

TOWARD A SURVIVOR CENTERED SOLIDARITY ECONOMY

ISSUE BRIEF

“From my point of view, instead of helping the victims, [the government] drags them into another negative and violent environment.”

“There are many of us who know how to do many things. We can get together and show others what we can do...That could help us financially.”

- Survivors from visioning call, December 2021

For many in our communities, economic ripples may feel more like storms. Survivors are expected to find firm financial footing while living through wave after wave of abuse, poverty, racism, gender-discrimination, xenophobia, and homophobia. . Despite the reform recommendations offered in [coerced debt](#), [housing](#), and [public benefits](#) briefs, many survivors are wholly excluded from official financial, government, and legal service systems and other mainstream economic opportunities needed for financial security and long-term safety. Consider the following statistics (and see the [factsheet](#) for more):

Disparities in violence and poverty: People marginalized by virtue of race, immigration status, gender-identity, etc. are twice as likely (or more) to experience IPV and poverty than their cis-het, white counterparts.¹

Opting out of mainstream safety services: In NYC, reports to police have consistently decreased² (prior to and during COVID), while calls to NYC hotlines and requests for fast financial assistance increased 21-fold during COVID.³

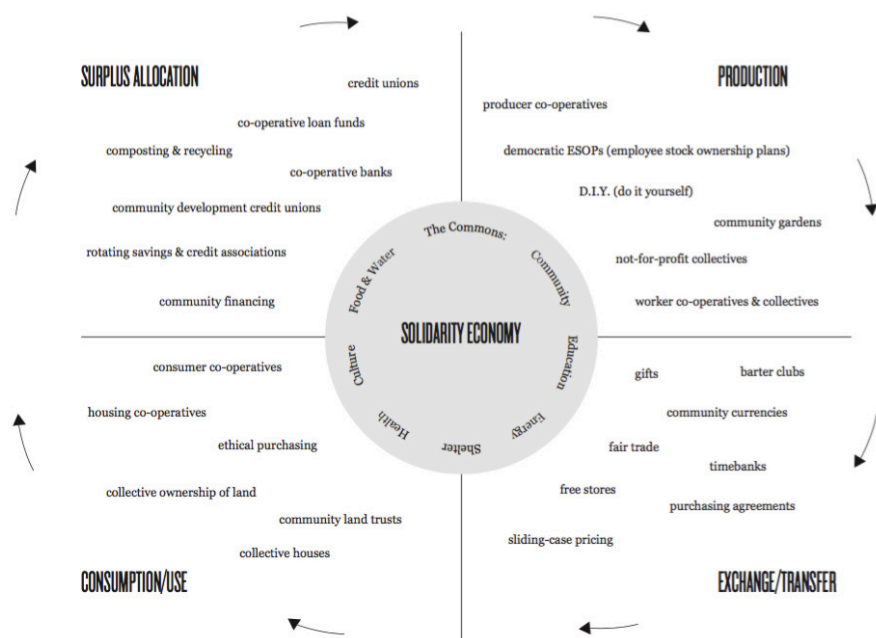
Higher and unique barriers to economic resources: In a national survey, 71% of advocates reported that BIPOC, immigrant, and LGBTQ+ survivors face disparities in health, safety, and access to resources during COVID-19.⁴ While the vast majority of advocates reported all survivors faced challenges with income, food, and bill pay as challenges, 100% of advocates working with immigrant communities did. In addition, “trouble with social distancing” and “fear of seeking help for abuse or COVID due to identity” were among the top 5 reported challenges (also 100% reporting).

New manifestations of historical racialized structures: Over half of NYC advocates reported increased acts of xenophobia, racism, and discrimination as a problem during COVID.⁵ In

2018, 57% of advocates in a pilot project said systems entanglement and barriers to address immigration, consumer, and/or criminal legal issues were the biggest barriers to safety (not abusive partners).⁶ While the previous issue briefs identify many system, budget, and policy issues, and offer important recommendations to reform current service and legal systems, we also need to acknowledge when to reform and when to lift-up and invest in survivor- and community-driven solutions.

Survivors who participated in the visioning calls are engaged in a set of principles and practices, known as the “solidarity economy,” born out of resistance to problematic systems and a desire for connection, community, and care. **Solidarity economy is a framework built upon values of cooperation, social and racial justice, democracy, mutualism, and ecological sustainability.** They framework emerges from deep practices and relationships between community groups and neighbors that extend a single entity. Some tools used to build solidarity economies include worker co-ops, credit unions, cooperatively-managed

Solidarity Economy Diagram (credit: SolidarityNYC)



Source: Resources: The Basics. SolidarityNYC. (n.d.). Retrieved September 9, 2022, from <http://solidaritynyc.org/#/resources>

loan funds, mutual aid networks, limited equity housing co-ops, and many more. These tools offer us opportunities to engage in solidarity economy principles and practices (www.solidarityeconomyprinciples.org) to achieve social transformation and liberation for survivors, but solidarity economies themselves only emerge when these are linked, networked, and resourced collectively. Survivors are already benefiting from some of these tools– some in formal ways, like worker cooperatives and in the use of alternative institutions like credit unions, and others in informal ways like selling goods or providing childcare (see inserted graphic). To truly achieve justice, these will need to grow and be linked together in powerful ways that allow for survivors to self-govern and self-determine how to meet these needs.*

We spoke to 24 Latinx survivors who are building worker cooperatives, as well as advocates and activists who are engaged in a range of solidarity economy practices in NYC. Below are key recommendations survivors had for the NYC Mayor, elected officials, and City agencies that would help build a more equitable economy in NYC; one that reflects their values of community, connection, and care, and maximizes their options for economic security.

* Deep gratitude to the advising and contributions of Cheyenna Weber of SolidarityNYC. Members of this advocacy group are students of solidarity economy, and benefited greatly from the generous teaching, practice, connecting offered by community leaders, long-standing initiatives, and survivors with rich expertise in solidarity economy.

RECOMMENDATIONS TOWARD A SOLIDARITY ECONOMY

Note: To the extent possible recommendations are direct quotes from survivors or consolidate multiple similar quotes. We also included notes and paraphrases from calls with advocates and activities (no transcripts were available).

We look to and support the leadership and expertise of communities, programs, and initiatives which have been creating economies rooted in solidarity for years.

This includes, but is not limited to: Principles and practices from the [“Growing a Resilient City” Report from SolidarityNYC](#) in 2013; The coalition building and direct action of the [Cooperative Economics Alliance of New York City](#); And we also support the policy platform developed by the [New York City Network of Worker Cooperatives](#). In particular, the recommendations by survivors below tap into the policy priorities of: Direct Financial Support, Education & Technical Assistance, and Movements for Racial & Immigrant Justice.

Enlist survivors as key and expert advisors - with leadership roles, decision-making power, and compensation — in efforts to reform policy/practices of current government economic systems and to create new economic opportunities. This includes, but is not limited to, establishing and funding the survivor and advocate advisory committees recommended in the [Housing Issue](#) Brief and the [Public Benefits](#) Issue Brief.

“Here everything’s different. We all count, we have a say. There is equality, comradeship and in our community, we try to respect the environment by using eco-friendly products.”

Increase direct and flexible funding to survivor worker cooperatives

“The salary we earn is almost entirely spent on paying the bills and the rent.” “We get [funds] for marketing and workshops, but we have other needs too.” Current funding structures focus on long-term business-development goals while neglecting to provide for the immediate and urgent needs of the survivors building from the ground up. Survivors need funds to cover business expenses, to pay a living wage, and to include benefits like health insurance (especially for mental health), retirement, and life insurance. Survivors need funds to cover business expenses, to pay a living wage, and to include benefits like health insurance (especially for mental health), retirement, and life insurance. Advocates noted that survivors need financial needs met immediately to avoid hardship, suffering, and dangerous or exploitative employment.

Specific recommendations include:

- *“Allow each [of our] cooperatives to directly apply for aid, instead of waiting for the funds to get to an organization who then decides where the money will be invested.”*
- Support or “open more cooperatives.”
- Remove restrictions from how funds can be used so that each cooperative membership can make decisions about how to use funding in ways that best serve their community and needs.
- Ensure funding to worker cooperatives will provide a livable salary and include other benefits (eg. health, retirement options, life insurance), so they have the income and time required to build their business.

- Provide fast, clear, and regular business, loan, and tax information and assistance (in multiple languages) to survivor cooperatives.
- Design and advocate for City, State, or Federal tax credits “made especially for [survivors] who participate in Solidarity Economy.”

City funding should go beyond worker cooperatives, connecting to other aspects of the solidarity economy like babysitting/childcare coops, urban homesteading or alternative use of commercial buildings, and building loan pools to pay survivor coerced debt.

- » The City should participate in a community-based process to identify a fuller set of solidarity economy practices to identify which it can lead or support directly and which should be led by private or community groups.
- » Provide funding to support survivors’ full range of economic and healing needs reflected in [Survivor-Centered Bridges to Economic Equity](#).
- » See survivor recommendations in the [coerced debt](#), [housing](#), and [public benefits](#) briefs as well.

Supplement direct aid to survivor worker cooperatives with increased funding, training, and capacity building to survivor-led and culturally specific advocacy organizations. Survivors value support from programs that can deliver technical financial/business support in holistic environments and supplemental services that embody survivors values of cooperation, care, and connection toward healing.

- » **Prioritize and fully fund culturally specific advocacy organizations to provide the technical assistance and emotional/trauma-informed support survivors want.** Program funding should include general operating funds, evaluation support, specific staffing, and sufficient flexible funding for programs to offer supplemental services like groups, therapeutic services, legal advocacy, and opportunities for cooperation, care, and connection.
- » **Revise or develop new processes to monitor and evaluate projects in solidarity economy to be immigrant-centered, community-driven processes that honor and uplift the history of BIPOC and immigrants in creating and furthering the solidarity economy:** “Many immigrant communities have experience with coops, but funders often redirect the use of funds which undermine the purpose. How do we limit institutional white-washing [from funders]? For example, a funder redirected grant dollars originally meant for parent-led child care to go to setting up daycares, instead. Daycares did not change the cost barriers to access for impacted parents, so the project was deemed ineffective, they lost funding, and didn’t have capacity to build an evidence-base for future grants. They get stuck in this cycle.”
- » **Fund training programs to advocacy organizations on the link between anti-oppression and abolitionist frameworks and gender-based violence.** Many organizations provide economic advocacy or material resources but rely on philosophies and are tied to systems that are not survivor-centered, equitable, or trauma-informed.
- » **Provide training or otherwise support initiatives to connect lawyers, incubators, and business developers directly to communities and survivors** so they can leverage resources or connect survivors with alternatives when mainstream legal options fail.

ENDNOTES

- 1 See Center for Survivor Agency and Justice, *supra* note 1 at 38
- 2 New York City Mayor's Office to End Gender-Based Violence, 2020 Family-Related Violence Snapshots (2020) https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/ocdv/downloads/pdf/2020_family-related_violence_community_board_snapshots_002.pdf (last visited Sept. 9, 2022).<https://data.cccnewyork.org/data/map/1347/domestic-incident-reports#1347/a/3/1578/99/a/a>
- 3 New York City Mayor's Office to End Domestic & Gender-Based Violence, 2020 Annual Report (2020) <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/ocdv/downloads/pdf/ENDGBV-2020-Annual-Report.pdf> (last visited Sept. 9, 2022).
- 4 See Sara Wee & Center for Survivor Agency and Justice, *supra* note 8.
- 5 *Id.*
- 6 Center for Survivor Agency & Justice, *The Economic Advocacy for Survivors Project: Final Project Report & Recommendations to NYC Human Resources Administration*. Inquire for access: info@csaj.org

WE NEED REAL, BOLD ACTION

The first step toward an effective, bold plan is commitment. See below for a variety of ways to support, act, and hold yourself accountable to the vision and recommendations for survivor economic equity.

We invite individual survivors, advocates, community members, community-based organizations, and aligned gender-, racial-, and economic-justice initiatives to support this vision and join us in advocating change.

Join Our Call-To-Action

You can sign as an individual, group, or on behalf of an organization. Your name or organization will be added to a future webpage to help us demonstrate power behind this vision.

And we call on City agencies, elected officials, and other policy makers to support the vision and help us turn key recommendations into reality. Contact us to connect with survivor and advocacy groups to advise, draft, and help effect your policy and legislative agendas.

Show Your Support

Contact us: nyc_survivor_ej@csaj.org

Together we can bridge the ripple effect and transform the economic landscape facing survivors in NYC.

“We all count, we have a say. There is equality and comradeship in our community.”

— a survivor visioning call participant