

ENGAGE L — MENT B

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THE FINAL CHAPTER:

SOCIAL IMPACT INITIATIVES 2021-2024

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Welcome to the last dispatch from the Engagement Lab.

After 14 years, the Engagement Lab is closing. This report documents our last chapter (2021-2024) of work, where we sought to build a powerful model for leveraging the resources of higher education and its institutional partners to foster community power.

Transforming Narratives of Gun Violence and Transforming Narratives for Environmental Justice sought to support long term community efforts to disrupt harmful, racist narratives, and to imagine the narratives needed for inclusive and just futures. We launched our first initiative in collaboration with Massachusetts General Hospital and the Louis D. Brown Peace Institute. Partners now include over 10 additional organizations in the Boston area. In a short time, we have supported over a dozen unique studio courses and created over 20 art and media projects, some of which have already had direct and measurable impact on shifting narratives in our city and beyond.

Doing this work within colleges and universities is not easy. They are traditional organizations that are hierarchical and slow to change. However, we remain convinced that higher education has a lot to offer. They have resources, talent, stability, and quite frankly, an urgent need to reevaluate their missions. Colleges and universities must be committed to bending rigid institutional structures to truly center communities' needs in their research and innovation missions. They need to do the hard work of aligning values so that neighbors and communities are not mere subjects of research, but collaborators.

If the last fourteen years at Emerson has taught us anything, it's that this work is both essential and challenging. All good things end, but we are hopeful that the model we created can influence future work and inspire future innovators.

Eric Gordon ELab Director Rachele Gardner
ELab Associate Director





IMAGINING AMERICA GATHERING IN NEW ORLEANS (FALL 22)



INTERACTIVE FILMMAKING STUDIO (SPRING 24)

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Our Values

Black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) disproportionately experience the burdens of today's social, health, environmental, and economic problems, as a result of centuries of racist and oppressive policies and practices in all spheres of society, including higher education. We commit to interrogating and dismantling racist and oppressive structures and practices, individually and collectively, as we imagine and create just, inclusive, and equitable futures.

ANTI-RACISM & ANTI-OPPRESSION

COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE

We believe in shared decision-making. Our initiatives are led by a multi-sector team of community and nonprofit leaders, institutions, and government. As we make decisions that guide the work, we center the voices and experiences of those within our partner communities.

THE BIG PICTURE:

How might we leverage Emerson's media and storytelling expertise to advance peace, equity, and justice?

CO-CREATION & CO-DESIGN

We commit to create and design with those who are most impacted by the issues we care about. This usually means that community participants work directly alongside students in a shared learning and creating space. We value the time, expertise, and agency of our community learning partners and commit to creating spaces that uplift and empower.

We seek to build and sustain relationships and impact over time. We stand against the traditional practices of higher education that involve parachuting in and out of communities solely for educational or research purposes, acknowledging that these encounters are exploitative. We commit to building trust over time with community-based partners and to facilitating experiences and projects that are mutually beneficial, and beyond the confines of the academic calendar.

SUSTAINABILITY

ASSET FOCUS

We strive to define people by their assets and aspirations rather than noting their challenges and deficits. We commit to asset-framing as a model for our co-creation work with communities, focusing on what individuals and communities have, not only what they lack.

We push ourselves to define and measure impact at multiple levels -- individual, community, and societal. We commit to involving our community collaborators in shaping and executing our research agenda. And, in addition to contributing to the academic literature, we commit to sharing our research findings in accessible formats with our collaborators.

DEMONSTRABLE IMPACT

We recognize that our freedom is inextricably connected to the freedom of others. We acknowledge the multi-generational consequences of white supremacy, anti-Black racism, and settler colonialism. We commit to working together toward mutual liberation.

CO-LIBERATION

We are hopeful for a future that is just, peaceful, and equitable. We believe in the power of creativity and imagination to move beyond the doom and gloom of today's headlines and to design a future where we can all thrive.

BOLD IMAGINATION

We strive to create opportunities and pathways to higher education for those who have been traditionally excluded.

EQUITABLE OPPORTUNITY

Social Impact Initiatives

We used collaborative design and storytelling to **elevate lived experience** and inspire change through the co-creation and distribution of art, media, and communications tools.





Transforming Narratives of Gun Violence seeks to understand the impacts of dominant narratives of gun violence on individuals, families, and communities most impacted, and aims to co-create interventions to change these narratives. TNE

Transforming Narratives for Environmental Justice seeks to advance environmental and climate justice through collaborative storytelling, design, and research.

FOUNDING PARTNERS



Massachusetts General Hospital
Founding Member, Mass General Brigham
Gun Violence Prevention Center

Since 2023, we've facilitated 6 TNEJ Social Impact Studios.









Since 2022, we've facilitated 14 TNGV Social Impact Studios.











We've also facilitated 2 sessions of Co-Design Studio, a foundations course introducing students to the theory and practice of collaborative design and preparing them to engage ethically with community partners.

6

Our Co-Creation Model

HAVE
How might we leverage Emerson's
media and storytelling expertise to
advance peace, equity, and justice?

Social Impact Studios brought local grassroots changemakers into the classroom each week to collaborate directly with students and faculty.

From 2022-2024, the ELab supported 19 faculty fellows and 10 community organizations to collaboratively craft curriculum for 22 Social Impact Studios.

Over 160 college students and 65 Learning Partners co-created over 20 art and media projects.

CO-CREATION





Before each semester, we worked with faculty and partner organizations to collaboratively design curriculum and prepare for each Social Impact Studio.

During the semester, students and communitybased Learning Partners co-created media and art projects for impact.

DISTRIBUTION





At the end of each semester, we hosted public events to debut and celebrate projects.

After each semester, we provided fellowships to selected students and Learning Partners to prepare the projects for further distribution.

IMPACT & EVALUATION





Once projects were finalized, we worked with partner organizations to support meaningful implementation, evaluation, and continued impact.

FACULTY FELLOWS met together monthly as a cohort and participated in the leadership of our Social Impact Initiatives. The Engagement Lab fellowship provided a generative space to explore the challenges and opportunities of collaborative teaching, learning, and research.

LEARNING PARTNERS are individuals who live, work, play, and serve in the communities with which we partner. They join Emerson students and faculty in Social Impact Studios as co-creators, bringing their passion, knowledge, ideas, and lived experiences of the issues and their impacts locally, to inform and guide projects in the classroom.



Students and Learning Partners have co-created more than 20 art and media projects through TNEJ and TNGV Social Impact Studios.

Here are some examples.



Fairmount Stories

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

Fairmount Indigo CDC Collaborative, AirPartners

An interactive website designed to share the history of advocacy along the Fairmount Line and goals for the future of the Line by visualizing relationships between people, their communities, transit, and air quality.



The Future is Food

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH GreenRoots

A short film that combines the television cooking show format with an exploration of the food justice efforts of GreenRoots, a communitybased organization dedicated to improving and enhancing the urban environment and public health in Chelsea and surrounding communities.



A Birder Mystery

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH Zoo New England

A playful performance where animal characters engage the audience to understand the Zoo's role in environmental conservation and how individuals can play a part. Students and Learning Partners performed the play at Franklin Park Zoo for over 125 quests on April 19, 2024.



Scan the QR code to learn more about these projects and explore our full archive

Incorrigible

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

Boston Uncornered, Nubian Square Foundation

In 1992, PBS produced a documentary about violence in Boston's Roxbury neighborhood, prominently featuring some of the teenagers caught up in it. Over 30 years later, *Incorrigible* follows up with the same men: deemed "incorrigible" as children, their stories demonstrate the transformative power of community love.



Peace or Piece?

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

The Center for Teen Empowerment

A narrative role-playing game about decisionmaking in the aftermath of violence. Players work in groups to make decisions to impact the story in real time. The Center for Teen Empowerment is using the game with their youth activists to spark discussions about critical issues, including individual and collective responsibility for advancing peace.



Peace Play in Virtual Reality

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

Louis D. Brown Peace Institute

A VR application inspired by the Louis D. Brown Peace Institute's Peace Play healing modality. Participants can express feelings and emotions they may not have language for by creating scenes using miniatures in an immersive sandbox environment.



People Powered News

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

Massachusetts General Hospital Gun Violence Prevention Center and Dorchester residents

A toolkit designed for newsrooms and communities who are committed to changing how gun violence is reported, to help people feel more represented in the news conversation, and to help journalists earn the public's trust. The toolkit includes suggestions for journalists and media outlets, tips for traumainformed interviewing, and two journalistic videos.



We've hosted 7 public events to debut and celebrate the co-created projects.

Here are some highlights.

These events are unique opportunities for communities from different neighborhoods, backgrounds, and generations to come together and meaningfully engage with one another's experiences by serving as initial audiences for each project.

100 average event attendance

60% + 40%

Learning Partners and community quests

Emerson students. faculty, and staff



"Even though what you're going to see today is a work in progress, it's a work that comes from the depth of the soul of [Uncornered] and the partnership they engendered from my students."

- Theodore "Regge" Life

Peace in Process - Fall 2022

Held at Codman Academy's Black Box Theater in Dorchester, this event was uniquely community oriented and intergenerational, bringing together members of the Louis D. Brown Peace Institute's survivors network joining youth from the Center for Teen Empowerment. Guests engaged for the first time with Peace or Piece? and Peace Play in Virtual Reality, two interactive activities designed for anti-violence and healing work.



Peace in Process - Spring 2023

At the third TNGV event of its kind, we sought to more deeply incorporate LDBPI's Principles of Peace. We added a Reflection Room, set apart from the main stage, as a calm space for guests to engage with the principles through Peace Play and a Peace Weaving activity designed by the theatre studio. On the main stage, there was a performance by the theatre studio, a presentation of the People Powered News journalism toolkit, and a celebration of a new partnership with Uncornered.



Planting Futures - Fall 2023

With artwork displayed around the room and on each table, and overflow seating in the balcony, this first TNEJ event was bursting with celebratory and hopeful energy. Students and partners from GreenRoots, Fairmount Indigo CDC Collaborative, and Speak for the Trees Boston worked together to curate a special line-up of films, poems, presentations, and reflections. GreenRoots' ECO Youth Crew rounded out the event with an interactive environmental justice workshop to test guests' awareness of local issues.



Compassion and Awe - Spring 2024

Franklin Park Zoo, nestled within Boston's largest park, Franklin Park, was a perfect event location to celebrate this semester's partners, Zoo New England and Speak for the Trees Boston. Students presented prototyped interventions to protect trees in public parks, and the theatre studio performed A Birder Mystery with the live sounds of peacock calls and donkey brays in the background. The performance drew over 125 zoo guests and event attendees.



with the ELab unique? What makes working

"While each project has the potential to contribute to change by itself, it's when you look at the collective, and when you see beneath the surface to the process by which they were created, that you begin to see the transformative power."

> - Rachele Gardner **ELab Associate Director**







"Everyone who is associated with the ELab desires to cultivate a deeper respect for and more mindful understanding of the valuable and complex work they are doing."

- Paul Turano

"Through my role in the classroom, I've been able to share my lived and professional experience directly tied to the issue of gun violence and its root causes.

> - Angelica Fontes Learning Partner



SOCIAL IMPACT CASE ST

Quiet Rooms

Outside of trauma rooms in hospitals around the country, there is a place those in the medical field call the "Quiet Room."

According to Dr. Cornelia Griggs and Dr. Peter Masiakos of Massachusetts General Hospital, "generally it is an unassuming room where [physicians] tell mothers about the deaths of their children, far too often because of firearm violence."

Quiet Rooms is a 20-minute poetic documentary about the impacts and root causes of gun violence in Boston's communities, as shared by survivors in their own words. Co-created by Emerson students and survivors of homicide victims from the Louis D. Brown Peace Institute, the film was produced in spring 2022's Collaborative Documentary studio.

Scan the QR code to watch the film:









Gun Violence Prevention Center

ENGAGE A



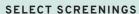




"I'm gonna tell you my story before someone else tries to tell it. When you tell it, and it's authentic, and it's true? You heal."

- Ruth Rollins

as featured in *Quiet Rooms*



Brigham & Women's Hospital **Boston City Hall**

Harvard Medical School

Maryland Crime Victims' Rights Conference

Massachusetts Correctional Institute, Concord

Massachusetts General Hospital

Massachusetts Independent Film Festival

Tufts School of Medicine Tulane University in New Orleans

The film has sparked meaningful conversations with community members affected by gun violence, medical

thousands in Boston and beyond.

Since its premiere in 2022,

Quiet Rooms has been seen by

professionals, and elected officials, and been incorporated into curriculum and training materials for medical students, first responders, and more.

The film has already inspired tangible change: the quiet room at Massachusetts General Hospital is being redesigned with survivors' needs in mind.

Broadening impact

Our work has been published by leading academic journals and local press outlets.





Transforming Narratives of Gun Violence

AUGUST 2024

This perspectives piece offers a succinct explanation of how TNGV has facilitated collaborative storytelling between community members directly impacted by gun violence and Emerson students and faculty.



Collaborative critical making in higher education

OCTOBER 2023

A case study of our community-centred storytelling efforts to transform harmful narratives of gun violence in Boston, introducing a framework for understanding the infrastructure required to support this kind of collaborative work within higher education.

Dorchester Reporter



If we want to end gun violence, we need to change the narratives

DECEMBER 2021

Only days before the public launch of TNGV, an armed man's mental health crisis and stand-off with police ended in his tragic death. This op-ed examines the headlines and news reports that followed the incident and calls upon news organizations to change their tactics in gun violence reporting.



Fighting gun violence by changing the narrative

DECEMBER 2021

A conversation between GBH's Jim Braude and TNGV founders Clementina M. Chéry, Eric Gordon, Dr. Peter Masiakos, filmed at the beginning of the initiative's collaborative work.

We've presented at convenings and conferences around the country.



HARVARD RADCLIFFE INSTITUTE ACCELERATOR WORKSHOP ▲

In October 2023, TNGV received a grant from Harvard Radcliffe Institute to bring together organizations and individuals from different cities who are doing narrative change work related to gun violence. Participants included representatives from the medical community, arts and media schools, the entertainment industry, and community-based organizations from Boston, Baltimore, Chicago, St. Louis, Philadelphia, and more.

IMAGINING AMERICA NATIONAL GATHERING

In October 2022 and 2023, groups of faculty, students, partners, and staff from ELab travelled to New Orleans and then Providence to present at the annual Imagining America conference. We shared about our co-creation model, showed some of our media, and engaged in conversation about successes and challenges with other community-engaged scholars, artists, and activists.

INAUGURAL SUMMIT OF SURVIVORS OF GUN VIOLENCE

In April 2024, TNGV attended the United States Justice Department's inaugural Gun Violence Survivors Summit, during which Attorney General Merrick B. Garland and Director Steven M. Dettelbach of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives dedicated a new Faces of Gun Violence exhibit.

OTHER CONVENINGS AND CONFERENCES

Boston Area Research Initiative, 2024 Conference

Lake Nona 2024 Impact Forum

University of Virginia, 2024 Workshop

Social Justice + Media Symposium, 2023 in Las Vegas, 2024 in Queens, NY

SNF Nostos, 2023 Conference

SOCIETY OF GENERAL INTERNAL MEDICINE

In May 2024, TNGV founders joined Massachusetts Public Health Commissioner Robert Goldstein for a plenary panel at the Society for General Internal Medicine's Annual Meeting. We were able to share the collaborative work of the initiative with hundreds of attendees, including physicians, researchers, educators, and more.

What does it take to do this work?

Here's how we did it:

PREPARE STUDENTS

- We taught Co-Design Studio, a foundational course on collaborative design methods
- We facilitated a sequence of courses through the Social Impact Design minor

ENABLE COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

- We included organizational partners on the initiative leadership teams to guide the work
- We designed curriculum with organizational partners
- We compensated learning partners through free course credit or a stipend
- We provided certificates of completion to learning partners

EQUIP FACULTY

- We held a 2-day summer workshop for new and returning faculty members
- Our faculty Fellowship fostered shared learning through monthly meetings
- We supported faculty with the design and implementation of curriculum

ADDRESS BARRIERS TO ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION

- We worked with Professional Studies to enroll Learning Partners to ensure physical and digital access to college spaces
- We offered evening classes to make timing easier for partners
- We offered transportation stipends so classes could occasionally meet off campus
- We made technology available for learning partners to borrow

SUSTAIN MULTI-YEAR PARTNERSHIPS WITH ORGANIZATIONS

- We offered year-long, renewable commitments to organizations, rather than just one semester
- We provided stipends for organizational partners
- We held regular meetings to connect on progress, address challenges
- We showed up for partner orgs outside of academic commitments

PRODUCE VALUE FOR COMMUNITY PARTNERS

- We aligned each class's desired outputs with the expressed desires of partner organizations
- Once the semester is over, we facilitated the completion of projects by offering paid fellowships to students and partners
- We supported the distribution of projects after semester ends
- We supported project design, communication, and web development
- We hosted regular events to bring the community together
- We followed up with organizations based on expressed need

INVEST IN STAFF CAPACITY

- Associate director Rachele Gardner built and sustained our partnerships, facilitated all programs, projects, and events, and supported the day-to-day needs of faculty and staff
- Communications manager Tyler Prendergast handled graphics and newsletters, and supported events and projects
- Lead developer Johnny Richardson built, supported, and maintained all ELab and project websites and applications
- Admin & events coordinator Liora Goldberg supported both public facing and student-centered events

