

# DESIGN AND SOCIAL IMPACT

A Cross-Sectoral  
Agenda for Design  
Education, Research,  
and Practice

# DESIGN AND SOCIAL IMPACT

A white paper based on the “Social Impact Design Summit,” a convening by the Smithsonian’s Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum; the National Endowment for the Arts; and The Lemelson Foundation at The Rockefeller Foundation offices in New York on February 27, 2012.

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Produced by:  
Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum  
Bill Moggridge, Former Director (1943–2012)  
Caroline Baumann, Acting Director  
Caroline Payson, Education Director  
Cynthia E. Smith, Curator of Socially Responsible Design  
Sarah Freeman, Public Education Manager

National Endowment for the Arts  
Joan Shigekawa, Acting Chairman  
Jason Schupbach, Design Director  
Jennifer Hughes, Design Specialist

The Lemelson Foundation  
Carol Dahl, Executive Director  
Abigail Sarmac, Program Officer

Text by Julie Lasky  
Design: OCD

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Social impact design—one term that refers to the practice of design for the public good, especially in disadvantaged communities—has attracted powerful interest in recent years. Increasingly, both practicing designers and students are seeking opportunities in this burgeoning discipline. But are the professional and academic structures in place to support them? And how might such structures be improved?**

On February 27, 2012, the “Social Impact Design Summit” was convened at The Rockefeller Foundation headquarters in New York to address the challenges and opportunities within the field today. Organized by the Smithsonian’s Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, with the National Endowment for the Arts and The Lemelson Foundation, the one-day event brought together 34 leaders of social impact design and a dozen representatives of foundations that support social programs.

The summit participants—who represented both nonprofit and for-profit organizations, as well as academic programs, government agencies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)—drew a picture of a professional area that has demonstrated many achievements and much promise.

Stretching across several design disciplines—including product design, graphic design, urban design, and architecture—and far from formalized in many aspects of its practice, social impact design also possesses a number of gaps and faces a variety of challenges.

Among the forces inhibiting social impact design today, summit participants singled out the lack of a clear understanding of what the term means. Greater clarity, they proposed, would lead to better-defined goals and would boost appreciation of the value of the field. Participants also pointed to a dearth of accepted standards and ethical guidelines that would help normalize the practice, as well as a lack of knowledge-sharing structures among social impact designers, especially those who work across design disciplines.

Cultural bias was seen as a potential hazard, especially when designers lacked understanding of local culture. And the difficulties of implementing and sustaining social impact design projects constituted a large part of this discussion. Finally, participants called for more stringent measures to assess the effects of social impact design and thereby demonstrate its value. Social impact design, it was noted, is both an art and a science, demanding not just creative skills but also rigor in its practice.

After enumerating gaps and challenges, the summit participants engaged in a discussion of organizational models for social impact design. These ranged from corporations with divisions dedicated to humanitarian work to nonprofits supported by philanthropic funds and volunteer labor. Many models were hybrids, with for-profit and nonprofit features combined under a single entity. Other examples were based at universities or evolved from academic programs. Still others were incubators that nurtured promising individuals and enterprises. The social impact design activities of existing governmental agencies and programs in Asia and South America were cited as instructive, while lessons were drawn from the work of educators and practitioners in Africa. Finally, public health was offered as a parallel discipline whose successful growth has made it worth studying and perhaps imitating.

The summit's third segment was devoted to educational and professional pathways, and to the question of whether careers in social impact design are currently viable. Participants described what they considered to be essential studies in a social impact design curriculum and the complexity of combining pedagogy with ongoing projects in the field. The tenuous nature of the pipelines delivering graduates to jobs was also discussed. And several participants even questioned the very existence of social

design as a discipline, wondering whether it would be better to consider it a strategy that could be embedded into any design practice.

The summit's fourth and longest segment concerned solutions. Participants offered suggestions for expanding networks and fostering communications among social impact design practitioners; for emphasizing storytelling as a way to convey the value of social impact design projects; for building a culture of evaluation that will create decisive benchmarks for professional accomplishments; for forming "intelligent coalitions" that will expand learning resources; and for creating alternative funding strategies to support all of this work.

# INTRODUCTION

The Smithsonian's Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, The Lemelson Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts, with support from the Surdna Foundation, organized a daylong meeting at The Rockefeller Foundation's headquarters in New York City with a select group of designers, educators, and foundation representatives who are active in the growing field of design for social impact. Socially responsible design is an overarching term for design that is socially, environmentally, and economically sustainable—three quality-of-life pillars defined and addressed by an international community.<sup>1</sup> The field is also known as public-interest design, social design, social impact design, socially responsive design, transformation design, and humanitarian design. In this report, the terms *social impact design* and *socially responsible design* will be used interchangeably.<sup>2</sup>

The “Social Impact Design Summit” brought together a range of participants and stakeholders from nonprofit organizations and for-profit businesses and design firms; government agencies and NGOs; and universities. Working on international and United States–based projects, the group was selected to represent an array of approaches, experiences, and perspectives, and testified to the diverse arenas and modes in which social impact design is undertaken.

Socially motivated design has enjoyed a renaissance in recent years, and the seeds of interest have sprouted

in a variety of locations. As designers, who have always been professional problem solvers, have moved more assuredly to authoring systems and strategies as well as objects, they have turned their sights to the needs of underserved communities. At the same time, design students, many of whom have come of age in economically turbulent times, are redefining the purposes of their studies and ambitions and finding increasing value in humanitarian work.

Occupying wide geographic and disciplinary territories, the field encompasses domestic and international projects in both rural and urban environments. It involves the design of graphic and digital communications, of domestic products, medical devices and farming equipment, of buildings and transportation, and of large infrastructure systems. These designers also tackle critical issues that are less concrete—such as the fragility and lack of equal access to natural resources, or the barriers to health and educational services in poor communities globally. Such designers can be found equally in the realms of economic development, community improvement, and disaster relief.

Social impact design has been a subject—both exclusively and tangentially—of a number of recent public programs and exhibitions. Its practitioners have occupied the stages at conferences on technology, the environment, business, and culture. They are staples at forums sponsored by design



**Richie Moalosi, University of Botswana, addresses Social Impact Design Summit participants (clockwise, left to right) Patrice Martin, IDEO.org; Jon Polhamus, GE Healthcare Global Design; Thomas Fisher, University of Minnesota; Amy Smith, Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Robert Fabricant, frog design; and Michael Cohen, The New School.**

organizations such as American Institute of Architects (AIA), Industrial Designers Society of America (IDSA), AIGA (a multidisciplinary design association that was formerly known as the American Institute of Graphic Arts), and American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA), as well as by university design departments. In 2007, Cooper-Hewitt’s groundbreaking “Design for the Other 90%” exhibition brought socially responsible design to the public’s attention in a museum context; a sequel, “Design with the Other 90%: CITIES,” opened at the United Nations Headquarters in 2011.

In his summit opening remarks, Jason Schupbach, Director of Design Programs at the National Endowment for the Arts, stated that the goals of the “Social Impact Design Summit” were to build a stronger support structure for social impact design and to help young designers who want to enter the arena understand what their opportunities are. “We want to know more today about what’s happening right now in the field,” Schupbach said. “We want to know what are the big needs of the field, what are the big issues, and to come out of here today with a few incremental ideas of ways to move forward.”

Abigail Sarmac, Program Officer at The Lemelson Foundation, which supports invention in the service of improving lives, stressed the importance of the user’s perspective in shaping innovation. “Lemelson believes

that design is the critical translator for that user perspective,” she said. “What can private foundations and the government sector do to promote this field?”

Answers to all of these questions were sought in three discussion topics formulated by representatives of Cooper-Hewitt, who organized and moderated the summit:

- 1. Where are the gaps in the field of socially responsible design? What are the biggest challenges to this area of design?**
- 2. What are organizational models of successful and sustainable ways of working in socially responsible design? What are current organizations missing? What are they doing wrong?**
- 3. How can we effectively prepare future generations of designers for this growing area of design? Is this a viable career path? If so, how do we raise awareness of this profession?**

# SUMMIT FORMAT

Led by Bill Moggridge, then the Director of Cooper-Hewitt, and Cynthia E. Smith, the museum's Curator of Socially Responsible Design, the summit consisted of two parts. In a morning session, 22 participants who were involved in social impact design engaged in a discussion of the three topics, while 12 representatives of foundations that supported socially responsible design projects observed and made comments when invited to join the conversation. The designer participants addressed each topic for one hour, concluding with a brief summary issued by three members of the group. Later, in an afternoon session, the participants were joined by 12 additional social impact designers and leaders, and divided into five teams to pursue the question of how to surmount the gaps and challenges addressed throughout the day, providing some near- and long-term solutions and actions to move productively into the future.

Prior to the summit, questionnaires were sent to participants requesting responses to the three topics as a springboard for discussion. (See Appendix B, page 42.) The quotations in this document are drawn from these writings, as well as from participants' statements at the summit. During the day, several participants also shared their responses to the event in video interviews conducted by Cooper-Hewitt.

The full list of summit attendees, along with their biographical information, can be found in Appendix A (page 41).

create  
"specialised arenas"  
for projects  
to be discussed  
(expert)  
by peers

**NOW**

10 key  
markets/  
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interdisciplinary  
centers @ universities  
• grants to seed  
interdisciplinary student  
teams to develop  
projects to solve social  
issues

**LATER**

Community  
Design  
Centers.  
As  
Conduit

BOTH  
QUALITA  
QUAN  
EVA

# 50 YEARS OF SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE DESIGN

Select highlights  
from 1963 to 2012

**1963**  
International Council of Societies of Industrial Designers (Icsid) is granted special consultative status with UNESCO to engage design on numerous development projects for the betterment of the human condition.

**1964**  
Architecture Without Architects exhibition organized by Bernard Rudofsky opens at The Museum of Modern Art in New York, bringing vernacular architecture from around the world into critical focus.

Architects' Renewal Committee in Harlem (ARCH), established by C. Richard Hatch as one of the first community design centers in the United States, begins operation.

**Whole Earth Catalog** launched by Stewart Brand includes alternative technology and design sections by designer Jay Baldwin and inspires a generation.

*The Limits to Growth* by Meadows, Meadows, Randers, and Behrens<sup>3</sup> is published and lays the foundation for sustainable design by modeling how "global ecological constraints would have significant influence on global developments in the 21st century."

*Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered* by British economist E. F. Schumacher popularizes the concept of "appropriate technology" (manufacture using local resources for local needs).

**1968**  
American Institute of Architects (AIA) convention keynote address by Urban League head Whitney M. Young Jr. challenges the AIA on issues relating to social responsibility and diversity within the profession.

**1973**  
A low cost "sweat equity" housing model is successfully tested in Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) by Millard and Linda Fuller, who go on to establish Habitat for Humanity International in 1976.

This timeline represents highlights spanning fifty years of socially responsible design compiled from Summit attendees, with additional research sources from John Cary, Jane Margolies, Leslie Speer, Anthony Schuman, and Kate Stohr.

**Resolutions, legislation, and publications that influenced design.**

*Design for the Real World: Human Ecology and Social Change* by Victor Papanek is published, challenging the established design world by advocating a more sustainable, inclusive approach to design.

**1976**

The Design for Need symposium is held at the Royal College of Art in London, examining early industrial design ideals—designing in human terms—where social purpose is combined with aesthetic expression and symbolic value.

**1979**

Inclusive design research by industrial designer Patricia A. Moore explores design, aging, and poverty.

**1981**

Architects/Designers/Planners for Social Responsibility (ADPSR) is formed to raise professional and public awareness of critical social and environmental issues and to further responsive design and planning.

International Development Enterprises (iDE), a nonprofit organization, is founded by Paul Polak to develop low-cost solutions for farmers who engage the markets to attack poverty at its roots.

**1984**

Les Ateliers' Studio International is established by Liz Davis creating the Design and Development Lab, which places French design students with NGOs working in the field to support realistic cooperation.

Brundtland Commission's report defines sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is signed into law to prohibit discrimination based on disability, establishing design standards that enable accessibility.

Earth Summit, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, convenes in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, producing international guidelines for more sustainable development.

### 1988

Designs for Independent Living, an exhibition of products for the elderly and physically disabled, is organized by Cara McCarty and opens at The Museum of Modern Art in New York.

### 1991

ApproTEC (renamed KickStart in 2005) is founded by Martin Fisher and Nick Moon, working with designers to create simple money-making tools for African entrepreneurs.

Design Corps is founded by Bryan Bell to provide solutions for the daily needs of everyday people through design.

### 1993

The Doors of Perception international festival is initiated by John Thackara, enabling social innovators to imagine alternative sustainable futures and "design practical responses."

Rural Studio at Auburn University is founded by Sam Mockbee and Dennis K. Ruth to design and build low-cost innovative housing for families living in rural Alabama.

### 1995

BaSiC Initiative, a university-based international learning service program, is founded by Sergio Palleroni, David Riley, and Steve Badanes to engage problems of communities traditionally underserved by the design fields.

United Nations' Millennium Development Goals are adopted, focusing the international community on eight key objectives to free people from extreme poverty and multiple deprivations by 2015.

**1997**

NESsT is founded by entrepreneurs Lee Davis and Nicole Etchart as an international nonprofit to support the planning, start-up, and development of social enterprises in emerging markets.

**1999**

Architecture for Humanity, a grassroots nonprofit organization that seeks architectural solutions to humanitarian crises, is founded by Cameron Sinclair and Kate Stohr.

**2000**

Structures for Inclusion annual conference, organized by Bryan Bell, is held at Princeton University for the first time to share best practices for those currently underserved by the architecture profession.

The Enterprise Rose Architectural Fellowship is established to partner emerging architects and community-based organizations in the service of low- and moderate-income communities.

**2001**

Design without Borders is initiated by Peter Opsvik and the Foundation for Design and Architecture in Norway to partner industrial designers with local universities and communities in Uganda and Guatemala.

Engineers Without Borders USA is founded by Bernard Amadei, a professor of civil engineering at the University of Colorado at Boulder.

Designmatters is launched at the Art Center College of Design to engage students and faculty on the global issues of healthcare, public policy, social entrepreneurship, and sustainable human development.

*Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things* by William McDonough and Michael Braungart is published as a manifesto calling for ecologically intelligent design.

*The Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid* by C. K. Prahalad is published, noting “the world’s five billion poor make up the fastest growing market in the world.”

#### 2002

The INDEX: Award is established as the largest monetary design prize in the world, awarded biennially to designs that improve vital areas of people’s lives.

D-Lab is founded at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology by Amy Smith to foster the development, design, and dissemination of appropriate technologies and sustainable solutions within the framework of international development.

#### 2003

Design that Matters is founded by Tim Prestero and Neil Cantor to create new products that allow social enterprises in developing countries to offer improved services and scale more quickly.

#### 2004

RED, an interdisciplinary team of designers, policy analysts, and social scientists, is formed by the United Kingdom’s Design Council to tackle social and economic issues through design-led innovation.

The d.school at Stanford University is founded by David Kelley to apply design thinking in creating strategic change for larger problems facing humankind.

#### 2005

The Aspen Design Summit is relaunched when the International Design Conference in Aspen partners with the AIGA to create a new type of design gathering for “a world facing serious challenges.”

Global Studio is launched by University of Sydney, Columbia University, and the University of Rome as an international, place-based interdisciplinary and participatory design and planning studio, under the leadership of Anna Rubbo.

The 1% program is launched by Public Architecture under the leadership of John Peterson to connect nonprofits with architecture and design firms willing to give of their time pro bono.

The One Laptop per Child prototype—a rugged \$100 laptop for underserved children designed by Continuum (Fuseproject designed subsequent models)—is unveiled at the World Summit on the Information Society by MIT Media Lab’s Nicholas Negroponte and UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

Design Studio for Social Intervention is founded by Kenneth Bailey as a creative lab for activists, artists, academics, and the public to come together and imagine new approaches to addressing complex social issues.

*Design Like You Give a Damn: Architectural Responses to Humanitarian Crises* publication is organized and edited by Architecture for Humanity.

#### 2006

Design for the Majority, the professional interest section of the Industrial Designers Society of America, is formed and headed by Leslie Speer.

Gulf Coast Community Design Studio (GCCDS)—a model post-disaster design, planning, research services program—is established under the leadership of David Perkes in Biloxi, Mississippi, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

#### 2007

Design for the Other 90% exhibition and catalogue is organized by Cynthia E. Smith and opens at the Smithsonian's Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum in New York.

D-Rev, a nonprofit, is founded by Paul Polak "to create a design revolution" by enlisting designers to develop products and ideas that will benefit the world's poor population.

#### 2008

The first Better World by Design conference, organized and led by Brown University and Rhode Island School of Design students, brings together professionals and students from multiple disciplines to better understand the power of design, technology, and enterprise in leading real-world change.

The Curry Stone Design Prize is established by Clifford Curry and Delight Stone as an annual prize awarded to designs that improve people's lives and the state of the world.

Catapult Design is founded by designer and engineer Heather Fleming to develop and design tools and technologies for the developing world.

Project H is founded by Emily Pilloton to utilize the power of design and hands-on building to catalyze communities and educate youth in order to improve the quality of life in their own backyards.

The Design for Social Impact workshop and the IDEO-designed toolkit are funded by The Rockefeller Foundation to educate and engage design professionals for active involvement with the social sector.

#### 2009

DESIS: Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability is founded by Ezio Manzini as a network of university-based design labs that work with local, regional, and global partners for social change and sustainability.

Transform, an annual collaborative symposium on innovations in health care experience and delivery, is launched by the Mayo Clinic Center for Innovation.

Change Observer, a web-based channel focused on design strategies for improving health, education, housing, and the environment globally, is launched by William Drenttel with support from The Rockefeller Foundation.

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**2010**

“Small Scale, Big Change: New Architectures of Social Engagement” exhibition is organized by Andres Lepik and opens at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Community Driven Design is added to Surdna Foundation’s Thriving Cultures Program to support the involvement of artists, architects, and designers in community-driven problem-solving and development efforts.

Design Education and Social Change Symposium is organized by Winterhouse Institute, bringing together 14 educators to explore the teaching and practice of social design in undergraduate and graduate design education.

**2011**

“Design with the Other 90%: CITIES” exhibition, organized by Smithsonian’s Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum’s curator of socially responsible design, Cynthia E. Smith, opens at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

IDEO.org is launched under the leadership of Jocelyn Wyatt and Patrice Martin as a nonprofit design organization focused solely on social innovation, enabling IDEO to make an even bigger impact on global poverty.

Design for Good campaign is launched by AIGA, the professional association for design, as an online platform to build and sustain the implementation of design thinking for social change.

Public Interest Design website is launched by John Cary to provide a platform for public interest designers to connect, share news, and learn about opportunities in the field.

**2012**

“Designing for Impact” is the focus of Clinton Global Initiative’s Annual Meeting, with a call to “design our world to create more opportunity and more equality.”

“Social impact design” is added to the National Endowment for the Arts Design Program grant guidelines as an activity eligible for federal government funding support.

Social Impact Design Summit is convened by Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, National Endowment for the Arts, and The Lemelson Foundation, bringing together leaders from the design industry, community, public, and private sectors to discuss ways to advance the field of socially responsible design.

# I. GAPS AND CHALLENGES

## **Where are the gaps in the field of socially responsible design? What are the biggest challenges to this area of design?**

Social impact design is a nascent field with innumerable pockets and few conventions. For this reason alone, summit participants were able to cite numerous challenges to the practice of social impact design and a range of innovative organizational models, but not one definitive version to follow. Although the summit format called for the articulation of hurdles as a first topic of conversation, in many cases the citation of gaps and challenges quickly evolved into discussions of opportunities and solutions. This white paper follows the summit's organizational structure in delineating obstacles first. Subsequent sections address some of the many models of excellence and offer proposals for future practice.

## **DEFINITION**

Due to social impact design's relatively new and growing status, several participants pointed to a lack of agreement about the field's definition and parameters. The conversation was not representative of an identity crisis, but rather

exposed the complex and global nature of the issues these designers are addressing.

Because the summit brought together participants who represented so many diverse areas of socially responsible design, they not only reflected on but also enacted the struggle of finding a common language.

Kenneth Bailey, founder of the Design Studio for Social Intervention, a nonprofit that assists social justice organizations with design-minded approaches, boiled the question down to its essence when he asked the morning assembly, "How do we define socially responsible, and how does it get measured, and who gets to frame what we mean by socially responsible?"

"Socially responsible is often the wrong term to define what it is trying to address," noted Laura Kurgan, Associate Professor of Architecture at Columbia University, where she directs the Spatial Information Design Lab. "Often, socially responsible design implies a) solving the problem of poverty, or b) prioritizing people and use in a design problem rather than design itself, or c) sustainable design, which is equally hard to define. Being socially responsible—or solving urban problems through design—means addressing politics, globalization, health, education, criminal justice, or economics among others."

Thomas Fisher, Professor of Architecture and Dean of the College of Design at the University of Minnesota, called for a more rigorous definition of social design as vital in structuring educational programs for aspiring practitioners. Because social impact design lacks an identity as a discipline distinct from the many fields it comprises—architecture, industrial design, anthropology, public health— “there is no clear path of study,” he said.

Arguing for an interweaving of social impact design with the machinery of policy, architect Teddy Cruz, who has worked extensively on social problems at the San Diego–Tijuana border, said, “Social impact design is not just a category; it needs to be embedded.” In this he represented a divide, which was evident throughout the day, between participants who viewed social impact design as a strategy or system that helps contour efforts across different professions, agencies, and scales of endeavor, and those who saw it more concretely, as a discipline with defined educational and career tracks. (See “Pathways,” page 32.)

The lack of a clear definition of social design posed a barrier to communication for some summit participants, and many attendees agreed that there were limitations around a common language. William Drenttel, Editorial Director of Design Observer and director of the Mayo Clinic’s Transform

Symposium on health care innovation, noted, “One of the biggest gaps is we don’t have a common vocabulary. If I talk to Robert [Fabricant, of frog] about solar energy in India, or talk [to Mariana Amatullo, of Art Center College of Design] about cervical cancer in the Latina community in LA, fieldwork means very different things.”

## **KNOWLEDGE SHARING**

It was suggested that, without a common vocabulary, social impact designers are limited in creating the connections that foster a pool of knowledge. “The biggest gap,” Drenttel said, “is that we don’t have an infrastructure among ourselves in order to work together to build a community where these bases of expertise can be expanded upon, where health care is different from housing and yet we can share the knowledge systems across disciplines.”

“There is need to document and publicize promising, innovative, socially responsible design projects around the globe so that others can contextualize and replicate them in the socio-cultural environment,” commented Dr. Richie Moalosi, Senior Lecturer in Industrial Design at the University of Botswana. He pointed out that a dearth of “champions” of social impact design in Africa limits acceptance on the

continent. There would be more enthusiasm for social impact design in Africa, he suggested, if a greater number of regional models of exemplary practice were brought to light.

Clear efforts have been made to provide social impact design information resources that are available to any and all professionals. These include the SEED Network, co-founded by Bryan Bell to establish protocols for community-based design; IDEO.com's Human Centered Design Toolkit, which walks designers through the process of working with low-income communities; AIGA's Living Principles framework, which includes educational tools promoting sustainable design; and Cooper-Hewitt's Design Other 90 Network, an online open database and social network. However, limited resources or a resistant organizational culture can be barriers to knowledge sharing, and social impact design still lacks a central, Wikipedia-like site that could serve all of its different branches.

Renee Kemp-Rotan, cofounder of the Black Design News Network, Director of Special Projects in the Office of the Mayor of Birmingham, Alabama, and former Chief of Urban Design and Development for the City of Atlanta, stated that design intelligence will continue to suffer from redundant efforts and wasted resources that come from a lack of "shared knowledge." After 30 years in her career, she said, "I still can't go with a touch of my computer to a single site that gives me a range of case studies that have been attempted . . . those that have worked, those that have not worked. . . . [W]hether nonprofit, for-profit, public sector, private sector, there needs to be a home, a knowledge base that we can all plug into and somehow find ourselves on the matrix of events and problem-solving situations that have occurred historically."

In addition to a body of knowledge tapped by design professionals across disciplines, some participants called for a stronger exchange of ideas between designers and recipients of design services. "What are we getting from the communities we're engaging with? What are we leaving behind, and how do we create a dynamic exchange of knowledge in that framework?" asked Mariana Amatullo, Vice President of the Designmatters initiative at Art Center College of Design. "That doesn't happen as often as it should."

A recurrent theme at the summit was the underappreciated knowledge held by local populations. "There is more chance for socially responsible design to take off in the developing world and emerging markets than in Western countries," insisted Bernard Amadei, Professor of Civil Engineering at the University of Colorado. "The young entrepreneurs there have a lot to teach us. They know the market; they know the constraints and are very creative. So socially responsible design should be seen as a two-way street, where we learn

from each other rather than the traditional approach where rich countries seem to have solutions for everyone else."

Even within disciplines, there can be more opportunities for designers to share experiences. Krista Donaldson, CEO of D-Rev, a nonprofit that designs medical devices for disadvantaged communities, noted, "Many practitioners don't have time to write about our work, even though we are the ones on the front lines trying new things, implementing, and connecting dots to bring about change (or alternatively failing in doing so, and trying new things). Academics have incentive to write about their work—but practitioners do not."

## STANDARDS AND ETHICS

The loosely defined practice of designing for social impact means that while more professionals are interested in this area of design, devising innovative approaches, there is no one standard to reference or follow. "Public Interest Practices in Architecture," a recent report funded by the Latrobe Prize of the Fellows of the American Institute of Architects,<sup>4</sup> disclosed that 81 percent of the 383 architects who responded to the survey answered affirmatively to the question, "Are you doing design in the public interest?" (The phrase "public interest design" has been widely adopted by American architects to describe socially focused efforts.) "In other words, it's like green design ten years ago," said Bryan Bell, Executive Director of Design Corps and cofounder of the SEED Network, which established protocols for community-based design, and a member of the research team that compiled the report. "Everything was green design because there were no standards. That's not helpful with convincing the public that we're actually being socially responsible."

The deeply ethical foundation of *ubuntu*—a philosophy shared, under different names, by numerous African cultures—can be instructive for practitioners of social impact design, Dr. Richie Moalosi said. Translated from the Bantu language as "I am because we are," *ubuntu*, he explained, "defines a process for earning respect by first giving it and gaining empowerment by empowering others. Everyone is invited to contribute toward the goals and common wealth of the community. . . . If this concept is applied to socially responsible design, it could result in the mobilization and development of sustainable lifestyles."<sup>5</sup>

## CULTURAL BIAS

Social impact designers working globally have a mandate to tread sensitively within the cultures to which they're providing services, or they will create the perception, if not the reality, of saddling a community with ineffective or inappropriate



Teddy Cruz, Estudio Teddy Cruz;  
and Laura Kurgan, Spatial Information  
Design Lab.

efforts, or even creating real harm. Renée Kemp-Rotan is currently trying to redress that scenario with a “culture code” that offers “a comprehensive framework of 100 cultural considerations” for rebuilding post-earthquake Haiti. These variables could be applied to many places where design, disaster, and the diaspora are concerned. “Design is never a culture-neutral exercise,” she declared at the summit. “I am dedicated to developing tools for designers that begin to measure our own cultural competency before we try to design and develop revitalization projects in countries that are outside of our cultural experience or expertise.”

For Kirtee Shah, an architect who is Director of the Ahmedabad Study Action Group in India, cultural bias takes the form of blinders—a failure to recognize the innovative capacity of local populations. As an example, he offered the Gujarat Earthquake Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Project, which gave residents of 900 villages in the state of Gujarat, India, a chance to participate in the restitution of their homes after the buildings were destroyed or badly damaged by a 2001 earthquake. Shah pointed out that 60 to 70 percent of India’s housing stock is built by “the people themselves—no architects, no engineers, no housing finance agencies. . . . These are major designers solving major problems. We have lost the ability to look at that. We are not supporting them. We are not recognizing them.”

## SUSTAINABILITY

As is Shah in India, several others around the table are actively working to increase local capacity. At different points, Patrice Martin, Co-Lead and Creative Director of IDEO.org, Amy Smith, the founder of MIT’s D-Lab, and Jennifer Toy, a cofounder of the Kounkuey Design Initiative, all expressed a mission to boost the knowledge and resources of nascent designers in the places they served. Martin was committed to handing local communities the design tools they need to sustain a project beyond IDEO’s involvement. Toy was working to build a landscape design program at the University of Nairobi to educate practitioners who can help improve local informal settlements, such as the city’s Kibera slum. (Like Martin, Toy defined the goal of socially responsible design as “enabling a community to take on a project and to create a life of its own after we’ve left.”) And Smith said that she hoped that design would come to be regarded “as an empowerment tool rather than as a thing that creates objects or buildings. Looking at how can we shift the way we’re doing social impact design so that it’s creating designers rather than design.” Summit participant Bernard Kiwia, a Tanzanian designer working with Global Cycle Solutions and former student of Smith’s, offered what amounted to testimony when he described how he came to design a bicycle-powered cell phone charger. (See “Models,” page 26.)

## IMPLEMENTATION

A number of summit participants spoke about the challenge of translating abundant energy, talent, and ideas into completed projects. “Sometimes local inventors don’t have time to create something to put into market,” Kiwia said. “There is no time to work. . . . You have to take care of the family. . . .”

“I find the biggest gap happens when well-intentioned work begins to be put in the field and there isn’t the support structure to implement it,” Cameron Sinclair, cofounder of Architecture for Humanity, noted. “The foundations are disappointed; the architect or designers are upset. But the only people who ever suffer are the community who put their trust and value in the process.” Sinclair identified two parts of that process, which are “connected but separate: soft versus hard. When I think about soft, I think about research, development, cultural connectivity, history. Hard social impact design is really boots on the ground, getting the stuff built. . . .”

Though many designers are eager to enter the social impact arena, the number decreases when the work involves long, immersive stretches in the field. As Heather Fleming, CEO of Catapult Design, noted, university-supported fieldwork offers an inexhaustible supply of student labor, yet it also creates the need for both mentorship (a luxury to busy designers) and continuity, as knowledge is handed off from term to term. And then there is the challenge of securing financial support for the long haul. “The problem,” said Timothy Prestero, CEO and founder of Design that Matters, “is that compared to the whole process that leads to implementation—which includes financing, manufacture and distribution, training, and adoption—design is the least hard part. Right now, because implementation is so difficult and expensive, it seems like commercial products are the only ones that offer clear built-in incentives for participation.”

For target communities where need has been identified, the challenge is convincing local politicians and recipients of its worth. “When we are working with local communities,” said Dr. Moalosi of the University of Botswana, “the level of design is just too high. It’s the elite design. The communities have had the problem for several years, but somehow they’ve developed some kind of solution.” Dr. Moalosi advised a closer working relationship between social impact designers and beneficiaries “on the ground.”

## VALUE AND IMPACT

The biggest gap observed by participants was the absence of perceived value of social impact design, particularly as demonstrated through metrics. With limited quantitative data

from impact and post-occupancy surveys, designers lack a clear lever to persuade nonprofits, foundations, government agencies, and NGOs to contribute resources.

Krista Donaldson suggested a more active alternative to “socially responsible design,” the overarching term used to describe socially, economically, and environmentally sustainable design, when she wrote, “Socially responsible suggests subjectivity around some undefined principals—whereas social impact implies impact must be demonstrated.”

“Most foundations and corporate funders don’t really care about aesthetics; they care about impact,” Cameron Sinclair pointed out. “So in the case of Haiti, where we’re building schools, I’m not being funded on the aesthetic of the school. . . . I’m being funded on the number of jobs created by that school construction.” About professing the benefits of social impact design, he emphasized, “At this moment, we’re in the ether and can wax lyrical about it, but there’s no empirical data.”

The paucity of impact data was a point made by Michael Cohen, Director of the International Affairs Program at the New School University, when he described sending students to appraise the quality of a slum-improvement project in Senegal 35 years after the United Nations and World Bank had launched it. “We discovered when we asked the UN and the World Bank [that] no one did long-term evaluation. So all of this debate about aid-effectiveness and design-effectiveness—nobody really knows.”<sup>6</sup>

Metrics boost not only economic support, but also accountability and transparency. Under normal circumstances, Bryan Bell said, “The [design] object’s created. We walk away. Therefore we are neither held responsible nor given credit for that impact. We need to be held responsible and given credit. When we’re given credit is when the value starts to increase.”

Sometimes, the problem is not demonstrating how well design performs, but simply explaining what it is. Jon Polhamus, Brand Design Language Manager at GE Healthcare Global Design, noted that “the challenge that I have as a designer: you spend so much time educating someone else on design.” Within his own organization, he recommended, “a finance person should have to spend time with a marketing person, or should spend time in a hospital. That would really save us time trying to convince people about design.”

Simply publicizing the gains made by social impact design would benefit the popular perception of its value, suggested Sergio Palleroni, Professor and Senior Fellow at the Institute for Sustainable Solutions at Portland



Mariana Amatullo.  
Designmatters.



Kirtee Shah, Ahmedabad Study Group.

State University. Palleroni proposed, in his written survey response, implementing a “media campaign which helps the public, communities in need, and public agencies gain an understanding of what social design is, how it operates, the success stories, and how to access such services.”

Benjamin de la Peña, Associate Director for Urban Development at The Rockefeller Foundation, commented on the idea of a parallel field, public health, as a historical example of an undervalued emerging discipline that had proved its worth and as a result gained credence and authority. Public health had done so, he said, by demonstrating the economic costs of not having public health programs or policies: “What

is the cost of so many people dying of malaria every year in terms of the national productivity? What are the costs of undernourishment in terms of economic growth? What are the costs of smoking and lung cancer to the general welfare of the population?” Addressing summit participants, de la Peña said, “What may be missing—and I don’t know if you’ll find it—is the question of what are the social costs of lack of or bad design? Until you come up with that, then you’re stuck with objects and processes that have no way of capturing the imagination of ever solving anything big.”<sup>7</sup>

Ideas for collecting and sharing data are discussed in greater detail in the section “Proposals” (page 36).

## II. MODELS

### **What are organizational models of successful and sustainable ways of working in socially responsible design?**

In her opening remarks at the summit, Cynthia E. Smith of Cooper-Hewitt gave a précis of different organizational structures for social impact design offered by participants in their responses to a survey issued before the event. These conventional and hybrid models included: for-profit design firms undertaking pro-bono projects; for-profit design firms that have founded separate nonprofit entities; nonprofit design organizations that are supported by grants, philanthropy, or fee-for-service, or that work under the auspices of larger nonprofit charitable institutions; and university-based design research programs. Smith also cited as models “social change incubators that identify investment, support, individuals, and collaborators among social entrepreneurs, such as Ashoka, NESsT and Echoing Green.”

Examples of all of these categories were discussed by participants throughout the summit, as were large urban initiatives and institutional models from other professional areas, like public health. The following represent just a few of these alternative models.

### **HYBRID MODELS**

Different modes by which design organizations deliver a combination of for-profit and nonprofit design services.

#### **NONPROFIT DESIGN ORGANIZATION SPAWNED BY FOR-PROFIT DESIGN FIRM**

##### **IDEO.org**

Described by its founders as a “streamlined, cost-effective organization focused exclusively on its commitment to social design,” IDEO.org is a nonprofit spinoff of IDEO, the Palo Alto-based design firm’s social design unit that concentrates on design projects in water and sanitation, agriculture, health, finance, and gender-related issues in impoverished communities. Founded in 2011, IDEO.org is supported by project fees as well as donations from foundations and social enterprises. It recently launched a fellowship program whose purpose is to “train our future clients around design and design thinking,” said Patrice Martin, the organization’s Co-Lead and Creative Director. For its first class, eight designers and engineers, including two industrial designers and a writer from IDEO’s ranks, were selected from 400 applicants for 11 months of immersion in IDEO-style strategy.

# COMMUNITY-INNOVATION

INTEGRATION OF FORMAL & INFORMAL  
(BERNARD)

COMMUNITY INNOVATION CENTERS  
- MATERIALS  
- MENTORSHIP  
- FUNDING

Funders  
(Early Stage)

↓  
PROTOTYPE & LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION

KIVA/KICKSTARTER  
FUNDING MECHANISM W. LOCAL COMPONENT

↓  
CASE STUDIES  
EVALUATION

EVALUATION:  
- HOW CAN DESIGN IMPROVE M+E  
- SHARE METRICS  
- GUIDING PRINCIPLES  
- ↑ SOCIAL EQUITY

SAVINGS:  
ANALYZE A SYSTEM & IDENTIFY WASTE. FEE BASED ON COST-SAVINGS.

↓  
GLOBAL NETWORK  
- DOCUMENTATION  
- COMMON METRICS  
- PRINCIPLES

↓  
SCALE?  
COMMITMENT TO INVEST IN SCALE OPPORTUNITIES

DESIGN IMPACT BOND  
\$

↓  
FUNDERS FOR D.S.I.

↓  
COMMERCIAL PARTNERS  
LOANS + FINANCE



SUSTAINED ENGAGEMENT  
- DESIGN FOR > DELIVERY  
- EVALUATION 5-10-15 YEARS  
- AWARDS + RECOGNITION

GLOBAL NETWORK  
- COALITIONS?  
- SUSTAINED? DIALOGUE  
- EVALUATION?

# NETWORK



Marc Norman, Syracuse University, and Bernard Kiwia, Global Cycle Solutions (left to right).

## NONPROFIT DESIGN ORGANIZATION WORKING UNDER AUSPICES OF A LARGER NGO

### Mass Design Group

Founded in 2010 by two Harvard architectural school graduates, Michael Murphy and Alan Ricks, MASS (Model of Architecture Serving Society) Design Group grew out of a hospital project in Rwanda that took innovative, practical steps to reduce transmission of disease. The studio has expanded its activities in Rwanda (it recently completed a primary school in Kigali), while undertaking the construction of medical facilities in Haiti. MASS Design Group currently operates under the fiscal supervision of Partners in Health, an organization with which it frequently collaborates, while it waits to secure its own nonprofit status.

## NONPROFIT DESIGN ORGANIZATIONS SUPPORTED BY FEE-FOR-SERVICE AND PHILANTHROPIC DONATIONS

### Architecture for Humanity (AFH)

Founded in 1999 by Cameron Sinclair and Kate Stohr, Architecture for Humanity originally organized competitions to spur design innovations in economically challenged communities and aggregated funds and a network of volunteer workers

for disaster relief. Today, it is a nonprofit design, construction, and development firm with 100 architects in 22 countries. “Just because you’re a nonprofit working with nonprofits doesn’t mean you can’t act like a for-profit,” said Sinclair who attributed AFH’s recent “exponential growth” to its new role financing and managing construction. AFH pays its architects on a par with professionals in the private commercial sector, Sinclair said, and it issues contracts that secure revenue for post-occupancy evaluation and knowledge sharing. The point, he explained, is to “enhance and support social design as a research tool, because nobody funds that.”

### Catapult Design

Cofounded in 2009 in San Francisco by summit participant Heather Fleming, Catapult Design creates products and services for fee-paying clients who are geared toward communities in need. Projects have included solar-powered lighting for health facilities in rural Rwanda and smokeless stoves distributed in the developing world. Roughly half of Catapult’s revenue comes from clients, with the other half coming from donors. The studio does not use volunteer workers.

### Design that Matters

According to its website, Design that Matters (DtM) in Cambridge, Massachusetts, which is directed by summit

participant Timothy Prestero, “leverages the skills of hundreds of volunteers in academia and industry to create breakthrough solutions for communities in need.” Founded in 2001 by Prestero and other graduate students at MIT’s Media Lab, DtM began as an educational seminar for students looking to address real needs in communities. It is now a low-cost design company serving the developing world. Projects include an initiative to develop an infant care device to treat newborn jaundice; and a newborn incubator for the developing world made from car parts taking advantage of locally available replacement parts. Sponsors range from the MIT Media Lab to the Ashoka foundation and from USAID to corporate donors.

## FOR-PROFIT DESIGN COMPANY ENGAGED IN NONPROFIT ACTIVITIES

### **frog**

This global interdisciplinary design firm with offices everywhere from Amsterdam to Ukraine, includes Fortune 500 corporations among its clients but also maintains a distinct unit devoted to nonprofit social innovation projects. Areas of interest range from disaster preparedness to human-centered healthcare. Robert Fabricant, a summit participant and leader of frog’s healthcare expert group, has a key role in an effort to tackle the HIV epidemic in South Africa through information communicated via rapid SMS technology. He has also been involved in frog’s strategic partnership with UNICEF’s Innovation Group to help the organization focus on technology solutions that are scalable and replicable in multiple markets, such as an initiative to improve maternal and infant health in urban Malawi and rural Zambia.

## CORPORATION WITH SOCIAL IMPACT DESIGN DIVISION

### **GE Healthcare**

Summit participant Jon Polhamus represented the Global Design program at GE Healthcare, which employs user-centered strategies for developing products.

According to the division’s general manager, Bob Schwartz, as quoted on the company’s website, the questions that motivate this approach are: “How do we reach the hearts and minds of patients? How do we make the experience better for technologists and clinicians? How do we help them deliver high-quality healthcare with greater access at a lower cost?”

## DESIGN CENTER MODELS

A number of social design entities are academic or research centers that are affiliated with universities. Such models may incorporate teaching into their activities and employ students

as workers. Others, such as the Gulf Coast Community Design Studio, described below, are situated at universities but maintain more of the character of a nonacademic research and service organization.

## UNIVERSITY-BASED DESIGN INITIATIVES

### **Gulf Coast Community Design Studio (GCCDS)**

Directed by David Perkes, GCCDS is affiliated with Mississippi State University’s College of Architecture, Art + Design in Biloxi, yet it is characterized as a “professional service and outreach program.” Perkes said, “In a way, our work is pushing the university model probably to its limits. . . . We are running a studio of 12 full-time professionals. No students, no semesters, no teaching other than an intern program.”

Established to help rebuild communities along the Gulf Coast after Hurricane Katrina, GCCDS has constructed 250 houses to date, bringing “a design quality into a process that would have otherwise produced a lot of standard housing,” Perkes said. The university characterizes GCCDS as a research center, leaving it free to secure funding from FEMA and a host of other organizations to pay for its operating costs. MSU covers only the director’s salary. “As a model, one thing I have to offer is the notion that universities can in fact become a practice,” Perkes said.

### **Massachusetts Institute of Technology D-Lab**

Part of MIT’s International Development Initiative—a cluster of programs, services, and events—the D-Lab, founded by the MacArthur “genius award”-winning mechanical engineer Amy Smith, comprises 16 courses that train students to develop appropriate technologies and sustainable solutions for the developing world. An outgrowth of the D-Lab is the International Development Design Summit (IDDS), a month-long program that gives an international group of students, professionals, and inventors the opportunity to design products in collaboration with local communities and innovators. Summits have taken place at MIT and in Colorado, Ghana, and Brazil. (In 2012, IDDS took place in São Paulo, Brazil.)

One such innovator, Bernard Kiwia, a Tanzanian bicycle mechanic, attended the inaugural IDDS at MIT’s campus in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 2007. As Kiwia recalled at the “Social Impact Design Summit,” he came out of the program a designer. Today, he is the technology manager at the social enterprise Global Cycle Solutions in Arusha and part of a team that visits villages in East Africa to understand residents’ needs, returning later with appropriate products. Among his designs are a bicycle-powered cell phone charger, a wheel-truing stand, and a pedal-powered drill press.

## INCUBATOR MODELS

Developing the skills of social design practitioners and nurturing projects through their formative stages is the aim of a variety of organizations with different priorities and strategies.

### Ashoka

Ashoka is an international fellowship program founded by Bill Drayton in 1980 that singles out and supports social entrepreneurs. As described on its website, the organization's mission is "to shape a global, entrepreneurial, competitive citizen sector: one that allows social entrepreneurs to thrive and enables the world's citizens to think and act as changemakers." Fellows, who are nominated by an international body of advisers, are selected through a rigorous evaluation process involving multiple interviews.

Currently, the network of Ashoka fellows numbers more than 3,000 in some 70 countries. They are supported by an annual budget of more than \$30 million. Recent fellow projects include efforts to improve educational conditions for the Roma of Hungary and developing sustainable organic farming practices in Togo.

### Echoing Green

Founded in 1987, Echoing Green offers a select group of emerging social entrepreneurs up to \$90,000 over two years to initiate new organizations. Less than 1 percent of the thousands of applicants are accepted into the program, which offers not only startup funding but also support services and connection to a global network of mentors. Thirty-six fellows were selected in 2012 and included individuals working on the development of an online platform with life-changing resources for children and teens in foster care, and on clean and safe energy products for impoverished people in rural India.

### NESsT

Cofounded in 1997 by "Social Impact Design Summit" participant Lee Davis, NESsT seeks to create sustainable social enterprises by providing organizations with "the tools and strategies of business leadership, entrepreneurship, and investment." The organization's mission is to build longevity into social enterprises by offering financial alternatives to foundation support. NESsT's operations are concentrated primarily in Central Europe and South America. Among the groups represented in its portfolio are one in Peru that provides disadvantaged children with musical educations and another in Romania that employs at-risk youth and adults to produce environmentally friendly shopping bags.

## CONTEXTUAL MODELS

Summit participants pointed to models of practice that

evolved from unique circumstances and organizational structures in different parts of the world. Such models might reflect long-standing efforts of governments that have taken an active interest in design as a tool to improve conditions for all residents—even the poorest, as a number of case studies in Latin America were discussed. Or they might reflect responses to sudden catastrophes, such as the reconstruction project that followed an earthquake in Gujarat, India, which Kirtee Shah, director of the Ahmedabad Study Action Group, described.

### Gujarat Decentralized Reconstruction Project

Summit participant Kirtee Shah, an architect based in India, singled out the Gujarat Earthquake Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Project as exemplary for its bottom-up approach. "In the process," he recalled at the summit, "an enormous amount of creativity, people's abilities, people's design skills, and variety emerged. It became a decentralized program, which otherwise would have been centralized."

In 2001, a 6.9 earthquake left 14,000 dead, 170,000 injured, and 400,000 homes destroyed or badly damaged in the state of Gujarat, India. The Gujarat Earthquake Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Project—an initiative funded by the UN, World Bank, and other agencies—provided for new infrastructure, landscaping, and earthquake-resistant buildings, giving residents of 900 affected villages a notable opportunity to participate in the design of their restored homes.

One of the "guiding principles" set forth by Narendra Modi, Gujarat's Chief Minister, was to "involve people and representative institutions in the decision-making process, and reflect their priorities and aspirations in program deliverables." He characterized the project as primarily "a community-based, owner-driven program, with technical assistance from engineers provided by the government, building centers, NGOs, etc. Owners will organize reconstruction, repairs, and strengthening through informal or formal contracts with small contractors, artisans, and masons."<sup>8</sup>

### Integral Urbanization Projects

"Some of the most powerful, progressive models have emerged from Latin America in the last two decades," Guatemalan-born architect Teddy Cruz noted. Among the examples he singled out was Curitiba, Brazil.

Jaime Lerner—an architect and urban planner who became mayor of Curitiba in 1971 (the first of three administrations) and governor of the state of Paraná, of which Curitiba is capital, in 1994 (the first of two administrations)—used the tools of design at city scale to institute a number of publicly endorsed urban strategies that made the city greener, cleaner,



**Renne Kemp-Rotan, Black Design News Network; Jessica Joseph and Edwin Torres, The Rockefeller Foundation; and William Drenttel, Design Observer (left to right).**

more pedestrian friendly, and more sensitive to the needs of impoverished residents. Among Lerner's accomplishments were motivating 70 percent of Curitiba's population to separate its garbage for recycling and designing the city's transportation system: an efficient, energy-saving bus and metro network. The first of its kind, the bus rapid transit system accommodated growth while limiting urban sprawl and congested traffic, inspiring similar systems in South America and internationally.<sup>9</sup>

## PARALLEL MODEL

Looking beyond the examples of effective social impact design organizations, summit participants considered models in homologous disciplines. Facing the same requirements for clarity of purpose, public recognition, educational and career pathways, and financial support, how did they evolve? Among parallel models the one discussed most frequently was public health.

### Public Health

Introduced at the summit by University of Minnesota's Dean of the College of Design Thomas Fisher as a template for public interest design (the term more commonly used in architecture), the field of public health was cited repeatedly

for having demonstrated its value to a skeptical audience in its early years. (See "Gaps and Challenges," page 20.) Fisher observed a parallel between public health's challenge to traditional medicine and public interest design's alternative to for-profit design services.

The problem, Fisher said, is that even socially minded designers are stuck in the equivalent of "a medical model of practice." He continued, "Most designers depend upon fee-based commissions, which prevents us from doing a lot of this work. . . . The more quickly we adopt a public-health model of practice, the faster we could achieve what we're all talking about: a widely differentiated user-centric way of delivering health to all people, as opposed to the reactive system of medicine where you wait until somebody is sick before you deal with it. It's about prevention rather than about curing after the fact."

Fisher further saw public health as not just a model but also a partner of social impact design. Its representatives, he said, are eager to work with designers and architects "because they're already realizing that a lot of public health issues are connected to the built environment. We have to figure out a way to meet them halfway. They clearly see most diseases of affluence—obesity, cancer—as well as diseases of poverty as key to issues of housing, sanitation, and infrastructure."

# III. PATHWAYS

**How can we effectively prepare future generations of designers for this growing area of design? Is this a viable career path? If so, how do we raise awareness of this profession?**

Attitudes toward this third summit topic were divided between practitioners who viewed social impact design as an approach—a flexible tool used by a variety of professionals in multiple sectors—and those who saw it as a discipline—a systematically acquired and applied set of professional skills. The education of designers and architects interested in the public interest varies, as more courses and degree programs have emerged in recent years to train aspiring professionals.<sup>10</sup> The flood of offerings, distributed at myriad scales across departments and institutions, indicates the growth and demand coming from a new generation interested in this area of design.

## **SOCIAL DESIGN AS APPROACH**

The question of how to train and mentor social impact designers calls for a thorough consideration of whether social impact design should be regarded as a discipline. “I am wary of defining socially responsible design as a ‘career path,’”

said Sharon Haar of the University of Illinois at Chicago. “Rather, I would like more designers to engage social responsibility as part of the ethos of their work. There are many ‘traditional’ practices whose work in affordable housing, community design and development, and institutional building is highly ethical and socially responsible [but they] do not define themselves as ‘socially responsible’ practices.”

Bernard Amadei of the University of Colorado also expressed the opinion that social impact design should be a mode of practice rather than its own discrete pursuit. “This is not a profession per se,” he insisted. “It is more about integrating a holistic and systems approach into existing disciplines that are involved in socially responsible design.”

Kenneth Bailey, founder of the Design Studio for Social Intervention, concurred. “Design actually when done well is a point of view,” he said, “a perspective, much more than it is a profession.”

“I question the whole mission of trying to professionalize this field,” said Robert Fabricant, Vice President of Creative at frog. The advantage his company brings to clients, he said, was a facility to serve across all sectors and scales, from UNICEF to Vodafone to small social entrepreneurs. “It’s not a simple thing,” he shared, “but the best designers I’ve

# Next Generation of Designers

- x Long-term impact - Where did students end up?
- \* Social engagement with Schools
  - what are they learning?
  - need for common vocab
  - nurturing design talent so we have social design in schools.
- \* Cultural exchange -
  - Bring in knowledge from outside. Embed into local community.
  - Fellowships / Teach for America model focused on design.
- \* CASE Studies
  - Not just lessons learned but changed behaviors
  - Learning from failure
- \* Raise Awareness ~~of~~ <sup>of</sup> the value of Social Impact Design

worked with demand that they work across those areas and don't see this as a single-track approach."

And Dan Etheridge, Assistant Director of Tulane City Center, which oversees the urban research and outreach programs at Tulane University's School of Architecture, suggested that even dedicated training in social impact design could be best put to use as a means of informing a general design career: "Designers who aspire to be traditionally licensed practitioners of architecture can be better supported to develop a skill set in socially responsible design and then move between it and more conventional practice over time," he noted. "There will always be a need for full-time leadership positions in socially responsible design, but I think there is so much work to be done that a more sustainable way of looking at it from the scale of the entire profession is to relax the boundaries that separate the way we practice rather than continue to reinforce them."

## SOCIAL DESIGN AS DISCIPLINE

Other participants, many involved with academic institutions, were more inclined to view social impact design as a clear discipline founded on well-considered educational routes rather than ad hoc experience.

Amy Smith, founder of the D-Lab at MIT, which focuses on products and strategies for international development, offered the model of an educational program that rigorously trains aspiring social impact professionals, both academically and in fieldwork. Having grown in a decade from one to 16 classes and from 20 to 400 students, her D-Lab, Smith said, almost qualifies as a university department. Though Smith hews to an academic model, her students have a chance to go into the field as well as participate in "an entire ecosystem where they can follow up," she said. "And so a freshman can take a class and . . . by the time they graduate, will have created their own company to be doing this work in the field."

Mariana Amatullo of Designmatters at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California—a cross-disciplinary initiative that engages students in ongoing social impact design projects—not only helps train future humanitarian designers but also works with them to improve global welfare and jump-start social innovation ventures now. Efforts include projects to increase access to water in the slums of Chile and Peru, and campaigns to promote public health in the United States. Designmatters, Amatullo said, seeks to give designers the ability to move "between the corporate and noncorporate and . . . navigate both."

Nontraditional educational programs were also discussed as preparatory to social design careers. Thomas Fisher of the University of Minnesota, for instance, described efforts at the school to develop a nonresidential, multi-institutional online certificate program in public interest design. And Cameron Sinclair of Architecture for Humanity is helping to develop studies in social impact design that are conducted exclusively online. “The fact that so many students are rebelling against their academic architecture degree or design degree and are seeking out this sort of knowledge means that there’s a huge opportunity,” Sinclair said.

## THE CURRICULUM

But what constitutes the best education for the aspiring social impact designer? Most of the summit participants, including many of the academics, argued for curricula that extend beyond the traditional design scope.

“Universities are in crisis right now,” Fisher said. “And it’s not just an economic crisis; it’s also an intellectual crisis. Students in the universities do not want to stay within the disciplinary silos and institutional structures that we have created for them, demanding that we change the way we think about and convey knowledge. Some institutions are looking at a challenge-based curriculum, where a student would major in a discipline and minor in a challenge—a cross-disciplinary education in which students come out equipped to do something in the world.”

William Drenttel, founder of Winterhouse Institute, supported a design education in which design plays no part, at least at its foundation: “I think there’s an argument to be made that what we really need are designers that don’t go to design school first,” he said. “That maybe they study politics, or economics, or even more critically for all of our futures in social enterprise, science.”

Dan Etheridge of Tulane City Center endorsed augmenting a traditional design education with “elective classes in public health, international development, and other disciplinary environments outside of the design school culture.”

Jon Polhamus of GE Healthcare Global Design referred to his own heterogeneous schooling as a graphic designer—which included courses in manufacturing, engineering, and architecture—as evidence of the value that broad knowledge can bring to design activities, especially those that require collaborations with nondesigner colleagues.

Timothy Prestero of Design that Matters recommended that the next generation learn how to run a disciplined experiment. “I have many, many years of graduate education,” he

said, “and it’s only recently that I understood the scientific method, in terms of how do you state your hypothesis, how do you list and prioritize your assumptions, and how do you focus on falsifying your assumptions rather than validating your cherished beliefs?”

Bryan Bell of Design Corps advocated a better professional education in best practices and appropriate ethics, while Teddy Cruz—who transferred from teaching in the School of Architecture to the School of the Arts at the University of California, San Diego—decried a tendency among institutions to segregate social responsibility from “artistic experimentation.”

Katie Swenson, Vice President of Design for Enterprise Community Partners, which sponsors the Enterprise Rose Fellowship program, deemed it vital to “teach students more about development and how projects actually happen. To just teach ‘design’ is to ignore 95 percent of what it takes to make a project happen. Design skill is extremely important, but not in a vacuum.”

Kirtee Shah of the Ahmedabad Study Action Group criticized the standard training of Indian architects, who are steeped in historical modernism and given little exposure to far more relevant vernacular design.

## THE PIPELINE

Improving peoples’ lives around the world is one of the goals of social impact design education. And for young designers, there are bountiful opportunities to alleviate global hardship both in and out of school. It’s quite a different matter, however, to shape a career for this type of work. “The question is, are we giving students enough depth (courses and experience) in this field to make them viable when they hit the street?” noted Sergio Palleroni of Portland State University.

Explaining that her program at Art Center College of Design seeks to help designers move “between the corporate and noncorporate and . . . navigate both,” Mariana Amatullo wondered, “What are the opportunities for careers that can be hybrid, that can really move across?”

Heather Fleming of Catapult Design suggested that the summit conversation was overemphasizing students and their futures at the expense of existing young professionals. “I’m more interested in how can we effectively capture this generation,” she said. “If you look at the designers who are in the industry right now, who are at the top of their field, it’s hard for them to break into this space. . . . Their salaries are going to be lower; you can’t send them off into the field because maybe they have a family. There’s almost a larger hurdle for

them than for students. But if I don't want to work with just students, which I personally don't have the time to train and mentor, then how can I leverage the current design community, not just here but abroad?"

Krista Donaldson of D-Rev also expressed concern about guiding emerging professionals: "My experience," she said, "is that these young designers that are coming out now—they're fantastic. But who's going to mentor them? This is very much an apprentice-based field. How are you going to learn about commercialization? How are you going to learn about impact assessment?"

"I think there are too few career paths," Patrice Martin of IDEO said. "I also think that, because there's not a strong awareness, or because there's not enough demand for what design can do in this space, the level of quality we're seeing is really inconsistent." In response to frog's Robert Fabricant's point about the advantage of gaining equal experience in the nonprofit and for-profit realms, she said, "My advice is to tell designers always, 'Go work in the private sector. Get that expertise to really be a designer, and then bring that back to the social sector,' because, right now, there's not enough of that discipline and rigor that exists in this space on its own."

Amy Smith of D-Lab pointed out that the discussion of career pathways focused entirely on students in the United States, as opposed to on indigenous designers in the communities in need. "I do think we also have to think about the designers who are in those communities, because long-term sustainable development and change will happen if designers are living in the place and not always being brought in from universities," she said.

Kirtee Shah, for his part, spoke enthusiastically about the Young Professionals program directed by the Bangkok-based Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR), which partners with universities to conduct workshops for young architects in 10 Asian countries and provide them with opportunities to practice in disadvantaged communities. This "rare and bold initiative," Shah said, "is showing results, costs little, and has huge long-term-impact potential."

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Suggestions for improving educational and career pathways for aspiring social impact designers are summarized below:

### CREATE SOCIAL IMPACT DESIGN EDUCATION AND WORK OPPORTUNITIES WITHIN THE COMMUNITIES SEEKING TO SOLVE PROBLEMS.

Both Richie Moalosi of the University of Botswana and Kenneth Bailey of the Design Studio for Social Intervention spoke of the value of bringing local community members into the arena. Moalosi suggested that student exchange programs "between new emerging economies and the developed economies" should be encouraged "as part of sharing ideas and promoting socially responsible design." Bailey spoke of his efforts to get "more people of color and people from the communities we're trying to serve into the field of design."

### INCREASE THE NUMBER OF DEDICATED SOCIAL IMPACT DESIGN-RELATED PROGRAMS IN SCHOOLS.

Thomas Fisher of the University of Minnesota proposed, "If the academy could establish a few pilot programs in this area either as tracks in existing programs or stand-alone interdisciplinary programs in their own right, that would give students interested in working in the field a clearer path and better equip them with the skills they will need without it being ad hoc, as so often happens now."

### PUBLICIZE EXISTING OPPORTUNITIES FOR SOCIAL IMPACT DESIGN TRAINING.

Noted Sergio Palleroni of Portland State University, "Programs are emerging that are making this path a distinct choice . . . but the need to make these options known to students is a problem. Are there possibilities for a national educational clearinghouse that would publicize service learning opportunities?"

### CREATE MORE FELLOWSHIPS AND OTHER POSTGRADUATE PROGRAMS THAT SERVE AS A BRIDGE BETWEEN EDUCATION AND CAREER.

As described by Katie Swenson of Enterprise Community Partners, the organization's Enterprise Rose Fellowship partners emerging architects with local community development organizations in underserved districts for three years to work to create affordable housing. The program provides an unusual opportunity in social impact design to groom recent graduates to become professionals. "We haven't taken the approach so much, 'You're a social designer,' as rather, 'You're entering the production stream,' which has its own set of deliverables," Swenson said. "And you're bringing your design into the heart of an existing stream to disrupt or invent within that process." The experience shows how professional identities can shift in this territory. Offered a spectrum of skills, including collaborating with financiers and policymakers, Swenson said, the majority of Rose Fellows who completed the program "are designers, but working more broadly in policy and community development."

For additional recommendations related to education and careers, see "Proposals," page 36.

# IV. PROPOSALS

In the summit's afternoon session, participants from the morning discussion were joined by 12 additional design leaders representing a range of organizations. Together they reviewed the three topics that structured the event: **Where are the gaps? What are the models? How can we prepare the next generation of designers?**

The participants broke into five groups to formulate recommendations for the near and distant future. Themes that emerged from this free play of ideas, along with those proposed in the surveys issued before the summit, are summarized below.

## 1. EXPAND NETWORKS

There is much that members of this diverse, global community can learn from one another and from the constituents they serve. Suggestions to foster relationships and pool knowledge in an effort to expand interdisciplinary research and participation in social impact design include:

### Short-term

- Issue a call for research papers on social impact design, and develop or build on existing web-based knowledge

hubs to integrate information—such as a database of resources and potential funding opportunities—across design disciplines.

- Convene multidisciplinary and discipline-specific meetings about socially responsible design around specific issues, communities, and geographies.

### Long-term

- Establish a two-way connection between design professionals and students working in the developing world and the informal modes practiced by local innovators seeking resources to put their products into the market. For instance, community innovation centers could be founded where local inventors receive access to materials, mentoring, and funding opportunities. The projects could be spun into case studies that would suggest appropriate opportunities for bringing an initiative to scale, either locally or in a global market.
- Establish socially responsible design practice residencies within foundations that are doing community development work to inform funding.
- Place designers within mission-based organizations with specific, funded projects.
- Expand the role of social media as a democratic, participatory tool for making decisions about social impact design efforts.

- Research and establish a map of how socially responsibly designed products reach their markets, with a focus on how manufacturing is accomplished and economies of scale are met.
- Develop portals to publicize and cross-promote resources for social impact design.

## 2. EMPHASIZE STORYTELLING

The value of social impact design is not effectively communicated to the social sector. Designers need to tell the “story” of how design can play a significant role in creating social change. Ideas include:

### Short-term

- Compile a glossary of social impact design terminology to form a unified approach to describing work.
- Create an archive of case studies via a web-based knowledge hub that demonstrates the value of social impact design in terms of cost saving, efficiency, and broad social impact.
- Collect and share examples of the best practices of effective storytelling with the social sector via online documents or webinars.

### Long-term

- Develop a media campaign that helps the public, communities in need, and public agencies gain an understanding of what social impact design is, how it addresses critical issues, and how one may gain access to its services.
- Develop a means to document and share the instructive failures of social design efforts.

## 3. BUILD A CULTURE OF EVALUATION

A persistent theme of the summit was the need for better tools to demonstrate the long-term impact of design projects and initiatives, an important result of which would be a more effective allocation of resources to support such endeavors. Some suggestions:

### Short-term

- Research existing metric systems and work toward an international system of metrics that evaluates social impact design.
- Study what does and does not work for social impact design projects and initiatives rather than only the final results.

### Long-term

- Seed large-scale programs at universities throughout the world that train students to evaluate the impact of social design.
- Institute processes for long-term evaluations (as long as 30 years).
- Build accountability and transparency into any system of evaluation.

## 4. FORM INTELLIGENT COALITIONS

Universities and design schools are currently an important seat for social impact design training and fieldwork, but there is additional need for dedicated social impact design programs within these and other institutions, and for greater recognition of their value. Resources for learning should not be concentrated solely in formal academic communities; they are also needed in informal teaching environments, both physical and online. Ideas include:

### Short-term

- Organize teaching workshops of social impact design within communities that lack formal educational programs where social designers are trained, and enlist the help of local design practitioners in their development.
- Impress on university administrators the value of social impact design research and practice in order to make it more of a vehicle for promotion and tenure.

### Long-term

- Create “intelligent coalitions”—or international networks organized by universities—that would foster the practice of social impact design through teaching and fieldwork, financial assistance through loan forgiveness, and access to resources and expertise in the launching of professional careers.
- Create a program for social impact designers similar to Teach for America, the organization that trains a select group of recent college graduates to be educators in underserved communities.



Jennifer Toy, Kounkuey Design Initiative.



Tim Prester, Design that Matters.

## 5. CREATE ALTERNATIVE FUNDING STRATEGIES

Often funds are not readily available or allocated to maximize positive impact. Alternatives to standard methods for supporting social impact design projects were proposed to enable innovative and ongoing support included:

### Short-term

- Maintain funding through successive iterations of a social impact design project—rather than just the initial stages—which will help ensure that the project is fully functional and meets all its users' needs.
- Invest in experimental social impact design strategies that bring higher risk but have great potential gains if they succeed.

### Long-term

- Establish a social capital venture model or platform like Kiva, the lending website that supports social entrepreneurship, which would draw in funding from around the world for investment in local inventors.
- Establish design impact bonds along the lines of social impact bonds (also known as pay-for-success bonds) created from programs that bring potentially money-saving designs to scale. Returns on investment would be contingent on the social benefits achieved through such designs.

# Where

Non market driven design problems.  
Civil society design  
Re thinking democratic practice, etc

• build evaluation + iterative design process into funding requirements

CREATE MORE BRIDGING BETWEEN LOCAL AND LARGER EFFORTS.

MET for evaluation design

# What

Growing Non Profit interest only

• Support pilot / high risk projects on small / localized scale

R + D FOR FINANCING RISK PROJECTS

SUPPORT DEVELOPMENT OF STANDARDS FOR ACADEMIC PROGRAMS FOCUSED ON "DESIGN FOR SOCIAL CHANGE"

imbed designer ?

COMMUNITY DEPENDENCY ISSUES

STANDARDS  
REGULATION VS. ACCOUNTABILITY



# How

SUPPORT INNOVATION NOT JUST INNOVATION

Young activists and organizers meeting designers of all kinds



PROCESS FOR SHARING LESSONS LEARNED

EMO in PHU OR FOR

## V. NOTES



**Bryan Bell, SEED Network; Katie Swenson, Enterprise Community Partners; and John Peterson, Public Architecture (left to right).**

**1** United Nation's World Commission on Environment and Development, "Towards Sustainable Development," in *Our Common Future: Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development*, (Geneva: United Nations, 1987), 41–58. ([www.un-documents.net/wced-ocf.htm](http://www.un-documents.net/wced-ocf.htm))

**2** For definitions of social impact design, see Ezio Manzini, "Small, Local, Open, and Connected: Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability," *Journal of Design Strategies* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 8–11.

**3** Donella H. Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows, Jørgen Randers, and William W. Behrens III, *The Limits to Growth: A Report for The Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind* (New York: Universe Books, 1972).

**4** Bryan Bell, Roberta Feldman, Sergio Palleroni, and David Perkes, "Public Interest Practices in Architecture," 2011 Latrobe Prize Progress Report submitted to The College of Fellows of The American Institute of Architects, December 31, 2011.

**5** For references to *ubuntu*, see Heike Winschiers-Theophilus, Nicola J. Bidwell, and Edwin Blake, "Community Consensus: Design Beyond Participation," *Design Issues* 28, no. 3 (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2012): 89–100; *Presidential Task Group for a Long Term Vision for Botswana, A Framework for a Long Term Vision for Botswana—2016*, (Gaborone: Government Printer, 2006); M. K. M'Rithaa, *Mainstreaming Universal Design in Cape Town: FIFA 2010 World Cup—Related Activities as Catalyst*

for Social Change, PhD thesis (Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa, 2009).

**6** Michael A. Cohen, "Revisiting Senegal After 40 Years," *The Huffington Post*, March 23, 2012. ([www.huffingtonpost.com/michael-a-cohen/revisiting-senegal-after-40-years\\_b\\_1375912.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/michael-a-cohen/revisiting-senegal-after-40-years_b_1375912.html))

**7** Dona Schneider and David E Lilienfeld, *Public Health: the Development of a Discipline* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008).

**8** A PDF of the policy can be found at [www.gsdma.org](http://www.gsdma.org).

**9** Mike Power, "Common Sense and the City: Jaime Lerner, Brazil's Green Revolutionary," *The Guardian*, November 5, 2009. ([www.guardian.co.uk/environment/blog/2009/nov/05/jaime-lerner-brazil-green](http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/blog/2009/nov/05/jaime-lerner-brazil-green))

**10** William Drenttel and Julie Lasky, *Winterhouse Symposium on Design Education and Social Change: Final Reports*. (<http://changeobserver.designobserver.com/feature/winterhouse-first-symposium-on-design-education-and-social-change-final-report/22578> and <http://changeobserver.designobserver.com/feature/winterhouse-second-symposium-on-design-education-and-social-change-final-report/30688>)

## APPENDIX A

### SUMMIT PARTICIPANTS

In attendance at the “Social Impact Design Summit” on February 27, 2012, in New York were:

### MORNING PARTICIPANTS

#### **Mariana Amatullo**

Vice President, Designmatters, Art Center College of Design

#### **Kenneth Bailey**

Founder, Design Studio for Social Intervention

#### **Bryan Bell**

Founder, Social Economic Environmental Design Network; Executive Director, Design Corps

#### **Michael Cohen**

Director, International Affairs Program, The New School

#### **Teddy Cruz**

Founder, Estudio Teddy Cruz

#### **Krista Donaldson**

CEO, D-Rev

#### **William Drenttel**

Cofounder, Design Observer and Winterhouse

#### **Robert Fabricant**

Vice President of Creative, frog

#### **Thomas Fisher**

Professor of Architecture and Dean of the College of Design, University of Minnesota

#### **Heather Fleming**

CEO, Catapult Design

#### **Renee Kemp-Rotan**

Director of Special Projects, Office of the Mayor of Birmingham, Alabama; Cofounder, Black Design News Network

#### **Bernard Kiwia**

Chief of Engineering, Global Cycle Solutions

#### **Laura Kurgan**

Director, Spatial Information Design Lab, Columbia University

#### **Patrice Martin**

Co-lead + Creative Director, Ideo.org

#### **Richie Moalosi**

Senior Lecturer in Industrial Design, University of Botswana

#### **David Perkes**

Director/Architect, Gulf Coast Community Design Studio

#### **Jon Polhamus**

Brand Design Language Manager, GE Healthcare Global Design

#### **Tim Prestero**

Founder and CEO, Design that Matters

#### **Kirtee Shah**

Director, Ahmedabad Study Action Group

#### **Cameron Sinclair**

Cofounder, Architecture for Humanity

#### **Amy Smith**

Founder, D-Lab, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

#### **Jennifer Toy**

Cofounder, Kounkuey Design Initiative

### AFTERNOON PARTICIPANTS

#### **John Cary**

Founder/Editor/Curator, PublicInterestDesign.org

#### **Lee Davis**

Cofounder and Chief Innovation Officer, NESsT

#### **Lou Elin Dwyer**

Research Analyst, Center for Technology and National Security Policy, National Defense University

#### **Dan Etheridge**

Assistant Director, Tulane City Center, Tulane University

#### **Sharon Haar**

Professor, School of Architecture, University of Illinois at Chicago

#### **Michele Kahane**

Professor of Professional Practice, Social Entrepreneurship, The New School

#### **Ezio Manzini**

Director of the Interdepartmental Centre for Research on Innovation for Sustainability, Milan Polytechnic University

#### **Marc Norman**

Director, UPSTATE: A Center for Design, Research, and Real Estate at Syracuse University

#### **Sergio Palleroni**

Professor Senior Fellow, Center for Sustainable Solutions; Director, Center for Public Interest Design, Portland State University

#### **John Peterson**

Founder President, Public Architecture

#### **Manuel Toscano**

Principal, Zago LLC, and National Director for Social Engagement, Design for Good, AIGA

#### **Phil Weilerstein**

Executive Director, National Collegiate Inventors and Innovators Alliance

### FUNDING REPRESENTATIVES

#### **Benjamin de la Peña**

Associate Director for Urban Development, The Rockefeller Foundation

#### **Sunny Fischer**

Executive Director, The Richard H. Driehaus Foundation

#### **George Jacobsen**

Program Officer, Community Development, The Kresge Foundation

#### **Jessica Joseph**

Associate Director, Innovation, The Rockefeller Foundation

**Maurine Knighton**

Senior Vice President of Operations and Program Director, Arts and Culture, Nathan Cummings Foundation

**Judilee Reed**

Director, Thriving Cultures, Surdna Foundation

**Ellen Rudolph**

Consultant

**Regina Smith**

Senior Program Officer, Arts Culture, The Kresge Foundation

**Katie Swenson**

Vice President of National Design Initiatives, Enterprise Community Partners, Inc.

**Edwin Torres**

Associate Director for New York City Opportunities Fund and Innovation, The Rockefeller Foundation

**PLANNING PARTNERS****Jamie Hand**

Design Specialist, Visual Arts Division, National Endowment for the Arts

**Jennifer Hughes**

Design Specialist, Visual Arts Division, National Endowment for the Arts

**Bill Moggridge**

Former Director (1943-2012), Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum

**Caroline Payson**

Director of Education, Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum

**Abigail Sarmac**

Program Officer, The Lemelson Foundation

**Jason Schupbach**

Design Director, Visual Arts Division, National Endowment for the Arts

**Joan Shigekawa**

Acting Chairman, National Endowment for the Arts

**Cynthia E. Smith**

Curator of Socially Responsible Design, Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum

**APPENDIX B****PARTICIPANT SURVEY SUMMARY REMARKS**

Introductory remarks by Cynthia E. Smith, Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum’s Curator of Socially Responsible Design, given at the “Social Impact Design Summit.” It is a summarized analysis of summit participants’ responses to a survey about the status of socially responsible design sent to each participant prior to the summit’s convening.

**We have brought together leading practitioners from the public, private, and social sectors—working within the United States and internationally. Your responses to our survey to gauge the current status of social impact design reflect a broad range of experience and perspectives, which helps us to frame the day’s conversation. This is evident even in the multitude of terms we use to describe this area of design:**

- socially responsible design
- public interest design
- design for social change
- public design
- social innovation
- social impact design
- social design
- public service design

**We asked you, “Where are the gaps that hinder growth for this area of design?” You responded with the following:**

- A lack of recognition of the value of design in the social sector, which limits the demand for design services.
- A lack of a single, clear, and accessible language, identity, and set of standards for this area of design—and a common language shared between designers and funders.
- No pipeline or incentives in place, and limited opportunities to build experiences in the social sector, which hinders practitioners’ ability to commit full-time to socially responsible design.
- Knowledge gaps in understanding socioeconomic and cultural differences; and the underlying causes that created the problem, which may in fact require more systemic solutions—not yet prevalent in social impact design.

**These are a number of the challenges encountered that hinder the growth of socially responsible design:**

- Educators meet resistance from universities to integrate this topic into the curriculum and their research. For students, there no clear path of study.
- “Lack of time” emerged as a challenge for many designers to sustain their efforts. Designers spend extraordinary amounts of time securing funding sources to undertake this work. The design development cycle takes time because communities are slow to engage new technologies. Measuring impact can take years.
- Few social sector organizations can afford to pay market rates for design services.
- Cultural bias is a challenge to overcome, especially when one does not share a common language, culture, or life experience.

**We asked you to describe successful and sustainable organizational models that you have encountered. Here are some of your responses:**

- Some—such as IDEO.org and International Development Enterprises—are hybrids, where a nonprofit design firm relies on fee-for-service and philanthropic contributions; MASS Design Group works under a larger, well-funded nonprofit, Partners in Health.
- Design Centers/Studios, like Tulane City Center, are based in universities and engage students for earning credits or money; they have the capacity to manage long-term grants, yet they do require support by top administrators to meet their mission.
- Social change incubators—such as Ashoka, NESsT, and Echoing Green—identify, invest in, and support individuals and collaborations between social entrepreneurs.
- There are numerous social, academic, research, and professional networks—such as the DESIS (Design for Social Innovations and Sustainability) Network—which works both locally and internationally. Others are volunteer-based nonprofit networks, such as Architecture for Humanity and Engineers without Borders.
- One successful model is based on the *ubuntu* concept of interconnectedness, which calls for a full engagement of the community in the development of the design at every stage.

**We asked, “Is socially responsible design a viable career path?”**

- Some respondents agreed that design for social impact is a viable career path when measured in terms of need, though maybe not as currently constructed.
- The path to becoming a financially viable career remains unclear, with few opportunities.
- This area of design will become more viable if demand for services increase within the social sector in the United States and the areas that are most in need in the developing world.

- Look to the field of public health as a way to develop the field of social impact design.
- Some thought that, rather than a distinct practice, it should be a specialization within existing professions.

**Survey respondents suggested the following actions when asked, “How do we raise awareness of this profession?”**

- Professional knowledge sharing via social networks and professional associations.
- Practitioner-led workshops to share experience and methods.
- Case studies of successful models and practices that measure the effectiveness of efforts.
- The incorporation of the study of social design into interdisciplinary coursework, along with social design-focused modules in existing design programs.
- The development and promotion of competitions for social impact design solutions.

**It was suggested by respondents that students interested in this field could take many actions to prepare themselves while they are still in school, such as:**

- To broaden their knowledge base, they could take elective courses—even if outside of their major—in public health, international development, sociology, anthropology, history, economics, and finance.
- To gain more skills and experience in the field, students could intern with social design firms or volunteer with organizations like Design Corps to engage underserved communities in the United States and the Peace Corps for cultural immersion and international humanitarian aid experience.
- To “learn and listen in the field, before speaking and designing”—probably the most critical skill students can gain from working directly with communities.

**The final survey question, “How can funders, academia, public and private sectors support this work in a systematic and sustainable way?” elicited the most ideas. Here are just a few of those ideas:**

- The seeding and incubating of start-up collaborative projects between designers and social enterprises to demonstrate the interest in social impact design.
- The establishment of a fund for designers engaged in socially responsible design, available for an extended period of time, to give this emergent field the financial stability it needs to demonstrate its value.
- The creation of an ethical protocol and an oversight board.
- The provision of public sector tax incentives that promote socially responsible activity—and tax penalties for projects which are irresponsible.