

# An Equitable Future in Education: Learning from 4.0 Alumni Experiences

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# AN EQUITABLE FUTURE IN EDUCATION: LEARNING FROM 4.0 ALUMNI EXPERIENCES

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An intended goal of 4.0 is to foster equity and inclusion throughout the organization and its curriculum. This report seeks to explore how efforts to promote equity and inclusion are understood by alumni, as well as the extent to which these values are embodied and implemented during and after 4.0's fellowship programs. The report is organized in three parts. First, we provide a brief review of several key findings from the literature that explore how design thinking is integrated with an equity framework. Second, we present high-level equity-related themes and key findings which emerged from a random sample of 4.0 alumni interviews. Finally, we provide recommendations and conclusions, stemming from interview feedback and the literature review.

Results from our analysis of a random sample of 4.0 alumni interviews (n=31) revealed nine key thematic findings that broadly pertain to the concepts of equity and inclusion as implemented by 4.0. These include:

1. 4.0 as an organization has built its culture around promoting equity.
2. Promoting an equity mindset and supporting alumni to view their ventures through an equity-based lens are central to 4.0's programming. These are approaches that alumni continue to utilize in their work with communities.
3. Alumni are "forever changed" by an empathy perspective instilled through 4.0's programming.
4. Alumni are impacted by the anti-racist educational philosophy instilled through 4.0's programming.
5. 4.0 coaching is critical as alumni implement equity and inclusion practices and integrate personal histories into their ventures.
6. 4.0 ventures address systemic racism and white privilege across society.
7. 4.0 is dedicated to funding and supporting entrepreneurs of all backgrounds.
8. Racial tensions can occur when bringing together 4.0 fellows of different backgrounds and personal histories. Therefore, within 4.0, there are teaching opportunities.



*"...I learned it through 4.0, the idea of designing for the margins. Designing for the groups of people who are the most marginalized in our country. If we can design to meet their needs, then we will by nature help ... It will meet everyone else's needs..." ~4.0 Alumni*

9. 4.0's focus on equity influences alumni in different ways. Even with 4.0's emphasis on equity, there are others who address personal histories and racism in other ways; there are no simple solutions.

Three recommendations emerged:

**Recommendation #1: Continue using curriculum that merges design thinking and equity.** Continue emphasizing empathy activities and empathy interviews as part of the 4.0 fellow experience while challenging alumni to abandon ego, and dedicate efforts to the problem and not the solution.

**Recommendation #2: Ensure adequate time for conversations about equity.** Stay true to 4.0's stated value and practice of acknowledging personal histories of racism and to process any racial tensions that arise during fellowship workshops.

**Recommendation #3: Revisit evaluation and assessment efforts to ensure alignment with Equity-Centered Community Design and EquityXDesign approaches.** As curriculum efforts expand 4.0's explicit focus on equity, so too should considerations of approaches to measurement.

Alumni interview findings strongly indicate that fellows actively translate 4.0's efforts to embed equitable practices into their training. For example, 4.0's emphasis on empathy, and the techniques related to equity interviewing, are frequently cited as having had significant impact on the fellows themselves, and their ventures. Fellows describe embracing the experiences of others and applying them in their own professional and personal lives. Across the diversity of alumni, there is a continuum of impacts on equity and anti-racism goals. While many report significant impacts, some do not. As a whole however, results show that 4.0 commonly influenced personal perspectives (individual/interpersonal racism), the approach and reach of their ventures (structural racism), and organizational practices of continuing ventures (institutional racism). Our recommendations largely amplify current efforts, encouraging the application of Equity-Centered Community Design and EquityXDesign models.

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# AN EQUITABLE FUTURE IN EDUCATION: LEARNING FROM 4.0 ALUMNI EXPERIENCES

## INTRODUCTION

As an organization, 4.0 seeks to invest in early-stage education innovators who “reflect the nuanced diversity of youth, families, and educators in communities across our nation.” Operationally, 4.0 utilizes a set of Community Values and Practices that were designed collaboratively with the 4.0 community. Embedded in, and consistent with, corresponding Values and Practices are steps such as Step 1: “Be honest about the histories of inequity and how we carry them within us.” Four values—equity, joy, self-determination, growth—are ideals that unify and drive the 4.0 community of education innovators as they seek to align their work with the Community Values and Practices.

This report is authored by the University of Delaware’s (UD) Center for Research in Education and Social Policy (CRESP). In it, we explore how the values of equity and inclusion are understood by 4.0 alumni (i.e., education innovators who have completed one or more of 4.0’s fellowship programs) as well as the extent to which alumni embody and implement these values during and after their fellowship program(s). This report is organized in three parts. First, we provide background on several key findings from the literature regarding the merging of design thinking with an equity framework. Second, we present high-level equity-related themes and key findings that emerged from interviews with 4.0 alumni. Finally, we provide recommendations and conclusions to help 4.0 continue to both acknowledge personal and systemic inequity histories as well as to support development of interventions that are designed for community co-ownership as a means to reduce inequities in education.

### Examples of 4.0’s Principles & Values

**Equity:** 4.0 recognizes equity as “an approach to liberation through education led by the people most directly impacted by historical and present inequities.” The reciprocal, co-ownership nature of the work is reflected in processes that 4.0 describes as “working to distribute leadership to fellows and alumni who work with their communities to design interventions to address inequity in education.”

**Be Real:** 4.0 describes being real as “striving for active transparency; to be honest; to lead with vulnerability; to be reflective and humble; and to practice integrity. It also means being realistic about the conditions and obstacles as we design accessible and effective interventions.”

## BACKGROUND

4.0 is committed to advancing equity in education as well as to developing equity mindsets among their fellows. In order to do so, 4.0 has implemented an approach to curriculum development that merges design thinking with an equity framework. An overview of design thinking, including how it can be implemented within an equity framework, is presented below.

Design thinking, traditionally used in business, engineering, and architecture, is now increasingly being used in the fields of social entrepreneurship and education (Chou, 2018; Panke, 2019). It is both a creative process for problem solving and a human-centered approach that requires extensive exploration into the lives and problems of a community prior to generating solutions. Design thinking requires engaging in empathic conversations with community members and engaging stakeholders in co-creating solutions. Furthermore, design thinking as a process is both iterative and exploratory, as ideas are implemented in real time and as the original problem evolves over time (Liedtka et al., 2017). It provides opportunities to experiment, develop and prototype models, receive feedback, and redesign (Razzouk & Shute, 2012).

Owen (2007) has given considerable thought to the critical skills that should be embedded in teaching design thinking. He describes 13 critical design-thinker characteristics and ways of working, which are often required, but not always taught. While some skills which are not explicitly taught are likely to transfer in the context of longer programs (such as advanced degrees), he argues that more formal approaches to instruction are needed. Among the skills discussed are topics like conditioned inventiveness, which emphasizes that what is created is novel, and inventive, but also practical in the context of the environment in which it is placed. Similarly the concept of human-centered focus, calls for what is designed to continually respond to the needs of the people for whom the solution is targeted. Other concepts of note include recognizing the importance of sustainability and the best interests of the environment are considered (environment-centered concern) as well as recognition for a key foundation of design thinking, the visual ability to images to depict ideas across a range of medias. Tempered optimism, bias for adaptivity, predisposition toward multifunctionality, systemic vision, view of the generalist, ability to use language as a tool, affinity for teamwork, facility for avoiding the necessity of choice, and ability to work systematically with qualitative information, round out the 13 key elements presented.

In recent years, there has been a call to reformulate design thinking to intentionally incorporate equity so that innovators and social entrepreneurs produce more equitable outcomes (Williams, 2019). For example, the EquityXDesign framework merges “the consciousness of racial equity work with the methodology of design thinking” (EquityXDesign, 2016). This framework rests on the assumption that in order for design thinking to lead to more equitable products, systems,

and institutions, then design thinking processes, tools, and mindsets themselves must be redesigned. The human designers must work to uncover their explicit and implicit biases, as well as acknowledge the power of systematic oppression (EquityXDesign, 2016).

Another example of modifying design thinking practices is the Equity-Centered Community Design approach created by Creative Reaction Lab (Creative Reaction Lab, n.d.). Through this design process, individuals learn tools intended to help dismantle systemic oppression which in turn can create a more equitable society. These tools include skills which target a variety of areas including approaches to building humility and empathy, defining and assessing topic and community needs, recognizing history and healing, as well as acknowledging, sharing, and dismantling power constructs (Creative Reaction Lab, n.d.).

Such approaches both reflect a new generation of designers and respond to the current need to establish programs and practices that re-define norms and power structures to effectively enable entrepreneurs and oppressed communities to thrive. Such approaches are an emerging method of thinking about, and designing intervention approaches, and are increasingly important in the 4.0 curriculum and implementation strategies.

## **METHODS**

The 4.0 Alumni Survey was distributed to all 4.0 alumni over ten weeks from October 2020 to January 2021. A total of 285 responses were collected. Of these, a random sample received an email invitation to participate in a semi-structured interview if, in the Survey, they responded “Yes” to, “Did you participate in 4.0 with an idea/venture?” Two alumni in the random sample were deemed ineligible because of conflicts of interest. Interviews were conducted with 31 of 38 eligible alumni (82%). Of the seven who did not participate: one declined to be interviewed, five did not respond to three separate contact attempts; and, the final person responded after interviews ended.

Interviews were conducted between February 11th, 2021 and March 26th, 2021. Interviews were approximately 30 to 60 minutes. All interviews were led by trained CRESPE evaluation team members and recorded. Alumni were assured of their confidentiality and encouraged to provide both positive and negative feedback. Participants received a \$25 Amazon gift card in acknowledgement of their participation. The UD Institutional Review Board approved all human subjects-related aspects of the process, including the content and process for communication as well as the administration of the interview protocol.

The goal of the interview was to receive feedback about the 4.0 fellowship process from alumni whose ventures were continuing as well as those whose ventures did not continue. Interview questions addressed topics such as: venture background and goals; how 4.0 supported the venture; strengths and areas of improvement for 4.0; and, any other advice for 4.0. While



interviews did not include specific questions or prompts about equity, anti-racism, or diversity, these major themes emerged organically.

## FINDINGS

Nine findings emerged from analyses of qualitative data and are presented below.

### FINDING #1: 4.0 AS AN ORGANIZATION HAS BUILT ITS CULTURE AROUND PROMOTING EQUITY.

Several alumni described that one of the greatest strengths of 4.0 as an organization is the emphasis on equity. Participants recognized that the organization fosters a culture where conversations can happen around supporting and centering concepts such as issues of power, systems of oppression, and legacies of privilege.

Alumni recognized diversity in the funded programs, as one participant noted,

*"I think the other [greatest strength] would probably just be their focus on equity, their focus on serving marginalized communities, their ability to bring together a really diverse set of founders, and value, and be respectful to all those people in the room."*

Another alumni echoed these words, stating:

*"It's one thing to throw money at something. It's another to throw it to have it support something that is change oriented and that you're building a culture around really crafting equity and creating change."*

Others point out a value in the approach 4.0 takes in its discussion of power, race and systems of oppression. As one alumni indicated:

*"I think the strengths, of course the centering of power, and race, and empathy, and understanding how systems of oppression play out in ventures or the privilege of even who can launch ventures and have the time and capacity to vision out a venture and all that stuff is definitely high on my list."*

Last, alumni shared that 4.0 is a place where actions seem to align with words. For example, alumni recognized that the organization does not shy away from support of movements like Black Lives Matter, and in so doing is seen as authentic, and special.

*"I think one strength of 4.0 is it's one of the few organizations that is willing to take a political stance and a human stance to stand up for Black Lives for example or some of the other initiatives 4.0 has taken over the past couple of years. I think it's not going to be for everyone and I think that's okay because I think historically a lot of the funding organizations have not*

*been for everyone and it's just been implicitly that way where if you didn't fit into this wider white privileged mold then it wasn't for you."*

## FINDING #2: PROMOTING AN EQUITY MINDSET AND SUPPORTING ALUMNI TO VIEW THEIR VENTURES THROUGH AN EQUITY-BASED LENS ARE TENETS CENTRAL TO 4.0'S PROGRAMMING.

Efforts to work with fellows to develop an equity framework for themselves and the ventures are skills that alumni bring with them to future endeavors. Alumni continue to utilize approaches such as "design with, not for" in their work. As one fellow notes:

*"It's just important from an equity lens that you have someone from the ground floor that you're designing with, and not for, a community. That's probably a phrase that I really took from all of 4.0's training is, how do you design with, not for, the community you intend to serve."*

Alumni recalled the value of building skills related to empathy, and seeing issues and solutions through an equity-oriented lens. In the words of another fellow:

*"Identity relevant equity-based leadership, that's their strength. They are able to put you in the shoes of your students, to put you in a place where you can understand what your students want, what the families of your students want, what the teachers want if you're working with a teacher venture, they're able to make you see it through those lenses, through an equity-based lens. And so that's definitely strong."*

Another alumni echoed many of the same sentiments, and elaborated on how the equity mindset skills they received as part of the 4.0 program, created a context for them to rethink their own program, and privilege. They note:

*"And then I think another part of it is, in the last couple years, how conscious they've been around equity and making that central to their programming. And that's really made me reconsider my program and privilege and better understanding the importance of race in the work that I'm doing... I think [equity] it's a mindset. I think one thing that I've been really conscious of is whose story to tell, and how are we making sure that our programming is done alongside with youth... I'm not just talking about consent, but I'm also talking about making sure that families and kids feel really comfortable and really safe and really included in not just the work that they're recording, but in the work of [the venture]. I think that's really important... I think that's a mindset that I've just adopted being in a lot of great conversations with 4.0."*

And:

*“I think even with the tiny program, they had a whole half day on racism and how that's ... Just both from a knowledge standpoint but how to approach that when coming from creating equitable solutions for students and it's helped because I try to intentionally give either students I work with or interns, the ability to, I guess, have self choice where what they want to do or where they want to focus their time. I always try to keep them in the back of my mind now and not try to over dictate the balance of where they can innovate or where they can focus their efforts on.”*

One alum talked about intentionally seeking out 4.0 to develop an equity mindset:

*“And I think those were some of the things that lured me originally and I think why I stayed in the network is that it gave me a real understanding ... Or a different perspective of the word power and how they approach equity and equality, is always something where I learn quite a bit from it and it helps the set that ... To help give me that mindset as well because I don't usually get that in some of the other circles that I'm in currently. ... We talked a little about the equity part or just the fact that user choice and that understanding power at a different level, I think that really becomes a strength because I intentionally go to 4.0 for that mindset.”*

When asked to provide advice for someone starting a venture with 4.0, one alumnus discussed the importance of developing an equitable organization:

*“And so I guess my advice for someone with my background [analytical mind and didn't grow up in an environment emphasizing equity] is to use it as a perspective to make your organization even stronger because if you can understand how an equitable organization allows you to do a lot more and being more sophisticated and have more tools to approach the problem solving you do, then it's going to be a major advantage against a traditional ... I would say, a 2000 company where it's how they approach business.”*

### FINDING #3: ALUMNI ARE “FOREVER CHANGED” BY AN EMPATHY PERSPECTIVE INSTILLED THROUGH 4.0'S PROGRAMMING.

When interviewers asked alumni about specific concepts, ideas, and skills they learned from 4.0 that still impact them, alumni discussed using both empathy interviews with stakeholders and an identity-affirming activity completed at 4.0 workshops. These empathy and anti-racist values have ripple effects in alumni's personal and professional lives. Many commented on the long-term impact the program has had on the ways in which the address issues including continuing to use

empathy interviews long after the training was completed, and working to shift thinking to include conversations about lived experiences and needs before designing a program intended to solve them. Below we present several statements from different alumni which speak to the ways they have changed and adopted an empathy perspective as a result of the programming.

*"Definitely empathy interviews. Before I did the pilot, I spoke with a few high school teachers, some college advisors, and then a high school student and a college student to kind of like talk through my idea and then get their advice, their feedback. So I remember specifically doing that, and that was really helpful. I mean, that's something I always do now is anytime I'm thinking about launching something or trying something, talking to the folks that would be impacted that I would be recruiting for said thing, and getting all of their feedback."*

And:

*"A good example of how something from 4.0 has forever changed me is I am a part of this collective of people who are trying to do mutual aid work... This group of people were like 'Let's go out and we'll give out care packages to all of the people who are experiencing homelessness in our city, and let's just assume they need deodorant, soap, socks'... My biggest thing was you could start with that, but the real work is asking them what it is that would be a game changer for their day. You are assuming that you know what it's like to be a person experiencing homelessness in our city. But if you haven't, then you don't know. So what we need to do is actually get out there and talk to people, gain their trust, and understand from their point of view what they need, not assume what they need. That was certainly something I learned from 4.0, without a doubt... this is exactly the empathy interviews... It was like you talk to people and you get an understanding of what it is that they're experiencing, and what their pain point is, not you guessing, and wanting to push your idea. It's not about us, it's like you got to de-center your ego."*

Further:

*"We did a little bit of design thinking. I think a lot of that, like doing empathy interviews with stakeholders, having stakeholders have a voice, having the people in the community help to build the idea with us is something that I've done. I think prior to going there, it was just me and I really didn't even know how to approach people on the venture outside of like, "Hey, we got a school coming. You want to enroll your student?" But not really knowing like, "Hey, we have a school coming. What would you like it to look like? What do you see an all-girls school looking like?" It changed my thinking in that way."*

Last:

*"Doing empathy interviews with stakeholders, having stakeholders have a voice, having the people in the community help to build the idea with us is something that I've done [and still*

*use]. I think prior to going there, it was just me and I really didn't even know how to approach people on the venture outside of, 'Hey, we got a school coming. You want to enroll your student?' But not really knowing like, 'Hey, we have a school coming. What would you like it to look like?'... It changed my thinking in that way... Engaging your community, engaging stakeholders, what questions to ask, all of those things came from 4.0 and it's something that I can use forever as a professional and in my personal life."*

In addition to empathy interviewing, one participant strongly valued the mask activity and suggested that it played a role in their understanding of the contrast between how the world sees them and how they experience the world.

*"One of the things was a mask activity. I actually got that from somebody at [4.0] camp... The girls create a mask and on the outside they put how they feel like people feel about them, and then on the inside, how they feel about themselves... This has them thinking about themselves in a different way. Doing an activity where they think about how the world sees them, how they see themselves and then have them discuss it... The most engaging activity was that one..."*

One alumnus talked about the impact of 4.0's curriculum and how they distributed resources from 4.0 to other people:

*"There have been a couple of resources I got from 4.0 that I passed around to different workplaces and they rippled and reverberated around. So I feel like a lot of the anti-racist work... once you have that information, you're kind of forever changed. So it's hard for me to even pinpoint exactly how I've been affected by it, but I know, tangibly, a lot of the resources I have passed along, either in the workplace environment or to my mother in law or just people... just a lot of that stuff, it was just, yeah, it's hard to exactly pinpoint how it impacted me, but I know that I am forever changed from having gone through that curriculum."*

#### **FINDING #4: ALUMNI ARE IMPACTED BY THE ANTI-RACIST EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY INSTILLED THROUGH 4.0'S PROGRAMMING.**

Several alumni talked about how 4.0 emphasizes an anti-racist educational philosophy by helping them both think critically about the communities with whom they are working, and how they can thoughtfully and respectfully meet the needs of marginalized communities. For example one participant noted that the program helped him stop to think about how his approach addressed institutionally racist structures.

*“The other thing personally is just about being an anti-racist educator... They helped shape me in those ways to just think about, like you're starting an organization, you're serving people, how do you do that in a really thoughtful way that really serves the people that you're working with well, and we are serving almost entirely people of color. So how do we do that in respectful ways and ways that are not upholding institutionally racist structures. So I think that they definitely helped contribute to my anti-racist education, I would say.”*

Another participant shared how, for them, the designing for the margins tactics that 4.0 presented, and the way it was presented, has had a profound and long lasting influence.

*“All of the anti-racist and liberation focused work resonates, just continues to have ripple effects in my life. I think that when George Floyd was murdered and some white people just started to try to wrap their heads around the idea of white supremacy. I was like I know a lot of this information already, and so much of it came from 4.0. I think, just being a human being in the United States, a lot of the ideas around 4.0's... I'm sure it's not 4.0's idea, but I learned it through 4.0, the idea of designing for the margins. Designing for the groups of people who are the most marginalized in our country. If we can design to meet their needs, then we will by nature help ... It will meet everyone else's needs...”*

#### **FINDING #5: 4.0'S COACHING IS CRITICAL AS ALUMNI IMPLEMENT EQUITY AND INCLUSION PRACTICES, AND INTEGRATE PERSONAL HISTORIES, INTO THEIR VENTURES.**

For one venture that focuses on racial equity by utilizing an empathy approach with educators, 4.0's coach pushed the alum to address their own racial identity and personal knowledge, and to utilize these insights to connect to their venture's audience:

*“We wanted to develop other professional development materials, particularly around empathy, trying to figure out how we can help teachers develop empathy for students, particular white teachers develop empathy for students of color, and even more specifically for Black students... She [my 4.0 coach] was very challenging, she didn't give me an easy time of it... she understood it and she pushed... I'm a white woman and I'm working in a realm of race, and she really... she helped me break it down, like ‘Who is your audience? Who are you really trying to reach?’ I had to say, ‘I'm really trying to reach white people because I understand how white people learn about anti-racism. I know what that process is,’ I think that [my coach], who was Black, made me really deal with that and specify who the audience is... The idea of a white person talking to white people about race... this is what I bring with my personal experience and connecting that to why I'm doing what I'm doing. That was one of the things [my coach] really pushed me on, owning my whiteness or my white identity... She didn't*

*seem to be at all concerned that she needed to tiptoe. It was just a really kind of direct relationship where we both could talk and... really name the problem. For somebody who works in racial equity, naming the problem is major."*

#### FINDING #6: 4.0 VENTURES ADDRESS SYSTEMIC RACISM AND WHITE PRIVILEGE ACROSS SOCIETY.

4.0's curriculum pushed, and supported, fellows to think about deeper systemic social issues and their root causes. In order to address systemic racism, some alumni have adopted organizational equity goals. Social mobility and breaking unjust cycles of poverty and structural violence, such as lack of access to higher education, are underlying themes across numerous venture activities:

*"We have specific goals around recruitment and participation, primarily of team leaders who identify as black or identify as people of color. So we're really focused as an organization on supporting, empowering, and resourcing designers and entrepreneurs and leaders of color. We're also looking to just like have a really strong experience of the people who are involved. So it's really important to us that people feel affirmed in their identity. And so we actually asked very specific questions about people feeling ... do they feel affirmed and are they able to bring some version of themselves into the programming and the coaching and the workshops?"*

#### FINDING #7: 4.0 IS DEDICATED TO FUNDING AND SUPPORTING ENTREPRENEURS OF ALL BACKGROUNDS.

Alumni recognize 4.0 as an inclusive organization where people from all backgrounds are welcome to present ideas and develop as entrepreneurs. Many seemed to initially question based on prior experiences with other organizations or funding efforts whether or not the 4.0 approach would be authentically inclusive. Without any specific prompt regarding equity or inclusion, many alumni recognized that the organization does what it says when it comes to supporting diversity:

*"And then I think I had heard about this in particular, but I knew they were looking to specifically outreach and do more work with people of color and Latinos and support more ventures led by people of color. So I was like, "Okay, that's aligned. That makes me happy that they are wanting to do that." Because in New Orleans, in particular, a lot of nonprofits and different organizations are white-led and led by transplants to the city. So that was important to me."*

And:

*"The funding and the opportunity to pilot and do pop-up was something that was definitely important for me to really always be able to redefine my idea. Definitely the money definitely helped to make things happen...I definitely wouldn't have been able to do it without the*

*funding. So the funding piece is definitely big, especially for entrepreneurs of color, who aren't able to access a lot of the funding that may be available to others. So it's like somebody pretty much gave you your piece of the pie, gave you a way to even have the program."*

Further:

*"But I think 4.0 has been consistently the most diverse, and I mean racially diverse, gender diverse, sexual orientation diverse, group that I've been involved with across the country. And I think that's really a good strength for 4.0."*

#### **FINDING #8: RACIAL TENSIONS CAN OCCUR WHEN BRINGING TOGETHER 4.0 FELLOWS OF DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS AND PERSONAL HISTORIES.**

While limited, a few examples were raised about times during the process where racial tensions were apparent, and topics were triggering. Within 4.0, opportunities exist for growth to ensure that fellows develop trust and that fellowship experiences are safe for everyone. In general alumni talk about the need to debrief, and come full circle after tough discussions, and suggest that at times there needs to be a senior leader in the room, or readily available to support facilitators, with a specific expertise in moderating racial discourse.

*"We spent a lot of time talking about feelings. I mean just like a ton of time talking about oppression, which I understand we have talked about a little bit, but we get super derailed by a person in our group. They lost control. I think the people that were facilitating their sessions were really young and not able to, it was just a messy, messy weekend with a lot of people crying and a lot of hurt feelings. I just didn't want anything to deal with them after that."*

And:

*"This is a tough topic... And I don't think it was directly handled in the time that we were there... And to be specific, we had some participants at 4.0, they used a lot of language that I think they just weren't understanding of. I think they were kind of perpetuating some kind of traditional ideas or some ideas that I think have embedded micro-aggression pieces in understanding who their users were. And I understand you can do that with demographics. That can happen. Whenever you're trying to understand who you're trying to help, you can get really stuck in a caricature of somebody or the person you're trying to help. And I think that really pushed some other folks in other ventures, it was very triggering for them. And we never had a debrief as a group during that... We never had a real closing on that, because it just was seeping up in different places. Well, in one place it seeped up was in this informal [gathering]. We went to a happy hour with some people from 4.0... And there was weird tension, because everyone was kind of trying to parse out or understand what was happening. And it was just really, one person was very, 'This is what it is, and I'm not going to budge on the idea of that.'*



*And another person was on the other end, and it was just really awkward. And I wish we had better tools or a little bit of space around addressing those kinds of things, because I think that's important. Discourse is important... Understanding everyone's sides is really important, especially in this field... sometimes we're not always going to be on the same page. Or the opposite would be, we're not understanding that we're on the same page, we're just saying different things... For me personally, I felt like that was a good teaching opportunity to lean into the discomfort and have the conversation."*

Further:

*"And if I'm really being honest, I'm a 40 year old Caucasian female. I was 38 at the time. I just felt like one of the things that came out of my weekend at 4.0 was that...In fact this particular girl said, 'Children of color don't need any more white people trying to help them.' And 'you all need to step out of the way so that people of color can do the work.' And part of me believes that to some degree. and I did hand the project off to people of color to do it...And so, I just felt like I was too old and the wrong color."*

#### **FINDING #9: 4.0'S FOCUS ON EQUITY INFLUENCES ALUMNI IN DIFFERENT WAYS.**

Even with 4.0's emphasis on equity, there are others who address personal histories and racism in other ways; in other words, there are no simple solutions. One alumnus, whose venture addresses equity and equitable access to education, acknowledged that although 4.0 incorporates equity in their sessions, this did not impact their venture's focus.

*"They didn't impact that [the venture's focus on equity]. That was core to the work that we do...Yeah, I think they did some sessions around equity that weekend. I think they are pretty comfortable and fluent in talking about issues of race and equity. I don't think they hide from those things at all. It's just they didn't influence my thinking in any way, but I'm glad that they keep it in the forefront of the work that they do."*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following equity-promotion strategies that emerged from alumni interviews are recommended for 4.0's consideration.

### RECOMMENDATION #1: CONTINUE USING CURRICULUM THAT MERGES DESIGN THINKING AND EQUITY.

The 4.0 fellow experience should continue to emphasize empathy activities and empathy interviews. These activities focus alumni on viewing venture ideas from community perspectives, challenge alumni to abandon ego, dedicate efforts to the problem and not the solution, and advance thinking, all in order to engage stakeholders in an equity-focused, design thinking-based approach.

### RECOMMENDATION #2: ENSURE ADEQUATE TIME FOR CONVERSATIONS ABOUT EQUITY.

4.0 should not stray from its stated value and practice of acknowledging personal histories of racism; this would include processing any racial tensions that arise during fellowship workshops. Leave "buffer time" in workshop agendas as a space for fellows to: lean into discomfort: have difficult conversations that may present a valuable teaching opportunity; and, acknowledge when tensions arise. Coaches may need support in developing skills to deal with and equitably support all fellows in these workshop situations.

### RECOMMENDATION #3: REVISIT EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT EFFORTS TO ENSURE ALIGNMENT WITH EQUITY-CENTERED COMMUNITY DESIGN AND EQUITYXDESIGN APPROACHES.

As curriculum development efforts expand 4.0's explicit focus on equity-centered design-thinking, so too should considerations of approaches to measurement. When overall evaluation and assessment strategies are reviewed and updated, these revisions should align with corresponding evaluation and assessment frameworks applicable to both Equity-Centered Community Design and EquityXDesign. Assessment-focused discussions related to capturing progress within 4.0 and among fellows could also be expanded to include approaches to youth assessment. As student populations become increasingly diverse and there is a pressing need to shift toward equity-centered design thinking, more meaningful assessment experiences and new opportunities to demonstrate knowledge will be required.

## CONCLUSION

Findings from the alumni interviews strongly indicate that fellows actively translate 4.0's efforts to embed equitable practices into their training. For example, 4.0s emphasis on empathy, and the techniques related to equity interviewing, are frequently cited as having had significant

impact on the fellows themselves as well as on their ventures. Fellows describe embracing the experiences of others and applying them in their own professional and personal lives. Across the diversity of alumni, there is a continuum of impacts on equity and anti-racism goals, with many reporting significant impacts although some do not. Overall however, results show that 4.0 commonly influences personal perspectives (individual/interpersonal racism), the approach and reach of their ventures (structural racism), and organizational practices of continuing ventures (institutional racism). Our recommendations largely amplify current efforts, encouraging the application of Equity-Centered Community Design and EquityXDesign models.

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