaborations with state institutions, colleges, universities, and nonprofits.

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND INITIATIVES

Narrative Change and Infrastructure: Symposia on Jackson's Water Crisis

One of the primary challenges that the Alluvial Collective addressed was the water crisis in Jackson, Mississippi, a deeply rooted problem exacerbated by systemic neglect and racism. Jackson's water infrastructure, failing due to years of underinvestment and mismanagement, disproportionately impacts communities of color, bringing the issue of environmental and infrastructural racism to the forefront.

- The Alluvial Collective organized a series of symposia to explore the history behind Jackson's infrastructure issues and foster narrative change around these problems. By engaging local community members and leaders, these events sought to inform the public about the racialized aspects of Jackson's water crisis while providing a platform for discussing long-term solutions.
- Key to this effort was recognizing that **many community leaders expressed skepticism about the handling of funds and resources dedicated to addressing the water crisis**. This mistrust, deeply rooted in the state's history of systemic racism and white supremacy, became a significant barrier to full community engagement in the symposia. To overcome this, the Alluvial Collective partnered with the **Project on Government Oversight (POGO)**, a Washington, D.C.-based organization specializing in government transparency, to organize webinars aimed at increasing transparency and accountability in the management of public resources allocated to address the water crisis.
- These webinars attracted local civic leaders, engaged citizens, and organizational leaders involved in the water infrastructure crisis. By providing clarity on the role of government agencies, such as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), in Jackson's water crisis, these webinars supported community trust and set the stage for more meaningful engagement in future symposia.

Narrative Change through Narrative Exposure

Another significant accomplishment of the Alluvial Collective's TRHT work has been its **effort to host thought leaders and cultural influencers, providing public forums for discussing racial healing, reconciliation, and systemic change.** These events, held primarily through digital media and web platforms, focused on creating narrative exposure, which aims to shift dominant narratives that perpetuate racial hierarchies.

- One prominent event featured **Rev. Dr. Jay Augustine**, who delivered a presentation titled "The Work of Reconciliation: Creating Cultures of Belonging." Rev. Dr. Augustine's talk contextualized reconciliation in three key aspects—salvific, social, and civil—and used historical analogies to discuss how American society can move toward a more inclusive culture.
- Another notable speaker was **Ellen Ann Fentress**, a long-time journalist and teacher based in Jackson, Mississippi. In her presentation, Fentress explored the intersection of race, class, and regional identity, drawing from her experiences growing up in the segregated South. Her presentation allowed participants to reflect on how historical divisions in education, particularly between public and private schools, continue to shape racial and socioeconomic disparities in Mississippi today.
- Both events reflect the Alluvial Collective's commitment to using storytelling and narrative exposure as a tool for racial healing. By inviting diverse voices and engaging in meaningful dialogue about Mississippi's racial history, the organization has created a platform for Mississippians to challenge the narratives that sustain racial inequities and reimagine a future rooted in justice and inclusion.

Building Knowledge and Capacity for Accountability

In addition to its focus on narrative change, the Alluvial Collective has worked to **build knowledge and capacity** among Mississippi's community leaders and civic organizations, **particularly in the area of economic accountability.** Through its partnership with the Project on Government Oversight (POGO), the organization hosted a **webinar series** focused on tracking federal spending and using the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) to ensure government transparency in Mississippi.

- This initiative was launched in response to concerns expressed by community leaders and civic organizations, who felt they lacked the tools to hold state leaders accountable for the resources allocated to address Jackson's water crisis. By educating these leaders on the use of FOIA and other transparency mechanisms, the Alluvial Collective helped to empower local organizations to better monitor government actions and ensure that resources are being used equitably and effectively.
- The webinars, which attracted key stakeholders involved in the Jackson water crisis, provided practical insights into how communities can use government transparency tools to advocate for their needs. This initiative aligns with the TRHT framework's focus on dismantling the systems of power that perpetuate racial inequities, by equipping communities with the knowledge and resources needed to challenge those systems.

CHALLENGES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

While the Alluvial Collective has made significant progress in advancing the goals of the TRHT initiative, it has also faced challenges, particularly in community engagement. As mentioned earlier, many community members initially expressed skepticism about the organization's ability to address the deeply entrenched issues of racism and systemic neglect in Jackson's water crisis. Overcoming this skepticism required a significant focus on transparency and accountability, which the organization addressed through its partnership with POGO.

Looking forward, the Alluvial Collective plans to continue its efforts to **foster narrative change, promote equitable disaster response, and build community capacity** for accountability and transparency. The organization also plans to release its **Equity in Recovery, Response, and Resilience Report** in late 2025, which will serve as a tool for Mississippi's community leaders and organizations to better prepare for and respond to future crises.

LOOKING FORWARD: THE PATH TO CONTINUED PROGRESS

| SUMMARY OF COLLECTIVE WORK

The TRHT initiative in Mississippi, supported by the Foundation for the Mid-South (FMS), has brought together a wide range of partners, including Millsaps College, Mission Mississippi, Jackson State University (JSU), Tougaloo College, the Neshoba Youth Coalition, and the Alluvial Collective. These partners focused on narrative change and economic transformation to foster racial healing, create equitable economic opportunities, and engage diverse communities across the state.

| CUMULATIVE NUMBER OF RESIDENTS/PARTICIPANTS REACHED

Over the reporting period, partners organized numerous events and activities that engaged a broad audience. The estimated total number of residents and participants reached through these efforts is approximately:

- **Millsaps College:**
40 participants in the storytelling event, 50 attendees at the panel discussion, and 16 participants in the Midtown Focus Group.
- **Mission Mississippi:**
51 participants in the “One Community” conversations across three cities (Picayune, Hattiesburg, Biloxi).
- **Jackson State University (JSU):**
22 participants in the listening session on community violence and structural inequality, with additional attendees in other events.
- **Tougaloo College:**
Over 50 attendees in agricultural and narrative change events, such as the “Blacks in Agriculture Fireside Chat” and panel discussions.
- **Neshoba Youth Coalition:**
Approximately 564 participants attended the 60th Anniversary Freedom Summer events, including youth from across the state.
- **Alluvial Collective:**
More than 100 individuals engaged through symposia, webinars, and community dialogues, with a focus on the Jackson water crisis.

In total, approximately **800-850 individuals** were directly reached across the TRHT events and initiatives during the 2023-2024 cycle.

COMMON THEMES ACROSS ALL EVENTS

The events hosted by TRHT partners revealed several common themes:

1. Economic Empowerment:

Participants consistently emphasized the need for access to good jobs, affordable housing, and quality education as central to achieving economic stability and overcoming racial inequities. As expressed during the Midtown Focus Group, many participants highlighted generational economic challenges and the need for systemic changes. For example, one participant noted, “Black people are the only population that never got any kind of reparations. We don’t want equality. We want equity.”

2. Narrative Change:

Across multiple events, narrative change was a core focus, particularly in reframing historical narratives related to race and agriculture. Tougaloo College’s events, for instance, emphasized how agriculture, traditionally seen as a space of exploitation for Black labor, can be transformed into a space of empowerment and ownership.

3. Racial Healing:

Healing circles and storytelling events were designed to facilitate difficult conversations about race and identity. At the “In a World of Circles and Squares” exhibition at Millsaps, participants engaged in racial healing dialogues, with one participant noting, “It was a deep and meaningful conversation about privilege and race.”

4. Leadership and Civic Engagement:

Engaging youth and fostering civic responsibility were highlighted in events hosted by the Neshoba Youth Coalition and Mission Mississippi. These organizations promoted leadership development and active participation in community building and racial healing. At the Neshoba Youth Coalition’s Freedom Summer event, participants expressed renewed commitment to promoting racial equity: “Seeing so many young people engaged was inspiring.”

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Statewide Reach vs. Centralized Efforts

One of the main challenges identified across the TRHT initiative was the difficulty in achieving a broader, statewide reach. While the partners effectively engaged local communities, there were limitations in extending the work to broader regions across Mississippi.

A recommendation moving forward would be to focus on scaling the work back to more concentrated areas with intentional outreach, rather than stretching resources thin across the state. Mission Mississippi’s approach exemplified a more focused effort, which could serve as a model for future activities.

Capacity of the Partners

Some partners demonstrated limited capacity to conduct sustained conversations around racial healing. The TRHT work, while impactful, was sometimes difficult to distinguish from the broader work of the partner organizations, which led to challenges in aligning efforts with the TRHT framework. For example, the Alluvial Collective and the Neshoba Youth Coalition, while conducting important work in their respective communities, faced difficulties in aligning their activities with the TRHT framework in a meaningful way.

To move forward, capacity-building efforts would be critical for these partners, or consideration should be given to identifying new organizations better suited to implement the TRHT's racial healing work. Mission Mississippi, Millsaps College, JSU, and Tougaloo College, by contrast, demonstrated strong alignment with the TRHT framework and should be prioritized for future efforts.

Reporting and Deliverables

The TRHT initiative faced challenges with consistency in reporting and delivering outcomes from partner organizations. While some partners like Mission Mississippi, Tougaloo College and Millsaps provided detailed and timely reports, others like the Alluvial Collective struggled to meet deadlines or provide comprehensive data on their activities. To address this, clearer guidelines and expectations for reporting should be established for the upcoming year, with technical assistance provided to ensure timely and accurate deliverables from all partners.

MOVING FORWARD / NEXT STEPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As the TRHT initiative transitions into its next phase, several key recommendations have emerged:

1. Focusing on TRHT Implementation Year:

Moving from pre-planning and community visioning, the next steps should involve concrete implementation of the TRHT framework, focusing on racial healing, narrative change, and economic equity. Each partner should revisit the TRHT framework and incorporate specific goals for implementation in their communities.

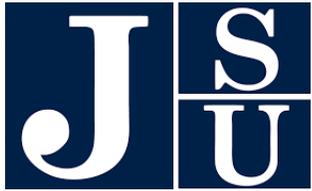
2. Strengthening Partner Capacity:

Continued support for partners is essential. Workshops or training sessions focused on capacity building should be implemented, especially for organizations like the Alluvial Collective and the Neshoba Youth Coalition. Alternatively, **replacing these groups with partners who are better equipped to handle the TRHT framework would be a viable solution.**

3. Community Visioning and Strategic Planning:

A meeting of community partners, Advisory Board and invested should be convened to review lessons learned, share best practices, and engage in strategic planning for the upcoming implementation year. This gathering would allow partners to reflect on their successes, identify areas for improvement, and chart a clear course for the next phase of TRHT work.

TRHT ALLIANCE PARTNERS



Jackson State University



Millsaps College



Mission Mississippi



Neshoba Youth Coalition



Tougaloo College



The Alluvial Collective